2015

An Examination Of Leadership Teams In Successful High-Poverty Middle Schools

Jessica Ann-Farag Waters
Indiana State University

VITA

Jessica Ann-Farag Waters

EDUCATION

2015	Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana Ph.D. in Educational Administration
2002	Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, Indiana M.S. in Educational Leadership Secondary Administrative License
1998	Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana B.S. in English Education with a minor in Business

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2010	Hazelwood Middle School, New Albany, Indiana Principal
2005	New Albany High School, New Albany, Indiana Assistant Principal
2004	Jeffersonville High School, Jeffersonville, Indiana Dean of Students
2002	New Albany High School, New Albany, Indiana English Teacher
2001	Hazelwood Junior High School, New Albany, Indiana English Teacher
2000	Hazelwood Junior High School, New Albany, Indiana Job and Home Teacher
1998	Corydon Junior High School, Corydon, Indiana English Teacher

AN EXAMINATION OF LEADERSHIP TEAMS IN SUCCESSFUL HIGH-POVERTY MIDDLE SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Jessica Ann-Farag Waters

May 2015

Keywords: Education, poverty, student achievement, leadership teams

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee Chair: Todd Whitaker, Ph.D.

Professor of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Steve Gruenert, Ph. D.

Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, Department Chairperson

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Ryan Donlan, Ed. D.

Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Committee Member: James W. Hanna, Ph. D.

Superintendent

Rossville Consolidated School District

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological, multi-site case study was to observe and examine the practices of leadership teams in high-poverty, highly successful middle schools. This study sought to find practices that leadership teams put in place that aid in the success of their student body. Examined for this study were two Indiana middle schools located in high-poverty neighborhoods, each of which had shown repeated success on the state's standardized test. Data for this research were collected via the Indiana Department of Education's website as well as through interviews with the schools' principals, leadership teams, and teachers. Observations of team meetings and collaboration meetings were also conducted as part of this study. After completing the faculty interviews and collaboration observations and the transcribing and reviewing all notes and recordings, three primary themes surfaced. These themes, consistently embedded within the culture of the school, were learning culture, data-driven culture, and shared leadership culture. Although these themes were similar, the detailed practices of the leadership teams at each school shared both similarities as well as differences. Within the themes mentioned were embedded essential practices of (a) high expectations for students and staff, (b) timely and specific interventions, (c) daily collaboration, (d) clear and focused goals, and (e) the implementation of leadership teams. These embedded cultures and practices appear to be significant and essential components in enabling these schools to attain achievement success for their students of high poverty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere appreciation is expressed to many individuals in my life who have helped me in the completion of not only this dissertation, but also in pursuits of my career goals. I would not have been able to complete this without their love and support. Thank you to my parents, Robert and Maureen Farag, for their love and encouragement my entire life. They taught me to never give up on my dreams. I hope I have made both of you proud. Thank you to my sister, Regan Farag, whose love, reassurance, and support keep me going. Thank you to my husband, Eric Waters, who is my biggest supporter. His love, support, and encouragement through the last two years has been amazing. But most of all, I would like to thank my daughters, Lila Ann and Olivia Marie, for reminding me each day why this dissertation was so important. Three squeezes girls! Thank you to Rhonda Mull whose constant guidance, goading, friendship, and love have helped me through every twist and turn in this journey. Thank you to Stephanie Lone for always being there to love, support, and listen. Thank you to Beth Howard for reminding me to have fun no matter what life throws at you. Cheers Beth! Thank you to my dissertation committee members and especially my chairperson, Dr. Whitaker. I constantly remind myself that, "It's people, not programs." Last, I would like to thank my current students and staff of Hazelwood Middle School who remind me daily of why my job in education is so important.

"And these children that you spit on
As they try to change their worlds
Are immune to your consultations
They're quite aware of what they're going through."
~ David Bowie (1971)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Study Rationale

Every child in the United States is entitled to an outstanding education no matter where they lay their heads at night. It is the responsibility of the educators in these children's lives to make sure that this occurs. Educators in every school across the nation face many different types of challenges to overcoming obstacles to students' learning. Specifically, educators in high-poverty schools have a huge generational and situational obstacle to overcome. A child's economic status is progressively causing a rift in public education (Weissmann, 2012). An educational achievement gap exists between high-poverty students and more affluent peers.

In 2007-2008, 17% of all public schools in the United States were considered high-poverty (Green, 2011). In 2011, 48% of the nation's public-school children qualified for free or reduced lunch, which was up 10% from 2001 (Southern Education Foundation, 2013). Sixty percent of all public school children in the country were from low income households (Southern Education Foundation, 2013).

The growing low-income population of the United States is the huge obstacle that educators must overcome (Layton, 2013). In the research report on low income students in the South, the Southern Education Foundation (2013) found that if the nation does not improve the

educational support provided to low income children, it will no longer be a nation at risk, but a nation in decline.

More now than ever, school leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and the success of their students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was introduced as a law that would close the achievement gap by mandating that all students achieve a basic level of proficiency in school by the year 2014 no matter what their socioeconomic status (SES; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). NCLB had a strong message to the states: address the achievement gap in schools immediately (McGee, 2003).

Test scores have played a very central role in education policy over the last decade (Reardon, 2013). There is a 40% gap in the test scores of underprivileged students and their more affluent peers (Weissmann, 2012). This achievement gap makes it difficult to even the playing field for students of poverty not only in their education, but in their future educational or career goals (McGee, 2003). The achievement gap is the difference between achievement of low socioeconomic students and wealthier peers (McGee, 2003). The United States places below average in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam, but PISA does not take into account the influence of poverty on education (H. Friedman, 2012). With the growth in poverty mentioned above, NCLB made it very difficult for schools with high poverty rates to see success. The achievement gap is more about the schools that children of poverty attend more so than the children themselves. These schools can either be a bridge from which students of poverty can cross into a productive adult life or can be an abyss they fall into never being able to claw their way out.

Typically, schools in areas with high poverty have been associated with low academic achievement. Students of poverty have many characteristics in common including their household income level and the educational attainment of their parents (Borg, Borg, & Stranahan, 2012). This culture of poverty leads many people, as well as educators, into having low expectations for these children of poverty (Gorski, 2008).

There is significant research analyzing the negative effect of poverty on education. One such report was the 1966 Coleman Report, which illustrated how society views schools with high poverty as having lower performing students (Coleman, 1966). The findings of this report indicated that SES factors as well as coming from a home with less educational strength had a direct tie to the academic achievement of students (Coleman, 1966). These findings also suggested that if these same students of poverty were placed in schools with students of higher SES and who were raised in homes with higher educational backgrounds, they would see academic success (Coleman, 1966). Another interesting fact the report found was that if the quality of school was improved only for students of poverty, they would see academic success (Coleman, 1966). Edmonds (1979) refuted Coleman on this aspect and found that all children were able to be educated due in large part to the quality of the education they received. Some researchers believe that the student's family background is the dominant factor contributing to their academic success. Believing this, however, would then absolve educators of their duty to give high quality education to all students no matter the family dynamics (Edmonds, 1979).

Many schools are proving that the students' socioeconomic background does not define their academic achievement and that academic progress is possible for students of poverty. These schools are considered outliers and have become case studies for why they are succeeding.

Education has the potential to break the cycle of poverty and to stop this generational and situational epidemic.

In an article concerning how schools could improve education for poor students, Jacob and Ludwig (2004) cited that one way to increase educational success of poorer students is by improving academic programs within the school. They believed that this tactic offers a way of helping these students escape poverty as adults (Jacob & Ludwig, 2004). Students benefit from schools who acknowledge their poverty background without using it as an excuse for a lack of academic achievement (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).

Reading through the volumes of documented literature exploring the correlation between SES and academic performance, one can examine many characteristics as to why these high-poverty schools are performing so well. Commonalities and key factors resurface in the research. Edmonds (1979) believed that an effective school had many characteristics that contributed to its success, which included strong leadership and high expectations (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). A primary element that truly contributes to student success is the school's leadership team (W. Friedman, 2012). A school's leadership team is composed of a group of educators who lead the school in the direction of the goals the school wants to attain. The support of an aligned leadership team will help the principal lead the school to make gains in student achievement (Fenton, 2014). These leadership teams work collaboratively to analyze issues facing their schools (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). The direct role the leadership team of a school plays in student achievement is essential to ensure that success transpires. Research indicates that the leadership team plays a critical part in successful high-poverty middle schools. Leaders do have an impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools (Hull, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Leadership team engagement is vital for any school to be successful. In the qualitative analysis of high-performing schools in Virginia, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (2004) found there to be schools exceeding predicted results because they utilized procedures that allowed them to achieve more success than what was expected of them. It is evident that students need access to high-quality education, but they also benefit from the positive effects of a strong leadership team within the school (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). By building capacity in schools, leadership teams not only help aid in the success of all students for the long-term but also develop processes and create an environment that can sustain that success for many years. Strong leadership can be found in successful urban schools where they also have high expectations that all students will learn (Edmonds, 1979). The most successful high-poverty/high-performance schools have extremely strong leadership teams, composed of professionals who value having a laser-like focus on the learning that is going on in every single classroom in the buildings. In his article on effective urban schools, Edmonds (1979) discussed a 1977 study by George Weber who examined four inner city schools and found that strong leadership and high expectations were necessary in school success.

McGee (2003) found that to close the achievement gap, the leadership team in a school must establish a culture of high expectations for all and that the use of data was critical. The key is for these leaders to not only have high expectations for all students but also set high expectations for themselves.

Reeves's (2003) belief was that effective teaching and leadership would make the difference in successful schools. The leadership team must consider themselves the instructional leaders of the building and bring innovation to every decision. These leaders must try novel

approaches to strengthening the capabilities, confidence, and capacity of their leadership team. This innovative thinking will strengthen the teaching staff and drive them toward the ultimate goal of the school: to produce the best educational atmosphere for the students and to ensure their success. Schools that have a common goal of attaining educational success for all of the students can overcome the effects of poverty on academic success (Parrett & Budge, 2009).

Purpose for the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine practices of leadership teams in middle schools reflecting a high-poverty/high-performance status. A qualitative study was used to evaluate factors contributing to the success of these middle schools. One research question was asked of two Indiana middle schools that fit the criteria of being high poverty (50% or more students who benefit from free or reduced lunch) and had made significant gains of 70% or better in English/language arts and math combined on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress+ (ISTEP+) (Indiana Department of Education, 2014) over the last three years. The research question focused on the practices of the leadership team that was in place at these middle schools.

Research Question

The following question guided this qualitative study: What practices does the leadership team accomplish that contribute to the student achievement in high-poverty, highly successful middle schools?

Personal Statement

The middle school years are a very turbulent time for adolescents. By the end of their eighth grade year, many students already have a fairly clear picture of whether they will graduate with their peers or drop out of school. I have always been passionate about this group of

students and, over my years as an educator, have become increasingly curious as to why some schools seem able to help their lower SES students succeed in their educational pursuits. My professional aspiration is to help these students and educators attain their dreams of success.

I have recently been intrigued by what has been coined 90/90/90 schools. These schools have 90% SES, 90% minority, and have a 90% pass rate on standardized tests (Reeves, 2003). Currently being an educational leader at a school with high SES has piqued my interest in the 90/90/90 approach even more. I wanted to know how these high performing, high-poverty schools are closing the achievement gap and now I am in a better position to help my school attain the same success. All students deserve a highly effective, highly motivated leadership team to help them achieve their highest potential in their educational endeavors. Studying these schools can help to provide an understanding of what certain leadership teams are doing to make positive impacts for students.

Limitations

The data for this examination were collected through onsite interviews of focus teams in selected schools. Limitations may have risen when the interviews were taking place. The main challenge was to build a relationship with those being interviewed where they felt comfortable being honest. How the focus group responded to me was a challenge as well. The types and amount of questions asked may have caused the participants not to answer honestly or to answer with bias. If they did not feel comfortable participating in the interview, the information needed to conclude this examination might not have surfaced.

My own bias on the topic could have presented a challenge as well. I needed to remain unbiased while interviewing the focus groups at the schools that were visited. I needed to remove personal experiences which might have created bias in the interviews and the data that

were collected. The number of schools that were visited was a challenge as well. I needed to make sure that enough schools were visited to gather the information needed to complete this examination.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study included variables that set the limits as to what was being examined. The geographical location examined only included public middle schools in Indiana. The willingness of middle school faculty and administration to participate and share candid answers in the study was another delimitation, as their answers to the interview questions determined what was found pertaining to the practices of leadership teams and if those practices contributed to the academic success of the school. Two middle schools in the state of Indiana were chosen based on the data retrieved from the Indiana Department of Education website (Indiana Department of Education, 2014). This data only included two samples: ISTEP+ test data and free and reduced lunch percentages. Middle schools that had 70% pass rates or better in English/language arts and math combined as well as 50% or more of their students on free and reduced lunch over the last three years was chosen for this examination.

Special Definitions

There are many key terms that are recurrent throughout this study. These key terms are listed and defined below. There is a citation on one of terms. For the purpose of this study, the key terms are defined as follows:

High-poverty schools are schools with 50% or greater of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

High performing schools are schools with 70% or greater pass rate in English/language arts and math combined on their standardized test.

Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress+ (ISTEP+) is the standardized test all Grades 3 through 8 school children take each spring to test their mastery of state indicators in English/language arts and math (Indiana Department of Education, 2014).

Leadership team is the leadership unit within the school that makes decisions that impact the student learning taking place. This may include, but is not limited to, administrators, counselors, and teacher leaders.

Middle school is a school housing Grades 5 through 8 or Grades 6 through 8.

Poverty is defined as "the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions" ("Poverty," 2014, para. 1).

Socioeconomic status is defined by the American Psychology Association as social standing of a person or group typically based on a combination of education and income ("Socioeconomic Status," 2014).

Student achievement is defined as student performance on the state standardized test.

90/90/90 schools are schools with an environment of 90% SES, 90% minority, and attaining 90% pass rate on their state standardized test (Reeves, 2003).

Summary

Public schools are entrusted by the citizens of a community to educate all of the students. This includes the expectation of educational equity even for those schools with very high-poverty levels. Public schools have been thought of as the great equalizer affirming that all children, no matter the income background, should have the opportunity to gain academic success (Reardon, 2013). Many schools defy the common stereotype of underachieving high-poverty schools. Placement and development of a strong, capable, and dynamic leadership team

is the step in the right direction for high-poverty schools to see success in the achievement of all of the students.

To make a difference in the academic success of students, a school must have strong leadership (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). An effective principal (leadership team) is a necessary requirement for a successful school (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Effective leadership teams can create positive cultures within the school which will affect the student achievement within that school. Effective school leaders can have a dramatic impact on the academic success of the students within the school (Marzano et al., 2005).

This chapter provided background information about high-poverty, highly successful middle schools. Usually, poverty is a predictor of the academic achievement of the students within the school. Typically, schools with low SES do not perform as well as schools with higher SES. However, there are schools with high poverty that are successful. There are ample data suggesting that a school's leadership plays a crucial role in the academic success of the students especially in high-poverty schools (Andrews & Soder, 1987). Leadership teams play a role in this success and can have a positive impact on student achievement.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many middle schools in communities across America meet the criteria for being considered high-poverty schools. Public perception, especially that of individuals not in the education field, have biases toward the belief that if a school is considered high poverty, its students are not succeeding. However, this most certainly is not always the case, as research demonstrates clear examples of high-poverty schools across the country with very successful student performance. In fact, many high-poverty schools have students who are making significant academic achievement.

These high-performing schools, although generally outliers, offer case studies for identifying and analyzing how and why they are able to excel in academic performance over their counterparts. Most important, these schools are demonstrating an ability to reverse the effects of poverty on the students' academic success.

After studying the literature, numerous characteristics surface as indication of how these high-poverty schools are performing so well. A common contributing factor for the successful academic performance in these schools appears to be the presence of a strong and effective leadership team. A review of literature allows for a more thorough understanding of the associated effects of poverty on education and practices of academically successful high-poverty schools, as well as an examination of the practices of effective leadership teams.

Poverty in Education

Poverty among the nation's youth continues to rise. In his article, Easterlin (1987) summarized that poverty has a more severe impact on children than on young adults. In 2003, 17.6% of American children's families struggled with incomes below the poverty line (Hoynes, Page, & Stevens, 2006). Remarkably, statistics indicate that children born into poverty also face a greater probability of remaining underprivileged into their adulthood (Hoynes et al., 2006). Poverty can be found in many different geographical areas across the United States. An Associated Press (2013) article published in the *New York Daily News* stated that "a full one in six Americans falls below the poverty line" (para. 9). Poverty has an influence over a multitude of lifestyle factors, but most disturbing is a child's education.

SES continues to be the single most powerful influence over student achievement. Consequently, poverty is the most utilized characteristic in educational research today (Sirin, 2005). Capra (2009) published an article on the effects of poverty on education. In her article, Capra discussed that while teaching about poverty in one of her classes, her students were shocked to learn that even though the United States is one of the wealthiest nations, it has one of the largest gaps between those who are considered rich and those who are poor. She noted that "the top one percent of U.S. families has more money than the bottom 40 percent; this gap has steadily increased over the past 70 years" (Capra, 2009, p. 76). As mentioned previously in Chapter 1, there is a 40% gap in the test scores of underprivileged students and their more affluent peers (Weissmann, 2012). Surprisingly, this is twice that of the gap between Black and White students (Weissmann, 2012). During the 1950s and 1960s, the achievement gap between Black and White students was much larger than that of the income achievement gap. That

disparity has shifted over the last 30 to 40 years, with the achievement inequality now lying between the rich and the poor (Reardon, 2013).

Many researchers have found that poverty is strongly related to test scores which in turn result in achievement gaps between different groups of students (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004). In 2000, Duncan and Brooks-Gunn researched the consequences of poverty on a child's development, specifically how poverty would result in adverse effects to the student's educational achievement. Their research indicated that children of low socioeconomic households are not only at a greater risk for retention and dropping out in high school, they are also more likely to have a learning disability (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). A very surprising fact is that poverty can also contribute to low test scores (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). A student's home environment is a predictor of how well he or she will perform on tests (Borg et al., 2012). In their review of literature, Borg et al. (2012) found that the household income of a children had an effect on that child's educational attainment.

In a meta-analytical review of research regarding the relationship between SES and student achievement from 1990-2000, Sirin (2005) found a medium to strong relationship between SES and student achievement. During research studies on this rift, Weissmann (2012) mentioned that more affluent students spend 400 more hours on literacy activities than children of poverty. In general, children raised in poverty conditions are read to less by adults and other family members and also experience more gaps in education as opposed to students from affluent families (Barton, 2004).

Barton (2004) also researched factors as to why academic achievement would be lower for the students of homes at or below the poverty level. For example, he found that students who change schools frequently during the school year had lower achievement (Barton, 2004), a

relatively common situation in families of poverty situations. Students who are from poverty tend to move more often than their wealthier peers, having a negative effect on their education (Borg et al., 2012). Transiency is a reoccurring problem for students of poverty. Many of these students arrive at schools and are not at the same academic level as their peers due to the many moves they encounter (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004).

Risk of retention, dropping out, learning disabilities, low test scores, being read to less by parents, and transiency are all influences on a student's educational success. Children of poverty have worse educational outcomes that will persist throughout their adult lives than their higher income peers (Boslaugh, 2013). These students also score lower on standardized achievement tests and reading sections of aptitude tests (Boslaugh, 2013). Additionally, children of poverty tend to be more reliant on schools than their parents for educational guidance (Chenoweth, 2009). Since some parents of children in poverty had negative experiences in school, they do not place a high priority on education. As a result, children in this situation tend to have low academic motivation due in large part to their parent's low academic expectations (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004). Based on their socioeconomic background, society is failing students of poverty if exceptional educational opportunities are not provided to them (Sirin, 2005). The intention of providing a free public education is to reduce the many differences between America's children (Boslaugh, 2013). Unfortunately, this is not always the case when it comes to children of poverty.

With the introduction of NCLB in 2001, the focus of accountability was shifted more toward those subgroups of students typically not performing well on state standardized tests, with SES considered one of the subgroups (Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004). NCLB mandated these subgroups would need to be considered proficient in order to

show progress and directed states to analyze this data so that no person in a subgroup was left behind (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004). Some research concluded that NCLB was misguided because it did not take into account that students from less advantaged households do not perform as well as those students from more affluent households (Ladd, 2012). Since NCLB does not even address the educational challenges that disadvantaged students face, the initiative would never be able to sufficiently close the achievement gap between the more affluent students and their disadvantaged counterparts (Ladd, 2012).

Many researchers have provided evidence that a student's aptitude and environment play a large role in his or her academic success (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010; Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004). Children raised in poverty experience significantly different challenges than their more affluent peers, including adjusting to impoverished conditions that directly affect their academic success (Jensen, 2009; Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004). Rothstein (2004) found that poverty can lead to diminished cognitive abilities as well as more behavior problems in children. He also found that students who live in poverty are more apt to walk to school, live in neighborhoods with higher levels of crime, and have fewer positive adult role models in their lives (Rothstein, 2004). All of this research creates a strong case that poverty does indeed impact educational progress and success, yet schools are held equally accountable for students' academic achievement no matter their SES.

Poverty is the most dangerous enemy of education (Capra, 2009). Most students of disadvantaged backgrounds have essentially given up on their educational aspirations and exhibit what is called learned helplessness (Jensen, 2009). Students with learned helplessness are more likely to drop out of school and often abandon their educational aspirations while in school

(Jensen, 2009). In the past, the most notable gap in academic achievement existed between African American and White students. Today, the achievement gap is reflected economically, between high and low income families (Ladd, 2012). If the common belief is that schools with low SES cannot expect their students to have high academic growth, educators can become discouraged. The detrimental physical and psychological effects of a life lived in poverty decreases expectations for a student with low SES which, in turn, strikes a devastating blow to that child's self-esteem (Jensen, 2009). Education should be the catalyst for those students raised in low socio-economic conditions to break the cycle of poverty and create a better quality of life for themselves. Even though much of the research shows a correlation between poverty and low academic performance, a child's brain can be affected by positive and rigorous environments (Jensen, 2009).

Some educational researchers have found exceptions to the public perception that schools with high poverty do not have high student achievement. Most of the research is based on a theory which has been coined 90/90/90 Schools. Reeves (2000) shed light on this phenomenon in the early 2000s. Reeves delved deeply into the factors his research indicated contributed to the academic success of many high-poverty schools. Reeves contended that the 90/90/90 schools have the following characteristics:

> More than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, a commonly used surrogate for low-income families. More than 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities. More than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards, according to independently conducted tests of academic achievement. (pp. 185-186)

Examining these high-poverty, highly successful schools can shed light on what is possible and needs to be changed within the educational system in order to achieve more equitable levels of high academic success for all students in every American community.

Successful High-Poverty Schools

Meaningful research provides data demonstrating that many schools with low SES are realizing academic success from their students. Throughout the years, middle schools have changed their focus from academic achievement to an emphasis on the many different needs that shape the whole child, then back again to academic achievement, primarily because of the increased spotlight on accountability (Juvonen et al., 2004). An article published online from the Center for Public Education (2005) stated that numerous factors contribute to a student's ability to be academically successful including a culture of high expectations and caring for students, a safe and a disciplined environment, a strong instructional leader, hard-working and committed teachers, and a focus on academic achievement.

When writing an article reviewing his research on the 90/90/90 schools phenomenon, Reeves (2003) came across very promising research that showed techniques from these schools that helped to make them so successful. Reeves (2003) stated, "This article includes new research that suggests that consistent application of the 90/90/90 techniques holds promise for improving student achievement and closing the equity gap in schools of any demographic description" (p. 1). This is very exciting news for those schools with high poverty that are trying to close the achievement gap.

These schools that Reeves studied had five characteristics in common: (a) a focus on academic achievement, (b) clear curriculum choices, (c) frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement, (d) an emphasis on nonfiction writing, and (e)

collaborative scoring of student work (Reeves, 2003). Reeves (2003) stated, "In fact, these variables, that teachers and leaders can control are more influential over student achievement than the intractable variables of poverty, culture, and language" (p. 17).

In a study of seven high-poverty, highly successful middle schools, Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobel (2002) found that these schools moved from below average on state assessments to above average because the leadership teams of each school believed in setting high expectations for each and every student. Their study even found that these schools were performing better than more affluent schools (Picucci et al., 2002). Parallel characteristics exemplified in these schools included high expectations, collaboration, decisions based on data, and shared decision making (Picucci et al., 2002). None of these schools used poverty as an excuse for low student performance. Instead, because they realized that their students were entitled to a better education, they made sure that high expectations were in place at their schools (Picucci et al., 2002).

In a study of high-performing, high-poverty schools in Kentucky, Kannapel and Clements (2005) found that high expectations for student achievement, a strong collaborative decision-making process, a strong academic focus, attention to data, and teachers who value their students were the recipe for a successful school. One interesting fact was that the when the teachers had high expectations for all of their students, the students usually performed above those initial expectations (Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

Upon examination, it is clear that high achieving schools of poverty have distinctive processes and standards in place to increase and solidify their success. Rothstein's (2004) research found that economically disadvantaged students have higher levels of academic achievement when they are attending better schools. Although specific approaches vary between

these schools, most important perhaps, is the common belief that all children can learn regardless of their SES. The Education Trust (1999), funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education, found 366 schools in 21 states that were beating the odds and proving that low SES students could have academic success in schools with high-poverty. It was found that high expectations and working together toward a common goal were reoccurring themes in all of those schools (Education Trust, 1999). The Institute of Education Sciences (2008) found that school leaders were able to signal change by (a) articulating a clear purpose, (b) creating high expectations, and (c) sharing leadership. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (2004) also found many of the same characteristics that successful high-poverty schools exhibited including a strong, stable leadership, and analysis of data. Barton (2004) found six school factors commonly associated with school success; (a) rigorous curriculum, (b) experienced teachers, (c) teacher preparation, (d) class size, (e) technology in the classroom, and (f) safe schools.

Based on research and findings cited above, in order to achieve success, leadership teams should strive to have five core elements embedded in their performance plan for their schools: (a) clear and focused goals, (b) a collaborative environment, (c) decisions based on data, (d) value placed on each individual student, and (e) high expectations.

Clear and Focused Academic Goals

Chenoweth (2010) interviewed principals from high-poverty, high achieving schools to get their viewpoints on factors contributing to their respective schools' success. One common thread she discovered was that these principals all created a laser-like focus on the instruction that was presented in their classrooms (Chenoweth, 2010). Focusing on the instruction in each individual classroom is a proven way to generate successful outcomes not only in one's

classroom but also collectively for one's school. One organizational factor that makes a difference in students' success is the academic focus of the school (Hoy et al., 2006).

Fostering an environment where clear and focused goals are the priority for the school's leadership team and the educators within the walls will ensure success. Leadership teams ensure that the school has communicated to the faculty and staff its clear and measureable goals that are focused on the academic achievement of all of the students within their building (Hallinger, 2003). Educators are motivated to complete goals that are challenging but also achievable (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Effective leaders encourage their schools to create ambitious goals while motivating those in the school to achieve those goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). When progressing towards achievement of these clear and focused goals, or vision, leadership teams must motivate and inspire their peers and colleagues in the building to maintain alignment with objectives while knowing that obstacles may arise (Kotter, 2001). Effective schools have clearly defined goals, agree to the importance of these goals, and create ways to implement them (Rosenholtz, 1985). The main priority in any school should be maintaining focus on the learning that is taking place in every classroom each day. This is especially important in low SES schools.

Clear and focused goals give the leadership team and the school a mission that they are deeply committed to and that drives the organization forward in accomplishing their goals (Turning Points, n.d.). Having clear goals helps schools focus on what is most important in schools: student academic success (Picucci et al., 2002). A main goal of high student achievement is clearly articulated to the faculty and staff in schools that see high academic achievement (Rosenholtz, 1985). High levels of organizational performance are predicted by the clear and focused goals set by the leadership team (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Clear and

focused goals that are also measureable will lead a leadership team and other educators within the school toward accomplishing their purpose: high student achievement.

Collaboration

A collaborative approach is vital in any successful school. Collaboration is the best way for educators to share best practices and openly discuss student outcomes in classes. Effective leaders understand that collaboration is crucial for success (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). From this two-way communication, teachers are able to create instructional strategies to help their students succeed while also supporting the development of their colleagues. W. Freidman (2012) stated, "Teachers say that collaboration and sharing best practices are keys to their effectiveness" (para. 10). When teachers feel effective, they are effective and collaboration plays a key role in achieving effectiveness. When teachers are able to collaborate and study data with their colleagues and administrators, they are more likely to acknowledge the need for improvement (DuFour et al., 2010). The Center for Public Education (2005) noted that collaboration is an area where teachers can address the barriers to students' learning and brainstorm instructional strategies to improve instruction in all classrooms. In collaborative settings, teachers more actively seek feedback and draw upon the knowledge and experience of their peers to help in improving the educational atmosphere in their classrooms and to increase the success of their students (Lieberman, 1998).

When members of the school community work together successfully and are guided by a clear and focused goal, they are collaborating correctly (Turning Points, n.d.). Leithwood et al. (2006) found that there was a large body of evidence in support of collaborative cultures within schools in increasing the improvement of student learning. In successful professional learning communities (PLCs), leaders require and make sure that teachers have time to collaborate with

their colleagues. DuFour and Mattos (2013) have explored strategies educational leaders employed to inspire success, and in fact stated, "Instead, schools need learning leaders who create a school-wide focus on learning both for students and the adults who serve them" (p. 39). This focus includes all educators being involved in collaboration where student data is analyzed and teaching strategies are discussed. Leadership teams and teachers should work together collaboratively while examining data that will help them make decisions to lead their students to academic achievement. Successful schools create protocols—including working in teams—that allow teachers to collaborate on the instructional challenges they may face every day (Turning Points, n.d.). Collaboration sessions are not gripe sessions but time for teachers to work together to share the responsibility for instruction (Chenoweth, 2007). Working collaboratively ultimately encourages all involved in the school to focus on the priorities and goals of the school.

Researchers have observed that collaboration between teachers is a key feature in high-performing schools (Appalachia Educational Laboratory [AEL], 2005; Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission, 2004). In the high performing schools studied by the AEL, it was found that they tend to have collaboration where instructional focused conversations took place (AEL, 2005). The leadership team must make it a priority to ensure that collaboration takes place based on the schedule that is created for the school. Teachers need time formally scheduled into the school day to collaborate with each other. This common time will also help teachers problem solve.

Collaboration is an important factor in increased students' achievement and will enhance the teaching and learning that takes place (Picucci et al., 2002). Picucci et al. (2002) studied the effective procedures at what they called *turnaround* middle schools. To fully attain increased student achievement, staff at the turnaround middle schools that were studied understood that

collaboration would help them achieve this goal (Picucci et al., 2002). Schools that have effective collaboration will have deeper dialogue during that collaboration (DuFour et al., 2010).

In her research on high-poverty, highly successful schools, Chenoweth (2009) discovered that collaboration was mandatory to ensure students learned at high levels. She concluded,

> By acting as a team, all the energy and expertise of the faculty and staff are concentrated, rather than dispersed, and can have a much bigger effect than is possible with the tradition of teacher isolation. That concentrated effect allows students—even students burdened by poverty and discrimination—to learn at much higher levels than has traditionally been expected. (p. 42)

Highly effective urban schools have a strong commitment to collaboration among their teachers where they can improve their teaching practices to ensure students' academic achievement (Rosenholtz, 1985). Collaboration supports teachers in their laser-like focus on strategies they create together to guarantee the academic success of all students.

Decisions Based on Data

Some studies have indicated that educators in high-poverty, highly successful schools collaborate to analyze data and discuss student achievement. The Center for Public Education (2005) stated, "Principals encourage, support, and collaborate with teachers to make the best use of their talents, experiences, and creativity toward the purpose of improving students achievement" (para. 21). The AEL (2005) found that teachers in highly successful schools used various methods to evaluate their students' performance, then used the data to plan and deliver their instruction. This data reemphasized the need for changes in curriculum, enriched weak academic areas, and increased their students' achievement (AEL, 2005). Reviewing the data helps teachers realize where students are weak and how to adjust their instructional strategies to

reteach the material (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004). Since schools are held accountable based on annual test scores, teachers should review and discuss the data they use on a day-to-day basis to increase student achievement.

A key finding in The Charles A. Dana Center's cross case analysis of turnaround middle schools found that high performing schools build capacity in their schools by using data to make informed decisions and to determine areas of need for their students (Picucci et al., 2002). These schools that they interviewed made informed decisions based on data they collected and developed systems to ensure their teachers knew how to make the data meaningful to them (Picucci et al., 2002). After talking with leaders of high performing, high-poverty schools, Parrett and Budge (2009) found that many principals felt having data-based discussions helped in the success of their schools. The best support a leader can give the teams of teachers that collaborate is to help them use data (evidence) to improve their teaching (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Effective schools look at the data at three levels: (a) the school level, (b) the classroom level, and (c) the student level, using this data to make decisions guided by improving teacher instruction and ultimately student learning (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). Leadership teams and teachers should make informed decisions together regarding the data that they collect and how to utilize it.

Black and William (1998) believed in the importance of common formative assessments in the academic achievement for all students. Their research incorporated results of many studies that concluded the importance of formative assessments and how they help lower achieving students succeed. These formative assessments provide teachers with a reliable tool for gleaning data that can help improve instruction within their classrooms. The AEL's (2005) interview data from their study also found what Reeves's (2000) research indicated about using

assessment data for instructional decision making. The Center for Public Education (2005) noted that when teachers use data to drive instruction, lessons can be tailored to individual students and, as a result, help improve academic achievement. Through this process, teachers can meet their students exactly where they are academically, then fill in gaps where data suggested they might exist.

Leadership teams should ensure that all teachers are monitoring their students' results and comparing them to their goals so they can measure improvement. Teachers should display and share the data they collect because it is important to know how their students are doing and to show their students that they need to work harder in order to acquire the academic gains they want (Chenoweth, 2007). Data should be used to substantiate or reevaluate decisions (Chenoweth, 2010). Basing decisions on data can help schools improve academic performance and guide schools through informed decision making.

Value Students

Educators and leaders in high-poverty, highly successful schools form caring bonds with their students. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) stated, "A strong sense of affiliation and caring among all students and adults in a school is crucial to engaging and motivating students to learn" (p. 9). For families in poverty, it can be difficult for parents to build trusting environments for their children when they might have feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and depression which affect their ability to focus on their children and meeting their needs (Jensen, 2009). This is where the school has an opportunity to step in and build caring and trustworthy relationships with their students. Students who feel valued, connected, and safe will want to learn (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004; Parrett & Budge, 2009). Positive student and faculty relationships can have a tremendous positive impact on a students' success in school. In

positive caring learning environments, students' academic performance is improved (Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004).

An issue that can create problems for teachers and the academic achievement of their students is their own belief about the educational potential of their students (Black & William, 1998). After reviewing a great deal of research, the Center for Public Education (2005) added that a key factor in high-performing schools was the relationships the teachers forged with their students. These relationships helped students feel valued and safe (Center for Public Education, 2005). W. Freidman (2012) stated, "Across all of these high-achieving, high-poverty schools, students state that they feel loved, valued and challenged" (para. 14).

To stabilize students' academic progress and behavior, educators need to build strong, caring relationships with them (Jensen, 2009). Jensen (2009) felt that relationships teachers built with their students could enhance the probability of students reaching their goals, improve their socialization, increase motivation in school, and strengthen their academic performance. Teachers and administrators that were interviewed in the AEL study stated that their schools were warm and supportive learning environments (AEL, 2005). They also stated that everyone benefits from this positive atmosphere and that the students felt safe to learn because they were treated with respect, cared for, and nurtured (AEL, 2005). Another way to show students that one values them is by encouraging them and letting them know that they can succeed.

Another key finding in The Charles A. Dana Center's cross case analysis of turnaround middle schools found that schools that are driven to succeed value their students by paying attention to individual students and created structured programs to help them which in turn prevented the students from feeling like they were invisible (Picucci et al., 2002). By choosing to care and value their students, high-achieving/high-poverty schools are creating environments

to help their students see academic success. When researchers talked with students at turnaround middle schools, they found that students felt like the close relationships they forged with their teachers affected them in positive ways (Picucci et al., 2002). The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (2004) identified, "Unlike schools without demographic challenges, these schools also have to go to greater lengths to motivate their students, build their self-esteem, and set high academic expectations for them, because their students may lack all three." (p. VII). Building relationships with students will ensure success.

High Expectations

Educators should have a clear educational mission to help students reach high levels of learning no matter what their economic background. An important aspect of any effective school is high expectations for student performance (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Students' futures depend on schools having the fundamental purpose that all students can learn at high levels (DuFour et al., 2010). High expectations should be the norm in all schools, not just successful high-poverty schools. While high-performing schools have a culture of high expectations for all, the conviction that all students can learn is particularly vital in successful high-poverty schools. Many researchers have found that schools that embrace high expectations, see high achievement. Teaching and learning are enhanced in schools where high expectations for student achievement are prevalent (Leithwood et al., 2006).

In a study of high performing schools in Tennessee, the AEL (2005) found that schools characterized as having high expectations not only for their students' academics, but also their behavior, found those high expectations to be a strong contributing factor to the schools' success. The six schools that they studied also felt like these high expectations were a strong motivating factor where students were meeting the challenge (AEL, 2005). When schools include behavior

into the high expectations equation, each student realizes that every child around them is held to the same standard. If behavior incidents are down, learning can increase. In an article on high-performing schools, the Center for Public Education (2005) stated that the culture of having high expectations is fundamental to high-performing schools and should be held by all stakeholders. Additionally, greater success is achieved when students are expected to have high academic achievement as well as exhibit appropriate behavior (W. Freidman, 2012). Leaders that are considered effective, communicate their high expectations and help others understand that these high expectations are indeed important and possible (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

The focus for many high-poverty, highly successful schools is to improve student achievement. Highly effective schools succeed where others fail because they adopt the mindset that they want to help students learn a great deal (Chenoweth, 2009). W. Friedman (2012) stated, "Hopefully, such high achieving, high-poverty schools can stimulate a fresh and constructive dialogue on how we can help all kids learn, regardless of the obstacles they face" (para. 17). This is where high expectations come into play. In the research of student achievement literature, Hoy et al. (2006) found that schools with a strong academic focus, positively affected students of poverty. If schools want to improve their students' achievement, they must make it culturally acceptable for academic success among the students (Jensen, 2009). Teachers at high achieving high-poverty schools make an effort to engage their students with high-level thinking, making connections to the outside world, encouraging questions, and promoting interest to ensure high levels of high expectations (AEL, 2005). Raising the bar for students increases their learning capacity, and by elevating expectations, teachers and administrators are demonstrating to students that they have confidence in their abilities, so they are pushing them even more.

Teachers need to teach all students material that is complex and sophisticated while aiming for and helping them to exceed their standards (Chenoweth, 2007). DuFour et al. (2010) found that "a climate of high expectations for student achievement has been cited as a critical aspect of effective schools" (p. 211) when researching highly effective schools. Teachers at highly successful/high-poverty schools believe in their students' ability to learn at high levels. They do not believe that due to poverty they are crippled and will never be able to meet their high expectations. Teachers in high achieving schools motivate students not only by setting high expectations, but also by reinforcing achievement (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004). These highly effective schools share a common belief that all students can learn and set high expectations for instruction to improve student performance (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2008).

Yet another key finding in the Charles A. Dana Center's cross case analysis of turnaround middle schools was that when educators had high expectations of all students, distractions were eliminated (Picucci et al., 2002). High expectations increased performance which in turn inspired pride and motivated the school to continue the progress (Picucci et al., 2002). This pride and motivation helps educators commit to the high expectations they set not only for their students, but also themselves. Leadership teams and teachers should reflect on their expectations at the end of each school year and reevaluate their mission.

Schools should also have high expectations for the faculty and staff within the building. High and rising expectations should be in place, with an expectation that teachers will learn more every year to improve their skills and knowledge base and to work collaboratively with their peers (Chenoweth, 2007). Leadership teams need to show their faculty that they have high expectations for the students, the educators with the building, and themselves. When held to

high expectations, an individual will rise to the challenge. Educators at successful schools commit themselves to ensuring that all students succeed while rejecting excuses that might arise.

Effective Leadership Teams

The most consistent attribute of many highly successful, high-poverty schools is the presence of very effective leadership that embraces collaboration, has high expectations for all students, and are, by their nature, caring educators. W. Friedman (2012) discovered these traits when he studied nine successful high-poverty schools with very strong leaders in Ohio. W. Friedman (2012) stated, "They lead with a strong vision, engage teachers in decision-making, take responsibility for their school's continued success and hold teachers and students accountable for the same." (para. 6).

Effective schools can have a dramatic effect on our society, but the leadership within the school is what makes the difference. Effective school leadership is an important factor in a highly successful school (AEL, 2005). In a study on school leadership, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) concluded that students benefitted most from a strong leadership team that created positive effects within the school. These leaders influence their students' success due to the goals that they set as well as the support they offered to the teachers (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Strong leaders set the vision and make it a priority to ensure high levels of academic achievement (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004). Leaders help others set aside personal agendas for a common goal that is important to the welfare of the organization (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994).

The most critical variable in an improving school is the principal or leadership team (McEwan, 2002). It is very evident that students need access to high-quality instruction from knowledgeable and effective teachers. Leadership within the school has a direct impact on the

academic achievement of the students and the success of any school. The leadership within the school has an impact on student performance because it serves as the vehicle for releasing the potential that already exists within the building (Leithwood et al., 2006).

The Center for Public Education (2005) noted that the principal's leadership is important to high performance in a school. In a meta-analysis study on the impact of principal leadership on student achievement, Marzano et al. (2005) found that principals can have an extreme effect on student academic achievement. They proposed a plan with five steps that a school leader could take to enhance the academic achievement of their students (Marzano et al., 2005). Of these five steps, the first and most important was the development of a strong leadership team. This leadership team needs to believe that they can make a difference in the lives of their students. In order to ensure this, they must have a shared vision of how they would like the school to succeed (Marzano et al., 2005). The team approach to leadership is more realistic for improving schools (Glatthorn & Newburg, 1984). These leadership teams can range from solely being the office administrators to the office administration along with teacher leaders and counselors. Further, successful high-poverty schools have extremely strong leadership teams, with individuals who value having a laser-like focus on the learning that is going on in every single one of the classrooms in their buildings.

The school's leadership team must also be comprised of learning leaders that ensure effective teaching and learning are taking place each day in every classroom. Leadership and effective teaching make the difference in these high-poverty, highly successful schools (Reeves, 2003). Andrews and Soder (1987) completed a two-year study that suggested that the principal played an important part in the academic success of high-poverty students. They found that test scores of high-poverty minority students were higher in schools guided by strong leaders

(Andrews & Soder, 1987). These leadership teams must be innovative and try novel approaches at strengthening the teaching staff, while ensuring that the ultimate goal of the school is to produce the best educational atmosphere for the students. They must not only have high expectations for all, but also have high expectations for themselves. Success is important in any leadership role and educational leadership teams should strive for success for themselves as well as motivate the teachers and students too.

A strong vision, engaging all stakeholders in discussions, and holding each other accountable are surefire ways to increase success at all schools. The leadership teams must have a vision as to where they see their school heading then involve all parties in this vision in ongoing, active discussions of how they should drive their school towards success. Accountability solidifies success, with everyone aware of expectations and knowing that others are counting on them to do their jobs. Chenoweth (2010) stated that school leaders "must be guardians of their students' futures, not of their staff members' happiness" (p. 20). Effective leaders realize that to enact change in the organization, which includes student academic success, they have the responsibility to produce results that include more effective and efficient educational practices (Ruebling, Stow, Kayona, & Clark, 2004). To improve the learning taking place in schools, effective leadership teams must be in place (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Effective schools should house leadership teams that have shared leadership among their staff, are able to overcome conflicts, and are positive influences in their schools.

Shared Leadership

Even though the leader of the school must be an educational visionary who offers direction and expertise to ensure that all students are learning at high levels, he/she needs to embrace the advice and expertise of others within the school. Shared leadership allows

educators to play important roles in the decision making that affects all areas of the school and students (Turning Points, n.d). An organization is shaped by leaders who inspire others to be leaders within the organization (Glatthorn & Newberg, 1984). Leaders work with others to create a shared sense of purpose in attaining goals to better the organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Shared leadership is important in creating an organization that focuses on ways to influence student learning (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). It is not intended to give certain teachers leadership roles within the school to enact change. Instead, it is about organizing the school in a way that creates the collaborative culture needed to ensure change (Lieberman, 1988). This approach brings a variety of viewpoints to the table and may also help others to more readily accept, support, and be more committed to the change. It strengthens the voice of teachers in making decisions about the school and accepting responsibility for results (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2008).

Research has shown that teacher leaders can help in creating a sense of buy-in from the faculty where all will work together toward improving the school (Leithwood& Riehl, 2003). These teacher leaders become educational leaders within the school. These educational leaders intensify the success of the school by being able to participate in making educational decisions about the school (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Sometimes an educational leader needs to build teachers up by encouraging them to take on more leadership responsibilities within the organization. The leadership team can become listening leaders, where by listening to the views of others, may position the organization to become even more successful. Sharing leadership responsibilities allows others in the school to crusade for the school's mission while the leadership team can learn from them (Donlan, 2013). A leader can learn from other educators in

the school, and when leaders gives others ownership over making decisions for the betterment of the organization, they create buy-in.

The leadership team also helps the organization succeed by fostering a climate of shared decision making. When leadership teams share leadership decision making in schools, students' achievement increases (Wilhelm, 2010). Wilhelm (2010) stated, "Highly effective principals maintain a balancing act of 'stepping up' (being more directive as needed), and 'stepping back (acting more in a guiding role as appropriate)" (p. 24). Teachers feel valued and empowered when their input is sought by administrators (AEL, 2005). The leadership team should encourage input about what is best for the school from others in the building. Leaders need the buy-in of those in the organization to ultimately have success for all. Wilhelm (2010) stated, "Achievement gaps will close. When teachers begin taking ownership, alongside administrators, for problems of poor achievement, they also gain ownership of the solutions developed as a team" (p. 38). Working as a team with shared decision making, teachers and administrators can and will close the achievement gap.

In order to raise the achievement of students, schools need to build the capacity of leaders within the building. No longer can schools look to the principal as being the lone instructional leader (Lambert, 2002). Shared leadership has proven to be essential in high performing schools. In his research, Jim Hull found that in schools with shared leadership, the schools goals were being met (Hull, 2012). Research suggests that shared leadership is vitally important for school improvement, especially since many leaders may find that their school becomes too dependent on their leadership instead of the shared leadership they may create (Lambert, 2002). Schools that incorporate shared leadership have an organization that is focused on leadership for learning (Louis et al., 2010). This shared leadership model is based on collaboration and engaging more

team members in decision making for the school. Being a collaborative culture includes making shared decisions with the organization based on the clear and focused goal(s) of that organization. Sharing leadership helps to achieve the school's goals of school improvement and student achievement. Shared decision making shows a collective responsibility for student learning which will ultimately help in the improvement of student achievement.

Overcoming Conflicts

All leadership teams hit road blocks which take them away from their focus or vision. However, highly effective leadership teams know that they must work together in order to achieve the student success they desire. Team members must respect each other, trust each other, and value the difference each person may bring to the table. Disagreements will push collective thinking to deeper levels for the team (Turning Points, n.d.). If one's leadership team is dysfunctional, the ultimate goal of students' success will never happen. Lencioni (2002) discussed behaviors that teams exhibit when they fail and how to overcome these behaviors, stating, "teamwork deteriorates if even a single dysfunction is allowed to flourish" (p. 189). One of the five dysfunctions teams must work on to actually become cohesive is the fear of conflict (Lencioni, 2002). Positive conflict can be a method for needed change within an organization especially when trying to increase student academic success.

Conflict may cause some team conversations to become uncomfortable. However, people on teams must realize that disagreements may arise. When team members trust in each other's abilities and share a strong commitment to their goals, they increase confidence in overcoming these conflicts. They realize that individual differences are fundamental to moving their organization forward (Turning Points, n.d.). The decisions of the leadership team should result in improved student learning no matter what differences may occur.

Principals that are deemed outstanding performers make the difference in their schools (Whitaker, 2003). By empowering the faculty and staff, one can create buy-in and ultimate success for all. Fearing conflict will cause teams to avoid holding each other accountable for the success of their students. Accepting conflict to help bring about needed changes will assist in focusing on the goals of the school.

Positive Influence

Leadership teams need to be forward thinking and always one step ahead of what might ail their organization. Principals who are considered effective realize that they need to screen out the negatives of the school day (Whitaker, 2003). Leadership teams make sure their colleagues are engaged in what they are doing, not distracted by the negative impacts of the day. Whitaker (2003) wrote, "Effective principals focus on the people in their schools" (p. 12). Leadership teams need to be educational, instructional leaders in their schools.

Being a positive influence should be a goal of every effective leader and leadership team. Whitaker (2003) stated, "Great principals know that putting others in an upbeat frame of mind comes back to brighten their own day as well. Keeping your school in a positive cycle enhances everything you do" (p. 31). Positive cultures create improvement and growth in successful schools (Habegger, 2008). Principals need to be the shifting force that helps others get from negative attitudes to positive ones. Being more positive and filtering out the negatives will create a more successful atmosphere (Whitaker, 2003). A positive climate facilitates success for an organization despite the situation. Focusing on the positives each day will help schools get through the negative things that may arise (Whitaker, 2003). One thing principals should require is that the staff speaks positively about the school in public. When those in the community spout negatives about the school, administrators and educators should reply with all of the good things

happening. Doing this will enhance job satisfaction and make the atmosphere in the school positive and focused on learning. When creating leadership teams, one must realize that using teachers can create a positive climate within the school (Lieberman, 1988).

An indirect way of affecting the academic performance of students is through the treatment of the teachers. Teachers at academically successfully schools have indicated that they respond positively when treated with trust and respect (AEL, 2005). Focusing on positives and giving credit where it is due within the building is also important. People need to feel like they are part of something special and successful. Effective leaders are mindful of the importance of building people up rather than tearing them down. Effective leaders realize that positive school cultures aid in students' achievement (Habegger, 2008). The way that one acts is more obvious than beliefs he or she may share (Whitaker, 2003). People believe actions more than words and therefore, leadership teams need to actively demonstrate their expectations instead of just stating them. Creating a positive influence will create stronger, more confident educators who are best for students.

Conclusion

When it comes to accountability, schools with high-poverty often find it difficult to meet the demands of both the public and the State. Poverty should not be a road block to success in education. Many high-poverty schools have busted the myth to show that students can indeed be successful even with the burden of poverty. The nation's academic success would rise if more schools would learn lessons from these high-poverty, highly successful school outliers (Chenoweth, 2009). Educators and administrators must hold themselves accountable for improving schools and ensuring academic success for every student.

Highly successful, high-poverty schools implement many strategies as mentioned above in order to achieve short-term and long-term success. When a school has clear and focused goals with high expectations and values their students, and faculty members collaborate with each other and make decisions based on student data, success is the only option. Research shows that highly successful, high-poverty schools demonstrate specific characteristics which can be summed up in one phrase: the effectiveness of the leadership team within the school. These leadership teams are effective because they share leadership within the school, work through conflicts, and have a positive influence. Leadership teams who place an emphasis on these factors will see academic success in their students.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Marzano (2003) determined that "schools that are highly effective produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student background" (p. 7). Leadership teams in schools across Indiana, especially those in low socioeconomic settings, must find ways to overcome many obstacles and help students find academic success. The SES of students is a strong predictor of their achievement in school. With school accountability now more prevalent than ever, schools need to implement practices that impact the achievement of all students, particularly those students coming from low SES. The practices of these leadership teams must also involve feedback and sharing from the faculty and staff in their schools as they work together in the quest for a better education of their students.

The purpose of this study was to determine the practices of highly effective leadership teams in two of Indiana's high-poverty, highly successful middle schools. This study sought to examine practices of leadership teams in high-poverty, highly successful middle schools. Focus groups were created in each of the schools and interviews were conducted with those groups on site. This form of interview benefits from the communication between the researcher and participants which generates valuable data (Kitzinger, 1995). The groups consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators.

A qualitative research approach was taken to determine the practices leadership teams in

these schools had that contributed to their students' academic success. Creswell (2007) defined qualitative research by looking at the design and approaches and concluded "qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 37). Qualitative research is a form of learning where the researcher places himself/herself within the context of the subjects being studied (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The researcher in a qualitative study conducts research by searching for the meaning and understanding to explain a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002).

Creswell (2007) also suggested that qualitative research helps one gain an understanding of the problem or issue at hand through directly talking with and empowering individuals. He concluded, "The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information" (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). A qualitative study helps the researcher interview participants in their natural setting to gain their voice on a problem that needs to be solved. Qualitative research has evolved in the last two decades whereby achieving status and visibility (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research provides researchers with the tools to study complex phenomena within their subject area (Baxter & Jack, 2008). What is so fascinating about qualitative research is the interaction between the researcher and those being researched. The researcher wants to understand the relationship between people and their experiences in the world (Merriam, 2002). Comparing qualitative and quantitative research, Merriam (2002) said it best: "The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single agreed upon, or measureable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in positivist, quantitative research" (p. 3).

This study examined the practices of leadership teams in high-poverty, highly successful middle schools and how their behaviors and practices contributed to the academic success of

their students. The research was based on a phenomenological, multi-site case study of two different high-poverty, highly successful middle schools in the state of Indiana. A combination of designs was highly appropriate for this study. I conducted interviews with leadership teams and the faculty at two Indiana middle schools concerning their experiences and opinions as to why their high-poverty school achieved academic success. I wanted to research the phenomenon that these two middle schools have in common.

Creswell (2009) concluded that phenomenological research is a strategy whereby the researcher questions a phenomenon through human experience. The researcher tries to explain an experience that several participants have in common (Creswell, 2007). Lester (1999) summarized that phenomenological research "translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant" (p. 1). This type of study created a more comprehensive understanding of the experience through in-depth interviews which will help forge a common interpretation of that experience. The participants were able to verbalize their common experiences through interviews and open discussion and allowed them to elaborate upon their opinions and insights through narrative.

Creswell (2009) explained that a case study is a strategy of qualitative research where the researcher explores criteria such as programs, processes, or individuals. A case study is an intensive description and analysis of a certain phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). It is expected to summarize the intricacy of a single case and is used within the social sciences such as education (Johansson, 2003). A case study should be a complex functioning unit, investigated in its natural setting with many methods, and be up-to-date (Johansson, 2003). Case studies are important for researchers because they develop a view of reality through human behavior that one cannot

gather from quantitative data (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Case study research can find unpredictable events because of its in-depth approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Conducting a multi-site case study helped in the understanding of the phenomena that is taking place in many high-poverty, highly successful middle schools across Indiana.

By focusing on two different middle schools, I was able to gain insight into how each school ensured the success of their high-poverty students. These practices may have been very similar, but the focus groups could have had differing opinions on why they were successful. Creswell (2007) stated, "Often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue" (p. 74). Creswell (2007) and Merriam (2002) specified that case study research should include observations, interviews, and documents. I gathered and examined many sources of data including school data from the IDOE website, observed these schools, and interviewed focus groups within these schools. The observations served as a vehicle to witness first-hand what contributes to the success in the schools being researched. By interviewing the focus groups, I was able to better understand the schools' beliefs and feelings on the topic of their students' academic success and if the leadership team contributed in that success. The data that were reviewed were the state standardized test scores over the last three years and any other documents the schools would like to share that would help in the understanding of their success. By interpreting this data, the intent was to determine if these schools' leadership teams utilized the same activities and if in fact their focus groups believed they were contributing to the high levels of academic success students have gained.

Research Question

The focused and serious responsibility of a school's leadership team must be present throughout the school. These leadership teams impact the learning and achievement that take

place in the school. The work that the leadership teams accomplish in their buildings to affect change and crucial cultural shifts in instructional implementation, lead to higher student academic achievement.

Through their research, Baxter and Jack (2008) found that one of the most common pitfalls of case study research is too many objectives being studied. That is why one question was answered by this study, "What practices do the leadership team accomplish that contribute to the student achievement in high-poverty, highly successful middle schools?"

My Role as the Researcher

Nunkoosing (2005) elaborated best on the topic of interviews in qualitative research. He summarized the role of the researcher by stating, "The power of the interviewer rest in his or her authority as a seeker of knowledge and methodological expertise, and that of the interviewee as a more or less privileged knower" (Nunkoosing, 2005, p. 699). I sought knowledge to better understand how these middle schools gained high student achievement and examine the leadership teams and how they contributed to that success. Interviews expose the thinking of the participants and make public that which is often considered private thoughts or behavior (Nunkoosing, 2005).

The two schools that were visited were in different geographical areas within the state of Indiana. I was an outsider to these schools and did not know the staff or any of the students. The schools were chosen based solely on their demographic data and test scores over the last three years. Interview questions were semi-structured to afford participants the opportunity to share their feelings and opinions about their practices within their schools as well as their school's leadership teams' practices. Gaining a connection or relationship with the participants is crucial in gathering the data.

Nunkoosing (2005) recognized that "When we seek to find what we already know in interviews, we learn little to advance our knowledge" (p. 702). It was important to keep my biases out of the interviews and findings when conducting the research. Flyvbjerg (2006) also commented on this misunderstanding of case-study research stating that many believe it is a way for a researcher to push his or her biases on others. Merriam (2002) reminded researchers that it is important to realize these biases and monitor them while collecting the data. A researcher wanting to gain knowledge will think like a scientist and eliminate bias.

Selection of Schools

A data analysis was conducted to find the Indiana middle schools that met the criteria of having 50% or more of their students on free/reduced lunch and whose students scored 70% or better in English/language arts and mathematics on the ISTEP+ test over the last three years—2011, 2012, and 2013. This information was found on the Indiana Department of Education website (http://www.doe.in.gov). Once these schools were narrowed down, the location of the school, the size of the school, the school setting, the configuration of the school, the number of faculty members, and the degree of poverty in school were taken into consideration for the final selection of schools used in this study. This amalgamated data allowed me to isolate and identify middle schools that have shown academic growth with other mitigating factors in mind.

Once the schools had been selected for this study, a letter was sent to the superintendent of each school to gain permission to proceed (Appendix A). Authorization from the superintendents was secured to interview staff as well as, observe collaboration meetings, leadership team meetings, and faculty meetings. The superintendents were informed of the minimal risk that was involved in this study and reminded that their middle schools had been chosen for this research based on outstanding achievement results on ISTEP+.

After being granted permission by the superintendent, the principal of the middle school was sent the same letter of introduction along with a follow-up phone call. During this phone call, I shared the purpose of this study, the format of the interviews, and the criteria and process for the selection of focus groups. A request to interview the leadership team, teachers, and counselors was made at that time, in addition to a request to observe collaboration meetings, a leadership team meeting, and a faculty meeting. Any other forms of data or artifacts to support the study were requested. If the principal gave permission for the study, he or she needed to send me an acceptance letter indicating agreement of the research study and assurance for the study's procedures. Upon the conclusion of this study, the results were shared with the superintendents and principals of the participating middle schools.

Participants/Focus Group Selection

Focus groups are effective at gaining insights into people's common understandings of a topic and for obtaining varied perspectives on the same topic (Gibbs, 1997). Researchers are able to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter time frame when utilizing focus groups (Gibbs, 1997). Interviews were conducted using focus groups that consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators. Once the principal had given me permission to visit his or her school, I requested the e-mail addresses of the teachers, counselors, and administrators, as well as a list of the leadership team members. These focus groups gave their consent to be interviewed. The researcher knowingly gives in to the participants' authority on the topic as well as their civil rights during interviews (Nunkoosing, 2005). An e-mail was sent to the faculty introducing me and study with an attachment letter (Appendices B, C, and D). The appropriate *Consent to Participate* form was also sent for the faculty member to review (Appendices E, F, G, and H). In this same e-mail, the faculty members were asked to indicate their preferences for

interview sessions to be held before, during, or after school hours.

Focus groups consisted of no more than six participants at a time to make for a more casual meeting. This also helped the participants feel like they could be honest. The leadership team was interviewed as a group outside of the other focus groups so that other teachers and counselors could share information without pressure. These focus groups allowed all involved to share their opinions while also listening to what others express. These focus groups may have helped people to gather their thoughts and come to certain realizations about what happens in their schools. Group discussions through open-ended questions will allow the participants to share their ideas and might take the research in a new direction (Kitzinger, 1995). At the end of each session, participants were asked to give any other information they felt was important to the understanding of their school's success.

Interviews, Observations, and Data Collection

Faculty members were emailed directly with their specified interview time, scheduled to reflect their request from the previous e-mail. The faculty focus group interviews were conducted over the course of two to three concurrent days, with each interview session lasting no more than 40 minutes. The focus group sessions were held before, during, or after school hours. Before the interviews started in each focus group, I explained the purpose of the study and then asked the participants to review and sign the appropriate *Consent to Participate* form (Appendices E, F, G, and H) after all of their questions had been answered. The participants were also informed that they could opt out or withdraw from this study at any time by either telling me during the visit, or emailing me directly.

Confidentially was essential during these interviews. I personally transcribed dialogue from each of the interview sessions to not breach this confidentially. A Sony Stereo Digital

Voice Recorder- ICD-UX523 recording device was utilized to tape each interview as well as notes taken by hand throughout the sessions to ensure that the transcription were accurate. All participants were given a code number that was written at the top of their *Consent to Participate* forms. This code number was written on a master list for me to use in the transcription of my notes.

The same open-ended questions were asked of all focus groups. The Interview Form with Questions were used to document school, date, time, and focus group being interviewed (Appendix I). The questions were open-ended and helped guide the conversation toward the purpose of the study while also allowing the participants to discuss other elements they felt helped them to achieve student academic success. The focus of the study was to answer how and why questions to uncover conditions that are relevant to the phenomenon that is being studied through interviews (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Open-ended questions helped to facilitate the interviews and allowed the participants to elaborate on their answers and ideas. These questions also aided in the follow up of the interviews.

Interview questions are the best method of generating data in qualitative research (Nunkoosing, 2005). Interviews are conducted when a researcher wants to know about another person's experiences and are interested in that person's behavior and emotions on a topic (Nunkoosing, 2005). The interview questions that were used were not leading so as to not include bias. Case studies include a large amount of narrative that is able to examine the complexities of the topic being observed (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Observations of collaborative meetings, leadership team meetings, and faculty meetings took place. These observations helped to gather data in real time. This also helped with more specific follow-up questions as they surfaced. Notes from these meetings and reflective notes

were taken on the Observation Form (Appendix H). This form also aided in the documentation of the type of meeting, purpose of meeting, location, time, and length of meeting, the participants involved, their behaviors and interactions, specific quotes from the participants, and any next steps they discuss.

The collection of data also occurred during these visits. Copies of any other forms of data or artifacts were requested, which may include meeting agendas, meeting notes, data analysis templates and notes, and anything else the principal or leadership team deem necessary to their success. The data or artifacts could be used to help support the work of these highly successful schools. The master list of faculty names and codes, *Consent to Participate* forms, thumb drive with audio files, transcription notes, and the schools' artifacts were locked in a filing cabinet in my office and will be destroyed three years after the study was completed.

Realizing my role as a researcher, my experiences, and my bias were very important to remember throughout this process. Bias should be reduced by continually questioning the data that were collected through these interviews. The interview was not used to support the theory one may already have on the topic. Its primary purpose was to construct stories of the events that take place helping to generate theories that might not already exist (Nunkoosing, 2005).

Summary

A qualitative phenomenological, multi-site case study analyses were conducted to address the research question focusing on the practices of leadership teams in high-poverty, highly successful middle schools in the state of Indiana and how they contributed to their students' academic success. Phenomenological research looked at discovering a deep understanding of a phenomenon that individuals of a certain group shared. Case-study research analyzed real life phenomena occurring in these schools. In this study, two Indiana middle

schools were studied that had achieved their success even with high-poverty among their students. With that knowledge in hand, schools with high-poverty were able to reflect on these ideas and characteristics as they seek to improve their student achievement. Data collection included interviews with focus groups, observations, data collected from the IDOE website, and other data or artifacts from the schools. The purpose of phenomenology is to research lived experiences of individuals sharing a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The goal of the case study is to be different things to different people (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This allows different readers to be attracted to different components of the research. The findings from this study provides insight to all schools and leadership teams in helping them understand best practices and learn innovative ways they can embed to impact and raise achievement levels in their schools.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine the practices of highly effective leadership teams in two of Indiana's high-poverty, highly successful middle schools using a qualitative phenomenological, multi-site case study analysis. The overarching research question to be answered was "What practices do the leadership team accomplish that contribute to the student achievement in high-poverty, highly successful middle schools?"

I examined the practices of leadership teams in two very different high-poverty, highly successful middle schools. I created focus groups at each school and asked members of both groups the same questions to find common themes from within these schools. The participants were able to verbalize their common experiences through open discussion and were able to elaborate upon their opinions and insights through this narrative form.

Two Indiana middle schools were visited where interviews and observations took place with administrators, teachers, counselors, and leadership teams. The potential list of schools to be considered for inclusion in the interview process were chosen based on their ISTEP+ scores over the last three years and their free/reduced lunch percentages. There were 77 middle schools in Indiana that fit this description. To reduce the number of potential middle schools for the study, I looked only at those schools who had close to 80% passing on both the English/language arts and math sections of ISTEP+ over the last three years. Thirty-two middle schools were

found to have this achievement. I then narrowed down the number of schools to include in this research project by looking at enrollment statistics including total number of students as well as the ethnic composition of the student body. I looked for schools with larger student enrollment that were also very diverse. These schools' achievement was remarkable when compared with other Indiana middle schools of similar socioeconomic composition and student body size. The findings are presented based on themes found while interviewing the various faculty members, including administrators and counselors, at these two schools.

Two school days were spent at each school building. On the afternoon prior to each visit, I sat down with the building principal to get an overview of the school and ask the interview questions. I did not ask the principals of each school about the presence of a leadership team until the interview prior to the visit. It was very interesting to find out that both schools had leadership teams in place. A tour of the building was also given. On the first day of the visit, faculty members, including counselors and administrators, were invited to participate in an interview lasting no longer than 40 minutes. They were able to choose before school, after school, or during their planning period interview times. Seventeen (26%) of the 65 total certified staff members at School A chose to participate in the interview sessions. Even though email reminders and newsletters were sent by the principal and me, many faculty members chose not to participate in the interview sessions. I sensed that the faculty of School A really did not want to be interviewed. There was a hesitant feeling from some of those that were interviewed. They seemed afraid to be honest and share their feelings of why they believed their school was so successful. Twenty-two (54%) of the 48 total certified staff members at School B chose to participate in the interview sessions. School B's faculty seemed a little more receptive to having an outsider interview them about their school. Still, many faculty members did not attend the

interview sessions even after emails were sent by me and announcements made by the principal. Observations of department and team meetings/collaboration meetings were conducted throughout both visitation days at both schools.

A month before each school visit, an email was sent to each school's administration, leadership team, counselors, and faculty introducing me and the topic being researched. A week before each school's visit, another email was sent to remind the administration, leadership team, counselors, and faculty of the visit. Both schools' principals gave their faculty information about interview dates, times, and locations. School A's interviews were held in a multi-purpose room that was usually used for parent meetings. It was not in the line of hallway traffic so there was minimal noise which made it very conducive to interviewing. School B's interviews were held in a small room off of the library. The room was close to a teacher work area so it was easy for teachers to locate the interview sessions.

Every focus group of both schools had the same process for their interview sessions. Participants could meet with me either before school, after school, or during their planning period. During many of the interview sessions at each school. I had one person in each focus group. This may have been due to the planning period time or lack of interest in the interview. Each question was asked from the interview form (Appendix G). All participants were given time to respond to the questions and elaborate if they saw fit. Participants were also given the option not to respond to questions and could ask to have their responses deleted if they decided to not participate in the interview.

To ensure confidentially of the interviewees and schools, the schools were referred to as School A and School B. Each principal was referred to as Principal A and Principal B of the respective schools. All faculty participants, including counselors, were given a number based on

their school and were referred to as Teacher and then their respective number. Transcriptions from interviews were completed within 24 hours of the interviews. Quotes taken from conversations held with those interviewed were altered only for readability by including punctuation. The schools' names when mentioned in direct quotes were replaced with either School A or School B. The principals' names if mentioned in direct quotes were replaced with either Principal A or Principal B.

In this chapter, the following information from each school is presented: (a) tables with demographic information by year, student population by ethnicity, and ISTEP+ data by year; (b) a description of the school using information from interviews and personal observations; and (c) an analysis of the themes discovered at each school from the interviews and observations. Finally, I described the experience at each middle school in narrative form.

After I completed the faculty interviews, reviewed the notes, listened to the recordings of the interviews, reflected on the observations from both schools, and reviewed and read the transcriptions of the recordings, three main themes began to emerge. These themes were reflective of the cultures the schools had embraced in their buildings. They had cultures of learning, were data driven, and exercised shared leadership. In his article on school culture and climate, Gruenert (2008) explained that group members' beliefs evolve into unwritten rules that they follow in order to remain in good standing with their colleagues. These cultures can have a negative or positive effect on the organization. The cultures found in the research have created positive effects in their respective schools and have influenced their students' success.

The themes are detailed below with actual quotes from participants in the focus group interview sessions and observations from team meetings. The rationale of each of these themes

is embedded within the research, including actual quotes from participants, to determine how each of them assisted in answering the research question of the study.

School Visitation: School A

Table 1 contains School A's demographic data. Table 2 explains School A's ethnicity breakdown, and Table 3 contains School A's ISTEP+ yearly passing scores in English/language arts and math.

Table 1

School A Demographic Data by Year

Year	Poverty %	Grades	Enrollment	Attendance
2014	53.6%	6-8	1,121	-
2013	54.1%	6.8	1.173	95.5%
2012	53.8%	6.8	1.185	95.1%
2011	51.8%	6-8	1,209	94.6%

Table 2

School A 2014 Student Population by Ethnicity

White	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial	Asian	American Indian
756 (67.4%)	96 (8.6%)	214 (19.1%)	47 (4.2%)	5 (.4%)	3 (.3%)

Table 3

School A ISTEP+ Percent Passing Scores by Year

Year	E/LA	Math	Grade
2014	81.6%	88.3%	B
2013	75.6%	84.8%	C
2012	81.8%	84.7%	B
2011	78.8%	82.0%	B

School A was located in a very urban northwest Indiana neighborhood, immediately off a major interstate in the middle of town and at an extremely busy intersection. The entrance to the school was difficult to locate at first due to the heavy traffic of the road nearby. School dismissed at 2:35 P.M. and one could see many adults outside helping students get to the right bus or cross the traffic laden road. Groups of students were milling outside to catch up on the day. The front entrance was well-secured with double-locked doors that led into the office. One must be buzzed in to gain entrance into the building. The office staff was extremely friendly and willing to help out in whatever way visitors needed. A visitor's badge was required at all times while in the building. One could see "bully free" banners hanging from the walls and many motivational quotes. A banner in the office stated, "Educating Everyone Takes Everyone."

Principal A had been in administration for 20 years in the same corporation. This was her ninth year as principal of School A. She and her children received their education in this corporation. She was invested in School A.

Taking a tour of the school was one of the highlights of my trip. The school was built in in the 1960s as the original city high school. It was shut down in 1979 for two years to

reconfigure it into a middle school. It had not been renovated since then. The building had an open air feel to it with many plants located in one area. The principal assured me that students knew not to touch the plants and had a huge sense of pride for their school. The building was very clean with what I referred to as an "old school" smell. The only glimpse of technology located in the building was one computer lab as well as teacher computers in every classroom. There was a lack of more updated technology in the building. The school also housed the auto-mechanics classes for the high school. The principal indicated that the high school students knew not to mingle with the middle school students. They had not had a problem housing this program in their school.

The city population was around 36,812 for 2013. The median household income in 2013 was $51,623 with 12.5% of the population living below the poverty level. School A's free and reduced lunch percentages had remained around 50% to 54% over the last three years (Table 1). The ethnicity configuration of School A was mainly White at 67% with Hispanic as the second highest at 19% (Table 2). One of the teachers mentioned that they were considered a blue collar community. This offered a snapshot of the area that surrounded the school and the clientele educated by the school system. Principal A stated,

> We have many students from trailer parks, a very transient population, and many students from government housing that feed into our district. There was a great deal of movement from the west in the last five to six years. Our parents have moved to our district and have been very candid as to why they have moved. They want to be in our school.

An outsider looking in could see that even with some of the barriers presented to the faculty of School A, their students were still making gains on ISTEP+ (Table 3).

School A's *Mission Statement* was

> To provide all students with a quality education in a positive learning environment supported by cooperative efforts of the school, family and community that meets the students' needs and aspirations while preparing them to become respectful, productive citizens who view learning as a lifelong process.

School A's *Critical Values* were "Be Honest, Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Fair, Be Compassionate."

Standing out as success factors at School A were a culture of high expectations from the principal and teachers, interventions embedded in the school day and after school, being data driven through the collaboration among the teachers and the administrators, and their leadership team.

Recognized Reasons for Success

Success was perceived in many different ways. Principal A equated her school's success to the leadership that trickled down from the district to the building. Principal A stated, "It comes right from the leadership in our district to the leadership in our building. Everything has to be aligned. You cannot have randomness. You all have to be going in the same line." Their success also came from the culture they had created in their building. The faculty and administration had high expectations for the students revolving around the interventions that were embedded within the school day and after school. Collaboration was a driving force in the teachers' schedule. It was very easy for them to dig into data on a daily basis. They also had a leadership team in position who helped to make decisions for the building and aided in the success they had seen. The district made decisions with the help of key staff members from each building and filtered those decisions through the building leadership team to the rest of building.

Learning Culture

It was clearly evident after reviewing my notes and transcribing my recordings that the high expectations for students and staff were embedded in the culture of School A and were the driving force behind the success they had seen over the last few years. Their five critical values mentioned previously were posted in numerous locations throughout the school, reminding their students and staff what was expected of them. Discussing the success of her school, Principal A mentioned the five critical values and stated,

> It's incredible. If you talk to any of our kids, and ask them what Principal A expects of you, they will state those critical values and tell you my expectations are high for them. They know of my expectations and their teachers' expectations in their classes. We want them to excel academically. Failure is not an option.

Principal A explained that the teachers of each grade level collaborated to determine what they call "power standards" for their students. The power standards had indictors linked to them that were tested after each unit. Students were expected to have eighty percent mastery on their indicator tests. If they did not master these tests, they were given remediation opportunities through their advisory period and after-school tutoring sessions until they achieved the expected results on their indicator tests. Principal A stated, "We begin with the end in mind. Our teachers are extremely at-tuned to the standards. They are always talking about the standards. They know them inside and out. Everyone is going to work hard and our students will succeed."

School A had high expectations for staff. The expectations were set high for not only the students for School A but also the staff. Student achievement was paramount at School A, and the high expectations translated into action by each teacher ensuring that learning took place

every day in every class. When asked if the staff knew that she had high expectations for them, Principal A stated,

> Oh yes. We [the administration] communicate those often. We share the information when we get any type of data. Teachers are analyzing the ISTEP+ data. I ask them to figure out why certain students performed poorly on ISTEP+. I then ask them why other students performed well. That kind of blew them away at first. If you don't know why they did well, then you can't recreate that. What were you doing in your classroom that was different? I don't ask individual teachers hardly anything. I ask what is the team doing that is effective.

When asked about the principal's expectations, many teachers verbalized the pressure they felt but that they also felt supported. It was evident that many faculty members feared Principal A but also respected her. They knew that these high expectations translated into the results they were seeing in the classroom and on the ISTEP+ assessment. Teacher 3 stated,

> They [the administrators] make sure you are doing this and this and this and then they check and check again. They have totally high expectations for the teachers and the kids. It creates the environment we have here. It's not that they say it one time and hope that we do it, they remind us daily and check. If you are not doing it, they speak to you. This factors into the success of our students. There is success across the board. We are all in it together.

Teacher 10 was firm in her answer that high expectations were all around them as teachers. She stated, "Principals A's expectation is getting students to achieve mastery. We are expected to know how our students performed on ISTEP+ and how they are performing during

the school year." She also stated that these high expectations help the teachers "know where we need to be to giving them [their students] everything they need to be successful."

Teacher 5 verbalized the same feeling about the expectations at School A. He stated, "There are no excuses here. How are we going to get better? We are never satisfied. We want to keep building on our successes."

Many of the teachers in the interviews expressed the same feeling of high expectations and accountability. Teacher 16 voiced his belief and stated, "Our principal has high expectations for us. She really does. She makes sure to hold us accountable for the learning taking place in our classes. It's amazing!"

Throughout the interviews, Principal A's high expectations continually surfaced. Teacher 9 stated, "Principal A's expectations are very clear. Our students know that we expect them to learn, respect each other, and behave. This comes from the top down." She indicated that these high expectations from Principal A had been established into the culture of the school and in each classroom. The teachers knew the expectations of them which then flowed to the expectations they had for their students. The students knew that these high expectations mean that their teachers valued them. She stated, "High expectations transfer into the value we show for our students. We expect a lot from our students and they know this. It shows them that we care about them."

School A had high expectations for students. Their learning culture was such that their interventions drove the high expectations of the school. One of the interventions was after-school tutoring or remediation. Principal A stated, "Each team has after school remediation. The students that are failing during a certain time, stay after school with their regular teachers. This is much more helpful than summer school."

This program was so successful because School A was able to use the corporation buses in order to get students home after tutoring. There was no excuse for not being able to stay after school to receive extra help.

When asked about the after school remediation sessions, Teacher 5 was adamant that transportation was the big piece of the process. He stated, "We did not want any excuses as to why they could not partake in this help session. The expectation was that you will be here."

The teachers' high expectations were linked to the indicator tests they used to monitor their students' learning. Teacher 4 stated,

> If students do not master the indicators on the tests, we work with them until they do and then give them other opportunities to take the test again until they master it. We will work at this until they get it. The students know that that is the expectation.

Teacher 4 continued by stating that the high expectations established within School A's culture helped their students feel valued. She stated, "Our students' self-worth goes up because they know we are not leaving them behind to go on in the book."

The second form of remediation was embedded in the day during the school's advisory period, which each student had for 45 minutes every day. Three days a week the students had remediation or enrichment based on their ISTEP+ scores from the previous year as well as their indictor test scores. Two days a week, they worked on the established five critical values as mentioned previously. Principal A stated,

> This was a tough shift. The idea at School A is that you are a team. You are responsible for our students' math and English education no matter what subject you teach. Everyone understands what our students need to achieve.

Teacher 7 said it best when he concluded that the advisory period helped build relationships with their students. Teacher 7 stated, "Relationships with students are very important. They know that even though we have high expectations, we believe in them and want to help them succeed."

Teacher 5 felt that the high expectations came from everyone in the building. He conveyed that there was not a teacher in this building that would not find extra time to help the students succeed. He stated, "It's what's best for the kids. They see we are invested in their education."

When asked if their expectations were high, Teacher 9 indicated that their high expectations made them the school they are today. They consider themselves a school that surrounding corporations looked to for advice. She stated, "These are absolutely high expectations. Our slogan is the 'School A Way.' We have good programs and good schools. We do more with less and yet we are still preforming. Our neighboring communities are calling us for advice."

The teachers were adamant that their students were acutely aware that their teachers had high expectation for their academic performance. Teacher 4 stated, "My students know my expectations—on grade level performance and to make sure they get my help to get there." She also believed that the teachers and the administrators had done a good job of utilizing interventions because they were seeing less students needing the remediation. She indicated that each teacher had high expectations for his or her students which filtered down from the principal. She believed that they needed to increase those expectations further. She stated, "Now we need to build rigor into our classes and raise the bar."

The belief that their use of remediation had not only aided in their success but had established the high expectations they had for their students was noticed during the interviews. Teacher 10 stated, "Our students really understand the importance of their mastery of indicators. They know that if they don't master these indicators, we do a lot of remediation with them. They know that we want them to see success."

Not only do they want their students to know their high expectations for success they had for them, but the teachers of School A wanted the students to know they cared about them. Teacher 11 stated, "We are about relationship building and creating a bond with our students. Relationships are very important. Students can't learn if they don't feel loved."

Data-Driven Culture

After reviewing the data from ISTEP+ test scores a few years ago, the leadership team in School A created the idea to infuse more time into the teachers' work day for collaboration. Principal A stated, "Our leadership team spearheaded this decision. They asked the staff if they thought collaboration was important. We knew this would create larger class sizes. We had a lot of debates as to the value."

They realized that if they wanted to increase the academic success of their students, they needed to work together. In order to work together better, they needed this collaboration time.

School A encouraged collaboration. School A had seen a great deal of success over the last few years due in large part to the amount of collaboration that was expected. This collaboration was easy to maintain during each day. School A tweaked their master schedule a few years back where they included an extra plan time for all teachers. Each teacher had one period set aside during the day as their individual planning period. The second plan time was purely for collaboration. Each planning time was 45 minutes in length. Teachers were on teams

at each grade level. Each team consisted of a math, English, science, and social studies teacher. The teachers were expected to meet with their team three times a week and with their department twice a week. In essence, they collaborated each day.

Principal A felt like the collaboration that had been embedded in her school aided in the success they have seen over the last few years. She stated,

> Our teachers have two planning periods each day. Our teachers meet with an administrator once a week during their team plan time. We discuss the concerns we need to address for at-risk students. We discuss what individual teachers are doing in terms of their students who are failing one or more subjects. We talk about parent contact. During their department plan, teachers collaborate in terms of putting their lessons together as well as thematic units. School A considers this to be sacred time. Collaboration is important.

Although administrators and teachers at School A recognized the crucial need for the extra collaboration time, one result had been class sizes growing larger than most schools. Creating the extra plan time increased average class sizes to thirty students. Teacher 2 stated, "The focus of our school is to raise the bar. Our daily collaboration aides in the laser-like focus of academics."

Many teachers were resolute in their belief that collaboration was a large part of what aided in their school's ongoing success. Teacher 4 stated,

> It is safe to say our teachers collaborate every day. I would say that that is something you will find here that is stronger than other schools. The collaboration at our school is outstanding. There are no isolated teachers in our building. The two plan times are critical to our success.

Teacher 6 stated, “This has been a wonderful thing to be able to collaborate daily with our colleagues. We get to know our students better.” He believed that the collaboration helped him get to know all of his students’ academic needs. He sensed that he was able to help them more.

Teacher 10 was in awe of the collaboration that took place each and every day. She stated,

> I’ve never worked in a building where collaboration is occurring all of the time. Even in the lunch room. We all approach it with a serious tone. We don’t complain about students, we find solutions. We are all accessible to each other to collaborate with each other.

Assistant Principal 1 indicated that collaboration was a must at School A. It was an expectation and she explained that each administrator was expected to bring information to the collaboration meetings as well as offer support in the brain-storming sessions. She stated, “From the first day of school, our teachers get to know the kids’ scores. They discuss them in collaboration sessions, group them, and figure out remediation and enrichment.”

Teacher 10 reiterated their use and knowledge of the data. She stated, “We understand our students and test scores. We understand that we know what they need to be successful.”

Collaboration was strong in this building. Teacher 9 stated, “The collaboration has aided in our success. No one feels the weight of carrying the whole burden. We are all in this together.” I witnessed this first hand while observing a few of the team collaboration meetings. I noticed that everyone was very open to new ideas and discussed concerns they had within their classrooms. Assistant Principal 1 was able to facilitate the meeting as well as give her input to

help find solutions. The team always reminded themselves to remain focused on the data and their collaboration.

Shared Leadership Culture

Within the district, there was a leadership team called the quality team. This team consisted of members representing many different groups of teachers from different buildings and dissimilar subject areas. Each building had one administrator and one teacher on the quality team. The quality team filtered decisions made to the leadership teams within the individual buildings.

School A had a solid leadership team in place. The leadership team in School A was composed of 11 members representing a diverse cross section of the school. Assistant Principal 2 was the administrator on this team, which contained three sixth grade teachers, three seventh grade teachers, two eighth grade teachers, and one counselor. This group met once a month during school hours. Many participants felt that this group was highly effective, student oriented, and research based. Principal A was a huge proponent of the leadership team. She stated,

> It [leadership team] is shared leadership that must come from the teachers. It doesn't work for the administrators to stand on high and say this is what you are going to do. You need teachers' buy-in. Our leadership team is made up of a representative of each group and all different grade levels. They determine how we are progressing. What can we do to make things better? They spend a lot of time looking at the data, they spend a lot of time figuring out what we can do not just on ISTEP+, but also with our Critical Values.

During the interview sessions, I came across a range of reviews of the leadership team. Many teachers felt that the leadership team aided in the success of the students and the school. Teacher 3 stated, "Our leadership team gives us a great deal of information that then flows both ways. We take our concerns to the group. Communication is key here."

Teacher 6 believed that the leadership team did aid in the success of their students such as helping the principal find research based programs to support the school's success. He stated, "They aid in the success of our students quite a bit. They are very research based. We are able to give our input as well."

Teacher 10 felt the same way and verbalized the effectiveness of the leadership team. She stated,

> They present at our faculty meetings or team meetings. A lot of work is done through them. They are effective. Whenever something new is coming up, they communicate well. They share with teams, and teachers. They do it with respect. It is always positive.

One of the members of the leadership team, Teacher 8, believed that the team did directly aid in the success of the students in School A. He stated, "We are a core group of individuals who work to get one outcome; to achieve greatness. We work as a team."

Another leadership team member, Teacher 9, explained that the leadership team was credited for creating the two planning periods, a process which provided a way to build collaboration into the school day. She believed that this aided in the success their students were accomplishing. She stated,

> We have some decision making abilities. We give our input and make recommendations. We do what is in the best interest of our kids. Our decisions affect student success. We

helped to create the schedule where teachers were able to collaborate more while also having an individual plan.

Only one administrator was on the leadership team, Assistant Principal 2. He was passionate about the leadership team and the correlation between the success the school had seen and the work the leadership team had accomplished to aid in that success. He stated, "They [the leadership team] are strong because of the success we have already seen. Our goal is to be more successful each year. Our leadership team has been in place since our scores starting rising."

Principal A explained that the leadership team's sole purpose was to help with the students' achievement. She believed that the work the team had completed had boosted success at their school. She stated, "Their job is to see how to help the students succeed in the school. They have to be forward thinkers."

A few teachers indicated that they felt that although the leadership team helped bolster discussions, that the real decisions that ensured success were made by the administrators. Teacher 4 stated, "The leadership team makes decisions with the help of the administrators in the building. We are very top down in this corporation."

Principal A's leadership was mentioned quite a bit during the interviews. Teacher 15 stated, "Our school's leadership team does give their input on certain topics, but the principal is the one who makes the ultimate decision on issues. Communication is key, though."

Mentioning the principal's leadership, many teachers strongly felt that she was the one that had ensured the success their school and students had achieved over the years. Teacher 17 stated, "We have solid leadership in our principal. She plays a huge role in our success."

Teachers believed that the length of the principal's tenure had helped them as well. Teacher 5 stated, "We have had constant leadership from our principal over the last nine years. We know what is expected and that she will support us. We trust her."

Teacher 4 stated, "The administration here has a large part to do with our success. They allow us the flexibility with a total buy-in from the teachers."

Teacher 12 also mentioned the support they had felt from their principal. She stated, "We have strong leadership in our principal. She wants us to do well and gives us support. Principal A is a huge factor in our success."

Teacher 13 believed that a large part of the success was because of their principal. He stated,

> We have had solid leadership since I have been here. This has really played a part in making sure the school runs the way it should and preforms the way we do.

School Visitation: School B

Table 4 contains demographic data for School B. Table 5 presents School B student population ethnicity, and Table 6 reflects the passing scores by year for School B in English/language arts and math.

Table 4

School B Demographic Data by Year

Year	Poverty %	Grades	Enrollment	Attendance
2014	56.4%	6-8	786	-
2013	54.3%	6-8	820	96.7%
2012	53.0%	6-8	804	96.7%
2011	51.2%	6-8	812	96.6%

Table 5

School B 2014 Student Population by Ethnicity

White	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial	Asian	American Indian
615 (78.2%)	19 (2.4%)	105 (13.4%)	44 (5.6%)	3 (.4%)	NA

Table 6

School B ISTEP+ Percent Passing Scores by Year

Year	E/LA	Math	Grade
2014	80.4%	87.1%	B
2013	83.7%	90.4%	B
2012	75.7%	81.1%	D
2011	80.6%	83.9%	A

School B was nestled in the rural corn fields of Central Indiana. The school sat back from the road in a very green space. Walking up to the building, a sign can be seen that stated, "Learn Today to Excel Tomorrow," which was also the mission statement of the school. One must be buzzed in to enter the building because the double doors were locked at all times. A banner hung in the front foyer that read, "Building a Better World, One Student at a Time." The office personnel was very friendly and eager to help. Upon entering the building, there was a welcome back bulletin board that stated, "Be Who You Are," with many adjectives of what students could become while in school.

Principal B was currently in his 10th year as the principal of School B. Previously he was the assistant principal for two years and a social studies teacher for five years in School B. He was committed to ensuring the success of School B.

The town of School B had a population of 22,010 in 2013 with 19.7% living below the poverty level. The median household income was $36,903. School B's free and reduced lunch had been between 51% and 56% over the last few years (Table 4). The ethnicity composition of the school was primarily White at 78% with Hispanic as the second highest at 13% (Table 5). When asked about the poverty in the area, the principal stated that there was no industry and that many drinking establishments and antique shops dot the community.

The school was built in 1971 and housed sixth to eighth-grade students. There were two floors of classes that were separated by grade level. Teachers were allowed to paint their rooms as Principal B felt like this was their home away from home so they should have the freedom to decorate as they liked. Each teacher of a core content area (English, math, science, and social studies) had a SMARTBoard located in his or her room. Each English and reading teacher had a mobile Chrome cart with 32 Chromebooks for student usage. There were hallway, bathroom, and cafeteria expectations posted throughout the building for all to see. These rules consisted of how students were expected to act within in the walls of this establishment. Math and English data walls were located in the second floor teachers' lounge. Acuity data were displayed by grade level. Data walls were also created in the different grade level hallways for the students to see as well.

The principal stated many times that he was a positive educator and that he expected the same from his staff. This had obviously filtered to his teachers because in one of the classrooms a teacher had a banner that stated, "You can't have a positive life with a negative mind." Many

of these inspirational quotes could be found throughout the building and in many of the classrooms and hallways. This positivity could be seen in high ISTEP+ scores over the last few years (Table 6).

School B's *Mission Statement* was "Learn Today to Excel Tomorrow."

School B's *Belief Statements* (four of the seven statements) were "All students are entitled to a quality education."

"The middle school philosophy addresses the cognitive, emotional, physical and social needs of adolescents."

"The learning environment should be safe and orderly."

"Learning is a continuous process."

School B's success came from the high expectations from the principal for everyone in the building, daily collaboration based on data, clear and focused goals based on data, and a principal who valued the input of the teachers by creating a strong leadership team.

Recognized Reasons for Success

School B has seen growth in their success for many reasons. Principal B was a firm believer that they would not have experienced such high levels of success without the huge emphasis on building relationships with their students. He quoted Whitaker and stated, "It's people, not programs. It's so true. You still have to have programs, but you have to build those relationships. You have to find what motivates them." He exemplified this when walking around the school. He knew his students not only by name, but also by test score. This was due in large part to the conversations that have revolved around data during collaboration meetings with teachers.

The culture they had created in their building has ensured their success. Principal B had high expectations for the teachers and students. Collaboration was expected and very evident in the teachers' schedule, which included data team meetings where they analyzed their data with administrators. They had a solid leadership team who aided in the success they had seen and a principal who asked for input constantly.

Learning Culture

There was a strong sense of high expectations from the building principal for all in the building. The teachers also had high expectations for their students. These high expectations built valuable relationships between the adults and children in the building. Teacher 1 stated,

> Our teachers have worked really hard to make sure kids are meeting the goals and analyzing their goals. We have data walls. I have to put a lot of the success on the math and ELA teachers. They have put forth a strong effort on looking at what we can do to help kids get a better knowledge base on how we can help the students succeed academically.

Principal B believed that they were working pretty hard right now, but they needed to work smarter, not harder.

The principal had high expectations for everyone in the building. After being labeled a D school in 2012, Principal B knew that as the educational leader of his school, he had relaxed his leadership. High expectations needed to be embedded in the everyday workings of School B. A sense of urgency needed to be communicated in order for their school to be where it once was; a highly successful school. Principal B stated,

> When we were a D school, I looked at myself to see what I needed to change. I am a pretty easy going guy, but I demand results. I am not a clock watcher. I treat you

> professionally. My expectation is that you do your job. You treat kids nice, like they are your own kids. You do the best you can do to get kids where you need them to be. You need to look yourself in the mirror every day and ask yourself if you are getting kids where they need to be each and every day.

Principal B continued by explaining how he raised the expectations for staff and students. He stated, "No one rises from low expectations. You have to have high expectations for kids. I'm idealistic but also realistic." School B had many interventions in place that contributed not only to the high expectations, but also the success that the school has seen over the last few years. Principal B detailed,

> Our interventions start with a morning teacher advisory (TA). This is where students get ready to start their school day. This is the students' home base. Their TA teacher gets to know the students very well. We then have leveled courses for English and math. Below level students also get a lab connected to their English and math class. Students are placed in these classes based on data collected from ISTEP+ and Acuity. We also have before and after school help sessions that we call "revive sessions."

The advisory period was the first fifteen minutes of the day and is just a check-in time. The "revive" sessions were optional before or after school and were not heavily attended due to transportation issues.

One could get a sense from the climate of the building, that Principal B was well-respected not only by the staff, but also the students. He communicated the morning announcements every day and included words of wisdom and encouragement that added to the high expectations of the building. He articulated, "Every morning I say to the school, 'Do your

best,' 'Be the best learners possible,' 'Be the best person possible,' and I always reiterate our mission statement, 'Learn Today to Excel Tomorrow.'"

During interviews with the focus groups, I came across the same feeling of high expectations. When asked if there were high expectations in the school, Teacher 1 was very enthusiastic about them. She described the high standards that Principal B had for everyone within the building. She stated, "Absolutely for staff and students." She also stated, "Our principal might seem laid back, but he has very high expectations for us and our students. Our staff is very concerned and dedicated to doing a good job."

With high expectations established for student learning, Teacher 3 also felt the high expectations that surrounded him. He stated, "Principal B stresses to us daily to be prepared to teach and cover what needs to be covered. Our principal also stresses to us to reflect daily and make a difference in our classrooms." Principal B's leadership was extremely strong due to these high expectations for the learning that took place in every classroom. His expectations had enhanced the success in the building.

With these high expectations also came respect for the teachers. Teacher 17 enthusiastically knew what the expectations were but also knew he was respected. He stated, "The clear expectations from administrators are to give 100% each day and daily collaboration between teachers. Our principal is open to new ideas. He pushes us forward."

Teacher 20 reiterated what had been expressed in previous interviews. She stated, "You have to have high expectations in order to get any results." When asked what was expected of the teachers, she explained,

> Do your job in a professional manner. Care for the children in a professional manner. Put forth the effort to figure out what the kids need and provide education to them with the best of your abilities.

Summing up the expectations embedded in the culture of the school, Teacher 4 stated, "Collaboration between teachers and clear expectations from the administrators."

School B had high expectations for the students. Assistant Principal 1 reiterated what Principal B had discussed regarding the value of setting high expectations. He believed that Principal B's high expectations enhanced the academic activity in the classrooms. He stated, "I think we have high expectations here. I don't think we could be 56% free and reduced lunch and see the gains we have seen without high expectations."

The teachers of School B definitely had high expectations for their students. Teacher 19 stated, "We hold them to a higher standard. They need to realize this is part of the real world."

Teacher 17 was clear that the high expectations in School B revolved around giving 100% daily, as stated earlier. This expectation was also demanded of the students. Teacher 20 stated,

> We expect our students to show respect for themselves and others. We expect them to follow rules and be civil to others. We expect them to be considerate of others. We promote this by modeling and our interactions with the kids. Some of our kids come from backgrounds that are not conducive to this. They have not learned this. These are the expectations we have that you should behave in certain circumstances. You can't just assume that they know how to behave this way.

The teachers wanted their students to be good citizens of their community as well as successful in school. Teacher 2 stated, "The number one emphasis is respect. They are expected to follow the rules. But we also tell them to be the best they can be."

Even though School B had high expectations for their students, they also strived to build meaningful relationships with them. They let the students know that they valued them as individuals. Teacher 3 stated, "All of the teachers have expectations and build kids up at the same time."

Assistant Principal 1 stated, "We develop relationships. We spend a lot of time talking with teachers about building positive relationships with their students. Developing these relationships are very important to our students' success."

Students in School B knew they were valued by their teachers. Teacher 20 justified this idea by stating, "We get kids to know we care and we want them to succeed."

Data-Driven Culture

Data conversations were an essential part of the daily exchanges that took place in School B. Since Principal B was data driven, he made sure that once he received the ISTEP+ results from the state, he shared them with his faculty. This enabled the teachers and administrators to break down and evaluate the data and determine how they could best use it to amplify instruction in each and every class. He stated, "We have become better at analyzing data and using it. Getting results does not just happen. It's looking at the data and figuring out what it is telling us. Figuring out what kids need and then follow through."

The principal expected daily collaboration. Collaboration was clearly evident as a priority in School B as well as having effective organizational communication. The teachers in School B had two scheduled 45 minute plan times each day. One plan time was with their data

team, which consisted of English, math, science, social studies, and related arts teachers at their grade level. The second plan time was their individual plan time, which was the same by department and grade level. During the data team collaboration, the team would meet in the faculty lounge where Acuity data was placed on three large grade level boards. The teachers were constantly looking at and reviewing the data. Specifically, each teacher was expected to monitor their Acuity data and discuss this data during their daily meetings. They are also encouraged to discuss instructional strategies that have helped them with their students' classroom learning as well as how they address individual students' needs. Each team was required to submit minutes from their collaboration meetings to Principal B. Once a month the departments had a vertical meeting so they could look at the data in each grade per specific subject areas.

Principal B was described as a strong leader who gave the teachers structure with room to make changes in their classrooms based on the data they were presented. Teacher 20 stated, "The emphasis on using data is extremely important to us. We are a dedicated staff who know how to use the data. The data doesn't lie."

The clear expectation for collaboration meetings was that teams were to discuss the educational needs of their students. It was evident that data was to be discussed and used. Assistant Principal 1 described Principal B's vision for the school's success. He stated, "But it's all about data. What do we need to do to get better?"

The teachers at School B also felt as though they were data driven as a school. They indicated in many of the interview sessions that their principal had helped them become that way. Teacher 9 stated,

> Principal B is constantly talking about what the data is telling us. We are always looking at data. We look very specifically at certain students academically that we need to focus on. We are looking at the data to see if they are capable of learning the material. We look at the ISTEP+ data to group our students in our classes. We use it to plan our lessons.

Teacher 18 explained that Principal B trusted the teachers, but had high expectations regarding their collaboration time. He also explained that their principal challenged them to see where they could improve next while collaborating. He stated, "We collaborate all of the time. This takes place each and every day. Sometimes we see things differently or not like the way we did before when we collaborate with our team."

Teacher 3 explained that Principal B really valued collaboration. He stated, "Principal B does not expect anything from us that he won't do himself. He is always collaborating with us and giving us new ideas about what the data is telling us."

Assistant Principal 1 reiterated the importance of the data teams. He reported, "Our staff works well together for the betterment of our students. They know what we are trying to accomplish. They are willing to change to make that happen based on the data." He also discussed that the staff collaborated to help increase the academic success of their students. He stated, "They know the academic achievement we are trying to accomplish."

As stated earlier, Principal B met with the data teams of each grade level every other week. He stated, "I make sure that everything I ask of my teachers, I do as well." Meeting dates and times were given to the teachers at the beginning of the school year so there was no question when meetings would take place. English and math teachers in every grade met quarterly with Principal B.

Many teachers did state that their principal and the implementation of collaboration were the main reasons for their success. Teacher 18 stated, "Our principal is always open to any new ideas we have. He pushes us forward and wants us to succeed."

After observing many data team meetings, I noticed that they were very focused on how to improve the learning of their students. Principal B led the data team meetings. It was obvious that they met often and did not get side tracked. They knew that they needed to bring their SMART Goals to the next meeting as well as samples of student work.

The principal set clear and focused goals. It was very evident that Principal B was goal oriented. He had set clear and focused academic goals for his faculty and students. These goals included over 85% pass rate in math and over 80% pass rate in ELA on ISTEP+ for this school year. One could see, based on the data presented, that the school either came close to meeting or surpassing these goals (Table 6).

Everyone knew the goals when asked. One goal was focused on informational text, and the other focused on problem solving. When asked about the goals, Teacher 2 stated, "They are very clear. We have pushed our students over the last couple of years. We believe they all can learn. We pushed some kids I thought might never be able to meet our expectations. They proved me wrong."

Assistant Principal 1 stated, "Our non-tested subjects can definitely help in these areas also. We don't ask them to change the way they teach, just embed this into what they are already teaching."

The teachers of School B felt the sense of urgency of helping their students learn the standards. Teacher 17 stated, "The most important thing we need to remember is to help the students learn these key concepts."

The teachers also knew the importance of including math and English standards into their own curriculum. Teacher 9 stated, "We are planning instruction and embedding language arts indicators within our curriculum while we collaborate. We want our students to have success on ISTEP+."

Teacher 21 repeated this attitude in her comments. She stated, "The principal has communicated clear goals to us, but he also gives us the freedom to control our classrooms as long as we are covering standards and using Acuity."

The teachers knew the goals and the expectations. Teacher 5 stated, "Our principal has given us clear goals and expectations. The main thing is to work as hard as you can to show success."

Many teachers felt that these clear and focused academic goals were what had helped them in their success. Teacher 18 stated, "Our school-wide goals have made a huge difference in our students' success."

Teachers were also expected to set SMART goals based on Acuity data. Principal B stated, "I ask the teachers, what are you going to do in your classroom after looking at the data? Create SMART goals to help you achieve success." SMART goals are strategic and specific, measureable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound goals educators can create for themselves and their students (O'Neill & Conzemius, 2006). The teachers were required to fill out a SMART goals form for the principal at the beginning of the school year after they had analyzed the ISTEP+ data and then again after each Acuity test. Teacher 18 stated, "Every teacher has SMART goals and the administration asks us how we address these."

Teacher 20 indicated that an unwritten goal of the school is to produce good citizens. She stated,

> We know the goals of our school are academic in nature, but we also know that we want to help our students become good citizens as well. We try to work on all aspects of our students. Not just academic, but character aspects too.

Shared Leadership Culture

Shared leadership was seen throughout the visit at School B especially during the data team meetings and the leadership team meeting. Teachers' voices were being heard and their ideas were being discussed and used in the day-to-day operation of the school. The interventions that were mentioned earlier were brainstormed, discussed, and decided by the administrators and the teachers. There is a strong sense of team work and shared leadership in this building.

The principal solicited input and shared decision making with the staff. As mentioned above, Principal B was very receptive to the ideas and suggestions that came from his faculty. Principal B reflected and explained that although he led from behind, he was acutely aware of where he and his team were going. He stated, "You must be willing to listen to people. Everyone has something to bring to the table."

The teachers also believed this to be true. Teacher 2 stated, "Our principal is the driving force behind what we do. He is supportive. But at the same time he is realistic."

During the collaboration meetings that were witnessed, I saw Principal B ask for input on a form he created. The form was to help the teachers analyze the Acuity data they would be receiving. He wanted feedback from each group regarding what they thought of the form and how he could make it more user friendly for the faculty.

The teachers believed they did have a voice in what occurred in their school. Teacher 3 emphasized, "Our principal is great at taking ideas with teacher input. He really listens to us."

Principal B met every other week with data teams at each grade level. During observations of another data team meeting, I was amazed at the level of in-depth conversations about the data and how it could be used by the faculty. The data consisted of ISTEP+ categories where weaknesses where shown and the upcoming Acuity tests. Conversations in one meeting focused on how to improve the math scores. The team also discussed the form the principal created and wanted to send to all teachers and how that process would help them to better discuss and analyze the Acuity results they would see in a few weeks. Principal B asked the group for their input. One could tell that he really listened to them and valued their opinions.

Principal B trusted his teaching staff. He stated, "If you don't have a happy staff, it's hard to get results. There is a fine line there. If you want to get results, you need to treat people well."

Everyone had a hand in making decisions at School B. Teachers brought information from their teams and departments to the leadership team, but they all felt like they had an influence. Teacher 1 stated, "It's not just a few people deciding things for the school, everyone has a voice."

School B had a solid leadership team. The leadership team's composition was representative of the school, with 14 members which consist of both administrators, both counselors, and a representative from all subject areas by grade levels. Principal B was pleased with the success the school had achieved over the last few years and credited it to the work the leadership team had accomplished. He stated, "This is the group that makes our school wide decisions."

Teacher 2 explained the leadership team the best. He was extremely passionate about the relationship between success the school had realized in the twenty years he had taught there and

the leadership team. He stated, "Each team has a person on the committee. We are building based. The staff is able to give a lot of input to the leadership team. Our principal listens to us. He helps us and is very supportive."

The leadership team at School B was solid and strong. Assistant Principal 1 is part of this team. He stated,

> The leadership team aids in the success of our students because we talk about the different programs we would like to implement to help make them successful. Whenever we look at major changes in our school, we start with the leadership team first.

Teacher 4 was also a member of the leadership team and valued the work they had accomplished over the years. She stated, "We meet and brainstorm and then we share the information to our teams. Communication is must. When we meet it's all about the students. We aid in the success of the students."

Teacher 18 stated, "Decisions from the leadership team are faculty based. They provide the direction for the school." The teachers in School B believed their leadership team had the best interest of the entire school. They wanted the school to succeed.

The teachers valued the work the leadership team did. They also respected the decisions that were made to ensure success at their school. Having a leadership team where teachers were members helped to hold everyone accountable for the commitments made and followed. Teacher 20 was also a member of the leadership team. She stated,

> We [the leadership team] have developed the forms and the processes we use in our building. We then give them to the faculty and ask for their input. They give us suggestions and we run with them. We started out with this group not just saying that we

> going to do it, but we actually did it. We prove that we are doing it. This makes it impossible for people to get lazy and fake it.

Changes to programs and policies at School B were not made quickly. Instead, potential modifications were considered and implemented over a period of time. Solutions for problem areas and concerns were thoroughly reviewed and discussed in order to optimize success. Teacher 22 stated,

> They [the leadership team] discuss possibilities and refine those possibilities before they are presented to the staff as a whole. They get feedback from the teams. Things are decided upon and formalized as a proposal to the staff. There is a good input from the staff.

I was able to observe the leadership team and noticed that they revisited topics discussed at a previous meeting. They discussed concerns teachers were having with writing in classes and how they could help them. Teacher 4 stated, "Is it getting us where we need to be based on the data?" It was very evident that everyone's input was gathered and valued during this meeting.

There was a constant focus on the data. Principal B asked at one point, "Is that what the data is telling us?" All of their conversations were based on students and achievement. They even discussed their Pass+ students not growing like they would like to see.

Summary

Even though there were many differences between School A and School B, several consistent themes transpired in each school. What stood out and was a commonality in each school were the cultures that had been embedded and how those cultures had aided in each of their success. The characteristics of high performing high-poverty schools mentioned in Chapter 2 surfaced during my research. High performing schools create high standards and expectations

which in turn creates a culture of improvement within the building (Hallinger, 2003). Both schools had a culture of learning, which showed through high expectations. Each school became a place where collaboration was valued which created a culture of being data driven. Increasing a teacher's voice within the school and engaging their thoughts and insights on topics has the potential for positive effects on the success of the school (Louis et al., 2010). Both of these schools had a culture of shared leadership in place. Chapter 5 includes a few summary sentences comparing the themes that were found.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The practices of the leadership team were observed during visits at both schools and revealed during interviews with focus groups of teachers, counselors, leadership teams, and administrators. The interviews provided a wealth of information about the presence of effective leadership practices taking place in both schools. The participants described the implementation of cultures that had a positive effect on the student achievement within their schools. Through the interviews and observations at both schools, the practices utilized by the leadership team emerged via the research question. What practices do the leadership team accomplish that contribute to the student achievement in high-poverty, highly successful middle schools?

It is important to note that a qualitative phenomenological, multi-site case study is evolving in nature. Phenomenological, multi-site case study research enables the researcher to answer "how" and "why" questions while also studying the phenomenon that influenced the situation (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Knowledge learned from a phenomenological, multi-site case study is important because it is more concrete and can correspond with one's own experiences.

This study was completed because I was curious about the phenomenon of high-poverty, highly successful middle schools in Indiana. A review of the literature about effective schools and effective school leadership in high-poverty schools provided a solid foundation and a guide to the research. The results in Chapter 4 were based on the perspectives of the individual faculty

members, counselors, leadership team, and administrators who participated in the interviews. The results also reflected the conclusions that I secured after participating in and analyzing the data that was gathered from the interviews and observations. Patterns and themes were looked for through the qualitative method to help determine the practices the leadership teams exercised to ensure the success of their schools.

Summary of Discussions and Findings

The components of School A and School B's leadership teams were observed and revealed during observations and interviews with teachers, counselors, and administrators. These observations and interviews provided a wealth of information about the effectiveness of the leadership teams' practices that contributed to student achievement within each school. Based on the observations and interview responses obtained, the following three themes emerged with slight differences at each school.

Learning Culture

The principals of both schools had embedded high expectations for staff and students within their school through their leadership teams. Participants in the focus groups of both schools expressed their belief that these high expectations were the driving force behind the success they had seen over the years. These high expectations included structured advisory periods and after-school tutoring where students had access to remediation and extra help. It all boiled down to the accountability both schools realized they must ensure in order to achieve the results demonstrated in the classroom and on ISTEP+ over the last few years. These high expectations enhanced the academic activity that took place in the classrooms as well as helped the teachers build relationships with their students. The teachers interviewed believed that their students felt valued and respected which encouraged the students to rise to these expectations.

These schools would not have realized this level of success as a high-poverty school without high expectations.

Data-Driven Culture

Conversations regarding data occurred daily at each school due in large part to the embedded culture of collaboration that took place. Both schools were data driven and realized the need to increase collaboration during the school day for their teachers in order to ensure their students' academic success. This collaboration created a focus on the academics taking place in each classroom. In order to escalate academic success, both schools believed they needed more time for the teachers to collaborate. As a result, each school had daily collaboration for every teacher incorporated into their daily schedule. This ensured that teachers got to know their students better and were better positioned to implement strategies to ensure academic success for their students. Both schools brought data to their collaboration meetings and disaggregated what needed to be done in order to help their students become successful.

Shared Leadership Culture

Highly effective leadership teams were in place in both schools. The principals of both schools created their respective leadership teams. They asked for input and encouraged their leadership teams to help make decisions in order to have a positive effect on their students' success. Each schools' leadership team represented a balanced cross section of the teachers within the school, with all subject areas represented so all voices could be heard. Leadership teams were focused on ways to create instructional capacity and influence student learning within a building. This practice placed emphasis on student learning and created commitment where information was cascaded to other teachers via the leadership team.

Conclusions

In the studies researched in his article on the role of leadership, Gezi (1990) concluded that leadership in school improvement is critically important. This study's findings found that the practices of the effective leadership teams within the high poverty schools studied contributed to the academic success their students have seen over the last few years. Based on the themes that emerged from both schools, practices were revealed that were of significant importance. These practices have shown to be effective in both schools and in the research study.

High Expectations Were in Place for Both Staff and Students

A review of previous literature on highly successful high-poverty schools revealed the importance of high expectations that affect students' academic performance (AEL, 2005; Chenoweth, 2007; DuFour et al., 2010; Freidman, 2012; The Institute of Education Sciences, 2008; Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Picucci et al., 2002). Schools that have high expectations in place have individuals who are highly dedicated and committed to their students' academic success and their educational careers. Both schools believed that their success was due in large part to the high expectations they had in their buildings. The leadership team created a high degree of accountability for all staff members and students by ensuring they rose to those high expectations.

School A had their five critical values posted throughout the building which reminded all who either taught or learned in the building what was expected of them. These were created by the leadership team and can be found on page 57 of this study. Teachers were expected to analyze data and create results. The teachers also believed that the high expectations and sense

of accountability filtered down from Principal A and their leadership team, but also felt strongly supported. Many of the teachers interviewed seemed fearful of the principal. I could never grasp the reason for this impression but sensed its presence. They knew what was expected of them and understood it was the right thing to do to guarantee success for their students. The teachers believed that the students knew they were to behave appropriately, but they must also academically perform. The teachers believed that the students knew that there was an expectation of academic success. The administration, counselors, and teachers also believed that these high expectations helped to create an atmosphere of caring in their building where their students knew they were valued. They valued their principal and his leadership.

There was a strong sense of Principal B's effective leadership ability in raising the expectations of the school. The teachers believed that his high expectations were not only clear, but they enhanced the academic activity within the building. He created a sense of urgency that was warranted, but not overbearing. The teachers of School B were encouraged to reflect on the learning taking place in their classrooms so they could make an educational impact on their students. Through these high expectations, the teachers of School B felt respected and supported.

The teachers within the building communicated high standards from the principal, the leadership team, and the staff which translated into dedication to creating a highly successful school. The faculty and students were held to higher expectations in order to see results that were needed to ensure their academic success. The teachers in this building also believed that holding students to higher standards built positive relationships of caring and trust. School B believed that building strong relationships with their students through high expectations was paramount in their success. They believed their students felt valued and knew that their teachers

were there to support them in their educational success.

Translated through these high expectations, the teachers of each building believed their students felt valued. Hoy et al. (2006) believed that if there were high academic standards in place a school would find academic success even if poverty were a factor. High expectations also translated into students trusting their teachers and believing that they had their best interest in mind.

Interventions Were Implemented to Support Student Success

Highly successful schools have academic interventions established within their school day. School A had interventions implemented during the school day in their advisory period as well as during their heavily attended after-school remediation sessions which included the added help of transportation. The inception of both of these interventions were many discussions through the leadership team. Their advisory period, an intervention embedded during the school day that created academic successes for their students, contributed to less students needing remediation each year.

Indicator tests, which were given periodically during the school year, helped gauge understanding and find where gaps needed to be filled. These indicator tests were created collaboratively by grade level teachers through power standards. Mastery was essential and the teachers helped the students by making sure they had the interventions in place to support their success on the indicator tests. The teachers were expected to stay after school to help their students during the tutoring sessions that took place. They were also expected to create lessons to help their students during the advisory period fill the gaps based on the indicator tests. They knew that excuses were not going to be heard and that academic results were what mattered.

School B also had a morning advisory period, but it was not the same length nor did it

provide the same remediation as School A. School B's advisory period was simply a time for the teachers to check in with their core group of students, oversee their academics, and help get them organized. The leadership team created "revive sessions" after school; however, they were not heavily attended due to lack of transportation. The teachers believed these intervention times built valuable relationships between the teachers and their students. School B lacked needed interventions within the school day as well as needed resources which were seen in School A.

Daily Collaboration Was Encouraged and Expected

Another practice of highly effective leadership teams is the emphasis on collaboration. Collaboration leads to the sharing of ideas which includes open dialogue about teaching strategies and best practice. Both schools agreed that collaboration contributed to the success they saw in the classroom and with their students. Teachers in both schools described the dialogue they participated in and how it enhanced the learning that took place in their classrooms.

School A's leadership team spearheaded a change in their schedule based on conversations with teachers and realizing the need for collaboration. School A's weekly team meetings were focused on students' achievement on the indicator tests and within their classes, as well as behaviors seen. Many times they stated that this meeting was not a time to complain, but a time to find solutions. Each assistant principal was assigned a team of core subject area teachers they meet with weekly. The administrators were required to bring data to these meetings with their team of teachers. They used this data to encourage dialogue in order to come up with solutions to issues the teams are encountering. School A did not have a room dedicated to team meetings where data would be shared or hanging on the walls. The principal was not an active member on any of the weekly team meetings. During observations of these team

meetings, the collaboration was strong and focused on the academic needs of the students. They diligently worked from bell to bell to create solutions to guarantee academic achievement for their students.

The weekly data team meetings at School B were more centered around data and collaborating on teaching strategies. School B's meetings were focused on not only students' academic achievement in each class, but also Acuity data that was obtained. ISTEP+ and Acuity data were placed on data walls in the grade level faculty lounges where these meetings took place. Principal B was part of each data team meeting every other week. He required the teams to submit weekly minutes so he had knowledge of what took place and what supports might be needed. He made sure that each team had the ISTEP+ and Acuity data so they could evaluate and dissect it in order to fathom the best way to utilize it to strengthen the instruction taking place in their classes. Principal B was credited with helping his faculty become data driven. They knew that the data did not lie, but would help them ensure academic achievement for their students.

Clear and Focused Goals Were Established

Schools where academic goals are the focus for higher academic achievement will have a direct effect on student success (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). When there are high but achievable goals in place, students will be motivated to work harder to attain those goals. Students will respect the academic achievement they have made (Hoy et al., 2006). Clear and focused goals help motivate teachers and students to work toward a common purpose.

School A's teachers indicated that goals were in place, but they did not know them verbatim. They implied that percentage goals for ISTEP+ could be found in the office, but were not clear exactly where. Many teachers suggested that the goal of School A was academic

success of their students. They made their main focus the goal of improving students' academic success during the collaboration meetings observed.

Clear and focused goals became the norm in School B. These clear and focused goals were evident in observations of their team meetings. All teachers knew their school's academic goals of over 80% pass rate in ELA and over 85% pass rate in math. One way to help ensure the success of attaining these goals was to create SMART goals in every class based on the Acuity data they obtained periodically during the school year. These goals gave them a clear expectation they could commit to and then demand of their students. School B believed that these goals have made a difference in their students' success.

Effective Leadership Teams Encouraged Communication and Results

Schools that implement shared decision making make teaching and learning their central focus (AEL, 2005). Strong leadership teams were in place at both schools. Each school had a good representation of teachers, counselors, and administrators on their leadership teams. This ensured the opinions of all subject areas were heard in the discussions and decisions that were being made within their schools.

School A's leadership team met once a month to collaborate while making decisions for their school. They strongly believed that communication was the key to their success. They cascaded and clarified the decisions they made to their team members and departments. They committed to the decisions that were made. They made sure that everyone had a voice and was heard. They worked well together to assure the success of their students and school. This group was credited with creating the extra plan time in their teachers' schedules to guarantee daily collaboration. They also gave input and made recommendations in the best interest of the students. Assistant Principal B was an active member of this team. I found it peculiar that the

principal was not an active member of the leadership team.

Principal B was credited with the shared leadership that took place at School B. He created the leadership team where every department and team was represented and met monthly. He led the group, but was not overbearing. He believed in leading from behind to help the school get in the right direction while giving everyone a voice. After interviewing the focus groups, I gained a sense that Principal B cherished the input he received from his teachers. Every teacher interviewed believed that the leadership team had a huge influence in the decisions that were made. Communication was also very important, with everyone's opinion being respected. Decisions were made based on faculty input, and then committed to the overall strategies that were created. School B's leadership team was valued mainly because they were always focusing on the data and input from teachers before they made any decisions. After observing their leadership team meeting, I saw how all of their conversations revolved around their students' academic achievement.

When measuring the responsibilities of school leaders and their correlation to student academic achievement, Marzano et al. (2005) found that the responsibilities of culture and input both had a correlation of .25. Culture within a school can have a positive or negative effect on the school's success. Marzano et al. believed that if a principal cultivated shared beliefs within the school, this in turn would positively affect student academic achievement. They also believed that if a school leader involved teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions, student academic achievement would be affected positively (Marzano et al., 2005). When teachers of high-poverty schools have a voice within the school and are able to make decisions that directly impact the academic success of their students, they increase the chances of being highly successful.

This study's findings found that the practices of the effective leadership teams within the high-poverty schools studied contributed to the academic success their students have seen over the last few years. They embedded cultures of learning, being data driven, and sharing leadership to ensure the success of their students. The following five practices utilized by the leadership teams seemed to play a crucial role in the high achievement of students in both schools: (a) high expectations were in place for both staff and students; (b) interventions were implemented to support student success; (c) daily collaboration was encouraged and expected; (d) clear and focused goals were established; and (e) communication and results were encouraged. These three cultures and five practices appear to be essential elements that could help other schools in attempting to create academic success in their schools for their students.

Implications

Specific factors should be in place in any school of any size and economic background that would like to see increased academic success. Schools may create excuses for not establishing the academic success that other schools may ensure. The two middle schools researched were larger than most in Indiana with higher poverty. They did not create excuses. Many schools might believe that technology or more resources are the answer to increased academic success. That is not always the case as seen in both School A and School B of this research study. School A lacked technology in all of their classrooms, but still saw results. School B did not have the resources to help with transportation for interventions after school like School A. Both schools had a few factors in place that aided in their success. Any school can see the same results as the two researched if they implement a leadership team, incorporate collaboration, and embed interventions. These factors do not need to look like the two middle schools researched.

A Leadership Team Needs to be Implemented

A school's leadership team does not need to resemble what was found at the two middle schools researched. While the schools researched had a good cross section of the faculty represented, only School B had a very involved principal. He was extremely data driven, while School A's principal seemed to be a more uninvolved. Even though School A's principal was not involved on the leadership team, the team had a strong presence in the school. The main thing to remember is to have people who want to be part of the team and who want to make a difference in the school's success.

I did believe that the principal was critical in the effectiveness of the leadership team. School B's principal was highly involved in the leadership team. School B's faculty and counselors rallied around Principal B and rose to his high expectations. He had a passion for success at his school and embraced the ideas around him. It would be interesting to see if School A would have higher success if Principal A were more involved in the leadership team. Both schools' leadership teams were collaborative which helped in carrying out initiatives that focused on the success of their schools.

Teacher Collaboration Should be Incorporated Within the School Day

Collaboration is a must for teachers, counselors, and administrators to share best practice and review data. The way in which it is embedded within the school day can look different than what was found at the two middle schools. Many schools are not able to give their faculty members two planning periods within the school day. This would increase class sizes. One way in which to increase collaboration is by creating common plan times for common subject area teachers. This will make it easier for teachers that teach the same subject to collaborate during the school day. They would be able to collaborate on instructional strategies and review data

together. If common plan times are not feasible, schools could utilize collaboration time before or after school so as not to interrupt instruction during the school day.

Interventions Should be Embedded Within the School Day

Interventions should be based on data collected and conversations among the teachers of those students who could benefit from them. The interventions do not need to look like what was in place at School A. School A seemed to have a much stronger focus on imbedding the interventions within the school day. School A made sure that there was a strong focus on each students' mastery of the indicator tests that provided them with the data they needed to give their students the correct supports. An advisory period was prescribed for students who needed support in mastering the indicator tests. Students that needed even more support were assigned after school tutoring. School A was financially able to provide transportation for the after school tutoring sessions. School B also had interventions in place. They had an advisory period within the school day that was not quite as long as School A's and also had before and after school tutoring sessions. Transportation was not provided to either session. School B's interventions looked differently but yielded the same results.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research is strongly recommended in understanding the practices of leadership teams in successful high-poverty middle schools. This phenomenological, multi-site case study only compared two middle schools of similar demographics in different geographical areas within the state of Indiana. It would be interesting to see what other researchers might find if the study were tweaked. Conducting case studies of more than two middle schools would create more data to observe and dissect. Comparing schools of similar neighborhoods might aid in the understanding of certain geographical areas in Indiana. On the other hand, comparing schools of

dissimilar neighborhoods and demographic backgrounds would be intriguing. Contrasting the special education programs in the schools would also be an interesting piece of data to consider. Another interesting study would be to compare the leadership teams in a high-poverty middle school that had been low achieving in the past, but became high achieving. Additional studies could be conducted comparing the practices of high-poverty, highly successful middle schools to high-poverty, highly successful elementary and high schools to distinguish if there are any similarities in how they ensure their students' academic achievement. One could also expand on this study's findings to investigate if these practices could be applied to all successful schools with students of any economic background. Continued studies would help in isolating the practices of highly effective leadership teams in successful high-poverty middle schools not only in Indiana, but the country as well.

Summary and Closing Thoughts

After visiting these two middle schools in Indiana, I found common practices of both leadership teams that helped in ensuring academic success and achievement for their students. Creating cultures of learning, being data driven, and sharing leadership within the school establishes atmospheres of academic achievement. Incorporating high expectations, interventions embedded during the school day, daily collaboration, clear and focused goals, and sharing leadership through effective leadership teams are the ways in which to ensure the previously mentioned cultures and ultimately the success in schools, no matter the socio-economic background.

Marzano et al. (2005) noted that using leadership teams aids in the success of schools. Leadership teams are necessary to improve academic programs in schools due in large part to the interactive dialogue that takes place between professionals with one goal in mind: students'

academic achievement. Shared decision making increases teachers' sense of ownership when decisions and goals are made to increase the student achievement at their schools (Rosenholtz, 1985). When teachers are committed to decisions that are made consensually, student achievement benefits. Rosenholtz (1985) stated, "Participation implies a commitment to school-based instructional programs, better curriculum development through the adaption of curricular material to specific classroom needs, and increased student learning resulting from greater teacher effectiveness" (p. 374). Leadership teams build capacity in their schools. When effective leadership teams are in place, teachers have an active role in creating change in their schools. Even if the principal leaves at some point, the staff can maintain the culture and practices that the leadership team helped to implement in the success of their school.

Even though it was found that the leadership team was very important and influential in the success of the school, the principal was the person that ensured that success. The leaders of these two higher performing, high-poverty middle schools were focused on the learning taking place every day in every classroom, the data that they were harvesting, and sharing leadership within their buildings. They were active participants in ensuring the success of their students and school.

When this research was begun over a year ago, it was not evident what would be found and if the information gathered would be beneficial. I wanted to find out what successful leadership teams in highly successful, high-poverty middle schools were doing to ensure their success. Not really knowing what would be found, it was astonishing to realize the simplicity of what these schools embedded within their cultures. Most educators become principals to affect the education of more than their classes of students. They want to aid in the success of all of the students in the building. The principals at the schools studied believed that it would take more

than just them to create success. They needed highly effective leadership teams within their buildings to affect the education of all of their students.

What was learned from this research resonated with I as a building-level principal. Many educators are always looking for a magic pill that will help their schools and students become successful. All they really need to do, however, is look to the people within the building to aid in the success. This study verified that there are certain practices to put in place to accomplish academic and leadership success. Principals and leadership teams need to hold every educator and student within the building accountable for high levels of learning through high expectations. They must implement interventions within the school day to ensure academic success and create times for high levels of collaboration if not daily, then weekly. They need to establish clear and focused goals while being data driven. Finally and most importantly, they need to build capacity in the educators within their schools through shared decision making and highly effective leadership teams where information and decisions made are clarified and cascaded to the rest of the school. These findings reaffirmed why I became an educator; to make a positive difference in the education of children.

REFERENCES

Andrews, R. L., & Soder, R. (1987). Principal leadership and student achievement. *Educational Leadership, 44*(6), 9-11. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198703_andrews.pdf

Appalachia Educational Laboratory (2005). *A case study of six high-performing schools in Tennessee*. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED489122.pdf

Associated Press (2013, November 6). One in six Americans lives in poverty, new census data reveals—much higher than official rate. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved July 1, 2014, from http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/poverty-america-affects-residents-article-1.1508965

Barton, P. E. (2004). Why does the gap persist? *Educational Leadership, 62*(3), 8-13. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov04/vol62/num03/Why-Does-the-Gap-Persist%C2%A2.aspx

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 13,* 544-559. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/baxter.pdf

Black, P., & William, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *Phi Delta Kappa International*. Retrieved from https://www.measuredprogress.org/documents/10157/15653/InsideBlackBox.pdf

Blasé, J. & Blasé, J. (2000). Effective instructional leadership: Teachers' perspectives on how principals promote teaching and learning in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 38*(2), 130-141. Retrieved from http://peoplelearn.homestead.com/Instruc.Effective.pdf

Borg, J., Borg, M., & Stranahan, H. (2012). Closing the achievement gap between high-poverty schools and low-poverty schools. *Research in Business and Economics Journal, 5*(1), 1-24. Retrieved from http://www.aabri.com/manuscripts/111012.pdf

Boslaugh, S. (2013, July 30). New report documents effects of childhood poverty on education, adult life. *Youth Today.* Retrieved from http://ww.youthtoday.org/view_article.cfm?article_id=6171

Capra, T. (2009). Poverty and its impact on education: Today and tomorrow. *Thought & Action,* 75-81. Retrieved from http://199.223.128.57/assets/docs/HE/TA09PovertyCapra.pdf

Center for Public Education. (2005). *High-performing, high-poverty schools: Research review.* Retrieved from http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/High-performing-high-poverty-schools-At-a-glance-/High-performing-high-poverty-schools-Research-review.html

Chenoweth, K. (2007). *Secrets to success: What top-performing schools have in common.* Retrieved from http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3746773

Chenoweth, K. (2009). It can be done, it's being done, and here's how. *Phi Delta Kappan, 91*(1), 38-43. Retrieved from http://www.dciu.org/cms/lib04/PA28000298/Centricity/Domain/39/Its_Being_Done,_Heree_How_9-09.pdf

Chenoweth, K. (2010). Leaving nothing to chance. *Educational Leadership, 68*(3), 16-21. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov10/vol68/num03/Leaving-Nothing-to-Chance.aspx

Coleman, J. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity.* Retrieved from http://mailer.fsu.edu/~ldsmith/garnet-ldsmith/Coleman%20Report.pdf

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Donlan, R. (2013, January 8). Sidelined [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.k12edleadershipatisu.blogspot.com/2013/01/sidelined.html

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2010). *Raising the bar and closing the gap.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R. & Mattos, M. (2013). How do principals really improve schools? *Educational Leadership, 70*(7), 34-40. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr13/vol70/num07/How-Do-Principals-Really-Improve-Schools%C2%A2.aspx

Duncan, G. J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000). Family poverty, welfare reform, and child development. *Child Development, 71*(1), 188-196. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00133

Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership.* Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_197910_edmonds.pdf

Education Trust. (1999). *Disspelling the myth: High poverty schools exceeding expectations.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://caedofu.tripod.com/doc/edtrust.pdf

Easterlin, R. (1987). The new age structure of poverty in America: Permanent or transient? *Population and Development Review, 13,* 195-208. Retrieved from http://oied.ncsu.edu/selc/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/The-New-Age-Structure-of-Poverty-in-America-Permanent-or-Transient.pdf

Fenton, B. (2014). New leaders for new schools: Forming aligned instructional leadership teams. *ASCD Express.* Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol5/504-fenton.aspx

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12,* 219-245. Retrieved from http://vbn.aau.dk/files/3790172/BF_Qualitative_Inquiry_2006_vol__12_no__2_April_pp__219-245.pdf

Friedman, H. (2012, August 29). America's poverty-education link. *Huffington Post.* Retrieved July 28, 2013, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/howard-steven-friedman/americas-poverty-education_b_1826000.html

Friedman, W. (2012, December 20). Lessons learned from high-poverty, high-achieving schools. *Huffington Post.* Retrieved July 12, 2013, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/will-friedman/high-poverty-schools-achievement_b_2339133.html

Gezi, K. (1990). The role of leadership in inner-city schools. *Educational Research Quarterly, 12*(4), 1-12. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ409652

Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus groups. *Social Research Update.* [On-line], 19. Retrieved from http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU19.html

Glatthorn, A., & Newburg, N. (1984). A team approach to instructional leadership. *Educational Leadership 41*(5), 60-63. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198402_glatthorn.pdf

Gorski, P. (2008). The myth of the culture of poverty. *Educational Leadership, 65*(7), 32-36. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr08/vol65/num07/The-Myth-of-the-Culture-of-Poverty.aspx

Green, M. (2011, May 19). Are high-poverty schools educating the poor to remain so? *Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mike-green/high-poverty-schools_b_862869.html

Gruenert, S. (2008). School culture, school climate: They are not the same thing. *Principal, 87*(4), 56-59. Retrieved from http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Principal/2008/M-Ap56.pdf

Habegger, S. (2008). The principal's role in successful schools: Creating a positive school culture. *Principal, 88*(1), 42-46. Retrieved from http://www.naesp.org/resources/1/Principal/2008/S-O_p42.pdf

Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 33,* 329-351. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305764032000122005

Hogan R., Curphy, G., & Hogan, J. (1994). What we know about leadership. *American Psychologist, 49,* 493-504. Retrieved from http://enrollment.mst.edu/media/enrollmentmanagement/enrollment/documents/What%20We%20Know%20About%20Leadership.pdf

Hoy, W., Tarter, C., & Hoy, A. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 43,* 425-446. doi: 10.3102/00028312043003425

Hoynes, H., Page, M., & Stevens, A. (2006). Poverty in America: Trends and explanations. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives, 20,* 47-68. Retrieved from http://www.vanneman.umd.edu/socy789b/HoynesPS06.pdf

Hull, J. (2012). *The principal perspective: Full report.* Alexandria, VA: Center for Public Education. Retrieved September 4, 2013, from http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/prinicpal-perspective

Indiana Department of Education (2014). *Indiana statewide testing for educational progress-plus (ISTEP+).* Retrieved from http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/assessment/iapm-1415-chapter-01-istep.pdf

Institute of Education Sciences. (2008). *Turning around chronically low-performing schools.* Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/ Turnaround_pg_04181.pdf

Jacob, B., & Ludwig, J. (2004). *Improving educational outcomes for poor children.* (NBER Working Paper No. w14550). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from http://www.nber.org

Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Jesse, D., Davis, A., & Pokorny, N. (2004). High-achieving middle schools for Latino students in poverty. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 9*(1), 23–45. Retrieved from http://www.leaonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S15327671ESPRO901_2

Johansson, R. (2003). *Case study methodology.* Retrieved from http://www.psyking.net/htmlobj-3839/case_study_methodology-_rolf_johansson_ver_2.pdf

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission. (2004). *Review of factors and practices associated with school performance in Virginia.* Richmond, VA: Author. Retrieved from http://jlarc.virginia.gov/reports/Rpt305.pdf

Juvonen, J., Le, V., Kaganoff, T., Augustine, C., & Constant, L. (2004). *Focus on the wonder years: Challenges facing the American middle school.* Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

Kannapel, P. J., & Clements, S. K. (2005). *Inside the black box of high-performing high-poverty schools: A report from the Prichard committee for academic excellence.* Lexington, KY: Ford Foundation. Retrieved from http://people.uncw.edu/kozloffm/highperforminghighpoverty.pdf

Kitzinger, J. (1995). Introducing focus groups. *British Medical Journal, 331,* 299-302. Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2550365/pdf/bmj00603-0031.pdf

Kotter, J. (2001). What leaders really do. *Engineering Management Review, 37*(3), 18-28). doi: 10.1109/EMR.2009.5235494

Ladd, H. F. (2012). Education and poverty: Confronting the evidence. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 31,* 203-227. doi: 10.1002/pam.21615

Lambert, L. (2002). A framework for shared leadership. *Beyond Instructional Leadership, 59*(8), 37-40. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may02/vol59/num08/A-Framework-for-Shared-Leadership.aspx

Layton, L. (2013, October 16). Study: Poor children are now the majority in American public schools in South, West. *Washington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/2013/10/16/34eb4984-35bb-11e3-8a0e-4e2cf80831fc_story.html?wprss=rss_national

Leithwood, K. A., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). Successful school leadership: What it is and how it influences pupil learning. *National College for School Leadership.* Retrieved form http://illinoisschoolleader.org/research_compendium/documents/successful_school_leadership.pdf

Leithwood, K. A., & Jantzi, D. (2008). Linking leadership to student learning: The contributions of leader efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44,* 496-528. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08321501

Leithwood, K. A, Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning.* New York, NY: Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/How-Leadership-influences-Student-Learning.pdf

Leithwood, K. A., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What we know about successful school leadership.* Retrieved from http://dcbsimpson.com/randd-leithwood-successful-leadership.pdf

Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of team.* San Francisco, CA: Joseey-Bass.

Lester, S. (1999). *An introduction to phenomenological research.* Retrieved from http://www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf

Lieberman, A. (1988). Expanding the leadership team. *Educational Leadership, 45*(5), 4-8. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198802_lieberman.pdf

Louis, K. S., Dretzke, B., & Wahlstrom, K. (2010). How does leadership affect student achievement? Results from a national survey. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 21,* 315-336. doi: 10.1080/09243453.2010.486586

Marzano, R. (2003). *What works in schools?* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McEwan, E. (2002). *Seven steps to effective instructional leadership.* Retrieved from http://www.learningdomain.com/Instructional.Steps.pdf

McGee, G. (2003). *Closing Illinois' achievement gap: Lessons from the "golden spike" high poverty high performing schools.* Retrieved from http://www.isbe.state.il.us/board/meetings/2000-2002/june02meeting/closinggap.pdf

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nettles, S. M., & Herrington, C. (2007). Revisiting the importance of the direct effects of school leadership on student achievement: The implications for school improvement policy. *Peabody Journal of Education, 82,* 724-736. doi: 10.1080/01619560701603239

Nunkoosing, K. (2005). The problems with interviews. *Qualitative Health Research, 15,* 698-706. doi: 10.1177/1049732304273903

O'Neill, J. & Conzemius, A. (2006). *The power of SMART goals.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Parrett, W., & Budge, K. (2009). Tough questions for tough times. *Educational Leadership, 67*(2), 22-27. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct09/vol67/num02/Tough-Questions-for-Tough-Times.aspx

Picucci, A., Brownson, A., Kahlert, R., & Sobel, A. (2002). *Driven to succeed: High-performing, high-poverty, turnaround middle schools.* Retrieved from http://www.utdanacenter.org/downloads/products/driven/ms_vol1.pdf

"Poverty." (2014). *Merriam Webster Online.* Retrieved May 9, 2014, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/poverty

Reardon, S. (2013). The widening income achievement gap. *Educational Leadership, 70*(8) 10-16. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may13/vol70/num08/The-Widening-Income-Achievement-Gap.aspx

Reeves, D. (2000). *Accountability in action: A blueprint for learning organizations*. Denver, CO: Advanced Learning Press.

Reeves, D. (2003). *High performance in high poverty schools: 90/90/90 and beyond.* Retrieved from http://www.gvsu.edu/cms3/assets/8D75A61E-920B-A470-F74EFFF5D49C6AC0/forms/boardmembers/resources/high_performance_in_high_poverty_schools.pdf

Robinson, V., Lloyd, C., & Rowe, K. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44,* 635-674. doi:10.1177/0013161X08321509

Rosenholtz, S. (1985). Effective schools: Interpreting the evidence. *American Journal of Education, 93,* 352-388. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/443805

Rothstein, R. (2004). Whose problem is poverty? *Educational Leadership, 65*(7) 8-13. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr08/vol65/num07/Whose-Problem-Is-Poverty%C2%A2.aspx

Ruebling, C., Stow, S., Kayona, F., & Clarke, N. (2004). Instructional leadership: An essential ingredient for improving student learning. *The Educational Forum, 68,* 243-253. doi: 10.1080/00131720408984636

Sirin, S. (2005). Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review of research. *Review of Educational Research, 75,* 417-453. doi: 10.3102/00346543075003417

Socioeconomic status. (2014). *American Psychology Association Online.* Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/

Southern Education Foundation. (2013). *A new majority: Low income students in the South and nation.* Retrieved from http://www.southerneducation.org/getattachment/0bc70ce1-d375-4ff6-8340-f9b3452ee088/A-New-Majority-Low-Income-Students-in-the-South-an.aspx

U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *No child left behind act.* Retrieved from http://education.ucf.edu/mirc/Research/NCLB%20-%20Bush.pdf

Turning Points. (n.d.). *Guide to collaboration and shared leadership.* Retrieved from http://www.ccebos.org/pdf/Teams.pdf

Weissmann, J. (2012). Occupy kindergarten: The rich-poor divide starts with education. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/02/occupy-kindergarten-the-rich-poor-divide-starts-with-education/252914/

Whitaker, T. (2003). *What great principals do differently: Fifteen things that matter most.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Wilhelm, T. (2010). *Fostering shared leadership.* Retrieved from http://www.allthingsplc.info/pdf/articles/Wilhelm.pdf

APPENDIX A: LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS

(Date)

Dear (Superintendent's name/Principal's name),

My name is Jessica Waters and I am the principal of Hazelwood Middle school in the New Albany Floyd County School Corporation. I am currently a doctoral student at Indiana State University an am beginning the research for my dissertation entitled *An Examination of Leadership Teams in Successful High-poverty Middle Schools*. The purpose of my study is to visit, interview, and observe the principals, leadership teams, counselors, and teachers of two Indiana middle schools who are attaining high-achievement scores on ISTEP+ and who have high numbers of free/reduced lunch students. I would like to gain a better understanding of the specific strategies used by these middle schools' leadership teams and staff as well as the practices of the leadership teams.

I would like to observe middle schools that scored 70% or better on the ISTEP+ test and who also have 50% or more students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. There were only ____ middle schools in our state that fit this criteria. From my research of ISTEP+ scores across our state, one of your middle schools meets the criteria for my study. I am requesting to visit _____ two to three times this Fall semester. I would like to interview some teachers, the leadership team, observe collaboration meetings, and faculty meetings.

I would like to speak with you about this request and appreciate your consideration. Once my study is complete, I would share all of my findings with you and the leadership team. Hopefully, this information could be shared with other principals and leadership teams across our state looking for specific strategies to increase student academic achievement.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. My e-mail address is jwaters@nafcs.k12.in.us and my school number is (812)542-8502. Dr. Todd Whitaker, my dissertation Committee Chairman, may also be contacted at todd.whitaker@indstate.edu.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jessica A. F. Waters
Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Todd Whitaker
Committee Chairman

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

(Date)

Dear (Leadership Team Member's name),

My name is Jessica Waters and I am the principal of Hazelwood Middle school in the New Albany Floyd County School Corporation. I am currently a doctoral student at Indiana State University and am beginning the research for my dissertation entitled *An Examination of Leadership Teams in Successful High-poverty Middle Schools*. The purpose of this research is to examine practices of leadership teams in middle schools reflecting a high-poverty/high performance status. This qualitative study will be used to evaluate factors contributing to the success of these middle schools. As a participant in this study, I will be attempting to gain a better understanding of the practices of your leadership team in securing the success of your school.

I would like to observe middle schools that scored 70% or better on the ISTEP+ test and who also have 50% or more students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. There were only ____ middle schools in our state that fit this criteria. From my research of ISTEP+ scores across our state, your middle school meets the criteria for my study.

Your principal has agreed to participate in this research and I will be conducting a two-day onsite visit this Fall. On the first day of the visit, I will be interviewing focus groups consisting of teachers, counselors, and the leadership team who choose to participate during their planning period, before school, or after school. Each interview session will last 40 minutes. I will review the purpose of the study and all components of the attached Leadership Team Informed Consent. After all of your questions have been answered, I will collect a signed copy of the Informed Consent form from each of you.

Once my study is complete, I will share all of my findings with your principal and the leadership team. Hopefully, this information can be shared with other principals and leadership teams across our state looking for specific strategies to increase student academic achievement.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. My e-mail address is jwaters@nafcs.k12.in.us and my school number is (812)542-8502. Dr. Todd Whitaker, my dissertation Committee Chairman, may also be contacted at (812) 243-2267 or todd.whitaker@indstate.edu.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jessica A. F. Waters
Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Todd Whitaker
Committee Chairman

APPENDIX C: LETTER TO TEACHERS

(Date)

Dear (Middle School) Teacher,

My name is Jessica Waters and I am the principal of Hazelwood Middle school in the New Albany Floyd County School Corporation. I am currently a doctoral student at Indiana State University and am beginning the research for my dissertation entitled *An Examination of Leadership Teams in Successful High-poverty Middle Schools*. The purpose of this research is to examine practices of leadership teams in middle schools reflecting a high-poverty/high performance status. This qualitative study will be used to evaluate factors contributing to the success of these middle schools. As a participant in this study, I will be attempting to gain a better understanding of the practices of your leadership team in securing the success of your school.

I would like to observe middle schools that scored 70% or better on the ISTEP+ test and who also have 50% or more students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. There were only ____ middle schools in our state that fit this criteria. From my research of ISTEP+ scores across our state, your middle school meets the criteria for my study.

Your principal has agreed to participate in this research and I will be conducting a two-day onsite visit this Fall. On the first day of the visit, I will be interviewing focus groups consisting of teachers, counselors, and the leadership team who choose to participate during their planning period, before school, or after school. Each interview session will last 40 minutes. I will review the purpose of the study and all components of the attached Teacher Informed Consent. After all of your questions have been answered, I will collect a signed copy of the Informed Consent form from each of you.

Once my study is complete, I will share all of my findings with your principal and the leadership team. Hopefully, this information can be shared with other principals and leadership teams across our state looking for specific strategies to increase student academic achievement.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. My e-mail address is jwaters@nafcs.k12.in.us and my school number is (812)542-8502. Dr. Todd Whitaker, my dissertation Committee Chairman, may also be contacted at (812) 243-2267 or todd.whitaker@indstate.edu.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jessica A. F. Waters
Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Todd Whitaker
Committee Chairman

APPENDIX D: PRINCIPAL CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PRINCIPAL CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

An Examination of Leadership Teams in Successful High-poverty Middle Schools

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jessica A. F. Waters, who is a doctoral student from the Educational Leadership Department at Indiana State University. Ms. Waters is conducting this study for her doctoral dissertation. Dr. Todd Whitaker is her faculty sponsor for this project from the Educational Leadership Department at Indiana State University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research is to examine the practices of leadership teams in middle schools reflecting a high-poverty/high performance status. A qualitative study will be used to evaluate factors contributing to the success of these middle schools.

- **PROCEDURES**

The school visitation will occur on two consecutive days. Ms. Waters will record interviews, observe during collaboration meetings and a faculty meeting, collect artifacts, and take notes during this visit. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. Provide an e-mail address from which to exchange information based on the research study.
2. Write an acceptance letter showing agreement of the research study and assurance for the study's procedures. This letter should be on your school's letter head, scanned, and emailed to the researcher.
3. Share via e-mail a list of all of the e-mail addresses of the assistant principal(s), counselors, and teachers in the school.
4. Participate in an interview session with Ms. Waters the evening before the first day of the visitation. The purpose of the research study will be reviewed first as well as this consent form. The principal will be able to ask questions during this meeting. After all of the questions have been answered, Ms. Waters will collect a signed copy of the Informed Consent form.
5. Interview questions will be asked to gain insight into the practices of the leadership team at the school and their contribution to the academic success the students have gained over the last three years. The principal does not have to answer any questions that he/she chooses not to answer. This interview session will last one hour and will be recorded for use by Ms. Waters to assist in the transcription of notes.
6. Provide Ms. Waters with a tour of the school.

7. Share the location for the focus group interviews on Day 1.
8. Share the location of the collaboration meeting observations, leadership team meeting observation, and the faculty meeting observation on Day 2.
9. Collect and share with Ms. Waters any artifacts, which may include meeting agendas, meeting notes, data analysis templates and notes, or anything else the principal deems appropriate and necessary to the school's success.
10. Participate in the observation of a leadership team meeting, collaboration meetings, and a faculty meeting on Day 2.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and are not likely to occur. If discomforts become a problem, you may discontinue your participation at any time. Ms. Waters will be the only one to listen and transcribe notes from the recordings that will be taken during the interviews and observations of the meetings. This will aid in the confidentiality of the participants.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

It is not likely that you will benefit directly from participation in this study, but the research should help Ms. Waters gain an understanding of how high performing, high-poverty schools are closing the achievement gap. Studying these schools can help to provide an understanding of what certain leadership teams are doing to make positive impacts for students. At the end of the research study, Ms. Waters will share with you by e-mail what she has learned about the practices of your leadership team and if they contribute to the success of your middle school.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when sharing information via the internet. Interviews will be recorded on a Sony Stereo Digital Voice Recorder- ICD-UX523 recording device and the researcher will also take notes. A master list of names with individual code numbers will be kept on a flash drive and stored for 3 years in a locked filing cabinet in Ms. Waters's office. The informed consents, interview notes, thumb drive containing the audio files, transcriptions, and artifacts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Ms. Waters's residence. These data pieces will be stored for 3 years after the study.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may do this by emailing Ms. Waters your intent to withdraw. If you choose to withdraw, any information you gave with be immediately destroyed. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact

Ms. Jessica A. F. Waters
Principal Investigator
6009 Hickory Way
Lanesville, IN 47136
502-541-6633
jwaters@nafcs.k12.in.us

Dr. Todd Whitaker
Faculty Sponsor
401 North 7th Street, 317B
Terre Haute, IN 47809
812-237-2904
todd.whitaker@indstate.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Subject

_____ _____

Signature of Subject Date

APPENDIX E: LEADERSHIP TEAM CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

LEADERSHIP TEAM CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

An Examination of Leadership Teams in Successful High-poverty Middle Schools

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jessica A. F. Waters, who is a doctoral student from the Educational Leadership Department at Indiana State University. Ms. Waters is conducting this study for her doctoral dissertation. Dr. Todd Whitaker is her faculty sponsor for this project from the Educational Leadership Department at Indiana State University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research is to examine the practices of leadership teams in middle schools reflecting a high-poverty/high performance status. A qualitative study will be used to evaluate factors contributing to the success of these middle schools.

- **PROCEDURES**

The school visitation will occur on two consecutive days. Ms. Waters will record interviews, observe during collaboration meetings and a faculty meeting, collect artifacts, and take notes during this visit. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview session with the researcher on Day 1 of the visit during the scheduled Leadership Team meeting in the conference room determined by the principal. The purpose of the research study will be reviewed first as well as this consent form. The leadership team members will be able to ask questions during this meeting. After all of the leadership teams members' questions have been answered, the researcher will collect a signed copy of the Informed Consent form.
2. Interview questions will be asked to gain insight into the practices of the leadership team at the school and their contribution to the academic success the students have gained over the last three years. The leadership team members do not have to answer any questions that they choose not to answer. This interview session will last 40 minutes and will be recorded for use by the researcher to assist in the transcription of notes.
3. Participate in the observation of a leadership team meeting, collaboration meetings, and a faculty meeting on Day 2.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and are not likely to occur. If discomforts become a problem, you may discontinue your participation at any time. Ms. Waters will be the only one to listen and transcribe notes from the recordings that will be taken during the interviews and observations of the meetings. This will aid in the confidentiality of the participants.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

It is not likely that you will benefit directly from participation in this study, but the research should help Ms. Waters gain an understanding of how high performing, high-poverty schools are closing the achievement gap. Studying these schools can help to provide an understanding of what certain leadership teams are doing to make positive impacts for students. At the end of the research study, Ms. Waters will share with you by e-mail what she has learned about the practices of your leadership team and if they contribute to the success of your middle school.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when sharing information via the internet. Interviews will be recorded on a Sony Stereo Digital Voice Recorder- ICD-UX523 recording device and the researcher will also take notes. A master list of names with individual code numbers will be kept on a flash drive and stored for 3 years in a locked filing cabinet in Ms. Waters's office. The informed consents, interview notes, thumb drive containing the audio files, transcriptions, and artifacts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Ms. Waters's residence. These data pieces will be stored for 3 years after the study.

.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may do this by emailing Ms. Waters your intent to withdraw. If you choose to withdraw, any information you gave with be immediately destroyed. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact

Ms. Jessica A. F. Waters
Principal Investigator
6009 Hickory Way
Lanesville, IN 47136
502-541-6633
jwaters@nafcs.k12.in.us

Dr. Todd Whitaker
Faculty Sponsor
401 North 7th Street, 317B
Terre Haute, IN 47809
812-237-2904
todd.whitaker@indstate.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Subject

_____ _____

Signature of Subject Date

APPENDIX F: TEACHER CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TEACHER CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

An Examination of Leadership Teams in Successful High-poverty Middle Schools

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jessica A. F. Waters, who is a doctoral student from the Educational Leadership Department at Indiana State University. Ms. Waters is conducting this study for her doctoral dissertation. Dr. Todd Whitaker is her faculty sponsor for this project from the Educational Leadership Department at Indiana State University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research is to examine the practices of leadership teams in middle schools reflecting a high-poverty/high performance status. A qualitative study will be used to evaluate factors contributing to the success of these middle schools.

- **PROCEDURES**

The school visitation will occur on two consecutive days. Ms. Waters will record interviews, observe during collaboration meetings and a faculty meeting, collect artifacts, and take notes during this visit. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

11. After the researcher has contacted the teachers via e-mail, they will e-mail their preferences of interviewing before school, after school, or during their planning period in the conference room determined by the principal.
12. Participate in an interview session with the researcher on Day 1 of the visit either before school, during planning periods, or after school. The purpose of the research study will be reviewed first as well as this consent form. The teachers will be able to ask questions during this meeting. After all of the teachers' questions have been answered, the researcher will collect a signed copy of the Informed Consent form.
13. Interview questions will be asked to gain insight into the practices of the leadership team at the school and their contribution to the academic success the students have gained over the last three years. The teachers do not have to answer any questions that they choose not to answer. This interview session will last 40 minutes and will be recorded for use by the researcher to assist in the transcription of notes.
14. Participate in the observation of collaboration meetings and a faculty meeting on Day 2.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and are not likely to occur. If discomforts become a problem, you may discontinue your participation at any time. Ms. Waters will be the only one to listen and transcribe notes from the recordings that will be taken during the interviews and observations of the meetings. This will aid in the confidentiality of the participants.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

It is not likely that you will benefit directly from participation in this study, but the research should help Ms. Waters gain an understanding of how high performing, high-poverty schools are closing the achievement gap. Studying these schools can help to provide an understanding of what certain leadership teams are doing to make positive impacts for students. At the end of the research study, Ms. Waters will share with you by e-mail what she has learned about the practices of your leadership team and if they contribute to the success of your middle school.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when sharing information via the internet. Interviews will be recorded on a Sony Stereo Digital Voice Recorder- ICD-UX523 recording device and the researcher will also take notes. A master list of names with individual code numbers will be kept on a flash drive and stored for 3 years in a locked filing cabinet in Ms. Waters's office. The informed consents, interview notes, thumb drive containing the audio files, transcriptions, and artifacts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Ms. Waters' residence. These data pieces will be stored for 3 years after the study.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may do this by emailing Ms. Waters your intent to withdraw. If you choose to withdraw, any information you gave with be immediately destroyed. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact

Ms. Jessica A. F. Waters
Principal Investigator
6009 Hickory Way
Lanesville, IN 47136
502-541-6633
jwaters@nafcs.k12.in.us

Dr. Todd Whitaker
Faculty Sponsor
401 North 7th Street, 317B
Terre Haute, IN 47809
812-237-2904
todd.whitaker@indstate.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Subject

_____ _____

Signature of Subject Date

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW FORM WITH QUESTIONS

School:

Date:

Time:

Focus Group:

Purpose of Study: To examine practices of leadership teams in middle schools reflecting high-poverty/high performance.

Overarching question: Overarching question: Why is your high-poverty school successful?

1) What do you believe are the factors that have contributed to your school's success?
    a. Are there particular people that influence this success?
    b. What programs or interventions are in place that contribute to your students' success?
2) Are there clear goals in your school?
    a. What are they?
3) How often do teachers collaborate?
    a. What does that look like?
    b. What types of data do you analyze?
4) How does your school show students that you value them?
5) What are the expectations for students and staff in your school?
    a. Do you consider these to be high expectations? Why or why not?
6) Does your school have a group of people that make decisions for the school? (leadership team)
    a. Who is a part of this group?
    b. How does it operate in your school?
    c. How do they aid in the success of your students?
7) What would you suggest to make your school even stronger academically?