The Roles of Leadership in High Performing-High Poverty Schools: A Case Study of Four Torchbearer Principals and Their Schools

by

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative case study of four Torchbearer high performing-high poverty schools located in south Alabama. Using the underlying assumption that all children can learn and that principals are integral to student academic success, this study examined the behaviors of high performing-high poverty school principals and the belief systems that they operate from to develop a deeper understanding of the types of leadership, structures, and support systems that promote improved learning for all students. Individual case studies were done for each school site. After considering each case separately, a cross-case analysis was conducted. Multiple data sources including the use of an in-depth semi-structured interview protocol with the principals, a principal self-assessment survey (Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, PIMRS; Hallinger, 1982) a whole staff survey (PIMRS; Hallinger 1982), document analysis and field notes were collected while shadowing each principal provided access to multiple perspectives and data sources, allowing for triangulation of data.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, federal and state accountability standards have heightened the

general public's awareness of the academic strengths and weaknesses of public schools. For

example, No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2001) highlighted statistics illustrating the failure of

some public schools. An example of this failure is 70% of inner-city fourth grade students

struggle to meet state and national grade level accountability measures in the area of reading

(Chenoweth, 2007). No Child Left Behind also put a spotlight on the qualifications of teachers

and administrators (WestEd, 2007). School districts must now ensure that each teacher has the

proper certifications before hiring them. The term "high qualified" is starting to become

common language within the general public when discussing schools and educators. NCLB gave

parents with children attending failing schools, defined as schools not meeting Annual Yearly

Progress (AYP) three years in a row (U.S Department of Education, 2001), the choice to send

their child out of district to a successful school. Failing schools face sanctions such as loss of

funding and requirements for the restructuring of staff. There have even some schools that have

been closed due to their unsuccessful attempts at bringing the level of student achievement to an

appropriate level (Chenoweth, 2007). Under NCLB states are now required to publish a report

card for each public school within the state. These report cards give the general public a

snapshot of progress being made and success rates at the school. Some researchers suggest that

this increase in public awareness may encourage school leaders to focus more on student

achievement (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Marano 2003). Although the pressures and challenges

that NCLB place on school leaders across this nation were easily met in some schools and school districts where student achievement has always been high, for high poverty-high minority schools the challenges of NCLB may seem hopelessly impossible (Carter, 2000). Many students living in low socio-economic areas face serious challenges within their educational system (Carter, 2000). Historically high-poverty urban schools with large concentrations of students of color have been associated with low student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kozol, 1991).

No Child Left Behind requires schools to have every student on grade level by 2014. Many school districts will have difficulties meeting this requirement, but this mandate is perhaps even more of a challenge when 90% of a school's students come from poverty stricken families. Finding any teacher to work in high poverty schools is sometimes a challenge, let alone a "highly qualified" teacher as deemed by NCLB (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007). The students who make up the population of high-poverty schools many times come from broken homes where putting food on the table is the priority, not homework (Payne, 2005). Principals in these schools tend to focus more attention on discipline and keeping order than raising the academic success of each and every student (Ingersoll, 2004).

Problem Statement

Our educational system faces serious challenges for many students living in low socio-economic areas. For decades education research has shown evidence of low student achievement in high-poverty urban schools with large concentrations of students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kozol, 1991). Yet, high-performing, high-poverty schools (HPHP) can be found in many areas throughout our nation (Chenoweth, 2007). There are many names for HPHP schools, such as turnaround schools (Murphy & Meyers, 2008) or 90/90/90 schools (Carter, 2000). The term

'90/90/90' refers to schools that have 90% or more of their student population eligible for free or reduced lunch, 90% are considered to be of minority status, and 90% or more of these students have met or exceeded state academic standards (Reeves, 2003). The Alabama Leadership Academy in 2004 created the Torchbearer School Program to recognize high-performing, high-poverty schools within the state of Alabama. According to some researchers, the organizational structures, belief systems, and leadership behaviors supporting achievement in high performing, high poverty schools are remarkably similar throughout the nation (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Kozol, 1991; Marano, 2003; Washington Learns, 2006). Research has also shown that there are some very clear patterns regarding successful forms of intervention and common HPHP characteristics across the nation (Carter, 2000; Jerald, 2001). These successful interventions need to be shared with all school leaders so that all children of poverty are given the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their socioeconomic level or minority status (Carter, 2000; Chenoweth 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to identify the behaviors and attributes of HPHP principals along with the strategies and methods they use that result in the high success rates at their schools. By researching and identifying the organizational systems, principal behaviors, and principal beliefs it may serve as a guide to help other principals who are struggling to meet the challenges of NCLB. By examining these leadership qualities and strategies a deeper understanding of the types of leadership, structures, and policies that promote improved learning for all students may be developed.

Significance of the Study

Casey (2000) states that high-performing, high-poverty schools are doing what many educators have considered impossible. HPHP schools take children who are considered hard to teach and teach them in ways that ensure they achieve academic success. It is imperative that further research be done to show how the leader within these HPHP schools is promoting high student achievement (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). It is crucial that additional research be done to learn more about the significant role educational leaders play in the development of strong teachers, implementation of high instructional standards, resulting in improved outcomes of student learning and achievement. The ways that principals meet the demands and address dynamics of leadership within a HPHP may be a model of success for any school leader to follow (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009).

Research Design

Using the underlying assumptions that all children can learn and principals are integral to student academic success, this study examined the behaviors of high-performing, high-poverty school principals and the belief systems that they operate from to develop a deeper understanding of the types of leadership, structures, and policies that promote improved learning for all students. A qualitative case study research design was used to conduct this research (Anderson & Davenport, 2002; Chenoweth, 2007). The researcher conducted this research at four Torchbearer Schools in Alabama.

Individual case studies were created for each school site. After considering each case separately, a cross-case analysis was conducted. In qualitative research it is crucial that the researcher not rely on only one method of data collection. Data should be triangulated to ensure greater rigor (Maxwell, 1996). Multiple data sources including the use of an in-depth semi-

structured interview protocol with the principals, a principal self-assessment survey (Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, PIMRS; Hallinger, 1982), a whole staff survey (PIMRS; Hallinger, 1982), document analysis, and field notes were collected while shadowing each principal provided access to multiple perspectives and data sources, allowing for triangulation of data.

The researcher interviewed the principal of each Torchbearer School. The interview questions were designed to ascertain information on the demographics of the school and the background of the principal. The principal of each school site also completed the principal self-assessment survey. This research included the use of a teacher survey administered to all of the teachers in each of the purposefully selected Torchbearer schools. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) was disseminated to the teaching faculty of each purposefully selected school. A review of documents was used to obtain additional insight regarding the focus of the teachers, the school improvement team and any other programs aimed at helping student achievement. Each school principal was shadowed for the period of one school day. The researcher met with the principal at the normal arrival time of each principal. The researcher took field notes throughout the entire workday of each principal.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to help identify what belief systems, organizational structures, and principal behaviors the principals in four Torchbearer Schools in Alabama are using to drive student achievement. Three research questions were used to guide the study:

1)   What organizational structures, belief systems, and leadership behaviors support achievement in torch bearer schools?

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2) What support systems are in place to facilitate the use of these structures, systems, and approaches?

3) What role(s) does the principal play when developing and implementing these structures, systems, beliefs, and leadership behaviors?

Site Selection

The Alabama Leadership Academy at the Alabama State Department of Education created the Torchbearer School Program in 2004. This program recognizes schools across the state of Alabama for being a high-poverty high-performing public school. The idea for this program came from a book study that the Leadership Academy did in 2004. This group read and studied Samuel Casey-Carter's (2000) book, *No Excuses: 21 Lessons From High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools.* During the 2010–2011 school year, 11 schools were awarded the honor of being identified as a Torchbearer School. This research utilized a purposeful sampling approach and focused on four of these schools. The 2010–2011 Torchbearer Schools selected for this research were [pseudonyms were used to blind the actual identity of the four schools in this study]: Black Hills Elementary School, Central Elementary School, Pine Hill Elementary School, and Northview Elementary School.

Each of these four schools was chosen for their exceptional student achievement as well as for the principal tenure. Another criterion for selection in this research sample is that the principals of each of these schools were present before, during, and after the Torchbearer status was achieved. Since 2007 the criteria to be eligible to win this prestigious award includes the following:

- Identified as Meeting the Challenge School, Advancing the Challenge School, and Exceeding the Challenge School according to the state rewards plan;

- Have at least an 80 percent poverty rate (percent free/reduced-price meals);

- Have at least 80 percent of students to score at Levels III or IV on the Reading section of the *Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test* (ARMT);

- Have at least 80 percent of students to score at Levels III or IV on the Math section of the *Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test* (ARMT);

- Have at least 95 percent of twelfth-grade students pass all required subjects of the *Alabama High School Graduation Exam* (AHSGE); and

- Have a graduation rate above the state average (high schools).

Retrieved from http://alex.state.al.us/showleaderpg.php?lnk=torch

Situating Self as Researcher

As a current high poverty high school principal, this research may be directly used to inform my own leadership practices. By dissecting the beliefs, organizational systems, and principal behaviors of these highly successful school leaders, I expect to learn more about what I need to do to lead my school towards excellence. Spending time in these schools and developing a working relationship with the principals may provide me with a powerful mentoring opportunity. It is my responsibility as the school's instructional leader to seek out best practices for my school. This research may provide me that opportunity. Another goal of this research is the hope that this research will allow me the opportunity to mentor other school leaders on the best practices that I uncover within these torchbearer schools.

Summary

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has brought the general public's attention to classroom accountability (Billman, 2004). The public accountability that comes with NCLB has left many public schools fighting to stay off the state's failing schools list. Yet, research has

shown that high-performing, high-poverty schools can be found in many areas throughout our nation (Chenoweth, 2007). It is imperative that further research be done to show how the leadership within these HPHP schools is promoting high student achievement (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). The purpose of this research is to help identify the beliefs, organizational systems and behaviors of HPHP principals in Torchbearer schools in Alabama. Identifying these principal beliefs, behaviors, systems may serve as a guide to help other principals that are working to improve the quality of learning for all students.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Many students living in low socio-economic areas face serious challenges within the educational system. Some education researchers have said for years that high-poverty urban schools with large concentrations of students of color have been associated with low student achievement (Darling Hammond, 2000; Kozol, 1991). Despite the educational trend, research-based structures and systemic practices can contribute to high student performance in high poverty schools in some areas (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Marano, 2003; Washington Learns, 2006). School characteristics such as school cultures that promote high expectations for all, high levels of trust, active student engagement, and an atmosphere of collaboration have all been shown to have a positive influence on student learning in high poverty schools (Chenoweth, 2007). This chapter provides an overview of research related to having a positive impact on the classroom instruction in high-performance, high-poverty schools (HPHP). These factors include organizational structures, policies, and systemic practices supporting high achievement; the importance of school culture and climate; and effective leadership models. Principal beliefs and behaviors are also reviewed. Further, this chapter highlights the importance of high quality teachers and how to recruit and retain strong teachers for HPHP schools. The successful curriculums and assessments that HPHP schools use to achieve the high level of accountability for their students are dissected and discussed. This chapter looks at remediation programs that

have been successful in these schools and how these schools challenge their students with enrichment programs. The following sections of this chapter explore research related to HPHP schools and their reasons for their success.

<div align="center">**High-Performing, High Poverty Schools**</div>

High-performing, high-poverty schools can be found nationwide. These HPHP schools are sometimes referred to as turnaround schools (Fullan, 2010) or 90/90/90 schools (Carter, 2000). In 1995, the term 90/90/90 was coined by an author of a research study on the high-performing, high-poverty schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The term refers to schools that have 90% or more of their student population eligible for free or reduced lunch, 90% are considered of minority status, and 90% or more of these students have met or exceeded state academic standards (Reeves, 2003). In December of 2004, the Alabama Leadership Academy created the Torchbearer School Program to recognize high-performing, high-poverty schools within the state of Alabama. To be eligible for this prestigious award schools must meet or exceed the following criteria:

- Have at least 80% of students on free or reduced lunch

- Have at least 80% of students score Level III or Level IV on the reading section of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test.

- Have at least 80% of students score Level III or Level IV on the math section of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test.

- Have at least 65% of students score in stanines 5-9 on Stanford 10 reading.

- Have at least 65% of students score in stanines 5-9 on Stanford 10 mathematics.

- Have at least 95% of Grade 12 students pass all required subjects of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

- Have a graduation rate above state average.

<div align="right">(Alabama State Department of Education, 2005)</div>

The organizational structures, belief systems, and leadership behaviors supporting achievement in high performing high poverty schools are remarkably similar throughout the nation according to some research (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Kozol, 1991; Marano, 2003; Washington Learns, 2006). There are some very clear patterns regarding successful forms of intervention and common HPHP characteristics across the nation (Carter, 2000; Jerald, 2001). One key finding in the literature is that HPHP schools commonly have a strong leadership structure at the local school and district level (Anderson, 2005). High levels of parental and community commitment to the school are present in most HPHP schools (Carter, 2000). The importance of being life-long learners and having relevant, high quality professional development for teachers is another common thread that link HPHP schools (Chenoweth, 2007). The importance of driving instruction by using student data on several assessments that are directly tied to the state standards is perhaps one of the leading connections that HPHP schools share (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005).

Another driving force behind HPHP schools is a master schedule that allows for teacher collaboration. This time for teachers and administration to collaborate leads towards a school that is focused on the same vision and set of goals. This model also allows for more shared leadership within the school, another common attribute among HPHP schools (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005). Research suggests that a school leader must embrace a shared leadership model if they are going to successfully accomplish the demands that come from leading a HPHP school (Izumi, 2002). Each of these areas is discussed further in the following pages.

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Leadership Structure at the School and District Level

There has been little research conducted on the contributions of district level leadership in high poverty/high performing schools (Anderson, 2005). One of the leading research studies that considers district level leadership looked at eight Colorado schools that are successfully closing the achievement gap (Anderson, 2005). This research was conducted after a 2005 study by the Colorado Children's Campaign (CCC) reported that nearly 400,000 students, on average, were below proficient on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). Despite these findings the CCC also reported on several schools in Colorado that were making significant gains on the achievement gap. The CCC report recognized these schools, but did not discuss how these schools were obtaining these positive results. The research team in this Colorado study analyzed all schools in the state, identifying the schools that were closing the achievement gap. The team then worked to provide insight and information regarding the types of programs, services, and resources which these schools employ. Several ideas about how district leadership could improve student achievement emerged from this research. Each of these is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Schools and students benefit when district leaders clearly articulate what expectations are, how these expectations will be measured, and how schools will be held accountable for successfully achieving these expectations (Anderson, 2005). Another way that districts can make strides toward improving student achievement is by exploring school hours and transportation (WestEd, 2007). Districts should explore how they can extend the school day and provide transportation to allow students to benefit from afterschool activities (WestEd, 2007). Many HPHP school students are going home to an empty house (Kozal, 1991). Districts can

help by giving principals greater autonomy to use discretionary dollars and hire staff to support the school level needs (WestEd, 2007).

High Quality Teachers and Administrators

The retention and recruitment of teachers is another way that district leaders can help at the local school level (Anderson, 2005). By providing incentives to veteran teachers and helping with the recruitment of high-quality teachers, districts can help support the long-term success of schools (WestEd, 2007). Stable teaching and instructional leadership are a common thread in the schools that are successfully closing the gap. In the high performing schools studied, either the administrator, much of the teaching staff or both had been part of the school for many years. Additionally veteran teachers were committed to mentoring and providing professional development to new staff members (WestEd, 2007).

Small Learning Communities

Districts can also help support improved student achievement by creating smaller schools and breaking larger schools into smaller communities (Knous-Dolan, Donnell-Kay Foundation, 2005). Districts can help create enrollment policies that will create more economic integration though school choice (Anderson, 2005). In districts where school choice exists, schools can weight the admission lottery process to ensure that various socio-economic backgrounds can attend. Districts can also create programs that are targeted at drawing a mix of students from different backgrounds. The data from Anderson, (2005) suggests that students of poverty perform well in a more economically integrated environment.

Parent Community Involvement

Some educators use the lack of parental involvement as an excuse in low performing schools (Carter, 2000). Positive relationships in some urban schools are infrequent because

some parents do not trust the schools and in turn the professionals do not trust the minority and low-income families (Noguera, 2003). Some of the barriers to trust for minority and low-income parents are past negative experiences with schools, unsatisfactory school-home communication, incongruent teacher and parent expectations, and parent experiences with discrimination (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). Some minority and low-income families feel alienated from schools because of the rigid and defensive attitudes of teachers and administrators that perceive them as "problems" (Noguera, 2003).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandates the establishment of family-community partnerships in Title 1 schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Fergusion (2003) states that the school-family-community partnership provision is being overlooked; yet, such partnerships may hold a key to reducing the achievement gap between White, poor, and minority students in public schools. Research indicates that school-family-community partnerships improve school programs and school climate, connect families with others in the school, increase parents' skills and leadership, and improve a student's chances of success in school and life (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Successful principals of HPHP schools know and understand that an outstanding school is a source of pride and a sign of stability for any community, but this is especially true in a poor community (Noguera, 2003). Highly effective principals work with parents and the community in several ways outside of school to help increase parent involvement within the school (Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

Billman (2004) states that the majority of high-performing, high-poverty school principals attempt to establish strong relationships with parents and the community and are constantly pursuing ways to involve parents in the school. To maximize parent and community

involvement, some leaders will include parents in the management plan of the school (Billman, 2004). Effective HPHP leaders not only strive to ensure that parents and the community are involved in goal setting for the school (Foster & Hilaire, 2004; Lambert, 2006), they also diligently work to "consciously match their cultural experiences and behaviors and lead community members in solving the deep problems that besieged the school" (Lambert, 2006, p. 238). They place particular emphasis upon trying to show the interconnectedness of school, home, and community (Lambert, 2006).

A vital step in creating and building partnerships with parents is making them feel welcome as equals within the school (Foster & Hilaire, 2004). Many HPHP principals encourage parents to visit the school and visit their child's classroom. Some HPHP schools have created programs where parents can come by and chat with teachers about their child's progress over coffee and doughnuts, or during a teacher's lunch. It is crucial that the staff of a school be trained on how to greet and work with parents in a way that makes them feel comfortable. Principals of HPHP schools will frequently attend parent teacher conferences, use an automated phone system to remind parents of special events, and sometimes even call parents personally to invite them to certain events (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

Successful principals create ways to help build partnerships with parents by giving them important ways that they can contribute and by showcasing all the valuable contributions that parents have made to make the school better already (Carter, 2000). In some HPHP schools parents have also been taught important ways that they can make a difference in their child's academic success. Some schools have Saturday programs that help the parents learn strategies they can use with their children at home. Other HPHP schools have math and science nights, so that parents can participate and discover ideas that can be done at home to help their child excel

in math and science (Foster & Hilaire, 2004). There are some parents who are willing to help at school; however, they are unsure what is needed and how to best accomplish the task. Some HPHP schools have put together a volunteer job description list that is compiled from needs identified by staff. Parents are provided the opportunity to volunteer for the jobs that best match the time they are available and their talents (Carter, 2000). Successful HPHP principals understand that by helping at home, in the community, and in the school parents can help improve the academic success of a school (Kannapel & Clements 2005).

Professional Development

Having opportunities for constant, continual training and self-improvement is another attribute of HPHP schools (Chenoweth, 2007). The Education Trust found that one-third of HPHP schools spent 10 percent of their Title I budgets on professional development (Barth, 1999). Professional development in these HPHP schools looks different than most educators are accustomed to seeing. There is a sense and purpose to all in-services. They are not simply a way of getting the necessary Continuing Education Units (CEU's) for license renewal. Experts are brought in to share their knowledge in an area of need for the school. The professional development is also linked directly to the instructional practices and changes necessary to make the greatest improvement to student achievement (Barth et al., 1999; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; McGee, 1999). Professional development in HPHP schools is often team or grade level based and school-wide. It also usually reflects a continual process of improvement (Lauer, 2001).

Some high-performing, high-poverty schools are parting from the traditional practice of professional development and one-time workshops in favor of a more in-depth and ongoing professional development (Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002). Another practice within

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HPHP schools is to have staff members who function in the role of in-house curriculum experts. These staff members have reduced teaching loads, or none at all. Their primary responsibility is to support other teachers. These curriculum experts attend workshops and research conferences to support the staff by bringing back the new information and presenting it to their colleagues (Carter, 2000). This practice allows most teachers to stay where they are needed most, in their classroom. The curriculum experts also spend a considerable amount of time doing classroom observations and modeling lessons for the teachers to further develop their understanding of the new information. One-on-one and team discussions about how the new strategies or resources are working are also conducted by the curriculum expert (Carter, 2000). Another approach used by some HPHP schools is to treat the teachers as the professionals they are and allow them the time to design and deliver professional development for the other teachers. This encourages a greater sense of ownership over the type of training the teachers receive, as well as greatly increasing the impact that such training provides (Anderson, 2005).

Data Driven Decision-Making

The key ingredient to all the HPHP schools nationwide may be the use of student assessment data to drive instruction (Chenoweth, 2007). Students in these high-performing schools take several benchmark assessments throughout the year to help teachers understand how to better design their classroom instruction. Students who emerge as borderline or below grade level receive more individualized and intense instruction, focused interventions, and more frequent informal assessments to ensure they are grasping the concepts being taught (Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

Principals in HPHP schools work hard to ensure that the staff receives extensive training on how to make data analysis meaningful. Data usage must become part of the culture of a

school to effectively reach all students (Chenoweth, 2007). Teachers must be instructed on how to disaggregate data into components that help define specific areas of student need (Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002). Both administrators and teachers use data in decision making to focus and best reach the curriculum and instructional needs of the students. Many of these schools not only examine current data, but also take advantage of data from other schools if available (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Some HPHP middle schools found it beneficial to analyze the skill level of each incoming student by using existing data from their elementary school (Carter, 2000). Most HPHP schools use data to build capacity that will support improved academic achievement. "Data use contributes to the institutional knowledge of schools and it helps guide schools through informed decision making" (Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002, pg. 24).

Teacher Collaboration

Several researchers have identified collaboration and teamwork among school staff as a typical feature in HPHP schools (Carter, 2000; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002). Communication takes places across grade levels and teaching areas. In these situations, teachers are eager to learn from one another (Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Ragland et al., 2002). Collaboration and teamwork provide venues for educators to assist one another while looking to improve teaching strategies and meet specific academic standards. During collaborative time, teachers can address barriers to learning, collaborate, and identify solutions, as well as take part in school-wide interventions (Chenoweth, 2007). Feldman (2003) found that HPHP schools set aside significantly greater amounts of time for collaborative planning time.

In HPHP schools teachers help, support, challenge, and create a system of best practices for students (Chenoweth, 2007). They work tirelessly to find ways to reach students and to challenge all students to reach beyond their potential. There is no "my students" or "your students" in these schools. Rather, teachers work to ensure the success of all students (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). In HPHP schools you may find teachers working with other teachers and getting rid of the dividing lines that normally separate a school. It is not uncommon to see a fifth grade teacher working with a third grade teacher to find a better way to reach a particular student (Feldman, 2003). Teachers work to create common assessments and other activities to capitalize on the learning of their students. Small groups are used for remediation and challenge groups to help other students excel at a higher level (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Creating lesson plans that allow teachers to be teaching the same skills and concepts is another way to help ensure each student is being reached. It is also common to have grade level meetings weekly to discuss assessment data and lesson plans for the next week (Ragland, 2002)

In some cases, especially in the elementary setting, teachers use curriculum programs to further ensure collaboration (Carter, 2000). This type of practice among teachers not only promotes teachers taking responsibility for their own students, but also for all the other students on campus using this program (Ragland, 2002). A shared curriculum establishes a road map for the teachers to follow, and ensures that everyone is moving in the same direction. This can establish a feeling that teachers are not alone, but rather they are a member of a team dedicated to the overall success of the school (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Many HPHP schools have reading programs that all teachers and staff, including administration and support staff, are involved in teaching. The whole school may come to a stand-still and reading instruction is taking place in every nook and cranny within the school building (Ragland, 2002).

To provide teachers with a common planning time is not always easy. Administrators have to be willing to use whatever creative means they can (Chenoweth, 2007). Some principals use early release Fridays, or duty free lunch periods to help make collaboration possible. Some principals rearrange the master schedule to provide common planning time for staff to meet in vertical (different grade levels) and horizontal (same grade level) teams for planning. It is vital that the whole staff comes together to share experiences and strategies that have demonstrated positive results (Johnson & Asera, 1999). Principals in HPHP schools find that an added benefit to having common planning time for a grade level is that it provides an opportunity for all of a student's teachers to meet with a student's parents (Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002). This allows the parent a chance to hear from multiple teachers about their child's performance and behavior. It also provides the teachers the ability to compare how one student is doing in each of his or her classes. This approach may not only show strengths and weaknesses across the curriculum, but also may help teachers work together to reach the student (Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002).

Shared Vision and Goal Setting

A vital element within all HPHP schools is an environment in which there is a shared sense of responsibility among all educators for the attainment of the school's goals (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). In many HPHP schools the principal creates this joint sense of responsibility (Chenoweth, 2007). This sense of responsibility must be developed by a commitment to allowing teachers to be involved in key components of the school decision-making (Johnson & Asera, 1999). Planning sessions for improvements need everyone at the table for their input. These structured opportunities for shared decision making help emphasize to the teachers a sense of responsibility for the school's improvement (Chenoweth, 2007;

Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Leaders in these schools showcase or highlight the importance of each individual's contribution to the direction and improvement of the school.

Much research on school change has argued that there must be a shared purpose for changes to be successful (McDonald, 1996; Schletchy, 1997; Senge, 2000; Whitaker, 2010). Many HPHP principals refuse to allow teachers to believe that they will fix all the school's problems. Getting all children to achieve on or above grade level is the shared responsibility of everyone in the school (Chenoweth, 2007). Many principals in HPHP schools build this sense of responsibility by encouraging teachers to make decisions about certain elements of the school on their own, without the input of the principal. In other situations, principals make it very clear that each teacher had a voice in the decisions that they made by listening to their thoughts and ideas before making the decision (Whitaker, 2010). By involving all staff members in a variety of roles that are central to the driving success of the school, a leader will create a deeper sense of professional responsibility (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

The ability to build consensus is crucial for a principal in a HPHP school (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Their efforts towards improvement would not have been fruitful if they were not able to convince enough staff to share the school's vision and goals. A good leader knows that they must take time to learn about their specific school contexts before any changes can even be brought to the planning table (Ragland, 2002). Strong leaders know they must first identify advocates who are ready to help support change and slowly engage these advocates to encourage other teachers to join the cause. These leaders also must take responsibility for maintaining vigilance and commitment to the purpose so that there is not a loss of focus that derails the staff's efforts (Whitaker, 2010).

School Culture and Climate

The culture or climate of high performing, high poverty schools seems to share four areas that can be considered the foundation of these schools. These areas include: 1) an environment of high expectations for all students, staff, and colleagues; 2) a strong sense of collaboration among teachers; 3) safe and orderly learning environment; and 4) a well-disciplined environment that includes a positive behavior support program (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005). Research has shown the importance of schools having a climate or culture with high expectations for all (Chenoweth, 2007). This culture of high expectations should be prevalent throughout the school and include everyone within the school. A culture of high expectations embraces the idea that all children can learn and that they deserve to learn. The staff in many HPHP schools express their commitment to this by not accepting failure from their students or their colleagues (Picucci, 2002). The culture and climate of HPHP schools also includes a strong sense of collaboration (Chenoweth, 2007).

In HPHP schools teachers help, support, challenge, and create a system of best practices for students. They work tirelessly to find ways to reach and challenge all students to stretch beyond their potential. There is no "my students" or "your students" in these schools; teachers work to ensure the success of all students (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Another key fundamental area among HPHP schools is an orderly and safe environment for learning (Chenoweth, 2007). A well-disciplined environment includes a positive behavioral approach that focuses on students taking responsibility for their own behavior (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). HPHP schools also focus on the importance of learning together as a staff to improve pedagogy. Working together as a professional learning community is vital to the future growth and development of the school (DuFore, 2005).

High Expectations—Staff, Students, and Colleagues

If there were one common thread that runs through every research study ever done on high performing-high poverty schools, it would be a climate of high expectations (Anderson, 2005; Chenoweth, 2007; Haycock, 2001; Izumi, 2002; Johnson, & Asera, 1999; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002; Ragland, 2002). Much of this research has concluded that a culture of high expectations is absolutely necessary and often is the dominant theme in these HPHP schools (Carter, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Many have even stated that it is what makes high performance possible in a high poverty community (Anderson, 2005; Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Ragland, 2002).

High expectations are a regular part of these schools and these expectations are displayed in concrete ways. High expectations are not just a rhetorical device; they provide the foundation that these schools are built on. Students, staff, and colleagues are all subjected to high expectations. Principals of HPHP schools expect their staff and students to perform to the best of their abilities. In return, the staff begins to develop high expectations for themselves and their colleagues and everyone begins to model the process of continual self-assessment and learning that is expected of the students (Chenoweth, 2007). It is crucial that everyone within the school believes that all children can learn. When a student fails in these HPHP schools the teachers do not blame the student, but rather acknowledge their own role in that student's failure. The flow of high expectations and the belief that all children can learn will eventually penetrate the student body and that is when school improvement begins to happen (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

The overriding goal in HPHP schools is to ensure that all students are at or above grade level (Carter, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007). School leaders many times minimize the use of labels

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such as special education or ESL; instead they set measureable and high goals for every student (Ragland, 2002). They also create opportunities for students of all ability levels to utilize assessment data to help them through a self-discovery progress and identification of their own areas for improvement. Through this practice, teachers and staff encourage intellectual exploration and achievement. Teachers and staff emphasize intellectual interests and refinement of critical thinking skills (Ragland, 2002). The belief within HPHP schools is that all students are capable of reaching high expectations and when they begin to fall short, resources and support are leveraged to help them reach their goals and build their confidence (Haycock, 2001).

Students in HPHP schools are held responsible for their learning. Many HPHP schools implement programs that reward students for accomplishing their work and behaving well. Those students who fail to demonstrate these traits are often required to work over their lunch period, report to mandatory after school tutoring, or even give up an elective class to finish core academic work (Chenoweth, 2007). Some HPHP schools even have Saturday programs in place for students and their parents to utilize (Anderson, 2005).

Safe, Orderly and Disciplined Environment

The importance of a safe, orderly and disciplined environment is often overlooked when researching exceptional schools (Lashley & Tate, 2009). For students to excel academically they must have a well-ordered, disciplined, and safe environment in which to learn (Jesse, 2004). Most HPHP schools approach the achievement of a safe, orderly and disciplined environment by a deeply rooted system of high expectations for everyone. This creates an environment where teachers are respectful of students and of their colleagues, which in turn models for students the importance of respecting their teachers (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Carter (2000) gives credit

to a strong focus of achievement as the key to discipline, for it models for students the rewards of self-control, self-reliance, and self esteem.

The philosophy of most HPHP schools is to create an environment that focuses on helping students assume responsibility for their own behavior. Positive behavior support programs provide consistent, clear rules, consequences, and rewards that help students to assume responsibility of their own behavior (Johnson & Asera, 1999). Often in these schools teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together to establish simple rules that will help create a school environment that is conducive to learning. Rules are often established to help prevent behavior problems before they start. In the majority of the HPHP schools there is much effort placed on acknowledging and sometimes celebrating positive student behavior (Moreno & Bullock, 2011). Behavior improvements are also supported when the students understand that they are valued and respected (Izumi, 2002). The principals and teachers in HPHP schools make it a priority to learn the names of all the students as well as information about their family. This development of a personal relationship among students and staff creates a powerful context for respectful behavior (Bhatti & Qazi, 2011). Student behavior can also be directly correlated to the quality of instruction within the classroom. Students are more likely to behave appropriately when they are actively engaged in learning (Chenoweth, 2007). A high quality level of instruction will lead to improved student behavior and less discipline, which leads to an even higher level of instruction (Johnson, & Asera, 1999).

Some research has shown the importance of climate and culture in schools (Chenoweth, 2007; Marshall, 2009; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2011). An environment of high expectations for all students, staff, and colleagues is vital for student success (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). A strong sense of collaboration among teachers is essential, especially in high poverty schools

(Carter, 2000). A safe, orderly, and well disciplined learning environment that includes positive behavior support programs helps teachers concentrate on learning instead of negative behavior (Izumi, 2002). Researchers have also noted the importance of leadership in schools and that the leadership model used by the principal affects teacher and student performance (Chrispeels, 2004; Chenoweth, 2007; Fowler, 2004).

School Leadership Models

Leaders are vital to the success of HPHP schools (Fullan, 2006). Research has shown that within HPHP schools the leaders come in many different forms, define their responsibilities in different ways, and exhibit various styles of leadership (Duke, 2006; Fullan, 2006; Harris & Chapman, 2002). The literature on school leadership has shown several rich descriptions of different leadership models including: transformational, instructional, transactional, authoritative, and situational. Each of these models is described in more detail on the following pages. These leadership models have been found to be the most prevalent within schools (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Chrispeels, 2004; Fowler, 2004; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Sample, 2002).

When looking at successful school leadership models there are universal characteristics that are consistently found when considering the qualities of an effective school leader. The ability to set goals and plan (McKee, 2002), have a clear vision (Bolman & Deal, 1997), personal charisma (Fowler, 2004), a strong sense of self and personal convictions (Chrispeels, 2004), strong communication skills and the ability to motivate and influence others to follow and participate (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002), are all important qualities. Generally, the definition of leadership is based on the last attribute, the ability to influence and motivate others. (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

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Research has also shown that the educational leader is significant to teachers (Chrispeels, 2004), instruction (Fowler, 2004), and outcomes of student learning and achievement (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). The demands and dynamics of leadership within a HPHP school call for strategies that are flexible and responsive to the needs and circumstances of their students, despite the countervailing forces that may exist in the school and broader environment (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009)

Transformational Leadership

A transformational leader is a motivational leader who has the ability to increase the motivation level of their followers. Transformational leaders believe that people will follow them as long as they are inspired to do so (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders believe that they can achieve great things because of their passion and their ability to share their vision. This type of leadership often feels that the best way to change or move people is by increasing the energy level of self and others and injecting enthusiasm into the culture (Nash, 2010). These types of leaders also feel a sense of responsibility to ensure that their followers know that they are cared about and are inspired to be successful on a daily basis (Bass, 1985).

Transformational leadership is usually achieved by raising the level of awareness about the desired outcomes. Inspiring people to transcend their own interests for the good of the group's goals or organizational goals can also improve outcomes. Lastly, transformational leadership usually relies on expanding the follower's hierarchy of needs and wants (Bass 1985). A transformational leader fosters a higher level of need for change and potential within the organization, taking it beyond basic needs. Burns (1978) states, "The transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower." One of the main objectives of transformational leaders is to enlighten their

followers to a greater cause than their own self-interests. Transformational leaders work "to turn individuals' attention toward larger causes, thereby converting self-interest into collective concerns" (Keeley, 1998, p. 113).

There are four pillars that transformational leaders use to support their goals. These pillars include intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, individual consideration and idealized influence or charisma (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

By providing meaning and challenge to their follower's work, transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers to a higher level (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The leader uses positive praise, optimism, and enthusiasm to increase the overall team spirit of the work place. Long-term visions and goals are worked on collaboratively to ensure team commitment. The leader reveals a strong commitment to collaborative vision and goals and communicates clear expectations for everyone to follow (Bass & Avolio, 1994). "Transformational leaders stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways" (Bass & Avolio, 1994, p. 3).

Conflict is used by a transformational leader as a productive tool for broadening possibilities and increasing opportunity for growth. Transformational leaders encourage their followers to embrace conflict and use it for innovative problem solving and a higher level of decision-making (Nash, 2010). Most importantly a transformational leader respects their followers and values their input, often when it is even in conflict with their own opinion. A transformational leader shows professionalism and integrity whenever they are in contact with any of their followers (Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010).

Instructional Leadership

A true instructional leader believes that student learning and the instructional quality of a school is the top priority, while everything else revolves around the enhancement of learning (Sahin, 2011). To be credible as an instructional leader, the principal should also be a practicing teacher (Fancera & Bliss, 2011). A principal who continues to teach whenever possible helps teachers, students, and other staff believe that "the sole purpose of the school is to serve the educational needs of students" (Harden, 1988, p. 88). The administrative duties that come with the job of being a principal are secondary to the drive and passion an instructional leader has for the school's quality of instruction and the disaggregation and use of student data (Flath, 1989). More recently, instructional leadership has been defined as a deeper involvement into the teaching and learning, or the core business of schooling (Sahin, 2011). The attention from the daily routine of administrative duties has shifted toward working with teachers directly on teaching strategies, dissecting student data, and working directly with remedial programs to raise student achievement. Some in the education field have proposed the term "learning leader" over "instructional leader" (Jansen, Cammock, & Conner, 2010).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) defines instructional leadership as "leading learning communities". A learning community is an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues. Learning communities allow time for all school staff members to meet and collectively work on problem solving, goal setting, and other student instruction-driven areas (Lunenburg, 2010). Instructional leadership has also been described in specific behaviors such as modeling good effective instruction, giving meaningful feedback to teachers, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting teacher

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collaboration, giving praise for excellence in teaching, and providing relevant professional development (Blasé & Blasé, 2001).

Instructional leaders know what is going on in the classrooms of their school (Whitaker, 2010). They spend time working with teachers on instruction, discipline and other curriculum issues. Instructional leaders know which students are doing well and which are struggling as well as the areas where they are struggling. Instructional leaders work directly with students and are visible throughout the school building during the school day. Whitaker (1997) identified four skills essential for instructional leadership. The first skill that Whitaker acknowledges is that an instructional leader needs to be able to show encouragement and appreciation to teachers for a job well done. Too many administrators do not give this enough attention. Secondly, instructional leaders need to be good communicators. They need to be able to effectively communicate essential beliefs regarding learning, especially the conviction that all children can learn and no child is unreachable (Mathes & Torgesen, 1998). Thirdly, an instructional leader needs to be a good instructional resource. Instructional leaders should be current on the best instructional trends and practices. Teachers should be able to count on good solid research-based information from their instructional leader concerning the best pedagogical strategies, newest curriculum methods and assessment information (Sahin, 2010). Lastly, Whitaker acknowledges the importance of the instructional leader's visible presence. The instructional leader must live and breath their vision of excellence in teaching and learning. They must be visible throughout the school building and school day modeling the types of behaviors they want to spread. Instructional leaders are visible when interacting with teachers, parents, and students all day.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership stands on the foundation that gaining reward and avoiding punishment motivates people (Smith & Bell, 2011). A transactional leader also believes in a clear chain of command and that the overall purpose of a subordinate is to do what their boss tells them to do. Transactional leaders often use management by expectation often. Working to expectation does not earn attention; reward and praise are only given to workers who exceed expectations. Structure is very important to a transactional leader. They like clear guidelines that require no translation for subordinates (George & Sabhapathy, 2010). Subordinates should know exactly what is required of them and the rewards they will receive for following directions. Punishments are not usually threatened; however they are usually implied, organized and understood (Keeley, 1998).

There are four major dimensions of transactional leadership. The dimensions include active management by exception, passive management by exception, contingent reward, and laissez-faire leadership (Bass, 1996). Active management by exception involves closely monitoring subordinates and correcting action to make certain that good quality and efficient work is done (Bass, 1996). Passive management by exception incorporates contingent punishment to correct unacceptable performance (Bass, 1996). Contingent reward encompasses the leader specifying what needs to be accomplished for the subordinate to obtain the reward (Bass, 1996). The fourth dimension, laissez-faire leadership, describes behaviors that show indirect behaviors and passive indifference about followers' actions or tasks (Bass, 1996). Transactional leaders are not usually change agents or reform leaders (George & Sabhapathy, 2010). Rather, they focus on maintaining the status quo. "The object of such leadership is an

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agreement on a course of action that satisfies the immediate, separate purposes of both leaders and followers" (Keeley, 1998, p. 113).

Authoritative Leadership

Authoritative leadership calls for a clear divide between the leader and subordinates. An authoritative leader gives clear expectations of what they want done, when they want it done, and how they want it done. There is little to no input from the group. This style of leadership oftentimes uses threats and intimidation tactics to keep the productivity of the subordinates high. Research has shown that this is perhaps the worst type of leadership style for schools (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). In the high-poverty, high-performance schools' research none of the principals were using this type of leadership. There is no creative autonomy for the teachers, and parents have little to no contribution to the school. Teachers find this type of leadership to be controlling, dictatorial, and bossy. Perhaps the only time this type of leadership is called for in a school setting is when the circumstances of the educational environment are so severe that it will take a knowledgeable, strong, authoritative leader with a clear plan to turn the school around.

Situational Leadership

A clear understanding of the dynamics of a situation must be researched before establishing a situational leadership model (White & Greenwood, 2002). Situational leadership is based on the integration of three main pillars. First, the readiness level that the group or followers exhibit on a task, activity, or objective must be taken into consideration. Secondly, the quantity of task behavior or direction that the leader will have to implore is measured. Finally, the socio-emotional support and relationship building that the group will require is also taken into consideration. According to the situational leadership model, the level of acceptance and readiness of the followers will dictate to the leader whether to increase or decrease the amount of

direction or task behavior they give. This level of readiness should also be considered when increasing and decreasing the level of relationship building that the leader uses. As the readiness level increases in terms of successfully accomplishing a specific task, the leader should decrease the direction or task behavior and increase the relationship behavior. Once the leader has brought the group to an above average level of readiness, the leader should decrease not only task behavior but the relationship behavior as well (White & Greenwood, 2002). The group is now fully committed and has the confidence to successfully accomplish the task the leader set out to achieve. Once the group has achieved this level, the leader must reduce the level of supervision and increase the amount of autonomy that the group has to make their own decisions. The decrease in supervision and increase in autonomy will show the group the leader's trust and confidence in them.

Situational leadership has been used successfully in many turnaround schools (Paredes, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). The principal must first and foremost research and assess what areas need improvement and attach a priority level to each area. Secondly, the principal must set realistic benchmarks to help move the school in a more positive direction. Then, the principal must research and assess the level of readiness of their staff to make the changes that will be necessary for the school to reach the successful benchmarks it will take to be an effective school. Once the readiness level has been assessed, the principal begins to slowly integrate task-driven directions while also building relationships and using positive socio-emotional support to increase the confidence level of the staff. The process cannot be rushed; an effective situational leader understands that they can only move at a pace that the group will be successful at reaching and meeting the benchmarks needed (White & Greenwood, 2002).

Leadership Behaviors

Certain types of leadership behaviors have often been linked with schools reaching high levels of student achievement (Shouppe & Pate, 2010). Carter (2000) researched and developed his seven common attributes of leaders in HPHP schools. Many other researchers such as Duttweiler and Hord (1987), Lashway (1996), Marek (1999), Verona and Young (2001), Clark and Clark (2002), and Glickman (2002) researched behaviors they believed principals must have to increase student achievement. Carter (2000) cited 21 schools in his 2000 book, *No Excuses*, that have broken the mold of high poverty causing low student achievement. The schools in his study were reporting scores over the 70th percentile on national achievement tests. Carter revealed what he believed was the key principal attributes that lead these schools to their success.

Principals must be free to spend money, recruit and hire their own teachers, and create their own curriculum as they see necessary for the improvement of their school (Carter, 2000). He believes principals know best which teachers have the qualities that they will need to be successful in their school. Carter also states that principals understand what curricular changes will be necessary to ensure student success within their school. Lezotte (1992) challenged school leaders by stating that someone must decide what is worth knowing. He suggested a national curriculum that would be developed by a national committee. Similarly, Marek (1999) pushed for a curriculum that went beyond state standards and was based in the arts, science and technology.

Jackson and Davis (2000) stated that if all educators were to hold students to high expectations, believing that each child could reach the higher bar, then students would excel to achieve at that level. Principals in HPHP schools must make high expectations the mantra of the school (Duttweiler & Madden, 2001). However, communicating and expecting high

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expectations from students are not enough; principals must raise the bar for the entire staff (Verona & Young, 2001). Setting high-level achievable goals for students and holding students and teachers accountable for reaching those goals are essential components of the success of a HPHP school principal (Carter, 2000). Another top priority of a principal of a HPHP school is the belief within themself that each and every student within the school is capable of learning. This belief should be evident to every child, parent, and teacher in the school (Clark & Clark, 2002).

Principals in HPHP schools must make leading instruction their top priority. This priority starts by recruiting and hiring the best teachers for their school. Managing and discipline must become secondary to their focus on instruction (Clark & Clark, 2002). The quality of teaching is the single most accurate indicator of a student's success (Carter, 2000). Once a high quality teacher has been hired, it is crucial that the principal ensures that teacher's success by placing them within the content area for which they have the highest content knowledge (Dufour, 2002). Haycock (2001), addressed this "If students are going to be held to high standards, they need teachers who know how to teach the subject" (pg. 10). Being a hands-on instructional leader is crucial; principals must be in the classroom observing the effectiveness of the teacher. The most important thing that principals should be looking for in their classroom observations is student learning (Dufour, 2002). Dufour goes on to state that principals who are true instructional leaders must ask, "To what extent are students learning the intended outcomes of each course? What steps can I take to give both students and teachers the additional time and support they need to improve learning?" (Dufour, 2002 p. 13). Thomas (1997) found that principals who are truly instructional leaders not only encourage great teaching, they inspire it.

A successful instructional leader creates a shift across the school from a focus on teaching to a focus on student learning.

Assessment of students creates valuable data for teachers to ensure student learning is taking place. Principals who are instructional leaders of high achieving schools monitor the assessment of every student and use the data to further develop the curriculum (Carter, 2000). Improvement strategies for the school are created by careful data analysis done by the teachers and the principal together (Dufour, 2002). Data analysis of student assessments can also help a principal develop more meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities with teachers (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Evaluation of innovations, programs, and instructional strategies of teachers should be done by a principal to ensure of their effectiveness (Kannapel & Clements 2005). If the effectiveness is not evident a principal must be willing to confront and correct the weak areas or eliminate practices that are not linked to student success (Thompson, 2002). Bell (2001) agreed that it is a critical attribute of HPHP instructional leaders to use assessment data as a diagnostic tool to determine if programs and strategies are effectively producing high student achievement.

Working in a HPHP school can sometimes be daunting, overwhelming, and even exhausting (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005). To keep teachers and staff energized it is important that the principal be positive and show encouraging support at all times (Fullan, 2010). It is also invaluable to take time to celebrate success as a school (Thomas, 2000). Instructional leaders should show their appreciation to the students and staff by arranging celebrations that allow them to communicate how proud they are of everyone. Sweeney (2000) stated that individuals are motivated by celebrations and recognition. These celebrations

communicate that the hard work and effort by students and teachers is not only appreciated, but also essential to the success of the school (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Marshak & Klotz, 2001).

Though there does not seem to be an undisputed list of principal attributes that guarantee student success within any school; there have been several principal behaviors cited within research that have been recommended to help schools reach high student achievement (Carter, 2001; Chenoweth, 2007; Fullan, 2010; Kannapel & Clements 2005). Some of the common attributes seen throughout this body of research are: communicating high expectations, being an instructional leader, data analysis, alignment of curriculum, celebrating success, setting school wide goals, and careful hiring of teachers (Carter, 2001; Duttweiler & Madden, 2001; Sweeney, 2000; Thompson, 2000).

Accountability and Assessment

The 1966 Coleman report implied that children of poverty could not be expected to learn at the same rate or as well as middle to high-income students. The 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation that will not tolerate any child of any income level, race, ability level, or gender to be not on grade level. The political landscape has changed drastically in those thirty-five years. The accountability movement that schools systems are dealing with today was fueled by the 1983 publication of A Nation at Risk (The National Commission on Excellence in Education). This report uncovered many important discoveries within the national public school systems, but also reported many inaccuracies (Bonstingl, 2001). The conclusions of this report are, however, what began the system of standards and accountability that school systems are judged by today (Carter, 2000). The high-stakes testing that is used today is a product of this accountability drive.

Probably one of the most sweeping changes that happened in schools after NCLB was the attention that sub-groups such as special education, English language learners, and minority populations received (Kannapel & Clements 2005). The language of NCLB does not allow any exception for any child. All children will be brought to grade level by 2014 was and still is the goal of this legislation.

Special education students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that is created by highly qualified teachers within the field of special education to help each child reach their potential. After NCLB even the IEP process changed to ensure that the goals on the IEP are standards based and on grade level. Inclusion classes are a mix of special education and general education students. Inclusion was mandated so that special education students were no longer "left behind" in a resource classroom where little to no standards were being taught. Collaboration between the special education teacher and the general education teacher is now required so that these students can be with their peers in the regular classroom (Kannapel & Clements 2005).

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

No Child Left Behind truly means no child should go unnoticed when they begin to slip through classroom cracks. Frequent monitoring of student progress is an essential component in the HPHP school (Kannapel & Clements 2005; Chenoweth, 2007). Teachers in these schools can recite the standards and skills that each of their students have mastered and those on which they need to continue to work. These teachers can tell you each student's strengths and their weaknesses. The principals in these HPHP schools can tell you the bottom ten percent of students in each grade level (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005). They can tell you the skills and standards that these students are working to accomplish. They know these students

by name. They have met and understand the family dynamics that each of these students may be dealing with daily. In an HPHP school teachers, principals, and other staff members all work together to frequently monitor all students, not just the students that normally comprise the bottom ten percent. Instead of a student feeling the support of a teacher they feel the support of a whole team of people who care about their success. There are no cracks for these students to fall into. Every crack has been filled with another person to help support and encourage students (Chenoweth, 2007).

Frequent monitoring is not viewed in a HPHP school as a way to make sure every student has mastered the content. Teachers view frequent monitoring in these schools as a way of making sure their teaching is on target (Carter, 2000). All teachers, to gauge their success or their failure to reach their students, use these frequent assessments. Low success rates on assessments do not mean that the students did not do well; instead it is viewed, as the teachers did not teach the material well (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005). Teachers collaborate to help expand their arsenal of teaching methods (Hanushek & Kain, 2005). When one class outperforms another, many times the teachers will collaborate to see what methods were used or what other variables may have contributed. Teaching in a HPHP school is a science; it is calculated, measured, and done until success is reached (Anderson, 2005).

Alignment of Instruction to State Assessment

Test Mills is only one of the many terms that personnel at some inferior schools call HPHP schools (Chenoweth, 2007). They do not want to believe that all children really can learn and that state assessment scores of 90%-100% are really possible by children of poverty (Carter, 2001). It is no secret that HPHP schools teach to the test. However, this does not mean that teachers spend 6 hours every school day drilling the standards into their students as if they were

multiplication facts. In HPHP schools teachers spend an exorbitant amount of time aligning their grade level curriculum to the state standards that are covered on the state assessment (Izumi, 2002). Teachers create units of study that will capture the interest of their students and inspire them to want to engage in the learning process. Students in HPHP schools are not taught the grade level standards throughout the school year in several different ways. Each skill or standard is spiraled throughout the curriculum to help students with retention. This way many standards are reviewed 3 or 4 times before the state assessment in the spring. Teachers in HPHP schools also help ready their students for the following grade level by introducing the next grade level standards while learning the current level standards. Teachers in many of these schools collaborate with the teachers on the next grade level to see what skills they need to address further with their students before the end of the year. The closer the teachers get to the end of the school year the more they begin to model for their students what to expect on the next grade level (Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

Alignment of Instruction to State and National Standards

Since the introduction of standards, educators have questioned whether or not they would truly improve the achievement of students and the quality of teaching (Gandal & Vranek, 2001; George, 2001; Lashway, 2002; Scherer, 2001). Scherer (2001) stated that standards are the greatest hope for improving student achievement across this nation. Vranek and Grandal (2001) reported that standards would help focus the general public's attention on the inequality within public education and also student achievement. They also forecasted that the standards would lead to a more rigorous curriculum and change the very nature of teaching. Lashway (2002) believed that the standards would create a shift from instructional leadership and foster more of a focus on student learning.

The competitiveness of getting students into a good university and then a good job after graduation has led many high performing schools to realize that they must look past their state assessment as the indicator of success for their students. State standards must be coupled with the National Standards that these students will be tested over on National assessments like the American College Test, Scholastic Aptitude Test, and the Graduate record Exam. Educators today should no longer be trying to ready their students for the local or state level job market. The generation that is in elementary schools today will compete for jobs nation-wide, as well as world-wide (Wagner, 2008).

Using Assessment Data for Teacher Planning

Another common finding within HPHP schools is the use of some type of targeted assessments throughout the school year to create data to help teachers guide instruction. There is much debate within education about high stakes testing and accountability programs throughout the nation. The performance of HPHP schools on these high stakes state performance assessments does receive a lot of attention by the principal and staff, however they are only a starting point for these schools. These schools all have other regular systems of assessment throughout the year that target the progress of individual students (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). These assessments are what the teams of teachers use for planning and changing their daily instruction and focus. Many schools have a regular, systematic, and integrated approach to assessments for their students and are clear about how these assessments will be used to drive instruction (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). From those data HPHP schools design and implement individualized support for struggling students. Teachers in these high performing schools use small learning communities or focused groups to reach all students with similar needs (Chenoweth, 2007). These teachers are very flexible in their use of resources to support student

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needs and reinforce school culture. HPHP schools across this nation also share a strong

commitment to core academics and standards but not at the expense of other important learning

in the arts and humanities (Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

Another common thread among HPHP schools is the use of common assessments. Many

teachers in HPHP schools felt that common assessments are what led to the greatest gains in

student achievement (Reeves, 2003). High stakes testing results are rarely received back in time

for teachers to do much with in terms of planning. The results are usually used more as a

measure of how well a school is doing, not as a measure of an individual student's skills.

Assessments however are given by teachers to assess the ability and understanding of needed

skills for each student. Assessment results are known within minutes, hours, or days from when

the student takes the assessment. This gives the teacher immediate feedback to better ensure a

student's success. If an assessment does not show mastery of a taught skill, then the teacher

knows that they need to re-teach that skill. Successful teachers use assessment data to restructure

their lessons and to collaborate with other teachers (Chenoweth, 2007). Through collaboration a

grade level team of teachers can see what concepts and skills the entire grade level is struggling

with. Sometimes one teacher will be using an effective method of instruction that can be shared

to help the entire grade level. It is through discussing assessment data and results that these

types of discoveries are made.

Importance of High Quality Teachers and Teacher Leaders

One of the most discussed problems in the world of education in recent years has been

the challenge to staff all classrooms with highly qualified teachers (Sander, 2007). Ensuring the

qualifications of teachers is one of the main themes within the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

(NCLB), which mandates that a teacher must be designated highly qualified to teach any grade

level or a core academic subject. No Child Left Behind has created a system of ensuring that all children are taught by a highly qualified teacher. NCLB has also driven veteran teachers back to school to become highly qualified.

Teachers are able to significantly influence student achievement (Aaronson, Barrow & Sander, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Kane, Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005) report that there is a separation in the effectiveness between the bottom and top quartile of teachers that equals a .33 standard deviation difference in student achievement gains over the term of one school year. Sanders and Rivers (1996) stated that there is up to a 50-percentile improvement in student achievement depending on teacher quality. They also stated that these improvements are additive and cumulative over subsequent teachers.

The literature also supports that on average students that are taught by a first year teacher learn less than students taught by a more experienced teacher (Hanushek& Kain 2005; Krieg, 2006). The studies that have reported these findings found that beginning first year teachers produced significantly lower student achievement gains than teachers that had 10–15 years' experience (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). The majority of the gains that experience brings to a teacher's effectiveness occur within the first four years that they teach. There have been several studies that have researched the effect of teacher certification and teacher education level and the effect that they have on student achievement (Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Krieg, 2006). The findings from these studies differ, sometimes very substantially.

Developing Teacher Leaders

The principals in HPHP schools understand the importance of developing and retaining strong teacher leaders (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005). The leadership style of the principal does not seem to matter in this equation (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Principals of

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HPHP schools seem to understand that they cannot achieve the far-reaching goals for their school alone. Teacher leaders drive the improvement measures day-to-day in many of these schools. Their best practice methods along with their passion, drive, and a relentless work ethic make them truly the driving force of the school (Loeb & Miller, 2006). A principal may harness this force by continually supporting and communicating with these teachers. Teacher leaders need the autonomy to plan and create without the worry of being shot down by administration (Krieg, 2006). A principal must also be willing to give up the glory to these teachers when their hard work accomplishes the goals of the school. A principal that cannot share leadership and be modest about where the credit should go will never see their school reach it's full potential (Whitaker, 2003).

Recruitment Strategies for Teachers

Many large school districts and even some states have put in place policies that will help attract or recruit teaching talent to their area (Loeb & Miller, 2006). Recent literature studies have highlighted that teachers seek employment very unequally across schools (Quartz, Barraza-Lyons & Thomas, 2005). A general trend found in literature has been that teachers with less experience and sometimes poor academic records gravitate toward high poverty schools that are attended mostly by minority students (Krieg, 2006; Peske & Haycock, 2006). A 2002 research study looking at New York State's elementary school teachers found that non-White students were up to four times more likely than White students to have an under-qualified, non-certified, first year teacher (Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2002).

Nothing works better as a recruitment tool for a school than the reputation of excellence (Haycock, 2006). Every educator wants to be a part of a successful school where students learn, teachers are respected and have a voice, and administration not only supports, but also

encourages and motivates the teachers (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005). Any

school with this type of reputation generally has several highly qualified applicants for every

position that comes open (Carter, 2001).

Unlike schools of excellence, many of the HPHP schools in the literature struggled in the

beginning stages of the school's turn around to find high quality teachers (Quartz, Barraza-Lyons

& Thomas, 2005). Principals within these schools began to realize that as they increased the

level of high expectations and accountability and as collaboration grew throughout the school,

they began to get a more accurate picture of the level of teachers within the school (Whitaker,

2009). Those teachers who are ready to accept the new level of accountability and collaboration

begin to dig in and commit to a new level of teaching. Other teachers who are not up to the

challenges that the principal has laid before them begin to work against the grain (Whitaker,

2003). These teachers usually will devote a considerable amount of energy to derailing the new

plan of direction for the school. If their attempt is unsuccessful and they find themselves in the

minority, generally they will look for another school to teach at. This process of winning over

teachers and getting uncooperative, noncompliant teachers to move on can sometimes take a few

years to accomplish (Whitaker, 2010).

Another very important part of this transition to becoming a HPHP school is for the

principal to only hire teachers who are committed to continuing the new mission and vision of

the school (Whitaker, 2010). Ensuring that the interviewing teachers are going to also fit in with

the existing teaching staff is also important. A HPHP principal must have their finger on the

heartbeat of their teaching staff to understand the sometimes complex mix of personalities and

attitudes within the school (Whitaker, 2010).

Retaining High Quality Teachers in High Poverty Schools

Retaining high quality teachers at a high poverty school is sometimes viewed as an impossible task (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigor & Wheeler, 2007). High poverty-high minority schools are often considered to be a 1–2 year training factory for new teacher graduates (Ingersoll, 2004). These new graduates come to these schools to get their two years of experience and get out as fast as they can find another job. The ability of a principal to recruit and retain teachers in high poverty-high minority schools may determine if they will be successful in turning the school around (Ingersoll, 2004). A successful leader in a high poverty-high minority school knows and understands that they will not be able to turn the school around alone. It will take a dedicated staff of teachers with great leadership an average of 3–5 years to accomplish this goal (Whitaker, 2010). Having this understanding is a driving force behind trying to recruit the best teachers who share the desire to take on such a challenge.

Once these teachers have been recruited, the principal then must work diligently to fuel their motivation level by supporting their reform work in hopes of retaining them. Every high quality teacher lost throughout the turnaround process is another setback for the school's drive to become high performing and more importantly for the students. The longer this drive towards high performance takes, the less likely it will become reality (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigor & Wheeler, 2007). The teachers, students and community must see the improvements within a timely manner to stimulate the drive towards improvement. The best fuel for continuous improvement is results that show progress (Whitaker, 2010). Once the school has achieved a level of excellence that will drive it into the world of high-performing, high-poverty schools, it may also become a highly sought after school for highly qualified teacher applicants. Most good educators want to be part of a successful school where students learn; teachers are respected and

have a voice, and administration not only supports, but also encourages and motivates the teachers (Whitaker, 2010).

Successful Curriculums in High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

At the heart of excellent schools is a strong, current and engaging curriculum. It is vital that the curriculum be vertically and horizontally aligned so that students transition smoothly from one grade to the next. The principal as the instructional leader has the responsibility to ensure the curriculum is followed and assessed to ensure students are gaining mastery of the content of each subject.

Standards-based Curriculum

The foundation of these high performing schools is solid standards-based driven curriculum (Rakow, 2008). It is from here that these schools measure where they are going and to what level they need to take their students. A standards-driven curriculum allows the teachers to not only see where the student has been in previous grade levels and what skills they must have mastered by the end of the school year (Carter, 2000). A standards-driven curriculum allows the teacher to forge ahead into where the student will be heading next year. Standards-driven curriculums provide a road map for everyone on staff to follow, so that the entire building is moving in one direction. These curriculums also help grade levels work more productively together (Rakow, 2008). Long gone are the days where teachers spend more time on their "favorite" unit of study. Teachers in these high performing schools recognize the value of the grade level working on the same standards at the same time. This type of teaching allows for fluid movement between classes for students if necessary. This type of teaching also promotes "Best Practices" when teachers can plan together and then collaboratively see where each teacher's strength and weaknesses lies. Generally, teachers using this type of collaborative

planning and team teaching approach work together to reach all students in the grade level not just their own (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). They work together to strategize ways to reach the students who are having the most difficulty, while also creating ways to challenge the students who have mastered the needed concepts (Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009). In most HPHP schools you will find that when you walk into any particular grade level classroom, the other classrooms on that grade level are covering the same or nearly the same concepts. Another key ingredient found in these classrooms is that even though the concept is the same, the method of delivery is what is best for the students within that classroom. Multiple learning styles are addressed across the grade level (Chenoweth, 2009). Students often will move from one classroom to another depending on where they are in their understanding of the concepts (Chenoweth, 2007). Once the teachers believe they have taught the concept to mastery, the teachers will collaboratively create an assessment that will accurately measure whether the students have mastered the new concepts or not (Chenoweth, 2009). Once this assessment has been given, they will spend time working together to decipher the data from the assessment to see how they did. Teachers in HPHP schools take ownership of how their students do on assessments; when students don't do well on the assessment in one class it is a grade level concern, not just a teacher concern (Chenoweth, 2009).

Remediation Programs

In many HPHP schools the whole building is involved in working with any student that is falling behind or struggling with needed concepts (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements 2005). Everyone works together to help the teachers bring up any struggling students and the principal, assistant principal, aides, counselors, volunteers, and parents may all become involved in this process (Chenoweth, 2009). Many schools divide students into small groups or even

create one-on-one situations to ensure the success of their struggling students. It is this collaborative safety net that builds the confidence of the struggling students (Haycock, 2006).

The effort that is placed on remediation by the principal is vital to turning a high poverty-high minority school into a HPHP school (Chenoweth, 2007). The literature suggests that leaders in HPHP schools focus most of their attention on ensuring that students are working on grade level and mastering content standards. Data disaggregation, team collaboration, and continuous improvement teams must be focused on how to raise the scores of students who are not performing on grade level. Remediation programs and strategies must be a fluid movement in every classroom within the school. Administration, teachers, counselors, aides, and parents should all be speaking the same vocabulary related to improvement every day (Foster & Hilaire, 2004; Lambert, 2006). This drive toward improvement becomes the heartbeat of the school and builds momentum for success. It is from this momentum that the school also forges ahead into creating enrichment or advanced programs for students who have already mastered grade level standards (Lambert, 2006).

Enrichment versus Remediation

Another area that helps fuel the drive and motivation that it takes to meet the demands of working in a high-poverty, high-minority school is enrichment (Hessberg, 2008). Challenging all involved and pushing the envelope for student achievement with the majority of the school population not only motivates teachers and students, but also builds pride throughout the school and community (Hessberg, 2008). That pride comes from seeing students meet accomplishments and achieve beyond what they ever thought they could.

Enrichment programs come in many different varieties, but all have the same goal for student achievement, pushing students to not only a new level of achievement but also a new

level of confidence (Chenoweth, 2009). The increased level of confidence that comes from these enrichment programs does not just affect the school's top students. Many times the same students who are in remedial programs are also placed in enrichment programs in hopes of instilling a new confidence in some other area of school that will help them achieve greater results in their areas of weakness (Reis & Renzulli, 2010). Sometimes a weak math student may be a gifted writer, artist, or musician. Taping into a student's area of strength may help the student begin to enjoy school and subsequently overcome their area of weakness. The increased expectations that enrichment programs bring create a school environment that celebrates success and lowers the occurrence of disruptive behavior (Reis & Renzulli). Helping students find something they are successful at in school not only increases the level of confidence of that student, but also helps instill a love of learning within that student.

Education researchers have confirmed for years that students living in low socio-economic areas face serious challenges within the educational system (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kozol, 1991). However, despite this research some schools through research-based structures and systemic practices have been able to achieve high levels of student achievement in high poverty schools (Chenoweth, 2007; Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Marano, 2003; Washington Learns, 2006).

Summary

Throughout this summary research on the importance of high expectations for all students and an atmosphere of collaboration among teachers and administrators has been presented. This chapter has also shown the importance of organizational structures, policies, and systemic practices supporting high achievement; the importance of school culture and climate; and effective leadership models. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has brought the

general public's attention straight to the classroom. The accountability that comes with NCLB

has left many public schools fighting to stay off the states' failing schools list. Chapter three

presents an overview of the research methods used in this study. The purpose of this research is

to help identify the beliefs, organizational systems and behaviors of selected HPHP principals

and the strategies and methods used in their HPHP schools. Identifying these principal beliefs,

behaviors, and systems may serve as a guide to help other principals who are working to raise the

achievement levels in their schools.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Across the United States, federal and state accountability standards have heightened the general public's awareness of the academic strengths and weaknesses of public schools (Billman, 2004; Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2001) brought to the American greater public attention to statistics such as 70% of inner-city fourth grade students struggle to meet state and national grade level accountability measures in the area of reading (Chenoweth, 2007). NCLB also has put a spotlight on the qualifications of teachers and administrators. The term "high qualified" is starting to become common language within the general public when discussing schools and educators (Billman, 2004; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). NCLB also gave parents of children who are in failing schools the choice to send their child out of district to a successful school (Krieg, 2011). Failing schools face sanctions such as loss of funds and the restructuring of staff (Krieg, 2011). There have even been some schools that have been closed due to their unsuccessful attempts at bringing the level of student achievement to an appropriate level (Krieg, 2011). It is crucial that parents be well informed in their decision making about where they send their children to school. Under NCLB states are required to publish a report card for each public school within the state. These report cards give the general public a snapshot of the progress and success rates of the school. This increase in public awareness may improve the motivation level of school leaders to focus more on student achievement.

The pressures and challenges that NCLB has placed on school leaders across this nation have been easily met in some schools and school districts where student achievement has always been high. However, for high-poverty, high-minority schools the challenges of NCLB may seem hopelessly impossible (Krieg, 2011). Many students living in low socio-economic areas face serious challenges within their educational system. Some research suggests that historically high-poverty urban schools with large concentrations of students of color have been associated with low student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kozol, 1991). No Child Left Behind requires schools to have every student on grade level by 2014. This mandate is a real challenge when 90% or more of a school's students come from poverty stricken families (Krieg, 2011). Finding any teacher to work in these schools is sometimes a challenge, let alone a "highly qualified" teacher as deemed by NCLB (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007). The students who make up the population of these schools many times come from broken homes where putting food on the table is the priority, not homework (Payne, 2005). Principals in these schools usually focus more attention on discipline and keeping order than raising the academic success of each and every student (Ingersoll, 2004).

Need for Study

The demands on principals and their roles have changed drastically over the last 20 years (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). The function of the principal at one time was centered on authority and management (Whitaker, 2003). Effective schools research (Casey, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Fullan, 2006; Kannapel & Clements 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; West, Ainscow & Stanford, 2005) began to slowly influence changes in the roles and responsibilities of the principal. Instead of focusing on management functions, principals began to evolve into instructional leaders within their school (Murphy & Meyer, 2008). Principals

quickly determined that being an instructional leader alone would not be enough to reach the

necessary level of student achievement. To remedy this some principals began to establish and

facilitate professional learning communities (Cranston, 2011). Many principals began to lead

school improvement teams to develop plans and establish goal and mission statements for their

schools (Chenoweth, 2007). The role of principal today requires a much higher focus on data

analysis, collaboration, student learning, teacher instruction, and the disaggregation of student

test data (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Principals serving in high poverty schools may feel these

changes and new demands more than anyone (Carter, 2001). Principals of high-poverty high-

performing (HPHP) schools make high expectations the mantra of the school (Duttweiler &

Madden, 2001). However, communicating and expecting high expectations from students is not

enough; principals must raise the bar for the entire staff (Verona & Young, 2001). Setting high-

level, achievable goals for students and holding students and teachers accountable for reaching

those goals is an essential part of the success of a HPHP school principal (Carter, 2001).

Another top priority of a principal of a HPHP school is the belief within himself/herself that each

and every student within the school is capable of learning. It is essential that this belief be

evident to every child, parent, and teacher in the school (Clark & Clark, 2002).

Problem Statement

High-performing high-poverty (HPHP) schools are doing what many educators have

considered impossible (Casey, 2000). These HPHP schools are taking children who are

considered hard to teach and achieving academic success. Too many schools are under-

performing. There is a need to learn what HPHP principals are doing, what they believe, and

how they drive all children to learn. Chenoweth (2007), in her book *It's Being Done,* states,

… these schools could have saved themselves a lot of trouble by falling back on the tired old excuses that many other schools use — that "these kids" can't be expected to do much academically because they are poor, because their parents don't support their education, because they don't eat breakfast, because the don't have a culture of academic achievement, or any of a number of other excuses. (pg. 14)

Elements of HPHP research emphasize the importance of leadership style and qualities within a school (Billman, 2004; Casey, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Fullan, 2006; Kannapel & Clements 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Lambert, 2006; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Ross & Glaze, 2005; West, Ainscow & Stanford, 2005).

Statement of Purpose

Despite historical trends, research-based structures and systemic practices have contributed to high student performance in high poverty schools in some areas (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Marano, 2003; Washington Learns, 2006). Research has shown that leaders are vital to the success of HPHP schools (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Murphey & Meyers, 2008). Research has also shown that the educational leader plays a significant role in the development of strong teachers, implementation of high instructional standards, and improved outcomes of student learning and achievement (Billman, 2004; Casey, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Fullan, 2006; Kannapel & Clements 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Lambert, 2006).

The demands and dynamics of leadership within a HPHP school call for strategies that are flexible and responsive to the needs and circumstances of their students, despite the countervailing forces that may exist in the school and broader environment (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009).

The purpose of this research is to help identify the behaviors and attributes of HPHP principals and the strategies and methods used in HPHP schools that contribute to their success. Identifying these principal behaviors, attributes, and leadership strategies may serve as a guide to help other principals who are facing the challenges of NCLB. By examining these leadership qualities we may develop a deeper understanding of types of leadership, structures, and policies that promote improved learning for all students.

Theoretical Framework

The belief that a child's education is based upon his or her innate ability and socioeconomic status went unchallenged for the first 75 years of the 20th Century (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Researchers argued that the achievement gap among students was a product of each student's aptitude and environment, not the quality of schooling (Dembo & Beaulieu, 2002; Dufour, 2004; Marzano, 2003; Washington Learns, 2006). Slowly, researchers began to establish the concept that what happens in schools does play a major role on a child's achievement. Robert Marzano (2003) stated that not only do schools play a significant role upon student achievement, but that, "Schools that are highly effective produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student backgrounds" (pg. 7). Lezzotte (2004) also presented compelling evidence that all children can learn and that schools control factors necessary to assure student mastery of core curriculum.

Organizational success is nearly always dependent upon the central variable of leadership (Murphy & Meyer, 2008). Leadership becomes even more important in times of crisis and significant change (Crandall, 1995; Rindler, 1987; Shook, 1990). "During a turnaround period is when leadership matters most" (Kanter, 2003, p. 67). Gerstner (2002) stated that "leadership is the most important element in institutional transformation" (pg. 235). Research suggests that

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successful school leadership is not only accepted as the key constituent in achieving school improvement (Harris & Chapman, 2002), but also has been regarded as the sole determining factor for a turnaround school success or failure (Fullan, 2006; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005).

The starting point for turnaround leadership in schools is to establish a culture of high expectations, high performance, collaboration, and mutual respect (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Strong principal leadership is essential to motivate the faculty to raise the expectations and performance of the students (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). In regards to raising expectations, school leaders must establish appropriate, measureable, and agreed upon academic and non-academic goals and targets (West, Ainscow & Stanford, 2005). Research studies reveal that successful turnaround leaders provide professional support and encouragement for their staff's personal growth (Giles et al., 2005). Effective leaders spend significant amounts of time supporting and encouraging their teaching staff (Billman, 2004). These leaders try to raise each teacher's self-esteem and self-image (West, Ainscow & Stanford, 2005) and to influence their beliefs about their professional ability (Ross & Glaze, 2005). For the most part, turnaround school leaders operate as facilitators, mentors, guides (Billman, 2004; Giles et al., 2005), and coaches (Ross & Glaze, 2005; Lambert, 2006) more so than they operate as administrative managers.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to help identify what belief systems, organizational structures, and principal behaviors the principals in four Torchbearer Schools in Alabama are using to drive student achievement. This purpose was addressed by answering the following research questions:

1)   What organizational structures, belief systems, and leadership behaviors support achievement in torch bearer schools?

2)   What support systems are in place to facilitate the use of these structures, systems, and approaches?

3)   What role(s) does the principal play when developing and implementing these structures, systems, beliefs, and leadership behaviors?

Research Design

A qualitative case study research design (Anderson & Davenport, 2002; Chenoweth, 2007) was used to conduct this research. Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the importance of context when seeking deeper understanding about the qualities and behaviors each principal exhibits (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005), a qualitative approach was selected. This research is based in four Torchbearer Schools located in both urban and rural areas.

This research included the use of a teacher survey administered to the teachers in each of the purposefully selected Torchbearer Schools. The entire teaching faculty of each chosen Torchbearer School was invited to complete the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). The PIMRS is a research based evaluation tool that measures the effectiveness of a principal's performance on 10 instructional leadership job functions. The subscales are comprised of 50 items, which refer to specific principal behaviors or practices (Hallinger, 1982). Each of the chosen four Torchbearer principals was shadowed for one school day and field notes were recorded. At the end of the shadowing day each principal also participated in taking the PIMRS. Each principal was also asked to share their vision and educational / leadership philosophy.

Document analysis was another component of this research, and each of the chosen Torchbearer School's school improvement plans was analyzed for beliefs, polices, and practices. Each school was addressed as an individual case study. A cross-case analysis was completed later to identify common areas of belief and practice.

Site Selection

The Torchbearer School Program was created by the Alabama Leadership Academy at the Alabama State Department of Education in 2004. This program was created to recognize high-poverty high-performing public schools in Alabama. The idea for this program came from a book study that the Leadership Academy did in 2004. This group read and studied Samuel Casey-Carter's book *No Excuses: 21 Lessons From High-Performing, High Poverty Schools*. In this book Casey-Carter (2000) highlights 21 high poverty schools across this nation that have truly beaten the odds and made no excuses about educating students of poverty. These schools reached levels of academic success that many schools in middle or upper class areas have not obtained. The book also looks at research-based strategies and methods used in these 21 schools that help them bring the achievement level of these poverty stricken schools to such high levels.

While reading the book however, the members of the Leadership Academy noticed that the schools being studied were not public schools. The book highlights charter schools, private schools, and a few magnet schools. This prompted the members of the Leadership Academy to look within the state of Alabama to see if there were any high-performing, high-poverty schools and to develop an award of recognition for the efforts of those in these schools. The name Torchbearer School was selected to designate these schools of excellence. During the 2007–2008 school year the first nine schools qualified for this prestigious award. All nine schools met all the criteria and were recognized in Montgomery, Alabama by the State Superintendent for

their accomplishments. Each school was also given a $15,000 monetary reward by the State

Department of Education. The criteria to be eligible to win this prestigious award includes the

following:

- Identified as Meeting the Challenge School, Advancing the Challenge School, and Exceeding the Challenge School according to the state rewards plan.

- Have at least an 80 percent poverty rate (percent free/reduced-price meals).

- Have at least 80 percent of students to score at Levels III or IV on the Reading section of the *Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test* (ARMT).

- Have at least 80 percent of students to score at Levels III or IV on the Math section of the *Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test* (ARMT).

- Have at least 95 percent of twelfth-grade students pass all required subjects of the *Alabama High School Graduation Exam* (AHSGE).

- Have a graduation rate above the state average (high schools).

Retrieved from http://alex.state.al.us/showleaderpg.php?lnk=torch

During the 2010–2011 school year 11 schools were awarded the honor of being named a

Torchbearer School. Four of these schools will be the focus of this research [pseudonyms were

used to blind the actual identity of the four schools in this study]:

1. Black Hills Elementary School

2. Central Elementary School

3. Pine Hill Elementary School

4. Northview Elementary School

Each of these four schools was chosen for their exceptional student achievement. Another

important consideration for choosing these four schools was the tenure of the principal. The

principals of each of these schools were present before, during and after the Torchbearer status was achieved. Additionally, all of the schools include grades K–5. Two schools are located in an urban area, but within the same school system. The other two schools are in rural areas of the state. It may be important to note if there is any differences or similarities in these two populations. A brief description of each school site is provided.

Black Hills Elementary School

Black Hills Elementary School is located in a rural area in southwest Alabama. Principal Dawson led Black Hills Elementary School to Torchbearer status during her first and second years at Black Hills Elementary School. Ms. Dawson is working on her third year as principal of Black Hills Elementary School. Black Hills Elementary was a failing school for over a decade. Low achievement and poor attendance were too often the expectation for the area's low-income community. The entire student population at Black Hills Elementary School qualifies for free lunch. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the students at Black Hills Elementary School are of minority status, primarily Native American.

Central Elementary School

In 2004, Central Elementary School was one of the lowest performing elementary schools in the state and was labeled a failing school. Dr. Thomas was hired as the new principal in 2004 and was charged with turning the school around. By 2007, Central Elementary School was named a Torchbearer School. This honor was bestowed upon this school again the following school year and in every year since. Dr. Thomas has led 32 teachers and 480 students towards excellence since she arrived eight years ago. In 2008, Central Elementary School was awarded the U.S Department of Educations prestigious National Blue Ribbon Award. In 2009, this school was awarded the Dispelling the Myth Award from The Education Trust. The U.S

Department of Education awarded Central Elementary School with the Turn Around School Award in 2010. Central Elementary School serves a student population that is 99% free lunch and 99% minority status.

Pine Hills Elementary School

Pine Hills Elementary School is located in Pine Hills, Alabama. Pine Hills Elementary School is lead by principal Mr. Shaw. Pine Hills Elementary School was chosen three years in a row, 2009–2011, as one of the top elementary schools in the state of Alabama. Pine Hills Elementary School was one of only two Alabama schools recognized in 2006–2007 as a National Distinguished Title I School. In 2009, Pine Hills Elementary School was recognized as one of the top ten rural schools in Alabama. Mr. Shaw leads his teaching staff of 20 with passion and love every day. Pine Hills Elementary School serves 291 students; 76% qualify for free or reduced lunch and 63% are of minority status.

Northview Elementary School

Northview Elementary School is located in the Redwood Park Subdivision in Fort Wright, Alabama, and encompasses kindergarten through grade 5. Dr. Cole has been the principal of Northview Elementary School for 16 years. Northview Elementary School was honored in 2003 as a Council of Leaders in Alabama Schools Banner School, an honor that only twelve other schools achieved in the state. Northview Elementary School is one of the top schools in the state of Alabama in the number of teachers who have attained National Board Certification. Presently, there are eleven out of 30 teachers with National Board Certification. Northview Elementary School earned its Torchbearer status during the 2010–2011 school year. Northview Elementary School serves 476 students, 85% of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch and 78% who are a minority.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

In most qualitative research studies data collection includes in-depth, open-ended interviews, participant observations, and a review of written documents (Larsen, 1987; Maxwell, 1996). It is crucial that in qualitative research the researcher not rely on using only one method of data collection. The data must be triangulated to ensure rigor (Maxwell, 1996). Multiple data sources including the use of an in depth open-ended interview with the principals, principal self-assessment, a whole staff survey, document analysis, and a day of shadowing to collect observational data and record it. Field notes will facilitate triangulation of the data collected in this research study. Below is a brief description of how each data collection method was used.

Open-Ended Interviews

The researcher interviewed the principal of each Torchbearer School. The interview questions were designed to ascertain information on the demographics of the school and background information about the principal (see Appendix A, Interview Protocol).

Principal Survey

Qualitative research investigations often use surveys as a support (Merriam, 1998). The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) was provided to the principals and teachers of each school. The PIMRS is a research-based evaluation tool that measures the effectiveness of a principal's performance on 10 instructional leadership job functions. Specific principal behaviors and practices are measured using subscales that are comprised of 50 items. Each respondent was asked to evaluate the principal's performance on 50 behaviors, and respondents rated performance on a scale from 1 for "Almost Never" to 5 for "Almost Always." The survey was administered to the entire faculty in each of the selected Torchbearer Schools at a faculty meeting. The teachers had the option to participate by filling out the survey and turning

it in to a labeled box. Teachers also had the option to not participate by turning the survey in

without completing it to the same box. The surveys remained anonymous at all times.

Review of Documents

A review of documents was used to obtain additional insights regarding the priorities and

practices of the teachers, the school improvement team and any other programs aimed at helping

student achievement. Another goal of reviewing the written documents was to help verify and

corroborate the data gathered through the interviews and surveys (Yin, 2003). Some of the

documents reviewed included the School Improvement Plan, written documents about

instructional leadership, the principal's educational/leadership philosophy, and the school's

vision statement.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The No Child Left Behind Act began the age of accountability in America's public

schools (Chenoweth, 2007). This Act challenged the belief that a child's education should be

based on his or her innate ability and socioeconomic status. NCLB helped make the

achievement gap a topic of concern and questioned the quality of schools throughout this nation

(Krieg, 2011).

High-performing high-poverty schools are doing what many educators have considered

impossible (Casey, 2000). These HPHP schools are taking children who are considered hard to

teach and with thoughtful hard work they are achieving academic success (Chenoweth, 2009).

The Torchbearer School Program was created by the Alabama Leadership Academy at the

Alabama State Department of Education (SDE). This program was created to recognize HPHP

public schools in Alabama.

Organizational success is nearly always dependent upon the leadership of a school (Murphy, 2008). Strong principal leadership is essential in these HPHP schools. Leadership can motivate the faculty to raise the expectations and performance of the students (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). School leaders must help to establish appropriate, measureable, and agreed upon academic and non-academic goals and targets (Bell, 2001; West, Ainscow & Stanford, 2005). A starting point for turnaround leadership in schools is to establish a culture of high expectations, high performance, collaboration, and mutual respect (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). This study examined four HPHP leaders and the belief systems that they operate from to develop a deeper understanding of types of leadership, structures, and policies that promote improved learning for all students.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Introduction

High-performing high-poverty (HPHP) schools take children who are considered hard to

reach and teach them in ways that ensure they achieve academic success (Casey, 2000). HPHP

schools serve student populations that are generally comprised of at least 85% minority students

who are also considered to be living in poverty. This population of students face many

challenges such as unstable homes and hunger, and many do not have supportive adults in their

home (Kozol, 1991). Schools must first address these challenges before they can begin to teach

these children (Kozol, 1991). Stable, high-quality teaching and strong instructional leadership

are a common thread in the schools that are successfully reaching children of poverty (WestEd,

2007). It is imperative that further research be done to show how the leadership within HPHP

schools is promoting high student achievement (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009).

The purpose of this research was to identify the behaviors and attributes of HPHP

principals along with the strategies and methods they use to produce the high success rates at

their schools. By identifying the organizational systems, principal behaviors, and principal

beliefs that contribute to student success, findings from this research may serve as a guide to help

other principals who are struggling to meet the challenges related to reaching students of

poverty. Furthermore, by examining these leadership attributes and strategies we may develop a

deeper understanding of the types of leadership, structures, policies, and practices that promote

improved learning for all students. In Alabama, high-performing high-poverty schools that are at

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least 80% poverty and have 80% of their students achieving above grade level on state standardized tests in the areas of math and reading are honored and named as Torchbearer Schools. Annually, the State Superintendent of Education and the Governor recognize the accomplishments of schools that earn this accomplishment.

The Torchbearer School Program was created by the Alabama Leadership Academy at the Alabama State Department of Education in 2004. This program was created to recognize high-performing high-poverty public schools in Alabama. These schools reached levels of academic success that many schools in middle or upper class areas have not obtained. The name Torchbearer School was selected to designate these schools of excellence. During the 2007–2008 school year the first nine schools identified qualified for this prestigious award. All nine schools met all the criteria and were recognized in Montgomery, Alabama by the State Superintendent for their accomplishments.

The criteria to be eligible to win this prestigious award include the following:

- Identified as a Meeting the Challenge School, Advancing the Challenge School, and Exceeding the Challenge School according to the state rewards plan.

- Have at least an 80 percent poverty rate (based on percent free/reduced-price meals).

- Have at least 80 percent of students score at Levels III or IV on the Reading section of the *Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test* (ARMT).

- Have at least 80 percent of students score at Levels III or IV on the Math section of the *Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test* (ARMT).

- Have at least 95 percent of twelfth-grade students who pass all required subjects of the *Alabama High School Graduation Exam* (AHSGE).

- Have a graduation rate above the state average (high schools).

During the 2011–2012 school year 11 schools were honored by being named a Torchbearer School. Four of these schools were the focus of this research [pseudonyms were used to blind the actual identity of the four schools in this study]:

1. Black Hills Elementary School

2. Central Elementary School

3. Pine Hill Elementary School

4. Northview Elementary School

Each of these four schools was selected for participation in this study due to their exceptional student achievement and the tenure of the principal. The principals of each of these schools were present before, during and after Torchbearer status was achieved. Additionally, all of the schools include grades K–5. One of the schools is located in an urban area; another is in a suburban neighborhood. The other two schools are in rural areas of the state.

Three research questions were used to guide this study. The three questions were centered on researching the organizational structures, belief systems, and leadership behaviors that support student achievement in HPHP schools. A mixed methods research design was used. It is crucial when conducting qualitative research that researchers not rely on using only one method of data collection. The data must be triangulated to ensure rigor (Maxwell, 1996). Multiple data sources have been included in this study including an in-depth, open-ended interview with the principals (see Appendix A), principal self-assessment (see Appendix B), a whole staff survey (see Appendix C), document analysis, and a day of shadowing to collect observational data and record field notes for each principal.

A whole staff survey, the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), was provided to the principals and teachers of each school. The PIMRS is a research-based evaluation tool that measures the effectiveness of a principal's performance on 10 instructional leadership job functions (Hallinger, 1985). Specific principal behaviors and practices were measured using subscales that are comprised of 50 items. Each respondent was asked to evaluate the principal's performance on 50 behaviors, and the respondents rated performance on a scale from 1 for "Almost Never" to 5 for "Almost Always." The survey was administered during a faculty meeting at each of the selected Torchbearer Schools. The entire faculty was present at these meetings with the exception of the principal. The principal was also administered the PIMRS during the interview process.

Description of Schools and Leaders

These four schools share many commonalities, but also are all uniquely different. Black Hills Elementary and Pine Hill Elementary are rural schools with over a hundred-year history. Northview Elementary is a suburban school built in the 1960s. Central Elementary School is the only urban school in this study and was also built in the 1960s. The teachers in these Torchbearer schools have been working with their current principal for 5–9 years in each of the schools with the exception of Black Hills Elementary. The teachers at Black Hills Elementary School have only been with their principal for 2 years because it has only been a Torchbearer School for the last two years. Northview has the largest teaching staff with 34 teachers, followed by Central Elementary with 22 teachers. Black Hills and Pine Hill are smaller schools with 17 and 19 teachers respectively. Pine Hill Elementary teachers average the most teaching experience out of all the schools with 10–15 years. The other three schools average 5–9 years of teaching experience.

The principals of these schools also range in the number of years experience. Black Hills principal, Ms. Dawson, has only been a principal for 2 years. Central Elementary principal Dr. Thomas and Northview principal Dr. Cole have both been a principal for over 15 years. Mr. Shaw at Pine Hill Elementary has 5 years of principal experience. Ms. Dawson and Mr. Shaw have both been at their current school for 3 years. Dr. Thomas has been leading Central Elementary for 8 years. Dr. Cole has the longest tenure with 12 years at Northview Elementary School. [Pseudonyms were used to blind the actual identity of the four schools and the principals in this study.]

Case Studies

The following pages present case studies on each of the four schools. Following the individual case studies, a cross-case analysis is provided to better illuminate leadership, organizational, and belief trends across the four high performing high poverty schools.

Black Hills Elementary School

Black Hills Elementary School is located in a rural area in southwest Alabama. The school is nestled among thousands of acres of pine forests. Black Hills is set back in the countryside and is nearly 10 miles from any major road. This school seemed to be the only building other than a few homes for miles around. Upon arriving at Black Hills Elementary School the first thing you might notice is the number of small classroom trailers that make up this school campus. These trailers are parked in several areas throughout the campus, all with permanent steps and decking attached for entry. The main brick school building is in disrepair and not large enough to house more than a few classrooms and the cafeteria. There are also a few larger old modular homes that are being used as classrooms and a concession area. Yet, the campus is very clean and well cared for with several flowers, bushes and beautiful trees

punctuating the school grounds. There are several Native American structures built on the school campus such as clay mud homes, cooking pits, and mud-stick homes. These structures are new, but are here to serve as a reminder of the rich Native American heritage in this area. The majority of the population surrounding this school is of Choctaw dissent. The community members living near the school are scattered for several miles throughout the countryside. The area is impoverished with most families living in older modular homes set off of dirt and gravel roads. There are rolling hills covered with pine trees and several children were out playing in their yards the afternoon that I drove over the winding roads of the countryside to the school.

Black Hills Elementary was a failing school for over a decade. Low achievement and poor attendance were too often the expectation for the area's low-income community. The Choctaw residents trace their ancestry to Native American Indians who made a choice to stop speaking their native language in public rather than join the "Trail of Tears" in the 1830s. The previous principal before Ms. Dawson and her staff began changing the school's dismal statistics. They improved reading and math instruction, used data to identify students who needed extra help and launched a cultural education program to teach the Choctaw language and culture. Currently under the leadership of Ms. Dawson, Black Hills Elementary School teachers have helped their students produce consistently among the highest reading and math proficiency rates in the state. In 2011, 94 percent of sixth-graders met state standards in reading. Indeed, 80 percent of them exceeded the standards, compared with 63 percent of their peers around the state. Nearly all Black Hills students are impoverished and qualify for free lunch.

Leadership at Black Hills elementary school. Ms. Dawson has led Black Hills Elementary School for 3 years. Ms. Dawson describes herself as a "hands-on leader." When asked about her leadership style, Ms. Dawson commented, "I do the data with the teachers. I

like to be very visible and hands-on with the students and the teachers." Ms. Dawson stated that she subscribes to a "servant leadership style. "I am always right there ready to support and lend a hand; I think this is why it works. Teachers respect me for this. At least that is what I have found here anyway." When asked about her core beliefs that drive her leadership, Ms. Dawson stated,

> I believe school has to be an extension of the family for students and for teachers. We are all in this together. We must care for one another and let each other know that we care for each other. Family is how I describe this school and I think that is part of the backbone of successful leadership.

Dawson went on to say, "I am pretty laid back, these teachers know that they can talk to me and I am just one of them. I don't have to pull the 'boss' card very often." Dawson also shared that one of her core beliefs is that,

> Every child can learn, can read and do math. All children have something to contribute to this world. We help our students make those contributions. Every child is special in some way. I believe that all children deserve a chance to learn.

Leadership role and behaviors. The leadership role that Ms. Dawson plays at Black Hills Elementary is one of a servant leader. Her leadership behaviors as noted in the PIMRS tables [see Tables 3–12], located in the cross case analysis, are of support and involving and developing teachers. Ms. Dawson in her interview addresses this behavior,

> I spend a good amount of my day working on organizing everything from field trips to assemblies, to professional development. Making sure that everything is taken care of so that my teachers don't have to worry about these issues and can concentrate on teaching children.

When asked about what things that she did that are the most effective for building leadership within the school Ms. Dawson replied,

> I think one of the most important things that I do is wear as many hats as I do. I do all that I can to take the load off my teachers so that my teachers can teach. We all have several roles, but I try to wear many more hats than just principal. I am everywhere. The teachers respect this, because they know that in other schools, many of the tasks that I am doing are usually done by teachers. I try to support them in every way I can.

Organizational structures. The first organizational structure that came into view during my day of observation was the use of data by teachers and Ms. Dawson for finding students that needed remediation. Ms. Dawson during her interview stated, "Student data drives everything here. Once the data is disaggregated remediation starts immediately, sometimes for a few, sometimes for the whole class." While I was observing a class, the teacher had just given and taken up a short assessment from her students. The teacher then gave the students a short 10 minute task to work on by themselves while she quickly went over the assessment, marking down names of students that were not grasping the concepts on the assessment. Within 10 minutes the assessments were gone over and the teacher began separating students into groups for further instruction.

During the interview Ms. Dawson also spoke about vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum as an organizational structure that supports the schools' work.

> I have also bought Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math to help with the vertical and horizontal alignment throughout the school. The results have been great; we have had several professional development hours devoted to this and it has really helped. The system is expensive, but I found it to be worth it. We have these two programs down to

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an art; it is almost second nature. I think having everyone on the same page working

through the same program has really helped us reach all students.

The use of data as part of the organizational structure of the school was also discussed

and observed during my visit to Black Hills. Ms. Dawson stressed that you can have too much

data and not really be able to use it all. Ms. Dawson recommended having just a few tests that

you really like and using just them for gathering student data. "Once we finally did that we

could really drill down and look at each student and that student's needs", stated Ms. Dawson.

Having support was also another structure that Ms. Dawson spoke about,

> Using data combined with the State and district support really made a huge impact on our
>
> student achievement. You really need to have these extra people on staff that can help
>
> the teachers teach and go through data for them. It is so hard to teach and be responsible
>
> for these students and have the time to remediate and go through data on a weekly basis
>
> or every other week basis.

Leadership belief system. Shared vision, goal setting and leadership are a large part of

Ms. Dawson's leadership. During the interview we were interrupted several times by

community members stopping by Ms. Dawson's office to say hello. The goals and mission of

this school are developed by the entire staff and by all stakeholders. Ms. Dawson stated during

her interview, "We have many community members that are very involved in this school and are

usually a part of the decision-making for goals and missions annually." As Ms. Dawson toured

me throughout the school the evidence of a family atmosphere was very evident. The culture

and climate of Black Hills are warm and inviting. Everyone seemed to be working hard, but not

too hard to stop for a quick hug and a friendly hello. As Ms. Dawson and I went from classroom

to classroom I could tell that the teachers are not intimidated or threatened by her presence.

When we entered a classroom, it always felt like that is where Ms. Dawson was supposed to be. When I asked Ms. Dawson about what her next steps as a leader were she told me,

> I want to be here everyday to help continue that wonderful family environment that this school has become. Our goals and mission will always be set by what our students need. I see my next step as simply continuing what I am doing and looking for what we can improve on as a team and family.

Support systems. Ms. Dawson has put in place several support systems at Black Hills Elementary School. These systems include a focus on supporting teachers, creating a family culture, community involvement, professional development, and protecting instructional time. According to Ms. Dawson,

> I think the best thing that I have done for this school is to really work on the cohesion of the staff. I have worked really hard to create or really bring back that family atmosphere to this school. There were a lot of divisions in the staff when I first arrived, not anymore. We have really grown together over the past few years.

During the interview process we spent some time discussing meaningful professional development. She noted, "Professional development is what started the success here, so I believe that is huge when working with teachers." Dawson went on to say,

> All teachers need to know and understand the research behind what they are doing, or what they are being asked to do. It is not enough to just train teachers, you must also educate them on the theories and research behind the strategies they are putting in place if you want them to really work.

Black Hills Elementary School Summary

Black Hills Elementary appears to be a unique and special school for all the children that attend, for the community, and for the teachers and staff who work there. Ms. Dawson has built a culture of love, support, and pride. Ms. Dawson and the faculty of Black Hills Elementary School appeared to know what it takes to have their students achieve at some of the highest levels across the state. What is perhaps most impressive, however, is how they got there. The ethic of care (Bates, 2005) that is evident through the atmosphere at this school really seems to help support all the hard work that goes into the high student achievement.

Central Elementary School

Central Elementary School is located in a dilapidated neighborhood in a large school district. This school serves a student population that is 99% free lunch and 99% minority status. Many of the homes around the school have been condemned and have boards over the windows. Nearly 95% of the students live in a government-run apartment complex a mile from the school. The streets around the school are not considered safe and are patrolled heavily by police.

Six years ago, Central Elementary School was one of five schools to undergo what the school district termed a "transformation process." A new principal, Dr. Thomas, came to lead this process. She was allowed to start from scratch and hire her own staff. The school system that Central is a part of used cash bonuses up to $40,000 for teachers to lure employees to come to Central. Dr. Thomas comments, "I have never been convinced that it was ever about the money." Thomas continued, "What it was about is bringing in a staff that all believed the same thing, that all children can learn and providing that staff with training and resources so they could change the entire culture of a school."

"That first year, it was hard," Thomas said, recalling resistance from the community that included death threats to teachers. Some who were resistant to changes at the school hung dead cats from the building, rubbed fish on the bricks, egged the school and left knives sticking up in the ground on the playground. "We did not leave. We did not tuck our tails and run. We were committed," Thomas said. "We cried together. We came together every afternoon until we solved the problems." The building was painted and cleaned. The faculty met regularly to come up with strategies to reach every student. Teachers walked children home so they wouldn't get into trouble in the afternoons. This is a practice that is still in existence even today. It didn't take long for the children, whom Thomas called "sponges ready to learn," to notice a difference. Some students wrote in class assignments that their teachers weren't falling asleep anymore, that children weren't fighting in the halls anymore, and that they were actually being taught.

In 2007, Central Elementary School was named a Torchbearer School. This honor was bestowed upon this school again the following school year and in every year since. Dr. Thomas has lead 32 teachers and 480 students towards excellence since she arrived 8 years ago. In 2008, Central Elementary School was awarded the U.S Department of Educations prestigious National Blue Ribbon Award. In 2009, this school was awarded the Dispelling the Myth Award from The Education Trust. The U.S Department of Education awarded Central Elementary with the Turn Around School Award in 2010.

Officials from the U.S. Department of Education, which awarded Central a prestigious Blue Ribbon Award, have been to the school and filmed teachers in their classrooms. The department is citing Central Elementary School as an example of a "true turnaround school." In 2010, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan visited Central Elementary School and made statements about how impressed he was to be in one of the best performing elementary schools

in the country who 6 years ago was one of the worst performing schools in Alabama. "If it can happen here," Duncan said of the school, situated inside an impoverished neighborhood, "I'm convinced it can happen anywhere else in the country."

Dr. Thomas has led Central Elementary School for 8 years. Dr. Thomas describes her leadership style: "I am the chief Learning Officer. I work hard at using a distributive or shared leadership model. You can't do everything yourself, you can't be the expert in every area. You have to find people that are smarter than you are and put them into leadership roles." When asked whether she believes that all children can learn, Dr. Thomas stated,

> Yes, but it doesn't stop there. All children can learn at high levels, not just learn, but at high levels. When we interview for teachers I look for that vision that all children can learn at high levels. I look for teachers who have a strong integrity and a strong work ethic, because this is hard work, very hard work.

Another core belief that Dr. Thomas shared with me during her interview was about data. Dr. Thomas told me,

> Data must drive everything that you do academically. The school's goals must be based on what student data tells us we need to work on. It doesn't stop there though, it's not enough to just look and talk about data, you have to plan and monitor how each teacher is using that data to instruct their students. After I have reviewed any student data I meet with the teacher to discuss student progress or regress. The numbers don't lie, you have to drive your school with the data."

Leadership role and behaviors. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) [see Tables 3–12] showed that the teachers and Dr. Thomas agree across the board on her role and behavior as the school's chief learning officer. Developing teachers and involving

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them in the leadership of the school are just two areas where Dr. Thomas and her teachers agree. "My teacher leaders are very successful. You met Mrs. Mitchell this morning. She is responsible for a great deal of our success. You have to trust the people you put in these leadership roles." Dr. Thomas continued,

>My teachers know and understand the expectations. We have a teacher leader subject representative on each grade level. These teachers know what to do whether I am here or not. The procedures are well established. The expectations are well known.

>During my interview with Dr. Thomas I asked her about her most important role as leader of Central Elementary. With no hesitation Dr. Thomas said, "Hiring teachers! It's all about the quality of teacher in the classroom. We have little to no turnover of teachers. This is basically the same staff that was here 8 years ago." While walking around from classroom to classroom I asked Dr. Thomas if there were other behaviors that she felt lead to student success at Central Elementary. "Being visible, being here everyday and being on time. I don't leave the building during the day unless I have to. Everyone knows that I am here. Team building is also crucial. Modeling how to work together and ensure that everyone is involved in the process," commented Dr. Thomas.

Organizational structures. The organizational structure of Central Elementary School was obvious the moment I walked down the first hallway. It is all right there in front of your face, for everyone to see. The halls and bulletin boards are filled with examples of student achievement as well as student, classroom, and school-wide data. Where there was not data or displays of student achievement there were quotes, paintings and other advertisements of the "can do" environment of Central Elementary School. While on my tour of the school Dr. Thomas stated, "These bulletin boards are really accountability boards and they create some

competition between teachers and students. We begin analyzing data and remediating students by the 2nd week of school."

The overwhelming structure of Central Elementary School is the use of data. "We are always looking for data, we have data meetings twice a week. We predict success on the ARMT by looking at data; I have a pile of data on my desk right now. I look at all students to see who has made progress and hasn't. I look at overall classroom to see who has made progress and who has not. After I study the data I meet and discuss my findings with teachers. Data simply drives everything that we do," stated Dr. Thomas.

Leadership belief system. While discussing Dr. Thomas's belief system for leading a school she stated,

> Monitoring student progress is obviously important in my opinion also, as you can see throughout the building. Each and every class has a hallway display of student achievement. Students notice and watch these bulletin boards; they are interested in each other learning.

Another area that Dr. Thomas and her teachers showed a high agreement level on the PIMRS was in the areas of shared vision and goal setting, as well as communicating school goals. Dr. Thomas commented on this as we headed to the school's collaboration room.

> I believe when you are creating the annual school goals each year that it is crucial to have all the staff involved in some capacity. It's not enough just to talk about school goals and write them on posters and hang them on bulletin boards, good leadership attaches who will be responsible for working on this goal to each and every goal.

Dr. Thomas continued as we entered the collaboration room,

Those goals must be created by the teachers that are going to be responsible for meeting

them and those goals must come from the data that has been collected on each of our

students. The benefit of everyone working together on school goals is that they will all

understand the goals. You don't have a disconnect between where we are supposed to be

going and where we are now. It's all in black and white.

Support systems. The PIMRS results [see Tables 3–12] also showed a high congruency

between how Dr. Thomas self-assessed and how the teachers scored her on promoting

professional development. Dr. Thomas had this to say about professional development.

If you want teachers to improve you must establish a way to continually get them the

professional development that your school data says you need. We are all life long

learners and if we are not growing we are regressing. I take teacher professional

development very serious.

During a conversation at lunch with Dr. Thomas I asked her about what other support systems

were in place that helped drive student achievement. Dr. Thomas explained that student

achievement can only happen when there is an excellent teacher in place in the classroom. Dr.

Thomas spoke about how she develops support for the teachers.

I think that one of the most powerful things that we do is that we have building experts.

So, when I do hire someone new they are imploded with help and support. They will not

be in isolation. For example I might pair Melissa with a new 2nd grade teacher. Melissa

will co-teach or be side-by-side with her during the first week. As the new teacher

becomes more comfortable Melissa will spend less time with them. However, if Melissa

senses a weakness in math she will then bring in the math-building expert to help. This is

all done on a peer to peer basis.

Central Elementary School Summary

There is no doubt that after spending a full day at Central Elementary School I was beyond inspired. Central Elementary school is a model school for every school in the nation. One of the last things that I spoke to Dr. Thomas about was the fact that most of the HPHP schools across the nation were elementary schools. I asked Dr. Thomas if she believed this could be done at the middle or high school level. Dr. Thomas replied, "Absolutely, it is going to be the same ingredients that we have put into the success recipe here. Now you may have to mix them a little different to get the results, but the ingredients I am certain are the same." Dr. Thomas and her teachers have proven that there are no excuses for students not to be achieving at a high level. As U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated, "If it can happen here, I'm convinced it can happen anywhere else in the country."

Pine Hill Elementary School

Pine Hill Elementary School is a part of a county school district and is located in Pine Hill, Alabama. Pine Hill Elementary is a rural school set off the beaten path and surrounded by forests and fields. This school building was built in the 1920s and looks like the traditional old school houses from that era. The building is well cared for and freshly painted. As you approach the school and pull into the parking lot you notice that the grounds are well taken care of and there is a beautiful white picket fence across the front of the schoolyard. Colorful flowers and bushes accent the old white schoolhouse and lead you to the old front door where the original corner stone reads 1921.

Pine Hill Elementary School is led by principal Mr. Shaw. Pine Hill Elementary was selected three years in a row, 2009–2011, as one of the top elementary schools in the state of Alabama. Pine Hill Elementary was one of only two Alabama schools recognized in 2006–2007

as a National Distinguished Title I School. In 2009, Pine Hill Elementary was recognized as one

of the top ten rural schools in Alabama. Mr. Shaw has served Pine Hill Elementary School for 3

years and led his teaching staff of 20 with passion and love every day. Pine Hill Elementary

School serves 291 students; 86% qualify for free or reduced lunch and 63% are of minority

status.

Leadership at Pine Hill elementary school. Mr. Shaw has been leading at Pine Hill for

the last 3 years. Mr. Shaw describes himself, "As an instructional leader rather then a

disciplinarian or general leader at the school. I believe it is very important to be in the classroom

every day, being a part of the learning." When asked about the core beliefs that drive his

leadership Mr. Shaw stated,

> The number one core belief that has led us to where we are is loving and caring for our
>
> children. Sure, we are going to be teaching them, but while we are teaching we are also
>
> showing that we care for them. You will see as you walk around the building today, these
>
> children will hug you all day long. These students work hard because they know that we
>
> care for them.

Another major core belief that Mr. Shaw shared with me during his interview was, "You must

have a highly qualified talented teacher in every classroom. Our teachers are some of the

absolute best. My teachers are extremely dedicated — they work hard, whether I am here or not,

they just don't stop." While discussing core beliefs, Mr. Shaw shared with me that his leadership

and the school itself run off of one main belief system. "The students here are taught

immediately that they can learn and learn at a high level. Everyone in this school believes to

their core that all children can learn."

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Leadership role and behaviors. When I spoke to Mr. Shaw about his leadership role within the school he mentioned that monitoring student progress and teacher instruction were high on his list. "It's important to watch the teachers teaching and recognize how the students are engaging and reacting to the lesson." Mr. Shaw rated himself at a higher level than his teachers rated him on the areas of the PIMRS [see Tables 3–12] that directly looked at monitoring student progress and communicating with teacher and students. Mr. Shaw told me that hiring teachers was his most important role as a leader.

> When I hire teachers I don't involve the other teachers because I know exactly what I want. I am looking for the compassion and love for children as well as someone who is compassionate. All my teachers are so much more than just classroom teachers. They are nurses, mothers, and mentors to these children 8 hours a day, every day. These qualities come across in an interview. I usually know immediately whether this candidate will fit in and meet the high expectations that this school requires.

> As an instructional leader, Mr. Shaw also mentioned the importance of knowing and coordinating the vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum. The PIMRS showed that Mr. Shaw rated himself lower than his teachers perceived him in the area of coordinating curriculum. While walking around the school I asked Mr. Shaw about how he sets his leadership priorities. Mr. Shaw replied,

> Priorities must be set by the individual needs of the students. Usually these needs are found in the data that we go over every week. We address each student, one by one to ensure they are all being pushed and on grade level. None of the teachers here teach their class, they teach every student. They truly understand the meaning of mastery teaching. No one falls behind here if we can help it.

Organizational structures. The organizational structure that I felt was most obvious as I observed for the day at Pine Hill Elementary was the school culture and climate. Everything seems to be centered on a love of children first and foremost. When asked about this culture, Mr. Shaw stated,

> I know that all teachers care, but this is to high level of caring. It is a very close community inside and outside the school. Many times we will know about what problems are going on in the community and are able to help our children deal with those challenges in a way that it doesn't interfere with their learning. It actually helps the students get to a place where they can learn because they feel safe and loved here.

> Another organizational structure that was noticeable as I sat and observed in classrooms was the constant presence of student data driving instruction. "We use it all the time, commented Mr. Shaw.

> We have weekly data grade level meetings where we look at many sources of data. Our students are assessed about every other week. This provides my teachers with data that really shows how they are doing teaching the material. This data is looked at and evaluated to see what each individual student needs. Data drives every academic decision we make here.

Being a data rich school is something that has to be led, it is hard work. I asked Mr. Shaw his thoughts on how it became a part of the culture at Pine Hill. "I believe that it is crucial that the leader of the school supports and recognizes the importance of data. It is a lot of work for these teachers to assess and then go through the data and evaluate where they are strong, weak." Mr. Shaw continued, "The leader must embrace this practice and make it a part of the high expectations and climate of the school."

Leadership belief system. Mr. Shaw and I observed students interacting for a while in the cafeteria during lunch. While we were observing I asked him about other beliefs that he felt drove student achievement. Mr. Shaw commented,

> When we work we work very, very hard together as a team. However, as a leader I also
> believe that it is crucial that you also celebrate just as hard as you work. We believe in
> rewards and incentives here. We celebrate hard here for any accomplishment we can.
> We provide a token reward system with tickets.

Mr. Shaw asked a 2nd grade student that was eating near us to show me her tickets. The young girls opened her purse and pulled out a hand full of tickets. "These tickets are given out for the 9 week period for grades, behavior and other things that students are doing right. My fifth and sixth graders will bring their tests by my office when they do well and I will give them a ticket." Mr. Shaw thanked the young girl and commented, " You would be shocked how well this works for all my students."

Another belief Mr. Shaw shared with me was during a walk around the outside of the building on our way out to observe the PE class. "I have loved teaching and learning for my whole life. I think people are born into this career. You just have to have it within you to really be successful in this business. You can't go into any school and fake your way to success. Children know if you are real or not, you can't fool them." Mr. Shaw stopped for a minute and addressed me further,

> It takes someone special to teach these students, it is really hard work that requires long
> hard hours and you have to wear several different types of hats. My teachers are so much
> more than just deliverers of curriculum. They really are special people. They all have
> learned their core beliefs about children and learning by working hard, sometimes failing,

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but still doing everything you can to reach every student. I am telling you they are just

unbelievable.

We continued on to observe the only male teacher on campus, the PE coach.

Support systems. When we returned to Mr. Shaw's office a hallway full of parents who

were volunteering their time to help around the school greeted us. "We have an amazing school

community. These parents are always up here. They are so proud of this school and want it to

be successful. Many of the parent and grandparents for that matter went to this school,"

commented Mr. Shaw. I continued my discussion with Mr. Shaw and asked him about what

support systems he thought the teachers appreciated the most. "As I said before I am in touch

with each of my teacher's daily, sometimes twice a day to see what they need. They sometimes

tell me I am too available to them." How about the students I asked. "Another important part of

my day though is communicating with the students. Sometimes that is on the playground or in

the hall in passing. Sometimes that's just a quick hug or a high five. These kids know I care

about them here. That is the most important communication that I do," replied Mr. Shaw.

I asked Mr. Shaw if he had any other comments about how he supports this school as a

leader that has helped drive the success here. Mr. Shaw took a minute and replied, "It's not that I

made changes so much as I made the decision not to make changes because this school is

functioning at such a high level." Mr. Shaw again took a minute to think and started again.

> "I know many leaders always have to make their mark or have things their way. I came
>
> in to an amazing well run school. Why would I change that? My job is to maintain the
>
> successful programs, policies and procedures that have made this school great for several
>
> years running. I don't want this school to slip while I am in charge. It is important to
>
> understand that this school is much bigger than one or two people. This school is a

community and a very successful one at that. But, it wasn't me that did that I just ensure it stays that way by continuing what we all know works for these children.

Pine Hill Elementary School Summary

Pine Hill is a quaint country school with a heart for children. There was no doubt in my mind after spending an entire day with Mr. Shaw and his teachers that Pine Hill Elementary School knows how to do more than create high levels of student achievement, they also know how to love their job while they do it. The family climate and culture of this school is felt immediately upon entering the building and can be felt in every hallway and classroom throughout.

Northview Elementary School

Northview Elementary School is located in the Redwood Park Subdivision in Fort Wright, Alabama, and encompasses kindergarten through grade 5. As I drove around the neighborhood waiting to meet Dr. Cole at 7:00 a.m. I couldn't help but notice that Northview Elementary School was the diamond in what physically looked like a rough neighborhood. The houses surrounding Northview are in disrepair and have little to no effort placed in keeping their yards nice. As you come around the bend and get your first view of the school, it kind of shocks you a little. The bright green and well-manicured grass seemed to glow. The flowers, bushes and landscaping are all obviously done with great care. The large clay flowerpots that line the circle drive give off a great statement about how Dr. Cole wants this building to be seen. The building itself is nothing special. At first it appears to be a typical school built in the 1960s. Upon entering the building the statement that was on the exterior continues on the interior. I have never been in a school that was as clean and polished as Northview. The floors were like mirrors, the walls freshly painted and covered in neat and orderly student displays. There was

student work displayed everywhere. The Steven Covey 7 Habits were displayed on very tasteful signs hanging from the ceiling, perfectly hung, centered down the hallways. Everything about the interior of this building was as perfect as it could be made. You never felt like you were in an average 50-year-old school building.

Dr. Cole has been the principal of Northview Elementary for 12 years. Northview Elementary School was honored in 2003 as Council of Leaders in Alabama Schools Banner School, an honor that only twelve other schools achieved in the state. Northview is one of the top schools in the state of Alabama in terms of the number of teachers who have attained National Board Certification. Presently, there are eleven out of 30 teachers with National Board Certification. Northview Elementary School earned its first Torchbearer status award during the 2010–2011 school year. Northview Elementary serves 476 students, 85% of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch and 78% of whom are identified as having minority status.

Leadership at Northview elementary. When I asked Dr. Cole to describe herself as a leader her first response was, "Big on teamwork, highly energized and want all staff to be enthusiastic about coming to work to give their best to our students." "So, how do you model this for your staff?" was my next question for Dr. Cole. "Work ethic is important for all staff and students, encouraging this work ethic daily is an important part of what we do together. I believe this is our second family and we are to support each other. I am a Type A personality and it seems most of my staff members are as well," replied Dr. Cole. I then moved on to question Dr. Cole about her core leadership beliefs that help her lead Northview. Dr. Cole pondered for a second and stated, "I understand that for a school to be successful in educating students in a manner that will enhance student achievement and great character, there must be many leaders within the school. I feel that administrators must show care and respect for all staff

members who contribute to ensuring students have the best environment in which to learn." Dr. Cole then stated,

I want to expand that to also include that great expectations for staff members are only as good as the high expectations the administrators set for themselves. Teachers and staff must see that the administrators will do whatever it takes to support them so that great things can happen at school for students. We have many wonderful leaders in our school in all areas. They are continually encouraged to be the best they can be for our students."

Leadership role and behaviors. The PIMRS results showed that Dr. Cole and her teachers were in agreement as to her leadership roles and behaviors are at Northview. In nearly all categories Dr. Cole rated herself within a very small margin of what her teachers rated her. Framing and communicating school goals were both areas of stretch and agreement between Dr. Cole and her staff. The supervision of instruction and the coordination of the curriculum were another two areas where the PIMRS showed high and similar scoring. While touring all the classrooms with Dr. Cole during my visit it was evident that she is the instructional leader of Northview. There was a strong respect for Dr. Cole among her staff; however, Dr. Cole also displayed a strong respect for her staff. There was, however, a clear understanding or expectation that Dr. Cole was in charge. The high expectations were the most evident part of my day at Northview. Every classroom that we entered teachers were working hard engaging students and students were also working hard. The classrooms were at the same high level of standard as the hallways. Perfection and high expectations were displayed everywhere I went in this building from the staff bathroom to the teacher lounge and in every classroom. The students that attend Northview are treated to a 50-year-old school that looks better than brand new.

Throughout our time together as we entered classrooms and spoke with teachers it was obvious that Dr. Cole had the heartbeat of every teacher and every classroom on campus. She knew every child we came in contact with and could tell you something about them. Dr. Cole's high expectations are communicated and are evident with the entire school body; however, it was also evident that she holds herself to even a higher standard. Dr. Cole does not rule with an iron fist and shout high expectations; rather she holds herself to high expectations and comes along side everyone else to help them reach a higher level. "I feel that administrators must show a care and respect for all staff members who contribute to ensuring students have the best environment in which to learn. From the secretaries, to the custodians and CNP staff, to the assistants and teachers, all jobs are important and respected. Great expectations for staff members are only as good as the high expectations the administrators set for themselves," stated Dr. Cole.

Organizational structures. The organizational structure that is predominating throughout Northview is data informed decision-making. "All data come to me so that I can monitor and make recommendation also. We are a data-rich school and use data daily, but we don't take assessments just to be taking assessments. There must be a reason that we are assessing, we must be looking for certain skills," stated Dr. Cole. I noticed throughout the day as I went from classroom to classroom speaking to teachers and students that data feels different here. When I spoke to Dr. Cole about this she commented, "Data is the guiding light at this school. We have several data meeting throughout the school year. Each and every child is monitored for progress. We monitor students to ensure they are all progressing, not just the students that are behind." Dr. Cole said that data here is not just numbers, to them data is a child.

We also want to ensure that our more advanced students are also growing and learning. It is amazing to watch the numbers grow as we detail and analyze the data for each

student and then put in place our plan for that student," Dr. Cole continued. "We also use data in our vertical and horizontal teams here. We look at a student's portfolio of data from year to year to look for patterns. We do not place children in special ed unless there is a solid pattern of a learning disability. Too many students are placed in special ed for the wrong reasons.

Another organizational structure that is very evident after being at Northview for one day is the collaborative, small learning communities. Teachers spend a good deal of time helping other teachers, regardless of grade level. The culture and climate of Northview is warm and friendly with high expectations always present. The difference I feel here is that high expectations are being met in a collaborative friendly spirit. Even the students are a part of the collaboration here.

We are working on implanting 7 Habits throughout the curriculum and becoming a leadership school. The students are a huge part of making this happen school-wide. We believe incorporating this into our curriculum will promote great character traits and continue to promote academic achievement that will follow the children on to their next level of education."

Leadership belief system. Dr. Cole and I went off campus to have lunch and to continue our discussion. During this discussion I found out more about Dr. Cole's belief system that drives her leadership at Northview.

My parents had to quit school in elementary school to help support their siblings. They brought their three children up with an understanding that education is important. Expectations were always very high and a great work ethic was always a must. They instilled in their children respect for all, regardless of status. Both my parents were at-

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risk students while in school, but there were a few chosen people in their community who took them to church and showed them a better way of life. Because of those few, very special people, my parents strived to give their three children a great childhood with high expectations.

Dr. Cole continued with this discussion and gave me a glimpse into why Northview looks and feels like it does.

I often have wondered what would have happened to me and my brothers had those community members not stepped up and shown my parents a better way of life. Because of this I encourage my staff to be the best for our students and show our children that they can have a great future.

Another belief system that Dr. Cole shared with me is the collaborative spirit that I had felt throughout my time in the school.

With the outstanding leaders we have at Northview, I seldom make decisions that are solely based on my opinion or my desires. When we hire new personnel, the people who will be most directly involved with that new employee will sit on the hiring committee.

Dr. Cole continued,

Curriculum decisions should involve input from teachers because they are the experts in their areas and they can give better perspective of impact. Most of the decisions I make on my own are those decisions that must be made quickly in the area of discipline or safety.

Support systems. "One of my primary roles is to support my teachers so that they can teach. I can't hold them to high expectations if I am not willing to support them so that they can do their job," stated Dr. Cole. One example of this that Dr. Cole told me about was when she

(Dr. Cole) first came to Northview students who misbehaved were placed in hallways, unattended with work to do. Dr. Cole told me,

> The teachers did not have the support from the administration to take care of the
> disruptive students in the classroom setting. I told teachers I was there to support their
> instruction and did not want students placed in the hallways. So they were told to send
> students to me when they became disruptive in class. I established a detention area in the
> office.

Dr. Cole also spent some time talking to me about her role in supporting students. She mentioned that when she first arrived at Northview there were no awards programs. "Students needed to be rewarded for academics, attendance, and great behavior. When we first started the award programs very few parents attended." Dr. Cole continued, "However, as word spread and parents became more aware of their children receiving awards and accomplishing goals, more parents came to the programs and showed pride in what their children were accomplishing."

> When I asked Dr. Cole to expand on how she supports student achievement she said,
> In a high-risk school, I have high expectations for teachers and staff to use great
> management skills with students so that we can have a great environment for learning.
> My staff depends on me to take care of discipline and angry parents; they expect me to
> support them with great hires, with their input. They expect me to listen to their needs,
> concerns, and suggestions and follow through when appropriate.

Northview Elementary School Summary

Northview Elementary school is a haven for students where they are respected, pushed, and loved. The high expectations of Northview principal Dr. Cole have become the mantra of the school. High expectations are reached daily by a network of support from everyone involved

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in this school. High expectations are just a part of who they are here at Northview; it's not about

hard work. At Northview high expectations are viewed as, How can I help you reach your

goals? How can we work together so that we all succeed? Dr. Cole has truly developed a

winning formula for students, staff, and the parents of the Northview school community.

Cross Case Analysis

As I reflected on the four days that I spent in these Torchbearer schools, I could not help

but marvel at their similarities and differences, yet all were achieving beyond expectations. They

all appear to be wonderful places of learning for the students that attend them. They all appear to

have found a winning formula for student achievement. The refreshing part of this is that they

all did it using a slightly different recipe. Dr. Thomas, principal at Central Elementary, told me

that success can be achieved at any school. "It is going to be the same ingredients that we have

put into the success recipe here. Now, you may have to mix them a little different to get the

results, but the ingredients I am certain are the same." That statement from Dr. Thomas has

stuck with me more than any other comment after conducting the research and reading the results

of the surveys. Each of these Torchbearer Schools appears to have found the right ingredients,

but they have also found the right way to mix them so that it works well for their school.

School and Communities

The statistics and demographic characteristics of the students at each of the four schools

are similar; however, the communities they live in are very different. Central Elementary School

is in an area dominated by urban housing projects. Pine Hill Elementary School is more in the

country with quaint countryside homes surrounding it. Dilapidated modular homes populated

the area around Black Hills Elementary School. Northview Elementary School is located in an

older neighborhood with several homes in disrepair. The most noticeable similarity in the school

buildings is the evidence of pride and hard work that has been put into the schools to ensure they are as clean and well organized as they can be. Each of the Torchbearer Schools have a staff that has taken great strides to ensure their schools were clean, neat, freshly painted, and were great learning environments. The exterior of all of the schools were manicured as best that they could be, with flowers and bushes. Student work adorned the walls of each school. School goals, mission statements and artifacts of student data were highly visible in the hallways of all four schools. Aesthetics were noticeably important at each of the Torchbearer schools.

Leadership and Teachers

While contemplating the differences and similarities in the demographics of the principals and teachers of the schools, I found that Northview and Central were more similar while Black Hills and Pine Hill more closely resembled each other. Table 1 illustrates that the teachers at Black Hills and Pine Hill have been with their current principal an average of 2–4 years and that the schools populations are about the same size. As a contrast though, Pine Hill teachers on average have more experience than Black Hills teachers. While Northview and Central teachers have an average length of time with the current principal of 5–9 years, they also share the same average number of years teaching. In terms of differences, the population size of Northview and Central Elementary Schools are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Teachers

Demographics	Pine Hill Elem.	Northview Elem.	Central Elem.	Black Hills Elem.
Number of Teachers	19	34	22	17
Average number of years with current principal	2–4 years	5–9 years	5–9 years	2–4 years
Average number of years teaching	10–15 years	5–9 years	5–9 years	5–9 years

Table 2 shows the demographic similarities and differences of each Torchbearer School principal. Again, the similarities between Northview and Central are noticeable. Both principals have their doctorate degree and have been a principal for 15+ years. Dr. Cole and Dr. Thomas have also been at their current school for longer than Mr. Shaw and Ms. Dawson. Similarly, the Pine Hill and Black Hills principals have been at their school 2–4 years and have both earned a masters degree. Mr. Shaw has been a principal a few years more than Ms. Dawson.

Table 2

Demographics of Principals

Demographics	Pine Hill Elem.	North View Elem.	Central Elem.	Black Hills Elem.
Number of years principal of current school	3 years	12 years	8 years	3 years
Number of years principal experience	5 years	15 years	15 years	2 years
Highest Degree Earned	Masters	Doctorate	Doctorate	Masters

Leadership Roles and Behaviors

The PIMRS showed similarities in self-assessment and teacher perception between Northview's principal, Dr. Cole, and Central's principal, Dr. Thomas. Both principals rated themselves at the highest level in most areas on the PIMRS that dealt with leadership roles and behaviors. The teachers in each of these schools agreed with their principal in these areas and also rated them very highly. While visiting each of these principals I observed that both of these leaders were strong and confident with their role and clear about what leadership behaviors they wanted to exhibit. Neither principal appears to be narcissistic; rather they appear to be very confident and assured of who they are and how they lead. They are both apparently comfortable in the "Chief Learning Officer" position as Dr. Thomas describes it. In contrast, Mr. Shaw and Ms. Dawson present a different leadership style or role within their schools. While visiting both these principals they demonstrated a more outwardly servant leadership style (Winston, 2005). The PIMRS clearly showed that on the self-assessment in these areas Mr. Shaw frequently rated himself at a higher level than how his teachers perceived him. The PIMRS showed the opposite for Ms. Dawson. Many times she rated herself at a lower level than her teachers did. This confidence level was evident in both interviews. Ms. Dawson considers herself as one of the teachers in many ways and does not feel as comfortable being the "boss" as she does being a "hands-on" principal that is ready to support and lend a hand. Mr. Shaw came across more comfortable with his traditional leadership role; however, he still wants to maintain a more hands-on approachable leadership style with his teachers.

Organizational Structures

There are more similarities in the organizational systems across all four schools than in any other area, especially in ways that support the data informed decision-making culture in each

school. Teachers and leaders at each of the four schools stated that they embrace this type of

data informed decision-making. Just being in these schools is enough to see the data-rich culture

and variety of behaviors that support that culture. After the conversations I had with teachers,

staff, and the principals, data was clearly at the heart of each of these schools. All of the schools

were beyond just collecting and looking at data; these schools analyzed, and use this data to

inform instructional decision making on a daily basis. These schools also differentiate

instruction for each and every student based on what they observe and what the data tells them.

Data is used to inform instructional decisions rather than using it only for summative assessment

of annual progress.

Table 3

Frame the School Goals

Frame the School Goals	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
1. Develops a focused set of annual school-wide goals.	4.9/5.0	4.9/5.0	4.9/5.0	4.8/4.0
2. Frames the school's goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them.	4.8/4.0	4.8/5.0	4.9/5.0	4.8/4.0
3. Uses needs assessments or other formal and informal methods to secure staff input on goal development.	4.9/5.0	4.6/4.0	5/5.0	4.9/4.0
4. Uses data on student performance when developing the school's academic goals.	4.9/5.0	4.9/5.0	5/5.0	4.9/4.0
5. Develops goals that are easily understood and used by teachers in the school.	4.8/5.0	4.8/5.0	4.8/5.0	4.8/4.0

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 4

Communicate School Goals

Communicate the School Goals	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
6. Communicate the school's mission effectively to members of the school community	4.8/5	4.8/5	4.8/4	4.9/4
7. Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings	4.8/5	4.9/5	4.8/4	5/5
8. Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers	4.9/5	4.9/5	4.9/5	4.9/5
9. Ensure that the school's academic goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school (e.g., posters or bulletin boards emphasizing academic progress)	4.3/4	4.6/5	4.9/5	4.7/3
10. Refer to the school's goals or mission in forums with students (e.g., in assemblies or discussions)	4.2/5	4.6/5	4.7/4	4.7/4

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 5

Supervise and Evaluate Instruction

Supervise and Evaluate Instruction	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
11. Ensure that the classroom priorities of teachers are consistent with the goals and direction of the school	4.9/5	4.7/5	4.9/4	4.8/4
12. Review student work products when evaluating classroom instruction	4.4/5	4.2/4	4.8/5	4.6/4
13. Conduct informal observations in classrooms on a regular basis (informal observations are unscheduled, last at least 5 minutes, and may or may not involve written feedback or a formal conference)	4.3/5	4.4/4	4.4/4	4.7/4
14. Point out specific strengths in teacher's instructional practices in post-observation feedback (e.g., in conferences or written evaluations)	4.4/4	4.6/5	4.2/4	4.6/4
15. Point out specific weaknesses in teacher instructional practices in post-observation feedback (e.g., in conferences or written evaluations)	4.1/4	4.8/5	4.4/4	4.7/4

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 6

Coordinate the Curriculum

Coordinate the Curriculum	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
16. Make clear who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum across grade levels (e.g., the principal, vice principal, or teacher-leaders)	4.5/4	4.7/5	4.7/5	4.8/4
17. Draw upon the results of school-wide testing when making curricular decisions	4.9/5	4.9/5	4.9/5	4.9/5
18. Monitor the classroom curriculum to see that it covers the school's curricular objectives	4.5/4	4.4/5	4.7/5	4.7/4
19. Assess the overlap between the school's curricular objectives and the school's achievement tests	4.8/4	4.7/4	4.7/5	4.7/4
20. Participate actively in the review of curricular materials	4.3/4	4.4/4	4.7/5	4.6/4

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 7

Monitor Student Progress

Monitor student progress	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
21. Meet individually with teachers to discuss student progress	4.5/5	4.2/4	4.5/5	4.8/4
22. Discuss academic performance results with the faculty to identify curricular strengths and weaknesses	4.7/5	4.7/5	4.6/4	4.9/4
23. Use tests and other performance measure to assess progress toward school goals	4.9/5	4.7/5	4.9/5	5/5
24. Inform teachers of the school's performance results in written form (e.g., in a memo or newsletter)	4.8/5	4.6/5	4.9/4	4.9/5
25. Inform students of schools academic progress	4.6/5	4.5/5	4.9/4	4.7/4

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 8

Protect Instructional Time

Protect Instructional Time	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
26. Limit interruptions of instructional time by public address announcements	4.5/5	4.3/5	5/5	4.7/4
27. Ensure that students are not called to the office during instructional time	4.1/4	4.2/4	4.7/5	4.1/4
28. Ensure that tardy and truant students suffer specific consequences for missing instructional time	3.5/5	4.2/3	4.6/5	3.5/3
29. Encourage teachers to use instructional time for teaching and practicing new skills and concepts	4.8/5	4.8/4	4.9/5	4.8/4
30. Limit the intrusion of extra- and co-curricular activities on instructional time	4.4/5	4.5/4	4.8/5	4.4/4

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 9

Maintain High Visibility

Maintain High Visibility	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
31. Take time to talk informally with students and teachers during recess and breaks	4.7/5	3.9/4	4.5/5	4.4/4
32. Visit classrooms to discuss school issues with teachers and students	4.6/5	4.1/4	4.1/4	4.7/4
33. Attend/participate in extra- and co-curricular activities	4.7/5	4.5/5	4.5/3	4.8/5
34. Cover classes for teachers until a late or substitute teacher arrives	4.4/5	3.8/5	3.9/5	4.6/3
35. Tutor students or provide direct instruction to classes	3.9/5	2.6/3	3.6/3	4.3/3

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 10

Provide Incentives for Teachers

Provide Incentives for Teachers	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
36. Reinforce superior performance by teachers in staff meetings, newsletters, and/or memos	4.4/4	4.4/5	4.5/5	4.8/3
37. Compliment teachers privately for their efforts or performance	4.6/4	4.2/5	4.1/5	4.6/3
38. Acknowledge teachers' exceptional performance by writing memos for their personnel files	3.8/4	3.7/4	3.8/4	4.3/3
39. Reward special efforts by teachers with opportunities for professional recognition	4.2/4	4.3/5	4.1/4	4.4/4
40. Create professional growth opportunities for teachers as a reward for special contributions to the school	4.3/4	4.3/5	4/4	4.8/4

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 11

Promoting Professional Development

Promote Professional Development	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
41. Ensure that inservice activities attended by staff are consistent with the school's goals	4.7/5	4.8/5	4.9/4	4.8/4
42. Actively support the use in the classroom of skills acquired during inservice training	4.7/4	4.7/5	4.8/4	4.8/4
43. Obtain the participation of the whole staff in important inservice activities	4.6/4	4.7/4	4.7/4	4.7/4
44. Lead or attend teacher inservice activities concerned with instruction	4.6/4	4.7/5	4.5/5	4.7/4
45. Set aside time at faculty meetings for teachers to share ideas or information from inservice activities	4.4/4	4.6/5	4.3/5	4.8/4

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Table 12

Provides Incentives for Learning

Provides Incentives for Learning	Pine Hill Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Northview Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Central Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ	Black Hills Elem. Mean Score Teach/Princ
46. Recognize students who do superior work with formal rewards such as an honor roll or mention in the principal' newsletter	4.6/5	5/5	4.9/5	4.9/5
47. Use assemblies to honor students for academic accomplishments or for behavior or citizenship	4.3/4	4.9/5	4.7/5	5/5
48. Recognize superior student achievement or improvement by seeing in the office the students with their work	4.5/5	4.8/5	4.7/5	4.7/4
49. Contact parents to communicate improved or exemplary student performance or contributions	4.3/4	4.1/4	4.7/4	4.7/3
50. Support teachers actively in their recognition and/or reward of student contributions to and accomplishments in class	4.6/5	4.6/5	4.6/4	4.9/4

Note. 5 = *Almost Always*, 4 = F*requently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 2 = *Seldom*, 1 = *Almost Never*

Mastery teaching was a standard in these schools. While I was visiting classrooms I asked the teachers about the difficulty of getting through their yearly curriculum. Several of the teachers stated that it was easier to accomplish more in their school because of the high expectations even with the extra time that it takes to teach to mastery. Also, a Central Elementary school teacher stated,

When all grade levels are teaching to mastery, you don't have to spend as much time reviewing past concepts. You also don't have the variation of skill levels in each class like I have had in other schools. It was not common for me to have some students in my last school that were two grade levels behind and some others that were a grade level ahead. It is so difficult to teach to that many different levels.

Another leading organizational structure within these four Torchbearer schools was the emphasis on collaborative small learning communities. Teachers work together vertically throughout the grade levels and horizontally across the grade levels. As shown in Table 6 the PIMRS showed strong clarity numbers across the board on coordinating the curriculum. Central Elementary teachers meet twice a week to collaborate and the other schools have teachers collaborate weekly together. While visiting each of the schools however, I noticed that there were several teachers collaborating on their own time outside of the official collaborative meetings. The teachers in all of these schools do not question this collaboration rather, they demand it. A teacher from Black Hills Elementary stated, "These teachers have discovered the value of working together to reach children and would have a hard time teaching without collaborating now that we see the value of it."

Another organizational structure that seems to encompass all four of these schools is the culture of high expectations and the climate that nurtures children. All four of these schools maintain high expectations across the board for each and every employee and student. The mantra of high expectations does not stop with the teachers; each of the principals holds themself to a very high standard. Each principal's work ethic and dedication to their school was more than evident soon after entering their school. All four principals appear to model the professionalism and behaviors that they want to see throughout their school.

Leadership Belief Systems

Frequent monitoring of student work and teacher instruction are two areas where all four schools rated their principal high on the PIMRS. The principals also rated themselves high in these areas on their PIMRS self-assessment (see Table 5 and Table 7). All four principals mentioned that these two areas were a part of their belief system that they felt help lead their students' achievement. In contrast, as I spent time in the schools, I could tell that Mr. Shaw and Dr. Thomas spent less time monitoring in the classroom. They monitored instruction and student work more through meetings and quick classroom visits. Dr. Cole and Ms. Dawson spent more time in the classrooms observing. Ms. Dawson spent the most time in classrooms not just observing, but actively being a part of the classroom environment. Teachers stated that Ms. Dawson many times lead small groups for math and reading instruction. Ms. Dawson also worked with individual students that needed further remediation.

Another belief system I found strong evidence of during my visits was that all four principals used some type of distributive leadership model. Each used the model to varying degrees, but they all appear to believe in sharing leadership and developing teacher leaders. Dr. Thomas used this model to a high degree; her grade level subject experts were an example of shared leadership. These grade level experts were trained by Dr. Thomas to lead and mentor other teachers. They were trained to know and understand all of Dr. Thomas' expectations. Dr. Cole was further down the spectrum in this area. She definitely used shared leadership while developing the school's vision and when creating annual school goals. Dr. Cole had teacher leaders that she shared leadership with and they helped guide the school, but Dr. Cole seemed to be more comfortable holding the leadership reins a little tighter than Dr. Thomas. I noticed this while visiting and also through conversations with her teachers. At Central Elementary the

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teachers had more autonomy to make decision without Dr. Thomas present. However, Dr. Cole liked everything to be cleared through her before teachers made decisions. The teachers at Central Elementary seemed to have a firm understanding of what Dr. Thomas would suggest without her even being at the meeting. Dr. Cole's teachers seemed more resistant to making decisions without her present. Pine Hills teachers seemed to share a good amount of leadership within the building. After conversations with individual teachers during my visit and my own observations, it appears that the teachers at Pine Hill have more leadership than Mr. Shaw recognizes. Mr. Shaw was very complimentary of his teachers and how hard they work for the students at Pine Hill; however he kept an "I am in charge" attitude during our interview. Ms. Dawson ranked closer to Dr. Thomas on using shared leadership based on the PIMRS results. Ms. Dawson's "hand's on" approach allowed for a good amount of teacher leadership to develop. Throughout my time in the classrooms at Black Hills my conversations with teachers led me to believe that they all have some leadership role within the school.

The demands of being a principal can be overwhelming. As a principal myself I know that there is plenty that can keep you busy and trap you in your office all day if you are not adamant about setting and sticking with your priorities. All four principals rated themselves high on the PIRMS for keeping a high level of visibility during the school day. After my observations and my conversations with teachers at all four schools, I would also rate all four of them high in this area. Being visible to the students and staff appears to be important to each of these Torchbearer principals.

Another area I would rank all four principals high in is in creating incentives for learning by having student celebrations for achievement. Each of the four schools that I visited not only have regular celebrations and award/honor nights, they also celebrate student success by visuals

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all over the school. The hallways in these schools are filled with student work, awards and

accomplishments. The morning announcements at each of the schools on the day I was visiting

mentioned some type of student celebration or student achievement. All four schools made

learning attractive and fun.

Support Systems

All four leaders acknowledged the importance of having strong relationships with the

community. However, after my visits and during the interviews it became clear that Pine Hill

and Black Hills Elementary have a much different type of relationship with their community than

does Northview and Central Elementary. At Pine Hill and Black Hills Elementary the

community is a partner in education, with parents, grandparents, and other community members

spending many hours at the school supporting what the principal and teachers do every day. The

communities at these two schools want to be actively involved in their child's education process.

Contrasting that would be Northview and Central Elementary schools. Both schools have a good

relationship with the community as stakeholders. The community in both of these schools was

consistently made to feel welcome at school. However, the community takes a more hands-off

approach compared to Pine Hill and Black Hills. At Northview and Central the community may

come to the awards night or to the holiday program, but you are not going to see many

volunteering their time to help in the cafeteria or front office. You are not going to see them in

the library reading to children, but at Pine Hill and Black Hills you would.

Professional Development

One of the most interesting commonalities I found at all four schools was that even

though they all rank very high on all State and National standardized tests, none of the schools

focus on them as the important end result. Each of the principals made a statement during my

visits that they are a necessary evil, but they are a small part of what influences what goes on in the classroom. All four schools focus more on covering the state and national core standards and analyzing data from their own assessments. Dr. Cole commented,

> We are much more interested in mastery teaching and ensuring that each student learns and retains what they need to go on to the next grade level. If you are doing that, then your students will always do well on the standardized tests.

Another area where there seemed to be a spilt between schools was in the area of professional development. All four schools have professional development; however, it is more of a priority focus at Northview and Central Elementary. In fact, professional development was barely mentioned at Pine Hill or at Black Hills Elementary. Ms. Dawson mentions some professional development during her interview, but at neither school did it seem like a priority of the principal. At Northview and Central Elementary professional development was mentioned several times and I was able to witness during both visits embedded professional development taking place during the school day. Interestingly on the PIRMS, as shown in Table 11, almost across the board all teachers rated their principal at a higher level than the principals rated themselves in the area of professional development.

Summary

In today's education world of high stakes tests and accountability Northview Elementary, Central Elementary, Pine Hill Elementary, and Black Hills Elementary appear to be setting a standard for excellence. I believe that any school that is achieving at the levels that these four schools are achieving should be getting national attention and should be considered a model school. However, these four schools are not just achieving at high levels; they are dispelling the myths about poverty and minority students not being able to learn. They are proving that not

only can these children learn, but they can learn at high levels. Teachers and leaders at each of the four schools appear to know, understand, and incorporate the necessary ingredients that it takes for all students to be successful regardless of socio-economic status or ethnicity.

Each of these four Torchbearer Schools has several commonalities while also being uniquely different. The principals of all four schools appear to have found just the right mixture of these necessary ingredients to help drive their student achievement levels beyond the majority of schools across the state. Each principal has demonstrated and incorporated organizational structures that includes using data decision making, small learning communities for teachers, and have created a culture within the school of high expectations for everyone. Each of the four principals demonstrated their role as instructional leaders in the school, albeit in different ways. Developing teacher leaders, ensuring vertical/horizontal alignment of the curriculum, recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, and using a distributive leadership model are all leadership roles and behaviors that these principal believe in and practice.

The belief systems these principals operated from include ensuring that there is a shared vision for the school and that all teachers have a voice. They had a belief that frequent monitoring of classroom instruction is vital to student success. They also frequently monitored student progress on an individual basis to ensure instruction is effective in all classrooms. However at the core of each of these principals is a belief that all children are special, have something to give, and deserve the opportunity to learn and grow.

Chapter five presents a discussion about the findings, implications for practice, and recommendation areas for further research. Chapter five also presents discussion focused around areas for school leaders, policy makers and principal preparation programs to consider.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Introduction

In our current accountability climate, school leaders are being challenged to lead their school to perform well on high stakes tests. Schools with high poverty levels or high minority levels are not exempt from this mandated accountability. The Torchbearer Schools in Alabama serve as examples of schools that have met this challenge with much success. The four schools studied in this research—Northview Elementary, Central Elementary, Pine Hill Elementary, and Black Hills Elementary Schools (pseudonyms)—are setting a standard for excellence not just in Alabama, but also across the nation (Alabama Leadership Academy, 2009). However, these four schools are not just achieving at high levels; they are dispelling the myths about poverty and minority students not being able to learn at high levels. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research. In this chapter is also discussion focused on areas of consideration for school leaders, policy makers, and principal preparation programs.

Discussion of Findings

After analyzing the data and field notes from this study I found several key findings that appear to be part of the successful recipe that these four schools have used to create student success. Examining the similarities and differences in these high performing high poverty schools led me to a better understanding of the types of leadership, structures, support systems, and practices that promote high levels of learning for all students at these schools.

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The statistics and demographics of the students that attend these four schools are similar. A high minority and poverty rate can be found at each of these schools; however, the community where each school is located is distinctly different. Black Hills Elementary and Pine Hill Elementary are rural schools. Northview Elementary School is a suburban school located in an older subdivision. Central Elementary School is considered an urban school and is located in a dilapidated neighborhood. Children living in urban, rural, and suburban areas can all face the same challenges such as unstable homes, non-supportive parents, and low expectations. These Torchbearer Schools are proving that children in all types of settings can overcome challenges and be successful learners.

Leadership and Teachers

The leadership styles of each of the principals in this study have several commonalities; yet also differ in key ways. A focus on distributive and instructional leadership styles were found at all four schools; however, leadership was not operationalized the same in each school. While each principal embraced these two leadership styles, each principal used the models to varying degrees. All of the principals espoused belief in and placed emphasis on sharing leadership and developing teacher leaders while also being directly involved with the instruction of students. Sahin (2011) stated that a true instructional leader believes that student learning and the instructional quality of a school are the top priorities, while everything else revolves around the enhancement of learning. During my visits to the schools, instructional leadership was evident in all four schools. To be credible as an instructional leader, the principal should also be a practicing teacher (Fancera & Bliss, 2011). Each of the four principals considered themselves to be practicing teachers, and each was concerned with the quality of daily instruction for students. Instructional leadership at two of the schools was very hands-on with the principal in

the classroom supporting the teacher and sometimes co-teaching the lesson. The other two

principals used a more meeting-focused instructional leadership model. These principals

discussed, analyzed, and worked with teachers on instructional strategies for their classroom to

better reach students. Communication takes places across grade levels and teaching areas,

vertically and horizontally (Kannapel & Clements, 2005) in these HPHP schools. Data and

instruction were discussed across grade levels during collaborative meetings with the principal.

During my visits to the schools it was apparent that both models allowed the principal to have a

first hand knowledge of daily student instruction and student progress in the classroom.

Leadership Behaviors and Roles

The behaviors and roles of each of the four principals in this study were observable and

well defined. Interestingly, the similarities and differences between each principal's roles and

behaviors were split among the four principals in this study. Two of the principals played

similar roles and displayed similar leadership behaviors while the other two principals

demonstrated similar roles and behaviors. The results of the Principal Instructional Management

Rating Scale (PIMRS) data clearly showed the similarities in the principal self-assessment and

the teacher perceptions of the roles and behaviors of their principal. The PIMRS illustrated

similarities in the principal self-assessment and the teacher perceptions in regards to leadership

behaviors and the role of each of the four principals in this study. During my visits to these

schools I found that I was able to confirm through observation what the PIMRS data revealed.

The teachers and principals at Northview and Central Elementary Schools consistently indicated

the highest levels on the PIMRS in the area of leadership roles and behavior. During my visits to

these two schools I also observed that each principal was very confident and assured in their role

as the school leader. Dr. Cole and Dr. Thomas, the principals in these schools, have both

assumed the role of chief learning officer (Fullan, 2006) at their school. Their role is clearly felt

throughout the building and they appear to embrace the responsibilities associated with their

roles. The leadership behaviors that Dr. Cole and Dr. Thomas exhibited are consistent with their

role as a strong, confident, decision maker. Their behavior is congruent with someone that has a

clear understanding of where they are going and how they are going to get there. While both

leaders are friendly, approachable, and espouse a shared leadership style, they are clearly in the

drivers seat. In contrast, Mr. Shaw and Ms. Dawson, the principals at Pine Hill and Black Hills

Elementary Schools, assume a very different leadership role within their buildings. Each of

these two principals demonstrates a more servant leadership role and related behaviors. Mr.

Shaw and Ms. Dawson consider themselves to be "hands-on" leaders. During my interviews

with both principals the confidence level that each displayed was much less about their own

leadership than it was about having confidence in their teaching staff. The PIMRS data and field

notes both suggest that neither principal takes much credit for student success within their

school, but rather emphasize that teachers deserve the credit. Teachers at these two schools view

the principals more as a team member and as supportive of teachers in the classroom. In

contrast, at Northview and Central Elementary Schools the principals are viewed more by

teachers as the leaders of instruction and the decision makers of the school. Dr. Cole and Dr.

Thomas are quick to give the credit to their teachers for student success; however, they make it

known that they play a large role as well in student success.

There were two leadership beliefs that were consistent in each principal interview. The

first belief is that all children can learn. Two of the principals took that statement a step further

by expressing that they believe that all children can learn at high levels. A second belief that

came out in each principal interview was the importance of developing a culture of high

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expectations. One of the common threads that runs through every research study ever done on high performing-high poverty schools is evidence of a climate of high expectations (Anderson, 2005; Chenoweth, 2007; Haycock, 2001; Izumi, 2002; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002; Ragland, 2002). These four Torchbearer Schools are no different. All four schools share a culture of high expectations for every student, for every staff member, and for the leaders. Much of the research on HPHP schools has concluded that a culture of high expectations is absolutely necessary and often is the dominant theme in these schools (Carter, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Many researchers have even stated that high expectations are what make high performance possible in a high poverty community (Anderson, 2005; Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Ragland, 2002). Students in all four of these Torchbearer Schools experience and are held to high expectations. Being at your best and doing your best is emphasized daily in all activities and events at these schools. During my visits to these schools I was able to observe students encouraging other students to be at their best in addition to hearing teachers encouraging other teachers. I also observed teachers training students on this practice by prompting students to encourage each other. Teachers expressed the importance of encouraging others to do their best and complimenting each other for a job well done. I observed teachers in the hallway, classroom, in the car line and on the playground working with students on this positive encouragement behavior. Dr. Thomas stated, "This type of culture must be grown and practiced; children do not do this naturally."

Organizational Structures

The organizational structure that drives each of the four schools was another dominant similarity among the schools. The similarities in all four schools were clearly evident from both

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the PIMRS data and from my field data. Decision-making, high-level instruction, team planning and collaboration are just a few of the similarities that can be found at each of the four schools. However, nothing was more evident within all four of these schools than the culture of using data to drive academic decision-making. Personnel at all four schools regularly analyze and use data to drive instruction on a daily basis. These schools also differentiate instruction for each and every student based on what teachers observe and what the data tells them. Data is used to inform instructional decisions rather than using it for summative assessment of annual progress. Data are not only used daily; they are used multiple times a day in some cases. It is evident that data drives remediation and enrichment in all of these schools as it is needed. Teachers are trained to analyze and understand what the data and numbers mean and that they have to be addressed. Teachers look at their student data as a guide to how well they taught their students, not as an indication of how intelligent their students are. The responsibility of student learning is squarely on the shoulders of the teachers and the principal. I observed teachers in all four schools collaborating to find ways to reach their students. They work together to support each other and to find ways to help other teachers teach their students. In these schools students do not belong to just one teacher; they belong to the whole school. Teachers and administrators take shared responsibility for raising each student's achievement level.

Mastery teaching is another commonality in these Torchbearer Schools. While I was visiting classrooms, several teachers mentioned the importance of ensuring mastery of curriculum. The teachers emphasized the importance that all students master the standards. In all four schools the teachers worked under the operationalized belief that it was their job to ensure that every student understood the standards and content before moving on to the next grade level. I asked the teachers about the difficulty of getting through their yearly curriculum.

Several of the teachers stated that it was easier to accomplish more in their school because of the high expectations even with the extra time that it takes to teach to mastery.

Another interesting commonality I found at all four schools was that even though they all rank very high on all state and national standardized tests, they do not focus on them as the important end result. All four principals made a similar statement during my visit that these tests are a necessary evil, but they are more focused on covering the state and national core standards and analyzing data from their own assessments. For example, Dr. Thomas stated, "Students will do well on standardized tests as long as teachers are teaching to mastery on the standards."

Another leading organizational structure within these Torchbearer Schools is the emphasis on collaborative small learning communities. Teachers in all four schools collaborate both within their grade level and across the grade levels. Teachers at these schools have discovered the value of working together to reach children and would likely have a hard time teaching without collaborating now that we see the value of it. Each school had set times during the day and week for collaboration; however, many teachers also collaborated outside of that time.

Support Systems

Support systems were another area where there was a differentiation among between the four schools. The support systems used in these four Torchbearer Schools are similar, but there are some key differences at each of the schools. Each of the four Torchbearer principals acknowledged the importance of having strong relationships with the community. Two of the schools have the community identified as a partner in education based on the level of support they receive. Parents, grandparents, and other community members spend many hours at the school supporting what the principal and teachers do every day. These parents and grandparents

want to be actively involved in the educational process. In contrast, the other two schools both appear to have a good relationship with the community as stakeholders. While community members are made to feel welcome at school, the community appears to take a more hands-off approach in the day-to-day work of the school. These communities of these two schools may come out to the awards night or to the holiday program, but few if any community members volunteer their time at the school. Interestingly the two schools with high parent involvement were the two schools located in rural areas and are led by a principal with a servant leadership style. The two schools with low parent involvement were located in urban and suburban areas and the principals use a leadership style that parents may find less approachable.

Another area where there seemed to be a difference between schools was in the area of professional development. All four schools offer professional development; however, it is more of a priority at two of the schools than at the others. In fact, professional development was barely mentioned at Northview Elementary and Pine Hill Elementary Schools. Professional development was mentioned several times during my visit and during the principal interviews at Central Elementary and Black Hills Elementary Schools. I was able to witness embedded professional development taking place during the school day during both visits. Interestingly on the PIRMS, as seen in Table 11, nearly all teachers in all four schools rated their principal at a higher level than the principals rated themselves in the area of professional development.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study goes back to a quote from Dr. Thomas, Central Elementary principal:

Success can be achieved at any school. It is going to be the same ingredients that we have put into the success recipe here. Now, you may have to mix them a little different to get the results, but the ingredients I am certain are the same.

While reflecting on the data, field notes, literature review, and my own experiences visiting these schools, this quote seems to capture the most important finding from this study. Success can be achieved at any school as long as the right ingredients are embedded. It is no secret that research has found over and over again best practices for teaching children. Highly qualified teachers and a highly qualified instructional leader that uses a distributive/shared leadership model are consistently found at high performing schools. Teacher collaboration, data driven decision-making and a strong relationship with the community have also proven to be present in high performing schools. The significance of this study is that the ingredients that are found throughout the literature and nationwide in high performing schools are also the backbone of each of the Torchbearer Schools in this study.

Highly Qualified Teachers

Each of the four principals in this study unanimously agreed on the importance of high quality teachers. Teachers are able to significantly influence student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). "You must have a highly qualified talented teacher in every classroom. Our teachers are some of the absolute best," stated Mr. Shaw, Pine Hills Elementary School principal. Aaronson, Barrow and Sander (2007) report that there is a separation in the effectiveness between the bottom and top quartile of teachers that equals a .33 standard deviation difference in student achievement gains over the term of one school year. When asked her most important role as a principal, Central Elementary School principal Dr. Thomas said without hesitation, "Hiring Teachers! It's all about the quality of

teacher in the classroom." Sanders and Rivers (1996) stated that there is up to a 50-percentile improvement in student achievement depending on teacher quality. They also stated that these improvements are additive and cumulative over subsequent teachers. The importance of highly qualified teachers is evident both in the literature and also in my field observations in these Torchbearer Schools. Dr. Cole, principal of Northview Elementary School, stated, "It all starts with ensuring that every child in every class has a high quality teacher."

Highly Qualified Instructional Leader

All four Torchbearer principals in this study referred to themselves as instructional leaders. Instructional leadership has been defined as a deeper involvement into the teaching and learning, or the core business of schooling (Sahin, 2011). A true instructional leader believes that student learning and the instructional quality of a school is the top priority (Sahin, 2011). The daily routine of an instructional leader involves working with teachers directly on teaching strategies, dissecting student data, and working directly with remedial programs to raise student achievement. Ms. Dawson, Black Hills Elementary School principal, stated that she spends the majority of her day in the classroom working alongside teachers and students. Dr. Thomas, Central Elementary School principal, stated, "I look at the overall classroom to see who has made progress and who has not. After I study the data I meet and discuss my findings with teachers." Some in the education field have proposed the term "learning leader" over "instructional leader" (Jansen, Cammock, & Conner, 2010). Dr. Thomas described herself as the "Chief Learning Officer" of Central Elementary School.

Instructional leadership has also been described in specific behaviors such as modeling good effective instruction, giving meaningful feedback to teachers, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting teacher collaboration, giving praise for excellence in

teaching, and providing relevant professional development (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). Dr. Cole, principal of Northview Elementary Schools, stated "Teachers and staff must see that the administrators will do whatever it takes to support them so that great things can happen at school for students."

Distributive/Shared Leadership

A vital and common element within all HPHP schools is an environment in which there is a shared sense of responsibility among all educators for the attainment of the school's goals (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). There was strong evidence in all four Torchbearer Schools that all four principals used some type of distributive leadership model. Each used the model to varying degrees, but they all appear to believe in sharing leadership and developing teacher leaders. "With the outstanding leaders we have at Northview, I seldom make decisions that are solely based on my opinion or my desires," stated Dr. Cole, Northview Elementary School principal. Dr. Cole continued, "Curriculum decisions should involve input from teachers because they are the experts in their areas and they can give better perspective of impact." This sense of responsibility must be developed by a commitment to allowing teachers to be involved in key components of the school decision-making (Johnson & Asera, 1999). Black Hills Elementary principal Ms. Dawson stated, "Shared vision, goal setting and leadership are a large part my leadership." Involving all staff members in a variety of roles that are central to the driving success of the school, a leader will create a deeper sense of professional responsibility (Johnson & Asera, 1999). Central Elementary School principal, Dr. Thomas stated, "I work hard at using a distributive or shared leadership model. You can't do everything yourself, you can't be the expert in every area. You have to find people that are smarter than you are and put them into leadership roles."

Teacher Collaboration

Another leading organizational structure within all four Torchbearer Schools is the emphasis on teacher collaboration. I witnessed during my visits at all four Torchbearer Schools teachers working together vertically throughout the grade levels and horizontally across the grade levels. Several researchers have identified collaboration and teamwork among school staff as a typical feature in HPHP schools (Carter, 2000; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002). All four Torchbearer Schools have teacher collaboration meetings at least weekly. Northview and Central Elementary Schools have collaborative meetings at least twice a week. Feldman (2003) found that HPHP schools set aside significantly greater amounts of time for collaborative planning time than lesser performing schools. In HPHP schools teachers help, support, challenge, and create a system of best practices for students (Chenoweth, 2007). Consistent with research, a teacher from Black Hills Elementary stated, "These teachers have discovered the value of working together to reach children and would have a hard time teaching without collaborating now that we see the value of it."

Parent/Community Relationships and Involvement

Research indicates that school-family-community partnerships improve school programs and school climate, connect families with others in the school, increase parents' skills and leadership, and improve a student's chances of success in school and life (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). All four Torchbearer School leaders acknowledged the importance of having strong relationships with the community. Mr. Shaw, principal of Pine Hills stated, "Parents are always up here. They are so proud of this school and want it to be successful. Many of the parents and grandparents for that matter went to this school." Billman (2004) states that the majority of high-performing, high-poverty school principals attempt to establish strong relationships with

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parents and the community and are constantly pursuing ways to involve parents in the school.

To maximize parent and community involvement, some leaders will include parents in the

management plan of the school (Billman, 2004). Ms. Dawson, principal of Black Hills

Elementary School, stated, "We have many community members that are very involved in this

school and are usually a part of the decision making for goals and missions annually."

Data Driven Decision Making

There are more similarities in organizational systems than in any other area, especially in

ways that support the data informed decision-making culture in each Torchbearer School. The

key ingredient to all the HPHP schools nationwide may be the use of student assessment data to

drive instruction (Chenoweth, 2007). Each of the four schools embraced this type of data

informed decision-making. Just being in these schools is enough to see the data rich culture and

variety of behaviors that support that culture. After the conversations I had with teachers, staff,

and the principals, data was clearly at the heart of each of these schools. Dr. Thomas, principal

of Central Elementary, stated,

> We are always looking for data; we have data meetings twice a week. We predict
>
> success on the ARMT (Alabama Reading and Math Test) by looking at data; I have a pile
>
> of data on my desk right now. I look at all students to see who has made progress and
>
> hasn't. I look at overall classrooms to see who has made progress and who has not.
>
> After I study the data I meet and discuss my findings with teachers. Data simply drives
>
> everything that we do.

Principals in HPHP schools work hard to ensure that the staff receives extensive training

on how to make data analysis meaningful. Ms. Dawson stated during her interview, "Student

data drives everything here. Once the data is disaggregated remediation starts immediately,

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sometimes for a few, sometimes for the whole class." Data usage must become part of the culture of a school to effectively reach all students (Chenoweth, 2007). Teachers must be instructed on how to disaggregate data into components that help define specific areas of student need (Picucci, Brownson, Rahel & Sobel, 2002). Mr. Shaw, principal of Pine Hills Elementary, stated, "I believe that it is crucial that the leader of the school supports and recognizes the importance of data. It is a lot of work for these teachers to assess and then go through the data and evaluate where they are strong, weak." Mr. Shaw continued, "The leader must embrace this practice and make it a part of the high expectations and climate of the school." Dr. Cole, principal of Northview Elementary School, states, "All data come to me so that I can monitor and make recommendation also. We are a data rich school and use data daily, but we don't take assessments just to be taking assessments." Dr. Cole continued, "Data is the guiding light at this school. We have several data meetings throughout the school year. Each and every child is monitored for progress. We monitor students to ensure they are all progressing, not just the students that are behind; data here is not just numbers, to them data is a child."

As I reflected on the differences evident in each of these Torchbearer Schools it became obvious that these successful Torchbearer leaders have not only ensured that their school has all the right research based ingredients, they have also found how to make them work best with their children, teachers, and community. Context matters: the ingredients of success were the same at Black Hills Elementary as they were at Central Elementary; however, if these best practices or ingredients were presented at Black Hills as they were at Central, there is a possibility that they would not work. The children, teachers, and community of Black Hills are very different than Central Elementary. The skills of effective leaders within these schools include the understanding of how to best present and support these best practices. The active involvement

and listening that these Torchbearer principals practice helps allow them the understanding of what their students needs are. Listening and actively involving teachers in decision-making allows for deeper understanding of student need. Carefully dissecting data also allows for more understanding of what each student needs to be successful. Having strong relationships with the parents and community is also crucial for a leader to understand how the context of the research-based ingredients should be applied.

Recommendations

The results that these Torchbearer schools are achieving indicate that leaders and teachers are using the right practices for teaching children in their own contexts. The methods and practices used by the leaders in these schools should serve as a model for current school leaders as well as aspiring administrators, but caution should be used when adopting these practices so that local context is considered when selecting approaches to be used. The process of studying these four Torchbearer Schools and the findings produced from this study have led to the following recommendations in the areas of further research and implementations for practitioners.

Further Research

There are three areas that come to mind while reflecting on what other research would be interesting and useful to perform in this topic area. In my research I described a difference of philosophy between the schools. I also noticed a difference in the community approach at these schools. I think it would be interesting and important to research how community involvement is affected by school proximity, community size, and principal leadership style. Interestingly the two schools with high parent involvement were the two schools located in rural areas and are led by a principal with a servant leadership style. The two schools with low parent involvement were

located in urban and suburban areas and the principals use a leadership style that parents may find less approachable.

While researching and writing the literature review for this study I noticed that the majority of the schools discussed in the research were elementary schools. I think it would be very beneficial to perform a longitudinal study on how the students at high-performing high-poverty elementary schools perform once they enter secondary education. A comparative study could be conducted on how students that attended high-performing high-poverty elementary schools perform in middle school compared to students that attended other elementary schools. It would be beneficial to study how the foundation that the students that attended HPHP schools perform in a traditional middle school compared to students who have not acquired the same foundation in traditional elementary schools. I would be interested to know if the students with a foundation from a HPHP elementary school are better prepared for traditional middle school and perform better.

Another potentially beneficial study in this area would be a comparative study on the attributes of high-performing schools that are located in affluent areas versus high-performing high-poverty schools like Alabama's Torchbearer Schools. It would be interesting to see what effect socioeconomic status has on the structures, support system, and leadership in high performing schools.

Practitioners

Professional development is a major category on most school system's improvement plans (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). However, in most school systems very little time is devoted to observing in other schools. I found that just being in these four schools to conduct research changed my perspective about why these schools are successful. We, as educators,

would benefit from spending more time looking at mentoring and modeling as a form of professional development. In my career I have learned more by observing and being mentored than I ever have by attending conferences. It is vital that we learn from each other. Spending time in other schools, observing what effective practices they are using and discussing these practices with the staff could be an extremely effective form of professional development. As an education leader I plan on sending my teaching staff to other schools that are achieving in areas that we are not achieving as high as we should or could be. I want my teachers to observe and then use their minds to collaboratively and creatively create a plan that makes sense for our school. Observing, listening and discussing strategies with other educators may be one of the most powerful ways to gain knowledge.

As a current principal I would also recommend that school leaders take an honest assessment of how many of the research-driven attributes can be found in their school. I would also recommend that they regularly assess how effective their school is at implementing and supporting these attributes. Principals should perform these assessments and discuss their findings with their teacher leaders, and school improvement team.

Leadership Preparation

Learning to respond to the realities of school leadership is the most important area that leadership preparation programs need to focus on and instruct. Colleges and universities must be at the edge of current research based effective practices ready to mentor and instruct tomorrow's leaders. Colleges and universities need to also send their professors into schools that are leading the way to observe and learn. Educators across this nation must become a web or network for each other. We must reach out to each other and learn from one another. Educators waste too much time and energy working in isolation, trying to solve problems that have already been

solved in other schools. Colleges and universities are a part of that prek-20 network. Professors

should be in schools that are working effectively, conducting research, and relaying that

knowledge to their students and others. If we are going to see a positive shift in the culture of

schools, mentoring and modeling should be taught as part of every education program. Colleges

and universities play a major role in building a foundation for the future of this nation by

establishing a culture of sharing knowledge as the standard for educators to follow.

Summary

High-performing high poverty schools across this nation and here in Alabama have found

effective, best practices to help drive their student achievement levels beyond the majority of

schools across the state and nation. Some of these effective components include teaching to

mastery, a focus on the core standards, informing all student learning, decision making with real

data, a focus on providing meaningful engaging instruction, and vertical and horizontal

alignment of the curriculum. Each principal in this study demonstrated knowledge about and

incorporated organizational structures and belief systems that include using data informed

decision making, small learning communities for teachers, a shared leadership model, strong

community relationships, meaningful data driven professional development, and a culture of

collaboration. Principals at these high-poverty high-performing schools modeled their deep

belief that frequent monitoring of classroom instruction is vital to student success. They also

frequently monitored student progress on an individual basis to ensure instruction was effective

in all classrooms.

A deep love of children, learning and high expectations could be found as the backbone

of instruction at each of these four schools. Personnel at these four schools are working hard to

prove that not only can all children learn, but they can learn at high levels. The teachers and

leaders in these schools do not use socio-economic status or ethnicity as a crutch or an excuse. Teachers and leaders at each of the four schools appear to consistently incorporate the necessary practices that create the right conditions for all students to be successful.

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