

**An Examination of Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of Democratic Principles
in Alabama's High-Poverty Schools**

by

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[democratic leadership, high-poverty schools, high-achieving high-poverty schools]

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Abstract

This study explored the practice of democratic principles in high-poverty schools with a focus on leadership that fosters democratic community. The study examined teacher perceptions of the practice of democratic principles at the individual, leader, and organizational levels. Findings were aimed at identifying practices that may contribute to high student achievement. The practices were measured by teachers' perceptions using the WorldBlu School Survey. The study sought to determine if a significant relationship existed between student outcomes and the use of elements of Democratic principles found in the leadership practices of school principals in high-poverty, high-performing schools and of those in high-poverty, lower-performing schools. Implications for practice allow for reflection on relationships between and among stakeholders, authentic participation of students, teachers, and families, thus promoting student success. The purposes of the study were to determine: (1) similarities and differences between the practices of teachers and administrators in Torchbearer Schools and in non-Torchbearer Schools; (2) systems and processes that promote or impede stakeholder input in Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools and (3) specific practices posited as evidence of school leaders valuing stakeholder input.

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Dedication

In Memory of my parents

Dock Calvin & Lillian Cornelia Smith DeRamus

In Memory of my siblings

Bertha Cornelia DeRamus Gadson

Dock Calvin DeRamus, Jr.

Family endures because it offers the truth of mortality and immortality within the same group. The family endures because it seems to individualize and socialize its children, to make us feel at the same time unique and yet joined to all humanity, accepted as is and yet challenged to grow; loved unconditionally and yet propelled by greater expectations. Only in the family can so many extremes be reconciled and synthesized.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
List of Tables	x
List of Figures.....	xii
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Statement of the Research Problem	5
Population.....	6
Research Questions.....	8
Research Design.....	8
Data Collection Processes.....	9
Instrument	9
Data Analysis.....	10
Significance of the Study.....	10
Assumptions and Limitations	11
Definition of Terms.....	12
Summary.....	14
CHAPTER TWO. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	15
Introduction.....	15

Democracy and School Leadership	16
Leadership in Schools	17
Leadership in Challenging School Contexts	21
Poverty in Schools	21
The Leader in the High-Poverty School Community	26
Democratic School Leadership	29
Genesis of Democratic Leadership	29
Democratic Leadership Evolved.....	37
Leadership, Democratic Community, and School Reform.....	40
Democratic School Leadership	43
The Conceptual Framework: Democratic Community.....	46
High-Poverty Schools	49
Alabama’s Low-Performing Schools.....	53
High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools.....	56
Alabama’s Torchbearer Schools.....	61
School Performance in Alabama’s Torchbearer Schools	65
Summary	69
CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY	70
Research Design.....	71
Population and Sample	72
Instrumentation	73
Procedure	75
Data Analysis	76

Conclusion	77
CHAPTER FOUR. FINDINGS	79
Survey	79
Demographic Characteristics	80
Democratic Principles	84
Research Questions	86
Research Question 1	86
Research Question 2	87
Research Question 3	88
Qualitative Data Analysis and the Open-Ended Survey Responses	96
Research Question 4	98
Conclusion	104
CHAPTER FIVE. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	106
Demographics	106
Democratic Principles	107
Results	109
Research Question 1	110
Research Question 2	110
Research Question 3	110
Research Question 4	112
Discussion	116
Implications for Practice and Further Study	124
Pre-service Educators and Education Leaders	125

Recruitment of Teachers and Principals	126
Mentoring.....	126
Family/Community Stakeholders Training and Professional Development	127
Recommendations for Future Study	128
Conclusion	130
REFERENCES	131
Appendix A WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS).....	149
Appendix B WorldBlu School Democratic Design System	151
Appendix C Qualitative Responses To WorldBlu Survey By Question.....	153
Appendix D Gradient Ratings for Interpreting Likert Scale Responses.....	165
Appendix E Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval and Informational Letter.....	166

List of Tables

Table 1	Torchbearer Schools 2004–2013	66
Table 2	Guiding Research Questions.....	77
Table 3	Years of Experience of Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (f = 106) and Teachers in High-poverty, Lower-Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (f = 83).....	82
Table 4	Measures of Association	84
Table 5	Comparison of the Number of Respondents from Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer Schools and the Mean Scores for each Democratic Principle.....	85
Table 6	Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) Perception of Practice of Democratic Principles at the Individual, Principal, and Organizational Levels (n = 115).....	87
Table 7	Teachers in High-poverty, Lower-Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) Perception of Practice of Democratic Principles at the Individual, Principal, and Organizational Levels (n = 86).....	88
Table 8	Comparison of Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (N 115) and Teachers in High-poverty, Lower-Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (N 86) Perception of Practice of Democratic Principles at the Individual, Principal, and Organizational Levels.....	89
Table 9	Between Groups Comparison of Teachers in High-poverty, High Performing Schools (Torchbearer) (n = 115) and Teachers in High Poverty, Lower-Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (n = 86) Perception of Practice of Democratic Principles at the Individual, Principal, and Organizational Levels.....	90
Table 10	Significant Variances revealed in Comparison of Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (n = 115) and Teachers in High Poverty, Lower-Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (n = 86) Perception of Practice of 10 Democratic Principles.....	91

Table 11 Non-Significant Variances revealed in Comparison of Teachers in High Poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (n = 115) and Teachers in High-poverty, Lower-Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (n = 86) Perception of Practice of 10 Democratic Principles	93
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List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework	48
Figure 2. Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation).....	83
Figure 3. Comparison of Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer Teachers' Early Career Years of Experience.....	84

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Research spanning four decades has informed the teaching profession that there is a significant relationship between the role of educational leadership and student outcomes (Hallinger, & Heck, 1996, 1998; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). Bass (1990) described leadership as an interaction between members of a group that involves affecting changes in perceptions, expectations, and situations of the members. He explained that leadership occurs when a member affects the competencies or what moves others. Marzano et al. found that principal leadership is important and has an effect on student outcomes including improved school attendance, school discipline, and academic achievement.

Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) asserted that although leadership effects are indirect there is an abundance of literature supporting that principals are significant in fostering school success. School effectiveness research and leadership studies from Levine and Lezotte (1990), Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore (1995), Hallinger and Heck (1996), and Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) support the idea that strong school leadership positively affects school climate and student outcomes and that principals do make a difference. There is sufficient evidence in the literature that effective leadership can and does positively affect school and student outcomes (Witziers, 2003). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) explained that the quality of school leadership is key to organizational learning and to improvement. They noted that school leaders have an influence on student outcomes; and a key rationale for the linking leadership to student

outcomes is the desire of policymakers to “reduce the persistent disparities in educational achievement between various social and ethnic groups, and ...school leaders play a vital role in doing so” (p. 636). Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) asserted that school leadership has a significant influence on student learning. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) noted that school principals significantly improve teaching and learning through their influence on working conditions, including teacher empowerment and collaborative decision-making, which are principles of democratic leadership.

School success for student outcomes include achievement on standardized tests, improved school attendance, and school discipline. Murphy et al. (2000) noted that progress reports have been shown to improve with effective leadership. They concluded that it becomes more crucial for school districts to seek principals with leadership characteristics, skills, and practices that focus on student learning and school success. The Wallace Foundation (2011) has provided support and attention to the importance of the school principal’s role in effective schooling. The Wallace Foundation noted that among the practices of many effective school leaders are building a sense of community and having a focus on student learning. In a research-based resource for schools attempting to improve student learning, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) provided nine characteristics that high-performing schools tend to share. Among them are effective school leadership, high levels of collaboration and communication, high standards, and expectations for each student, and an environment that supports learning.

The concept of trusted, shared and collaborative leadership, grounded in democratic theory and principles, is evident through the work of Spillane (2005) and Reeves (2003, 2007). Democratic leadership “[v]alues people’s input, gets commitment through participation, and has a positive impact on school climate” (Blankenstein, 2004, p. 214). The development and

cultivation of a community of collaborative relationships enhance teaching and learning. Significant participation by all educators allows faculties to use the resources and talents of a variety of professionals, which makes success more achievable and more sustainable. Student learning benefits when teachers are willing and are able to share in the decision-making, which supports a culture of improvement (Lambert, 2002).

Richard DuFour (2004) wrote that a primary purpose of education is to ensure that students learn and encouraged that all stakeholders take an active role in providing opportunities for students to learn. He urged that working together for improvement while ensuring that learning takes place and students achieve must become the routine work of everyone in the school. School leaders and educators who believe all children can learn develop school cultures that encourage collaboration and have learning as a priority. In their call for *Reinventing the Principalship*, Murphy et al. (2000) acknowledged that a new kind of leadership would be required for improving schools. Affirming that school transformations based on factors such as quality of education, labor market needs, and technological advances will require different leadership. Marzano et al. agreed that the top priority of principalship is leadership for learning. The importance of school leadership and democratic and collaborative engagement of educators is of particular importance in high-poverty schools. They noted that many factors may contribute to school success in turning around schools, but “leadership is the catalyst” for improving schools (2004, p. 7).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to investigate the extent to which leadership that fosters democratic community is significant in improving school performance, especially in high-poverty schools. It sought to examine the extent to which teachers in high-performing and in

lower-performing high-poverty schools in Alabama perceive their principals implementing and supporting principles of a democratic community. This researcher defined Democratic community as school community where professional practice and processes reflect a set of democratic principles as outlined in the WorldBlu Democratic Design System (WBDDS) (See Appendix B).

There is a body of research on high-performing, high-poverty schools that are successful. High-performing, high-poverty schools, referred to as Turnaround Schools, high-performing high-poverty schools affirm that the influence of organizational leaders is a key factor in the success of an organization (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Murphy and Meyers (2008) wrote that “successful turnaround schools almost always have good, if not exceptional, principals... leadership is crucial” (p. 321). There is evidence that democratic community and democratic leadership are related to positive student outcomes in other areas of the world and thus can give a global perspective. Democratic leadership empowers and encourages participation and building consensus in decision-making (Fullan, 2001; Goleman, 2000).

Nsubuga (2008) conducted a study in Uganda schools and found a positive relationship between the democratic leadership style and student academic performance. Nsubuga asserted that leadership must value the ideas and contributions of teachers and others in the education community and must recognize that authoritarian, hierarchical leaders do not administer effective school communities. His study found that many school leaders rely on democratic or participatory styles of governing to build trust, respect, and commitment, thus allowing others to have a voice in decisions that affect their work. He emphasized that leaders need to engage students in making and implementing decisions since they are directly affected by those decisions. Although Nsubuga’s assessment was in Uganda, similar findings in the United States

suggest that this idea of democratic community is an encouraging way to support the development of dynamic school organizations.

Harris and Muijs (2003) agree that leadership aids in capacity building, but indicated there are gaps, which suggest that further study is needed to explore the nature of the relationship between leadership and improved school/student outcomes. Since there are gaps, it is important to look at the degree to which providing an environment that supports democratic practice matters in such schools. Kensler (2008) noted that there is growing evidence that supports Dewey's call for more democratic practice in schools and creating high quality *learning* environments. She proposed that continual improving of student learning depends on improving teacher learning. This current study focused on the principal's practice of providing leadership and an environment, democratic community, which supports teacher learning, thus promoting positive student outcomes. This research explored the connections among leadership, high-poverty schools, and democratic community and their collective relationship to student success.

Statement of the Research Problem

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) noted that there is consistently someone attempting to change K–12 education by proposing new programs or practices. There have been decades of reform efforts from *A Nation at Risk* in the mid-80s to the Reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act after the turn of the century. These reform efforts have prompted attempts to improve teachers, to close academic achievement gaps, and to improve schools through restructuring. Attempts to close academic achievement gaps occur within and among varied groups. Extensive research has brought attention to gaps between high-poverty schools and schools in higher socioeconomic communities. These gaps have also highlighted that there are high-performing and lower-performing schools from poverty stricken communities.

Alabama, the state in which this research occurred, has been identifying high-poverty, high-performing schools for a number of years. Since 2004, the state department of education has designated these high-performing high-poverty schools as Torchbearer Schools.

Although the Alabama Torchbearer School recognition began a decade ago, there are limited empirical leadership studies in regards to the types of leadership present in *Torchbearer* schools. Additionally, the field has little knowledge as to whether these schools and their school leaders foster the practice of democratic community. The present study sought to determine the extent to which democratic community was a contributing factor in the success of these schools.

Population

The participant population of this study is the faculty of high-performing, high-poverty schools and high-poverty, lower-performing schools in Alabama. The State of Alabama has designated high-performing, high-poverty schools in the state as Torchbearer Schools. The Alabama State Department of Education website provided the criteria required to achieve Torchbearer designation (ALSDE, 2011b). Torchbearer Schools must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years and must have met additional criteria including: having at least 80% poverty rate (percent free/reduced meals), having at least 80% of students score Level III or Level IV on the reading section of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test, having at least 80% of students score Level III or Level IV on the mathematics section of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test, having at least 65% of students score in stanines 5–9 on Stanford 10 reading, and having at least 65% of students score in stanines 5–9 on Stanford 10 mathematics (ALSDE, 2011b). The comparison group consisted of a group of schools with similar demographics who did not meet the achievement criteria of the Torchbearer Schools and

made less than 70% of their AYP Goals as indicated by their status in the 2011–2012 Title I Accountability Reports (Accountability Reporting System, 2011).

Since the inception of the Alabama Torchbearer Program, 70 schools have received the Torchbearer designation. During the 2011–2012 award year, three months prior to this study, 13 schools received the reward. Of the 70 Torchbearer schools to receive the designation, 66 are elementary, three are middle/Jr. High, and one is a high school. The researcher developed the list of Torchbearer schools from yearly announcements of the Torchbearer Award and retrieved the Non-Torchbearer schools from the Alabama State Department of Education’s Accountability Reporting System. Because the pool of schools at the secondary level was so low, and the one high school has not demonstrated continued Torchbearer status, the study included no secondary schools. Only one of the three middle/Jr. High schools has received the designation two consecutive years. Since sustainability is important, these schools were not included in the study. If the leadership has changed since the designation was awarded, the school was not used in the study unless the school had maintained at least two years of high performance outcomes under the new leadership.

Two hundred thirty-three (233) Title I schools did not make AYP during the 2011–2012 reporting period. The ALSDE based the AYP status on results of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) given to students in grades three through eight. The ALSDE based the Alabama ARMT on the Alabama state standards, which define what students should be learning each year. The 2011–2012 status report included 44 schools that made less than 70% of the goals. The number of Torchbearer schools (high-performing, high-poverty) meeting the sustainability criteria of three consecutive years of Torchbearer status was six. The six schools (lower-performing, high-poverty) with comparable student populations that did not meet 2010–

2011 AYP were identified from the list of 233 Title I schools. This was the comparison group for the present study (ALSDE, 2011a).

Research Questions

Four research questions were addressed:

1. To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?
2. To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, lower-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?
3. To what extent do teachers' perceptions of their principals' implementations of democratic principles differ in high-performing and lower-performing high-poverty schools as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?
4. What do teachers perceive as tangible evidences that democratic community exists or does not exist in the Torchbearer Schools and non-Torchbearer Schools?

Research Design

The primary method for the study was a quantitative research design. The most appropriate course of action to answer the research questions under investigation was through the use of a survey (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 34). Surveys are appropriate when investigating the possibility of an existing reality. Quantitative studies using the survey method allow the researcher to establish objectivity and thus describe the current reality using statistical analysis. The qualitative analysis is used here with the quantitative to not only show frequencies of practice, but to disclose any evident patterns that might aid in deeper understandings of the

practices allowing the researcher to see detailed accounts of the actual practices being implemented (Creswell, 1994; Smith, 1975; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009)

Content analysis and comparative analysis were used to address question four. This question addressed teacher perceptions of the use of democratic leadership in their schools.

Data Collection Processes

The researcher mailed an informational letter to selected superintendents and principals and requested permission to conduct the study. Once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study, the researcher contacted the principals whose schools were selected to participate in the study and set up a time to meet with the principal to further explain the study and its purpose. A packet with surveys, informational letters and a time frame for distribution and return of the surveys was discussed with the principal.

The researcher returned on the distribution day to administer the surveys. At the conclusion of the informational meeting, the letter of consent was distributed. The researcher provided the survey for willing participants. To protect the integrity of the research, anonymity was ensured by providing blue ballpoint pens, there were no identifiers on the answer sheets, and respondents deposited the surveys face down in a receiving tray.

Instrument

Following IRB approval, the researcher moved forward with the study. The instrument used for this study was the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS) measure of democratic community. The WBSS consisted of 38 questions, each with a six-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from one (1– almost never) to six (6 – almost always). Kensler's (2008) inquiry into the content validity of the WBSS for school settings resulted in 100% of the surveyed professional educators reporting each of the 10 democratic principles and

corresponding survey questions as [clear and] relevant to democratic community. Kensler found that “the WBSS is a highly reliable instrument as indicated by the internal consistency measure, Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .97$)” (p. 59). She used a large sample size (N = 883 teachers) and piloted the study with a diverse body of schools. These schools included urban, rural, suburban, elementary, middle, and high schools. Results indicated high reliability for varied subgroups. Kensler affirmed that “further investigation into the construct validity of the WBSS confirmed the single factor structure of the WBSS (Kensler, Caskie, & White, 2006). “Each of the 10 democratic principles loaded significantly on the latent variable Democratic Community” (Kensler, 2008, p. 59).

Data Analysis

After receiving the responses from the survey, the researcher used software from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0 for analysis of the quantitative data. Three quantitative research questions drove the study. These three questions sought to determine the status of democratic leadership practices in each type of school and if there was a difference in the relationship between the dependent variable, Democratic Community, and the independent variables, high-performing and lower-performing schools. The researcher tested the quantitative research questions using a one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Content analysis was used to determine teachers’ perspectives of evidences of democratic leadership practices in each type of school. The researcher used comparative analysis of themes to determine if there were differences in teachers’ perceptions between the school types.

Significance of the Study

The push for accountability in education has drawn national attention. The current focus on learning for all students places major attention on the knowledge, skills, and practices of

educational leaders. In support of the need for strong school leadership, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) wrote “effective school leadership *substantially* boosts student achievement” (p. 48). Others such as Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) noted that research has supported the idea that effective school leadership is a primary determinant of an effective teaching and learning climate. Furthermore, effective leadership promotes teacher and student success (Leithwood et al, 2004; Murphy et al, 2000). Students in Alabama Torchbearer Schools are succeeding at significantly higher levels than some of the non-Torchbearer Schools with similar populations. There is no knowledge regarding the type of leadership practices occurring at these schools and if leadership practices in these schools differ. Determining if Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer principals’ perceived leadership practices are different may provide evidence regarding leadership principles that make a difference in student outcomes among learners in high-poverty schools in Alabama. On the other hand, if there are no significant differences in perceived practices of principals in high-performing and lower-performing schools, assumptions regarding the leadership practices that promote success among students will need to be explored further. The findings should also be of value to schools, school leaders, and researchers in other states as they seek to identify the key factors in student success in high-poverty schools.

Assumptions and Limitations

1. The study was based upon the assumption that teachers reported honestly on the responses on the WorldBlu School Survey, the demographic information and the open ended questions.
2. It was assumed that teachers’ narrative responses would be honest and would provide valuable insight into how their schools operate and why their students perform as they do.

This study had the following limitations:

- 1) The study included only elementary schools.
- 2) The study occurred in one state with a limited number of Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools.
- 3) The small sample size limited the analysis to the individual level. Therefore, the study raises concerns of generalizability.

Definition of Terms

Democratic Community: school community where professional practice and processes reflect democratic principles as defined in the WorldBlu Democratic Design System (WBDDS).

Democratic Leadership: shared, collaborative leadership grounded in democratic theory that empowers and encourages participation and consensus building in decision-making.

Education Reform: Education reform is restructuring or change, whether formal or informal, intended to improve teaching and learning. Often the change is imposed “top-down”, but most successful reform is from within an organization and change occurs “bottom-up” to effect change within the local context.

High-poverty High-performing Schools: High-poverty High-performing Schools are schools that have high concentrations of low-income students who beat the odds and contradict the generalization that schools with high concentrations of low-income students generally have lower achievement scores. In Alabama, the high-poverty, high-performing schools have at least 80% poverty rate determined by the percent of free/reduced meals. In achievement, the schools have at least 80% of students score Level III or Level IV on the reading and math sections of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test and have at least 65% of students scoring in stanines 5–9 on Stanford 10 reading and Stanford 10 mathematics.

High-poverty Low-performing Schools: High-poverty Low-performing Schools are Title I schools that have high concentrations of low-income students and are identified by a formula that factors in standardized reading and math test scores resulting in their not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Leadership: Leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of [a] situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members... Leadership occurs when one ...member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. Any member of [a] group can exhibit some...leadership.

Poverty: Akindola (2009) writes that poverty transcends the traditional connotation of experiencing a shortfall in income. It is a lack of adequate income combined with other deprivations that allow human capabilities to go unrealized.

School Performance: School performance rankings based on standardized tests and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in Torchbearer Schools. The Alabama State Department of Education launched the Torchbearers program as a way to recognize high-poverty public schools in Alabama that have overcome odds and stand out as high-achievement schools. The schools that receive the Torchbearer designation are high-poverty, high-performing schools that make academic excellence possible for all students despite the economic situations in which they live.

Torchbearer Schools: Schools recognized through a program created by the Alabama State Department of Education to recognize high-poverty, high-performing public schools in Alabama. To be eligible for a monetary reward, the Torchbearer School must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years and must have met additional criteria as applicable.

Turnaround Schools: Turnaround Schools are struggling schools that undergo significant change and experience high achievement in a short time.

Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the study, its purpose, research questions, significance, and conceptual/theoretical basis. Torchbearer schools are performing at higher levels than other Title I schools. The study was designed to help determine why some schools are successful when schools with students with the same demographic characteristics are not. The survey design allowed the researcher to determine whether teachers in these schools perceived a difference between Alabama Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer Schools' teacher level, principal level or organizational level practices, and to determine the extent to which these practices utilized the democratic principles identified in the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS).

The next section provides an overview of related literature on the topics relevant to this study. Among them are the evolution of democratic school leadership, characteristics of high-poverty schools, and the role of the principal in implementing practices that ensure positive student outcomes.

CHAPTER TWO. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Educating children for a democratic society is vital to the underlying principle of public education in the United States. This is evidenced by mission statements of many schools (Ligon, 2005). These mission statements vary because of the differences in the values and the processes of education in diverse community life. Dewey (1922, c1916) recognized that upholding a person's circumstance is often grounded in the education that person receives. He argued in viewing education as a social function, that "participation in the life of the group to which [individuals] belong, is to say...that education will vary with the quality of life which prevails in a group" (p. 94). Dewey believed that a society that is willing to change and to improve "will have different standards and methods of education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs" (p. 94). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds deserve opportunities to move from their circumstances of poverty and to enjoy the educational resources and opportunities of students from more affluent communities. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) affirmed that schooling can be the gateway that would allow students to not be restrained by their circumstances, but to move toward some level of financial freedom.

Mission statements found in schools' offices and handbooks frequently address preparing students to live and to participate as productive citizens in a democratic society. From Dewey's perspective, education is an outcome of democratic practice. He wrote, "The very process of living together educates" (Dewey, 1922, c1916, p. 7). He noted that an education should prepare

individuals for full and productive participation as citizens of society; and that through education as persons acquire social positions, and function as citizens and community stakeholders, they have the opportunity to advocate for resources required to ensure that educational improvement is possible.

Democracy and School Leadership

There are a multitude of views on the role of democracy, the role of schooling, faith in human capacity, the importance of school leadership, and the importance of democratic leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 1995, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2003, 2004; Woods, 2004, 2006). However, as to the role of schooling, the basic idea is that educating all young people leads to a better society. This idea has become more evident and more urgent through the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Achievement standards from local, state, and federal agencies have expanded as a part of this law. This has prompted more stakeholders to actively participate in achieving performance goals and has led to an increased emphasis on improving schools and ensuring that students succeed (Kannapel & Clements, 2005) and it has led to an examination of the factors that make schools successful. Effective schools research shows that a high quality teacher appears to be the most important school-based factor in student success but the leadership of the school is also a critical element (Jacobson, 2008; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).

The significance of the school leader is affirmed in recent leadership research. Research shows that school improvement efforts and effective schools attribute their success to leadership. Fullan (2002a) wrote that the “emphasis on the principal as instructional leader has been a valuable first step in increasing student learning” (p. 2). This correlates with the idea that school

leadership is key to overall school success (Goodin, 2010; Heck, 1992). Cunningham and Cordeiro (2000) concur that “the principal is at the very heart of school improvement” (p. 137). School principals are responsible for varied managerial and leadership roles. Among the management duties are the supervision and management of the school plant and infrastructure, the safety of all stakeholders, and the day-to-day functions of the school. Equally important is the principal’s role as an instructional leader. This includes developing a healthy school climate where the worth of each individual is valued and celebrated; and providing relevant learning opportunities for stakeholders: students, parents, and teachers (Lindahl, n.d.).

Various leadership models exist in education settings as in other organizations, and there is a significant body of research about the topic of leadership in schools (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). The following section provides a review of some of the most prominent educational leadership literature, with a focus on leadership in high-poverty schools, and the practice of democratic community.

Leadership in Schools

Bass (1990) defines leadership as “an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members” (p. 19). Visionary leaders have worked to implement organizational and systemic reforms. Some have experienced significant success while others have not been as successful. One factor in leadership success is involving all stakeholders, not just those that have similar visions. Bringing all stakeholders to the table provides for diverse input and addressing needs. Fullan (2001) suggested that “Even when things appear to be working, the supposed success may be a function of...superficial compliance” (p. 43). “Successful organizations don’t go with only like-minded innovators...they don’t mind when

others...disturb the equilibrium” (Fullan, 2001, p. 43). Meeting the needs of the total community means participants must have the best interest of the group at heart and must work to improve the learning community at large. Numerous conditions challenge school principals in their educational setting, and socioeconomic disparities rank among the most crucial. Harris (2007) noted that although schools have made gains, economic gaps are significant in the inequities found in educational outcomes. Economic disparities are evident in schools in poverty stricken communities.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) found two functions central to defining leadership: providing direction and exercising influence. They wrote, “[L]eaders influence student learning by helping to promote vision and goals, and by ensuring that resources [and organizational systems] and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well” (p. 3).

1. [A]dministrators and teacher leaders provide most of the leadership in schools, but other potential sources of leadership exist.
2. A core set of leadership practices form the “basics” of successful leadership and are valuable in almost all educational contexts. Those practices include: setting direction, developing people, and developing the organization.
3. Successful school leaders respond productively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work.
4. Successful school leaders respond productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, pp. 2–7).

Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) provided seven important claims about successful school leadership and explained that these claims find support in “robust empirical evidence” (p. 3). The claims are

- School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on [student] learning
- Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
- The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices...demonstrate responsiveness to...the contexts in which they work.
- School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions.
- Widely distributed school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students.
- Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
- A [few] personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness (p. 3).

Spillane (2005) wrote that “stories of leadership successes follow a familiar structure.”

The leader “takes over a struggling school, establishing... goals and expectations and challenging [the status quo].” The leaders create new routines and structures that...transform the school’s culture, contributing ...to greater teacher satisfaction, higher teacher expectations for students, and improved student achievement” (p. 143). Spillane wrote that the problem with most of the success stories is that most equate school leadership with an individual leader, most often the principal. He said “[S]chool principals...do not single-handedly lead schools to greatness; leadership involves an array of individuals with various tools and structure” (p. 143).

Reeves (2007) accused some stakeholders of working to block leadership initiatives, impede innovation and maintain status quo. He wrote that the greatest impediments to change include “the gap between what leaders say they value and what leaders actually value” and when

leaders succumb to rhetoric that “blocks leadership initiative, stifles innovation, and [seeks] to maintain the status quo” (p. 92).

As school leaders launch school improvement initiatives, they must realize and accept the challenge that change begins with the leader. School improvement that matters begins with changing the school culture, the values of the teaching, learning community. “Cultural change begins with the school leader” (Reeves, 2007, p. 94). The leader must ensure that stakeholders participate in planning and coordinating the curriculum with the focus on teaching and learning. Fink and Resnick (2001) explained that school principals are responsible for establishing the focus on a pervasive culture of teaching and learning. If the environment is not conducive to teaching and learning, student achievement can suffer.

Fullan (2001) promoted the idea that administrators serve as change agents to transform the teaching and learning culture of the school. In order to improve student learning educators must work to improve access to learning. To improve access, every member of the school community must share responsibility for student learning, all—from the custodian to the principal—need access to many kinds of information and resources. Beare, Caldwell, and Millikan (1989) wrote “Outstanding leadership has...emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be doubt that those seeking quality in education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority” (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 99).

School effectiveness research refers often to student’s academic achievement. Leadership in schools has been identified as having positive effect on student performance. By recognizing and understanding the context of poverty within schools and communities, administrators and teachers can identify, understand, and work together to influence how faculty,

staff, and students treat one another. McKinley, Brayboy, and Searle (2007) wrote about the “invisibility” of indigenous people, but similar treatments have been incurred by other ethnicities and marginalized groups. To avoid the obstacles and rid schools of labels that impede learning, and by learning to understand the needs of the school population and to affect the interactions, instructional practices and strategies, administrators can encourage teachers to enhance their professional practice to meet students’ needs. By using decision-making and reflection and by applying strategies pertaining to curriculum and instruction, administrators and teachers can shape administrator-teacher and student-teacher academic interactions. Through cultural congruence accompanied by relevant curriculum and materials, using constructive, meaningful and challenging instruction while responding to students’ traits and needs, students experience equitable learning opportunities and have a greater chance of achieving academic success (McKinley et al., 2007, pp. 173–192).

Leadership in Challenging School Contexts

Poverty in Schools

The growing emphasis of school improvement and student achievement has been aimed toward high-poverty teaching and learning environments. Examining why the gaps persist among various groups is common. Current research efforts are examining why students in high-poverty communities are lagging behind those in more affluent communities (Moore, Kochan, Kraska, & Reames, 2011). Research supports the idea that the gap is real and that students’ experiences in high-poverty schools are different from students’ experiences in low-poverty school communities, but research also proposes that the students in these high-poverty schools can and do succeed (Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel, 2005; Moore, Kochan, Kraska, & Reames, 2011).

There are numerous causes for the economic circumstances that families find themselves facing. Some children are born into poverty, but others experience poverty because of sudden, unanticipated situations such as families losing their homes, parents fleeing abuse, or teens running away. It is crucial that education leaders look beyond students' and families' economic statuses and direct their attention to barriers that impede student learning. Some education-related problems that arise from poverty include a lack of learning resources in the home, stereotyping, tracking, retention, and test bias (Shannon, 2007a). Combs is quoted as saying, "Schools are not suffering so much from a lack of efficiency as they are from a lack of humanity" (Carman, 2005, p. 25).

Jensen (2009) addressed the meaning and the seriousness of poverty in his book, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*. He identified six types of poverty: absolute, generational, situational, relative, rural, and urban. Whatever the type of poverty, there are significant challenges that plague families living in poverty and thus affect children and their learning. The risk factors are numerous, but schools can and should be the safe places that can turn children's lives around. Regardless of why children are in the environments they are in, they should not be placed in positions to have to battle their life circumstances. Poverty is unrelenting; it is an incapacitating state of being that stems from various risk factors. Poverty affects the whole child and should be openly discussed to shed light on biases, to reduce stereotyping and to remove barriers that impede teaching and learning. According to Beegle (2010), "If structural causes of poverty are clear and the damage [of] stereotyping and judging are illuminated, students not living in poverty are often more supportive and those from generational poverty are empowered to externalize the poverty and not see it as their own deficiency" (p. 2).

Historically, the relationship of the income levels of the families has indicated that students are at risk of failure in school and in life because they live in poverty. This expectation of failure supports a self-fulfilling prophecy that children who live in poverty cannot or will not achieve. “A legacy of low expectations, low standards for teaching and learning, and underachievement for students who find themselves within this economic stratum [of poverty] has become reality” (Mangum, 2008, p. 2). Marx (2008) identified other issues that children in poverty encounter such as less qualified teachers, frustrated teachers, and low expectations. Ensuring equal educational opportunity for all is an ongoing quest. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act stresses the needs of disadvantaged students, and the No Child Left Behind Act extended this effort. Marx noted that programs and models have been developed and implemented to promote closing the learning gaps between low- and high-poverty schools.

America has long been identified by catch phrases such as *the land of opportunity* and *land of the free and home of the brave*. Many immigrants have traveled at risk of their health and safety to be able to experience and work for educational success and employment opportunities. The American myth of success is based on the assumptions that the United States is a land of opportunity for all and that anyone can rise from poor circumstances based on his or her efforts; and that race, creed, and background do not have to be barriers to success... (Goode, 1997; Weiss, 1969).

Ensuring that poor students learn along with those more advantaged should be a primary purpose of education. It is imperative that all stakeholders take an active role in providing opportunities for students to learn. Working together to improve education, ensuring that learning takes place and that students achieve must become the routine work of everyone in the school. One method for helping this to happen is by creating learning communities within

schools. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2010) encouraged the use of professional learning communities aimed at ensuring that all students learn. DuFour et al. (2010) dedicated *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap* to “heroic educators...in their quest to...help all students learn at high levels” (p. iii). The professional learning community model operates from a shift in focus from teaching to learning and through the assumption that the “core mission of formal education is...to ensure that students... learn” (DuFour, 2004, p. 6).

When one walks into most schools, placards and posters proclaiming the mission and goals of the school greet us. Often, these displays are decorative artifacts that have little meaning because school leadership and faculty have not internalized the meanings of their mission statements. When a school faculty and staff are committed to changing defeatist attitudes and removing barriers to learning, they must believe and exemplify the positive assumptions, beliefs and ideas as illustrated in the climate that they display. DuFour (2004) proclaimed “School mission statements that promise ‘learning for all’ [may sound] cliché; but when the school staff takes [the] statement literally...rather than as politically correct hyperbole—profound changes...take place” (p. 6). This profound change supports the idea of second-order change discussed by Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005). These changes involved “deep change” or “dramatic departures” from business as usual. These profound changes also involved “new ways of thinking and acting” (p. 66).

In 2008 licensed educators of Alabama public schools participated in the Take 20: Alabama Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey. Some 30,000 educators participated in the survey aimed at determining to what extent Alabama’s educators perceived that their school had positive teaching conditions where teachers felt supported and empowered. Teachers’ perceptions of principal leadership and behaviors were significant to the study. Additionally, the

study focused on 19 Alabama Torchbearer Schools and a comparison population of lower-performing schools that served similar socio-economic populations. Lindahl (n.d.) found that principals are vital to school success and to student learning. Lindahl's study found that the Torchbearer School principals were perceived as "more approachable and more responsive to concerns, had higher levels of trust and respect, and were more effective in promoting a safe teaching and learning environment." The study also found that Torchbearer principals exceeded their counterparts in praise and recognition, facilitating participation, and promoting innovation. The data from the Take 20 survey suggested that school leaders have had some success in getting teachers involved in decisions and shared governance, but attempts at some important and more critical leadership and administrative behaviors have not been fully embraced.

Chenoweth (2007) wrote "One of the big questions facing American education is 'Can it be done?'" This refers to whether or not schools can "help all children learn to high levels, even poor children..." (p. 1). Chenoweth (2007) linked the obstacles of poverty and discrimination based on race. Although race is a significant factor, especially when linked with other barriers, this research is based solely on the context of high-poverty schools. The barriers brought on by poverty and the biases linked with it caused her to ask if children facing such obstacles are able "to learn to read, write, compute, and ... become educated citizens?" (Chenoweth, 2007, p. 1). In her introduction to *It's Being Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools*, she chronicled the successes where academic achievement traditionally has eluded the students. It highlights the stories of 15 schools, including West Jasper Elementary School, which is an Alabama Torchbearer School located in Jasper, Alabama (Chenoweth, 2007, pp. 139–152).

Further evidence is provided by Fullan (2006). Fullan used Doug Willms's "hypothesis of double jeopardy" in discussing the vulnerability of children being educated in the context of

high-poverty school and community. Willms's hypothesis proposes that children in low socioeconomic status (SES) families may be vulnerable, but children from low SES families who also reside in low SES communities are more vulnerable (Fullan, 2006, p. 11). These students are often faced with defeatist attitudes that result in barriers to learning. In his foreword to Carter's, "No Excuses," Adam Meyerson wrote, "Casey Carter's book drives a stake through [the] culture of defeatism" (Carter, 2000, p. 2). Not only should students in poverty not feel defeated before they begin, they should not see achievement as a goal for a select few. It is honorable to applaud achievements of those who are succeeding, but as Meyerson wrote, "Educational excellence among low-income children [should not] be seen as the work of isolated superstars..." (Carter, 2000, p. 2).

The Leader in the High-Poverty School Community

Anderman, Belzer, and Smith (1991) explored how school culture mediates the effects that administrators have on teachers. They theorized that principals' actions create the distinctive working environments that occur within their schools. These different kinds of environments often are predictive of teacher satisfaction and commitment. The Anderman, et al. study examined the possible relationships that democratic leadership, building capacity, teacher empowerment, and participation have on student achievement. Results indicated democratic leadership was essential to establishing, maintaining and growing a school culture.

The school community must be led by an innovating leader who is capable of influencing change through people and through teams. A school community where the leader is a critical thinker, is able to think conceptually and see the bigger picture, is more likely to have a culture where it is safe to take risks and work for the common good. The school leadership sets the tone for the mission, the values, and the goals of the school. Although innovative and creative, the

leader must be grounded in this knowledge and thinking for lasting results (Fullan, 2001, 2002a). Fullan (2002a) noted the importance of forging deep and lasting change and said this occurs through “transforming...what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it” (p. 19). Schools should be inviting places where teachers and students want to go and want to teach and to learn. Barth (2004) wrote, “The first major purpose of a school is to create and provide a culture that is hospitable to human learning” (p. 18). The school community should represent a community of lifelong learners representing learning that will change lives. Barth also asserted that “learning can be informative [and] transformative” (p. 51). Since the school culture and school capacity affect student achievement (King & Newmann, 2001) and the school principal influences capacity, culture, and climate, how might the principal/school leader have a positive effect on increasing the academic achievement of students? Schools that make a difference in student learning are led by principals who foster staff effectiveness and student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Brooks and Miles (2008) discussed the early period of education that posed the belief that school leaders have the responsibility to shape people into “perfect” beings and highlighted that other social issues rose in significance in educational issues and concerns. They highlighted the influence of Teachers College at Columbia University in defining educational leadership and they compared their work to Taylor’s theory of scientific management. Most significant was the attention to protocol and procedure, efficiency, control, and effectiveness. Active engagement of the principal in instructional issues became less of a focus and educational leaders became business managers focusing on organization, finance, and legal issues confronting the schools.

Brooks and Miles (2008) reminded readers of the period from the 60s through the 80s, where those who experienced the social unrest recall the numerous efforts for the government

and other organizations to effect change in educational leadership. The move toward more interpersonal relationships became the major focus in the training of teachers and educational leaders. The authors' journey from "scientific management to social justice... and back" gave a quick review of the history of educational leadership theory, but reminds us of the importance of ensuring quality education and equity for the children whom we serve.

Theoharis (2007) provided a practical view of what goes on in the lives of educational leaders who advocate for social justice and equity. His research delved into the educational inequalities experienced by students identified as diverse populations. Education professionals often identify these students by race, socio-economic status, special needs, and as English language learners. His exploration of how principals work day-to-day, the challenges, and the barriers encountered, and the decision making processes as well as the decisions made illustrated the complexity of the educational leader's roles and how effectively some work to implement social justice strategies.

Harris and Chapman (2002) conducted a study commissioned by the National College for School Leadership in England which focused on leadership in schools in difficult contexts. They found that school leaders exhibited leadership that complemented individual school context and community needs. In their study, they found that each school leader affirmed that during critical times, each had to assert autocratic leadership characteristics. They agreed that autocratic leadership approaches would not lead to sustainable improvements in his or her school. Each school leader in the study had chosen a leadership style that would help meet the needs for the school to progress and to empower others to lead. The leadership of a school principal committed to school improvement and student learning is a major component for achieving and sustaining a supportive learning community and successful outcomes. Fullan (2002b) argued

that as “sustainable educational reform becomes the agenda, the more...leadership becomes the key” (p. 1). He further noted that “...emphasis on the principal...has been a valuable first step in increasing student learning” (p. 1). Although there have been persistent calls for educators and schools to close academic achievement gaps and to improve student learning, reform efforts must not happen by chance. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) noted that practices must be research-based and school leaders must be those who forge positive student outcomes.

Work in schools is accomplished through the actions and resources of human capital. The development of people and of their relationships to each other and to the leader is important. Duke (2007) affirmed that one person may not be able to turn a low-performing school around singlehandedly, but suggested that one person with the right attitude, skills, talents, and training can motivate members to accomplish tasks. Like any leader, school administrators must be aware of how the larger environment shapes individual and organizational interactions (Goodin, 2010; Sergiovanni, 1996).

In recent years, some researchers have indicated that democratic leadership can have very positive effects on school success, particularly in what have been traditionally low-performing schools. A major strength of the democratic leadership style is that it encourages collaboration and empowers others to be involved and to be heard (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). “Schools are more democratic when the top-down hierarchical decision-making structure is replaced by one that is more inclusive and that invites participation by all stakeholders” (Bucci, 2005, p. 130).

Democratic School Leadership

Genesis of Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership has its roots in the role of education in a democratic society. John Dewey, often called the most prominent thinker on education of the 20th century, devoted a great

deal of his attention on democracy and its relevance to his beliefs about formal and informal education. Dewey saw the practices of thinking and reflecting as essential elements of education. He also specified that education must consist of interaction and the creation of environments conducive to learning (Smith, 2001).

Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) first described democratic leadership in 1938 in a study known as *Leadership and Group Life*. In this study, the researchers explored different styles or types of leadership on group structure and member behavior. Lewin et al. (1939) developed a framework of three leadership styles based on the leaders' decision-making behaviors. He identified the autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles of leadership. In the study, groups of schoolchildren were assigned to the leadership roles of democratic, authoritarian, and laissez-faire.

In the autocratic style, the leader makes decisions without consulting with others. There is individual control over all decisions without any form of consultation and with little input from others. Autocratic leaders set down expectations and dictate what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be done. There is a distinct division between the leader and others with the authoritarian leader making independent decisions with little or no input from the rest of the group (Lewin et al., 1939). The autocratic leader generally enforces absolute control. He or she makes choices based on his or her ideas and judgments and rarely accepts advice from followers. Researchers found that decision-making was less creative under authoritarian leadership. Lewin et al. (1939) also found that it is more difficult to move from an authoritarian style to a democratic style than vice versa. Abuse of this style is usually viewed as controlling, bossy, and dictatorial (Smith, 2001). Experiments revealed that use of the autocratic style caused a high level of disgruntlement (Lewin et al., 1939). The study found that an autocratic style

worked when there was no need for input on the decision, the decision would not change as a result of input, and the motivation of people to carry out actions would not be affected whether or not they participated in the decision-making (Lewin et al., 1939).

In the democratic style, the leader offered guidance to group members, but the leader participated in the group and allowed input from other group members. The leader involved the people in the decision-making, although the process for the final decision may have varied from the leader having the final say to him or her facilitating consensus in the group. The study found this to be the most effective leadership style. In Lewin's study, children in this group were less productive than the members of the authoritarian group, but their contributions were of a much higher quality. Democratic leadership is a leadership style in which members of the group are more engaged in the decision-making process (Lewin et al., 1939). This supports the idea that the democratic style is one of the most effective and productive, and it leads to better contributions from group members and increased group morale.

Democratic leadership is an open, collegial model in which a leader communicates with and leads his or her team. In democratically led organizations ideas tend to be freely and openly shared and received ("Leadership Styles: Democratic Leadership Style," 2008). Democratic leadership involves assessing and distributing responsibility among members. The democratic leader promotes the sharing of responsibility, the exercise of delegation and continual consultation. Researchers have found that this leadership style is one of the most effective and leads to higher productivity, better contributions from group members and increased group morale. The democratic leader encourages group members' participation and high engagement. As the status or positional leader, the principal most often retains the final say over the decision-

making process, but group members feel engaged in the process and are more motivated and more creative (Lewin et al., 1939).

In the laissez-faire style, leaders are hands-off and allow group members to make the decisions. The leader's involvement in decision-making is minimized. This type of leadership allows people to make their own decisions. This leadership style works best when people are capable and motivated in making their own decisions, and where there is no requirement for central coordination (Lewin et al., 1939). The researchers found that children under laissez-faire leadership were the least productive and made more demands on the leader of the three groups. They showed little cooperation and could not work independently. These leaders tend to offer little or no guidance and leave decision-making up to group members. Although in some situations, where group members are highly qualified in an area of expertise, this style can be effective. However, it often leads to poorly defined roles and a lack of motivation (Lewin). The laissez-faire style of leadership was not good in several ways. Clear guidelines to ensure and permit input and participation for all (democratic leadership) were clearly superior to little or no guidance.

Of the three types — autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire — democratic leadership allows for the greatest input by others. Lewin and his group distinguished democratic leadership from autocratic and laissez-faire by asserting that democratic leaders relied upon group decision-making, active involvement and participation by members, honest praise and criticism, and a degree of comradeship. Lewin et al. concluded that there was more originality, group-mindedness and friendliness in democratic groups as opposed to the aggression, the hostility, and lack of satisfaction and contentment in the laissez-faire and the autocratic groups (Gastil, 1994; Lewin et al., 1939).

As leaders, the democratic leader is responsible for and makes final decisions, but they allow the team members to participate in the process by providing input before making important decisions. This participation allows for developing skills among members and may increase job satisfaction and productivity (“Leadership styles: Using the right one for your situation,” n.d.). Leithwood et al. (1999) contended that three criteria may undergird the participative element of democratic leadership: 1) participation will increase school effectiveness, 2) participation is justified by democratic principles, and 3) leadership is potentially available to any legitimate stakeholder.

Lewin et al. (1939) further concluded that the difference in behavior in autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire situations is not a result of individual differences. This study involved groups of children who were assigned autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership situations. The study revealed that positive change and social interaction occurred more readily under democratic leadership styles. It indicated that in open environments, when all stakeholders can participate and be part of the group without giving up individuality, participants are more likely to make changes without a great deal of conflict. The study further revealed that the more authoritatively the group was led, the less creative and original was the decision-making.

During the third decade of the 20th Century, Newlon (1934) and other researchers began to associate educational leadership with social policy (Brooks & Miles, 2008). World War II had a significant influence on American education. Structural and organizational issues began to influence the education and the training of educational leadership. The social and political upheavals of the sixties caused turmoil in communities and in schools. Bureaucratic and

autocratic structures that enforced policy and produced significant outcomes motivated theorists regarding schools where priorities included maintaining order.

Woods (2006) began to examine the culture of education and suggested that reculturing was necessary. He noted that “a key implication for school leadership... is that it needs to be engaged in recentering the culture of schools... to encompass a shared vision and values orientated towards democratic ideals and practice” (p. 331). He asserted that “the point is not for it to be just a vision that is set down in text, but one that is constituted through everyday dialogue and, hence, is part of the ‘creative fashioning’ of educational discourses” (p. 331).

Woods (2006) further noted that the challenge for contemporary educational leaders is to infuse shared and distributed leadership with a dispersed ethical rationality to which all stakeholders contribute. For educational leadership, it means shaping a school culture that encompasses a shared vision and creating an educational culture, which values:

- an understanding of human potential that encompasses the nurturing of ethical insight;
- an open approach to knowledge;
- the capacity for constructive dissent;
- the essential commensurability of human beings and the implication that authority ultimately requires democratic legitimacy; and
- a rich narrative of democracy [that] gives education a self-conscious orientation to the world (p. 334).

Gordon W. Allport, in his introduction to Lewin’s 1948 *Resolving Social Conflicts*, argued that there is a “striking kinship” between Kurt Lewin’s and John Dewey’s work (Lewin et al., 1939, p. 7).

Both agree that democracy must be learned anew in each generation, and that it is a far more difficult form of social structure to attain and to maintain than is autocracy. Both see the intimate dependence of democracy upon social science. Without knowledge of, and obedience to, the laws of human nature in group settings, democracy cannot succeed. ... [W]ithout freedom for research and theory as provided only in a democratic environment, social science will surely fail. Dewey, we might say, is the outstanding philosophical exponent of democracy; Lewin is its outstanding psychological exponent. More clearly than anyone else has he shown us in concrete, operational terms what it means to be a democratic leader, and to create democratic group structure. (Lewin et al., 1939, p. 7)

To affect policy in education, leaders must prepare themselves and their constituents to actively engage in conversations and efforts to effect change. Oftentimes these conversations may require skills and language with which leaders and stakeholders may not be familiar. In “A Democracy of all Learners,” Woods (2006) argued that the article was intended to support educational leaders in meeting the need, ... to protect and promote the ideas, concepts and values of democracy in the language of education, and to engage in what Dryzek (1996) referred to as the ‘creative refashioning of discourses’ (p. 323). Woods discussed democracy in terms of Western democracy. He wrote,

Western democracy begins with the recognition that neither the capacity nor the right to interpret the most important truths is confined to an elite. Its roots are embedded in the idea that everyone is able to sense and discriminate between fundamental values which give meaning to life and place into perspective transient, mundane passions. (p. 324)

Woods provided a brief explanation of democracy and concluded by stating,

... recognizing these historical roots is also to recognize that democracy is not simply about the right to have and express an opinion, but is based on the potential of all to ascertain and establish truths about the purposes and conduct of the good life. (p. 326)

Woods contended that there are four rationalities in a democracy. The rationalities are ethical, which focuses on supporting and enabling aspirations for truth and the engagement of people; decisional, which focuses on power and freedom from arbitrary and imposed rule by others; discursive, which focuses on open debate and the operation of dialogic and deliberative democracy; and finally, therapeutic, which focuses on the creation of well-being, social cohesion, and positive feelings through participation and shared leadership. “These rationalities analytically distinguish the complementary and interacting dimensions of democratic leadership and practice and have their own distinctive focus, priorities and consequences” (Woods, 2006, p. 328).

Richards et al. (1991) contrasted democratic leaders as opposed to task-oriented, autocratic leaders who closely monitor subordinates. They noted that democratic leaders care more about developing relationships and encouraging cohesion and empowering teachers and staff through their participation in decision-making. Although democratic leaders maintain a strong focus on relationships, they do focus on completing tasks. This process is less complicated when there is not severe opposition to their plans and programs. Richards et al. indicated that in stressful leadership situations, democratic leaders become more focused on developing relationships. Though there is discussion surrounding the conceptual precision of the Lewinian definition of democratic leadership, “Lewin and others have identified the central element of the term: democratic leadership. This brand of leadership influences people in a

manner consistent with and/or conducive to basic democratic principles and processes, such as self-determination, inclusiveness, equal participation, and deliberation” (Gastil, 1994, p. 956).

Lewin (1948) reflected on the group experiments conducted with children. His thoughts provide a clear idea of how democratic principles can influence student learning:

There have been few experiences for me as impressive as seeing the expression in children’s faces change during the first day of autocracy. The friendly, open, and [cooperative] group, full of life, became within a short half-hour a rather apathetic looking gathering without initiative. The change from autocracy to democracy seemed to take somewhat more time than from democracy to autocracy. Autocracy is imposed upon the individual. Democracy he has to learn (Lewin, 1948, p. 82).

Democratic Leadership Evolved

During the 1940s leadership research moved from trait theories to behavioral theories related to styles of leadership. This was at a time when there was significant concern regarding totalitarian governments and during this period a democratic style of leadership was found to be superior to autocratic or laissez-faire styles. Gastil (1994) defined democratic leadership as distributing responsibility among the membership, empowering group members, and aiding the group’s decision-making process. Gastil’s work grew out of the work of Kurt Lewin. He wrote “Kurt Lewin and his colleagues presented what has become the classic formulation of democratic leadership” (p. 955). Under democratic leadership, group members tended to have a more participatory role in making decisions. Particularly, there is recognition of the human capacity for shared principled characterization of democracy. Implications for educational leadership lead to a renewed focus on school cultures and the ideals of democracy.

San Antonio (2008) noted that in democratic leadership school stakeholders may represent the best source for ideas and for relevant change since they are closely involved and are most aware of the needs and the conditions of their schools and communities. Walker and Dimmock (2000) said that involving stakeholders is becoming a major aspect in school reform efforts in an era of more decentralized, site based, self-managed institutions. In their research on the globalizing world of education, they remarked that the education is “caught up in a new world order” (Walker & Dimmock, 2000, p. 227).

Klinker (2006) wrote that schools have lost sight of their primary purpose which is to educate young citizens to live and work in a democracy. Public opinion and external pressures have perpetuated the loss of focus and direction. Given the public pressures of accountability measures and general societal changes, schools have become more complex organizations. Wasonga (n.d.) suggested that as organizations have become more complex, democratic leadership has garnered more attention. Citing Tillman (2002) Wasonga noted that although there is more attention given to democratic leadership, “institutional theories, norms, and practices continue to perpetuate ...inequities [and] injustices”. Klinker (2006) advocated for democratic leadership in schools. She believed,

the psychological and political advantages of linking educational leadership to democracy are obvious... in light of our own vulnerability and our realization that the most potent influence against outside forces is a populace that understands democracy and the effort needed to make democracy work. (p. 51)

Mursell (1955) recognized that the democratic leader consciously practices democratic techniques and realizes the potential power in the knowledge, skills and talents of many rather than a few. The leader knows how to capitalize on that power and delegate responsibilities,

which leads to more creative and innovative leadership. The leader includes others by referring matters that concern the group to group members while maintaining the position adviser both in personal and in professional matters. Most important the democratic leader recognizes and praises others' ideas and wants to be respected as a fair and just individual who respects others.

Starratt (2003) argued that “a qualified form of democratic leadership of schools is not [just] possible, but [is] necessary” (p. 14). He offered valid premises for a qualified theory of democratic educational leadership:

- There is a philosophical tradition... that asserts the intrinsically social nature of human beings.
- Any form of democratic living requires ‘civic virtue’, namely the ability to forego, at least on some occasions, self-interest on behalf of a more general common good”
- Democracy as participation in communal self-governance can be enacted in its most generous sense at the local level, in small communities, and in small organizations like schools...

Starratt (2003) made the argument for a postmodern theory of democratic educational leadership by laying out what he calls “givens” and by presenting arguments that these givens be made into something that provides a “reasonable foundation for an ongoing effort to build a theory ...to legitimate the practice of democratic leadership in schools” (p. 26). As he worked toward a theory of democratic leadership of schools, Starratt made the significant point that there is ethical and just fulfillment in working toward a democratic community and that it is worth the effort.

Leadership, Democratic Community, and School Reform

Dewey's assertion that democracy is grounded in the faith in human capacity, intelligence, and the shared experiences served as a framework for this study. Democratic leadership is founded on the belief that the leader should build capacity in their organization. The talent and skills of others should be used to guide the organization. In schools this means the principal, as leader, depends on the individual and collective knowledge and abilities of teachers to take the school from low-achieving to high-achieving. Walker and Dimmock (2000) asserted that the main purpose of school should be the delivery of curricula in ways that enable all students to realize their potential and that the leadership and management need to be responsive and adaptive to the requirements and characteristics of teaching and learning that will accomplish that goal (p. 230).

Wasonga (n.d.) encouraged individuals to recognize that democratic leadership promoted fairness as a goal. She suggested that the barriers that one encounters may negatively affect fair and just leadership unless democracy is recognized as a process to be practiced and implemented as well as a goal to be achieved. Furman and Shields (2005) argued that democratic leadership and social justice are interconnected. This is supported by the thinking of Gross and Shapiro (2006) in that leaders not only consult with stakeholders, but should include them in collaborative processes such as dialogue and participation. Barth (2004) encouraged readers to collaborate and to share leadership that moves throughout the building developing leadership and making the school community "look, act, and feel like a democracy" (p. 80). Shapiro (2006) described democratic leadership as having a "sustained process of open dialogue, right to voice, community inclusion, and responsible participation toward the common good" (p. 1). Although

such a process may entail a level of conflict, the outcome with good leadership should lead to balance with high levels of trust and accountability.

Dantley and Tillman (2006, 2010) urged that democratic school leadership stress the need for care, equity, and justice as well as addressing the cultural implications for educational outcomes for every student. Democratic leadership assumes that high efficacy is experienced when all participants have their interests heard and respected, and takes for granted that there is a correlation between participation, representation, and productivity. Researchers found that participation leads to effectiveness and productivity.

Wasonga's (n.d.) study was part of the Voice 3 project sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). The project explored educational leadership's understanding of school improvement and democratic community along with social justice. Wasonga's (n.d.) research questions included: How do ...principals describe their conceptions of democratic leadership? And how do they relate democratic leadership to the concept of social justice? She used a focus group to investigate these perceptions among middle school principals seeking to find what she credited Krueger and Casey for defining as the "the range of ideas ...that people have about something" (p. 4). Wasonga ranked and coded the participants' responses into four themes from most frequent response to the least. The four themes included shared decision-making, advocacy, respect, and control.

Researchers cited throughout the Wasonga study strongly aligned democratic leadership with social justice. The Wasonga (n.d.) study found that democratic leadership involves shared decision-making, collaboration, empowerment, and focus on school performance and student achievement. In Wasonga's study, one middle school administrator said, "leadership is stronger if you share the decision making process...; the programs are stronger because of increased sense

of ownership people hold when they are given a voice” (Wasonga, p. 6). Weiss and Cambone (2000) in their research found that teachers became more active as site-based decision-making enhanced the teachers’ opportunities to influence decisions. Short and Greer noted that teacher involvement was prompted by his or her perception of how school life was affected. Staff members were more willing to participate and they tended to be more “creative and innovative if they believed their input was valued (Wasonga, p. 7). Some administrators in the Wasonga study acknowledged that with the varied voices and ideas there is the concern about the loss of power, having its purpose diluted, and the leadership “losing control of the...process” (Wasonga, n.d., p. 7.).

Meehan and Cowley (2003) noted that educators have taken many roads to reforming education since the early 1960s. The focus has been on classroom teachers with an emphasis on testing, on professional development, and on reorganizing and restructuring school organizations and facilities. Improving schools in the 21st Century will mean investigating nonstructural elements and reculturing the teaching and learning environment (Fullan, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Meehan & Cowley, 2003).

Leadership that builds capacity, empowers, and encourages participation, and models and nurtures ethical behaviors, facilitates community and promotes successful student outcomes. Cambron-McCabe (2000) wrote that “People in democratic societies have a right to expect schools to be guided by moral principles such as justice, respect, fairness, liberty, honesty, and equity” (p. 278). The characteristics of participation, fairness, accountability, choice and empowerment are indicative of the democratic leadership and are among the 10 principles of democratic community as identified by the WorldBlu Democratic Design System.

Democratic School Leadership

The democratic view of educational administration first evolved among educators in the early years of the twentieth century in response to social changes in school organizations and reactions to authoritarian and autocratic practices among supervising personnel. Research indicates that allowing teachers and other stakeholders input into what affects them, influences the quality and the kind of relationships that exist among members of the community. Razik (2001) wrote, “Leadership that builds democratic community diminishes the hierarchal, isolating structure of traditional schooling” (p. 178).

A central element in democratic leadership is that it “influences people in a manner consistent with... basic democratic principles and processes, [like] self-determination, inclusiveness, equal participation, and deliberation” (Gastil, 1994, p. 956). Gastil discussed the functions of democratic leadership, the roles of democratic followers, and the appropriate settings for the democratic model of leadership. He noted that leadership and authority are conceptually distinct; therefore, one should not compare them to hierarchical, authoritative positioning (Gastil, 1994). Capable teachers and staff who work well independently perform best with democratic leaders. Richards et al. (1991) cited Fiedler and Chemers (1974), who advocated that “the authoritarian or democratic values of group members strongly affect the type of leader who is likely to emerge” (p. 6).

Democratic leadership emphasizes shared or participatory leadership. The role of the principal as the “status leader” is critical. In his or her role as the status leader, the building principal initiates and maintains focus on effective planning, decision making, and implementation. Competing and conflicting interests prevent accomplishing goals. Democratic leadership promotes harmony as opposed to the discord of laissez-faire leadership. On the other

hand, the assertive or strong democratic leader is not to be labeled autocratic. The autocratic leader enforces decisions without concern for the desires or interests of others in the organization (Mursell, 1955).

There are studies that attempt to delineate between democratic leadership and distributive leadership. Woods (2005) wrote that in distributed leadership “emphasis is placed on the distribution of leadership according to the market or organizational value of people’s expertise, skills and motivation” (p. 42). He further identified two types of distributive leadership, numerical or additive, implemented through concerted action. Woods contended that “democratic leadership functions as a means of engendering compliance with dominant goals and values and harnessing staff commitment, ideas, expertise and experience to realizing these” (2004, p. 2). In distributed leadership, leadership responsibilities are assigned and roles are carried out by multiple players. In democratic leadership, stakeholders take a participative and collaborative role in decision-making.

Natsiopoulou and Giouroukakis (2010) asserted that one individual is not capable of successfully administering and leading a school alone. They discussed democratic leadership as one alternative approach to school governance. Referring to what they called the “democratic and distributed leadership model,” the model secures staff members’ “participation in the school’s decision-making processes, promotes meaningful collaboration and harmonious work relations...and boosts student and teacher productivity” (p. 1). San Antonio (2008) found that democratic school leadership affords higher levels of commitment and trust and cited Fullan (2005) to further insist that it “grants greater empowerment at the school level” (p. 43). The school principal influences the school environment. Hallinger and Heck (1998) affirmed that schools that make a difference in student learning are led by principals who are instrumental to

staff effectiveness and in students' learning. Furman and Shields (2005) proposed that stakeholders participate in democratic processes for the common good of all students. The Wasonga study was a part of a larger study that looked at school principals' and the superintendents' perceptions of school improvement, democratic community, and social justice. The administrators' remarks provided qualitative data that urged that schools work for "the good of children" and develop "a culture that values children" (p. 8). Their remarks promoted the need for advocacy skills such as "listening, tolerance, confidence, consistency, trusting, and caring" (p. 8).

Principals who participated in Wasonga's study discussed respect as a significant characteristic for leadership and advocacy. They believed that respect is necessary for engaging and advocating for others, and they emphasized that respect is not to be limited to people, but it should include "ideas, opinions, and cultures" (Wasonga, p. 10). The principals recognized the need for diversity in personnel and in ideas and perspective. They emphasized the need for the ability to assess what is needed and what is good for all children, especially marginalized populations that include students from low socio-economic communities and educated in high-poverty school settings.

Finally, the characteristic that has significant implications for democratic leadership is control. One principal in the Wasonga study said, "Doing what is best for kids is an easy value to support[;] working to achieve agreement and make decisions in the best interest for kids and not for teachers, the leader must 'take control or the kids will lose'" (Wasonga, n.d., p. 11). It is important to note that some teachers thought that evidence of their participation in decision making is not always evident, and they believed that the authority of the principal was limited (Wasonga, n.d.; Weiss, & Cambone, 2000).

Gastil (1994) noted that numerous researchers have advocated democratic leadership while contrasting it to authoritarian or more management styles of leadership. He suggested that “ [an] undemocratic leadership style result[s] in a variety of undesirable outcomes including, but not limited to, undermining the pursuit of ethical ideas, such as self-determination, personal development, and democratic decision making” (p. 955). The school leader who practices democratic leadership, implements democratic principles, and promotes democratic decision making fosters democratic community in schools by allowing stakeholders to participate in the process.

The Conceptual Framework: Democratic Community

Since the turn of the 21st century, significant attention has been generated around the idea of reimagining, reconceptualizing, or reinventing schools and school leadership. Brooks and Kensler (2011) found that this new interest has brought forth new theories and approaches that may help school leaders, leadership preparation organizations, and practitioners to reconsider the conceptual and empirical foundations that undergird the thinking about who they are, what they do, and how their work influences others (Murphy, et al., 2000; Natsiopoulou, 2010). Among the most intriguing approaches is the idea of the practice of Democratic Community.

Brooks and Kensler (2011) cited a Woods and O’Hair’s (2009) editorial in which the authors wrote that democratic community is a compelling concept in that it

... facilitate(s) the development and sustainability of schools...designed to promote a way of living that requires the open flow and critique of ideas with an authentic concern for the interest of the individual as well as the common good... (p. 55)

Kensler found that although the literature has not previously presented a functional, prepared definition of democratic school community, qualitative research on democratic school

communities and leadership provides evidence of a relationship between practicing democratic principles and trust. Blasé and Blasé (2001) address the importance of trust and of empowering teachers if a school is going to be successful. They asserted that those who work to restructure schools recognize that significant sometimes radical change is “imperative.” They are aware of their programs shortcomings, failures, and inequities and they make commitments to bring about positive change. Their findings “echoed” other research findings that confirm the vital role of principals in initiating and facilitating change for group process management and for instructional leadership (p. 141). Marzano et al. (2005) found that “leadership is vital to the effectiveness of a school” and that “[l]eadership is critical to school success” (p. 4). Kensler’s research supported the definition of democratic school community as one characterized by the practice of the ten democratic principles presented in the WorldBlu Democratic Design System (WBDDS) (Kensler, 2008).

As shown in Figure 1, this conceptual framework identifies the major research variables and the three levels at which those variables are tested. This framework undergirds the research and drives the study of the ten democratic principles (variables) that are explored as to the practice and the relevance of these principles in high-performing and in lower-performing high-poverty schools.

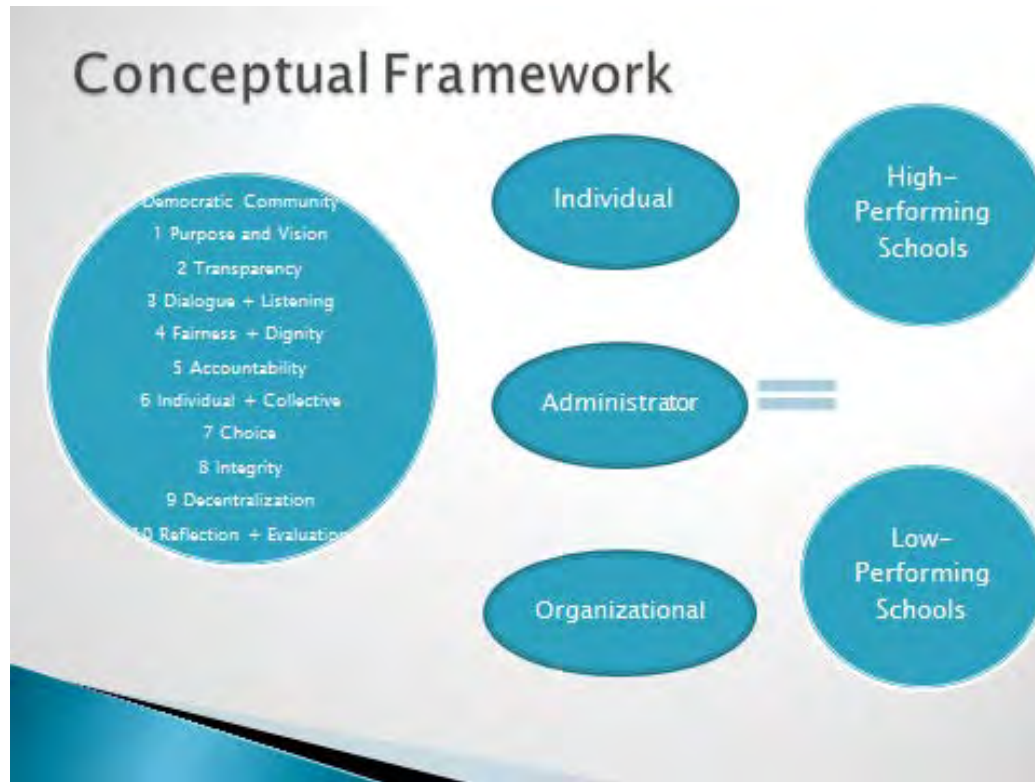


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The ten democratic principles represented are as follows: 1) purpose and vision – an organization knows why it exists and has a sense of direction; 2) transparency – when ideas and information are freely shared responsibly; 3) dialogue and listening – when members of an organization participate in conversations that lead to deeper level of meaning and understanding; 4) fairness and dignity – when all members are treated justly and with respect; 5) accountability – when each member is responsible for himself and the organization; 6) individual and collective – when each member recognizes his or her unique contribution to achieving the organizations goal; 7) choice – when each member of the organization is allowed to exercise his or her right to choose among possible opportunities; 8) integrity – when individuals make ethical and moral decisions; 9) decentralization – when authoritative stances are put aside, power is distributed

among stakeholders; and 10) reflection and evaluation – when organizations are willing to learn from the past and use that knowledge to improve (Kensler, 2008).

Brooks and Kensler (2011) noted Follett’s holistic, systemic approach of the 1920s and 1930s which focused attention on reciprocal relationships and learning and Senge’s organizational learning some six decades later. Throughout the development and the progress made within organizations, Slater and Bennis (1964) suggested democracy to be a “functional necessity” in organizations and systems competing to survive during constant, unrelenting periods of transformation (p. 168). This is an effective rationale for democracy within an organization, but Kensler (2010) questioned how and why democratic environments produced successful outcomes in times of unceasing change.

The practice of democratic community suggests that decision making is decentralized and that the leadership encourages all community stakeholders—specifically, teachers, students, and parents—to take an active role and participate in making decisions that affect them. Leadership that fosters participation, collaboration, and empowerment has proven to have a positive effect in some high-poverty schools, the topic area this research study examined.

High-Poverty Schools

Understanding the context of this study means understanding poverty and its effect on student performance in schools. There are studies to support the belief that the greatest factor attributing to student achievement is socioeconomic factors. The Coleman Study (1966), conducted at 4,000 schools with 568,743 students, 66,826 teachers, and 4,081 principals is a significant study regarding student achievement and socioeconomics. The study analyzed student demographic data as well as student academic goals. Out of this grew the premise that student achievement is greatly influenced by the students’ and the schools’ socioeconomics.

The Lubienski and Lubienski (2004) study analyzed NAEP data on achievement in public and private schools. The study found that public school students outperformed private school students in math after they took into consideration socioeconomic status (SES) and other demographics. The study drew a representative sample of 23, 000 4th and 8th grade students. It utilized data from 1,340 public and private schools. The findings showed that demographic differences between public and private school students in grades 4 and 8 accounted for the high achievement of private school students. The authors said that the demographic data included SES, race, and disability, but after a careful analysis, the study showed that the SES accounted for most of the differences in achievement.

Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) found that there is a powerful relationship between poverty and underachievement. Thus, they stress that it is vital to understand the context of poverty and take deal with the outcomes and issues involved in a meaningful way. This idea is captured in a quote from a principal from their book, *Leading School Turnaround: How Successful Leaders Transform Low-Performing Schools*, “You have to understand the context we work in. This is an area of high social deprivation where daily existence is difficult enough. Simply getting to...school...is an achievement for many ...students. Poverty,” he said, “is not an excuse for underachievement, but it is a powerful influence” (p. 25).

Leithwood et al. (2010) asserted that “school failure is not self-inflicted...and suggest[ed] that school failure might be linked to various causes including, but not limited to factors such as:

- Poverty and diversity create challenges for individual student learning that many schools are ill equipped to address.
- The negative effects of poverty and diversity on student learning are greatly magnified in schools with homogeneous populations.

- Identifying schools as “failing” is highly contingent on a surprisingly large number of circumstances, including the definition of “underperforming the criteria for judging performance, and on who assesses performance.

Describing conditions in more successful schools, the researchers found that systemic conditions such as trust, collaboration, innovation, and a focus on teaching and learning are formulated and carried out by school leaders (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010).

Commonalities found in schools designated as low-performing tend to include a correlation between low socioeconomic conditions in homes and communities that make up the student population. This may cause conflict in the school. Corallo and McDonald (2002) wrote that “symptoms of stress is evidenced by low expectations for student achievement, high teacher absenteeism, and high rates of teacher turnover” that in turn may affect student performance (p. 1). The reasons for low performance among students vary from district to district and from school to school. With national standards serving as the foundation, state and local standards and assessments may vary, which account for the variance in documented student performance. When student performance is measured by nationally normed assessments as well as state mandated assessments, low-performing schools share some common conditions. Often low-performing schools are in poorer communities where circumstances make it difficult for students to arrive at school prepared to learn. This challenge generally stretches school and community resources, and schools that carry the tag and dishonor associated with being labeled low-performing experience structural and organizational stress and persistent low expectations. This climate of low expectations leads to low self-concept which leads to failure (Corallo & McDonald, 2002). There is an abundance of perilous myths circulating about people living in poverty. The idea that poor people share expected values and common behaviors is being called

a culture of poverty, a term coined by Oscar Lewis in his book, *The Children of Sanchez* (Gorski, 2008). Empirical research has shown that although a culture of low expectations may be prevalent, the “culture of poverty” does not exist. The so-called culture of poverty is based on stereotypes and personal biases that perpetuate low expectations. These barriers make it difficult for teachers to teach and for students to learn. Gorski suggested that the socioeconomic gap can be eliminated when educators stop trying to fix students and begin address the systems and processes in schools that support inequities.

There is, however, evidence of schools that succeed in spite of their low socio-economic environments and conditions. Carman (2008) attempted to dispel the myth that children of poverty cannot meet high academic standards in his book, *The Forces Behind School Change*. He argued that it is probably difficult to find anyone who would disagree that high-poverty schools are more academically challenging than high-socioeconomic schools (SES). Some may believe the rhetoric that the students attending high-poverty schools are destined to fail, and that the schools are not capable of helping all children reach high academic standards. Carman addressed these “egregiously false assumption[s]” and the beliefs that perpetuate them, identifying two myths that must be challenged and discounted: (1) Intelligence is fixed at birth (2) High-poverty schools are at a disadvantage because of the type of students they serve. Carman (2008) calls these assumptions “calamitous myths” that promote the idea that “intelligence is genetic and... high-poverty schools will fail because of the types of students they serve” (p. 21). The path to success for these students should be found in the schools. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) saw schools as the pathway to moving students from poverty to economic independence and noted that students in effective schools showed a significant difference in expected passing rates. Where communities and schools have become isolated

because of personal and collective economics, there are many issues to address beyond the academics, but this does not mean that the children do not deserve the opportunity to learn. Many schools with high rates for students from poverty have and do succeed. Researchers have found that in order for this to happen, students need access, opportunity, and support. For example, Sergiovanni (1992) wrote, “Many administrators and teachers believe that students do not have the right to fail” (p. 131). This attitude should be prevalent throughout the school community. Success is more likely to occur if this value is heartfelt and more than a slogan. “It is harder to convince young people [that] they ‘can learn’ when they are cordoned off by a society that isn’t sure they really can. That is...one of the most destructive and long-lasting messages a nation possibly could give its children” (Kozol, 2005, p. 37).

Alabama’s Low-Performing Schools

Several Alabama public schools have experienced underperformance. Each year schools in Alabama set student achievement goals related to their Scholastic Achievement Test-9 (SAT-9) scores. The schools designed improvement plans to reach their goals. Schools that did not score satisfactory were placed on “Academic Caution.” There are three levels of Academic Caution for Alabama schools: Alert 1, Alert 2, and Alert 3. The status number signified how many years the school had not succeeded in making their school improvement goal. Alert 3 schools were at the lowest level and could be taken over by the state. Meehan and Cowley (2003) identified 45 low-performing schools in Alabama in their presentation, “*A study of low-performing schools, high-performing schools, and high-performing learning communities.*”

In early 2001, the state chose several schools for closure, based on poor student performance. The Alabama Education Association (AEA) piloted the priority schools initiative in 2001 choosing seven Alert 3 (state takeover) schools for piloting. Alabama categorized its schools based on the scores from the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT).

The AEA undertook this initiative partnering and collaborating with the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), Alabama Parent Teachers Association, Alabama School Board, classroom teachers, and administrators. The State Superintendent endorsed the program as did the State Department of Education (SDE). At the end of the pilot year, six (6) of the schools moved from Alert 3 to Clear; and one (1) school moved to Caution. The State Department of Education, after having participated in this program, addressed the negative labeling and changed the low status identifier from “Alert” to “Priority.” Of the seven schools from the 2001 cohort, two have closed. Of the remaining schools, all made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2008; four schools met 17 of the 17 goals, and the other made 16 of the 17 goals (Davis, 2008, 2009b; Hart, n.d.; Wight, 2000).

In 2002, the Alabama State Department of Education announced that in the 2002–2003 school year, schools in need of immediate assistance would be identified as Academic Priority Schools. It identified the factors used to determine that schools in need of immediate assistance. It included student performance on the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), the Alabama Direct Writing Assessment (ADAW) and the Stanford 9 Achievement Test (SAT-9).

A collaborative effort of the Alabama State Department of Education, the Alabama Education Association, and the Federal Government determined Academic Priority Status in the following ways:

- a. AHSGE Priority List—Less than 80% of twelfth grade students passes all required subject-area tests (reading, language, mathematics, and science).
- b. SAT-9 Priority List—The average percentile less than 80% of twelfth grade students passes all required subject-area tests (reading, language, mathematics, and science).
- c. ADAW Priority List—No students met academic content standards at level 3 or level.

Alabama defines persistently lowest-achieving schools as elementary and secondary schools that do not meet the state's reading/language and mathematics annual measurable achievement objectives (AMOs) at a proficient level, over a three-year period, for the all students group attending a full academic year. The Alabama Department of Education identified 55 persistently lowest-achieving Title I schools in Alabama. These were Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. To provide funding assistance to these schools, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) could apply for the Title I School Improvement Grant (SIG) (Morton, 2010). For the 2010–2011 school year, nine states received funds to assist in providing resources to qualifying districts.

The requirements of the proposed regulations of the ARRA defined the criteria that the State Education Agency (SEA) would use to award school improvement funds to local education agencies (LEAs) with the lowest-achieving Title I schools with the goal of raising student achievement at those identified schools. The regulations allowed for selection of schools in three tiers. Tier I schools are the schools in the lower-achieving five percent of all Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the state, or one of the five lowest achieving Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the state, whichever number of schools is greater. Tier II schools are secondary schools (middle or high) that are equally as low achieving as a Tier I school and is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I, Par A funds. Tier III schools are Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that is not a Tier I school (Davis, 2009).

The interventions for the schools in need of improvement are transformation, turnaround, restart, or school closure. Alabama submitted 38 applications; twenty-four applications were not funded as of May 2010; fourteen Alabama Schools were identified as SIG funded schools. The

National Education Association (NEA) chose to work with 13 of those Priority Schools during the 2010–2011 school year providing the opportunity to implement one of four specific proposed interventions. The fourteenth school was designated for school closure. The Alabama Education Association (AEA) in collaboration with the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) studied the interventions. The AEA found the transformational model most acceptable. In this model, the LEA would be required to address four specific areas, critical to transforming the lowest achieving schools: 1) Developing teacher and school leader effectiveness; 2) implementing comprehensive instructional reform strategies; 3) extending learning time and creating community-oriented schools; and 4) providing operating flexibility and sustained support (Davis, 2009).

The risk of a state takeover has its advantages and disadvantages. The takeover brings new resources, but also brings significant challenges. Teacher and student morale are generally low, and the negative community perception of the schools made it a challenge to recruit and to retain staff. In these schools in Alabama, the allies found in the AEA, parents, and business and community leaders helped many teachers and students to realize their potential. Hart (n.d.) asserted that students cannot thrive until they feel safe and providing schools with orderly learning environments was a top priority. Other characteristics that had a significant impact included parental engagement, professional development, data-driven decisions, community outreach, and incentives and celebrations (Hart, n.d.).

High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools

“The elimination of poverty and progress towards sustainable development will only take place if there are increased and improved levels of education.” ((DFID), 2000b:1; Harber, 2011)

High-poverty, high-performing schools are schools that have demonstrated high academic performance considering the significant numbers of poor children who attend the school. There are schools around the country where faculties and their students have beaten the odds and performed well academically and have scored above standard percentiles on state assessments (Carman, 2008; Reeves, 2003). Conditions of collaboration, empowerment, and innovation created by and implemented by school leaders, and that focus on teaching and learning contribute to the schools' successes (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010).

There are numerous successful programs around the United States where high-poverty populations are performing above national and state standards. Reeves (2003) coined the term 90/90/90 in 1995, to discuss observations made of high-poverty, high-performing schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He based the term on his observations in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where schools had been identified by specific characteristics. Ninety percent or more of the students in the 90/90/90 schools were eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90% or more of the students were of ethnic minority groups, and 90% or more of the students met the academic standards in reading or other area that had been set by their district or state (Reeves, 2003; 2005). His original research included four years of test data and represented more than 130,000 students and 228 schools. The populations ranged from poor and/or minority to Anglo and/or economically advantaged students from inner-city urban schools, rural schools, and urban suburban schools. This research addresses the concept of democratic leadership in the context of high-poverty schools. These schools are designated as Title I schools.

Reeves (2003) described common characteristics of high achievement schools and worked to identify common behaviors leaders and teachers in high-poverty, high achieving schools exhibited. Among the characteristics found in the 90/90/90 schools were: 1) a "laser-

like” focus on academic achievement; 2) Clear curriculum choices; 3) Frequent assessment of student progress with multiple opportunities for improvement; 4) An emphasis on ...writing, and 5) Collaborative scoring of student work.

A significant finding of the 90/90/90 study was the sustainability of schools’ successes without external interventions or specialized curriculum and textbooks. After the initial accountability report that documented the success of the high-performing or 90/90/90 schools, Milwaukee issued subsequent reports that included these findings: (1) The schools’ techniques were persistent; and although the students are still poor and their economic situations have not improved, more than 90% of the students meet or exceed state standards; (2) The techniques were replicable. In the initial report there were seven schools identified as 90/90/90 and in a later report there were 13 schools with the honored designation; and (3) The techniques were consistent in their emphasis on writing, performance assessment, collaboration, and focus on learning.

Reeves (2003) acknowledged that over time the term 90/90/90 has been used to describe successful schools that had high numbers of poor and minority students. Reeves reviewed his earlier study and replications of it and affirmed that the evidence indicated that “while economic deprivation clearly affects student achievement, demographic characteristics do not determine academic performance” (p. 1). His research supports practices that are “inexpensive and... replicable” (p. 1). Reeves provided sources of similar research findings including the work of Casey Carter, author of the “No Excuses” case studies (Carter, 2000) and Kati Haycock (1998; 2001) and the Education Trust research on student success in high-poverty schools that make the case that the Milwaukee studies are not isolated cases of success (Reeves, 2003).

In a research-based resource for schools attempting to improve student learning, Shannon and Bylsma (2007a) provided nine characteristics that high-performing schools tend to share: clear and shared focus; high standards and expectations for all students; effective school leadership; high levels of collaboration and communication; curriculum, instruction and assessment aligned with standards; frequent monitoring of learning and teaching; focused professional development; supportive learning environment; and, a high level of family and community involvement

Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly (2004) in “Equity Audits: A Practical Leadership Tool for Developing Equitable and Excellent Schools”, educational administrators investigated reasons for student performance gaps. They asked questions regarding the educational levels of teachers at higher socioeconomic status (SES) schools and those at lower SES schools. Based on data that not only showed differences across districts, but also within schools, this led to the follow-up concerns regarding gifted and talented classes being taught by more educated, more experienced, more stable teachers as opposed to the lower level courses that were taught by the least educated, least experienced, more mobile teachers. Skrla et al. (2004) concluded that to close these achievement gaps there must be efforts toward more equitable opportunities, including access to curriculum and to qualified teachers for minorities. The advances that have been made can be attributed to the resources provided through integration, but the inequities in access to qualified teaching staff and to higher level courses have helped to widen the gaps. The authors concluded that achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, language and culture, socio-economic, and other problems are not just equity problems for schools, but for society. Their assertion that gaps can be closed has been based on the fact that schools systems have been successful in closing academic achievement gaps, therefore, it can be done; we must have the

will and the commitment to get it done. The overarching belief of the authors was that achievement gaps can be closed. They designed practical tools that provide for the possibility of equity in public education.

Riester, Pursch, and Skrla (2002) studied a mixed group of principals of high-poverty Texas schools and clustered their beliefs and practices into three themes. One major theme was “promoting a democratic culture” (Lyman, 2004, p. 78). This theme included empowering the school faculty and staff and a commitment to the success of all children while providing a teaching environment that is inclusive and encourages participation. In describing the success of a school in St. Paul, one principal said, “I empower leaders” (Chenoweth, 2007, p. 84). Acknowledging the significance of the principal’s role in positive student outcomes and overall school success, Chenoweth (2007) wrote that the principal allowed leadership to be shared throughout the school in an effort to deepen the culture while focusing on teaching and learning. High-performing, high-poverty schools seemed equipped to engage in the successful practices because of three overarching factors: the strength of their...leadership; their commitment to building a learning community; and their understanding of research-based principles regarding how children learn (Bell, 2001).

Bell (2001) suggested that high-poverty, high-performing schools may very well hold the key to understanding successful school reform. She wrote that high-performing, high-poverty schools are distinguished from their counterparts because of the influence of adults over the quality of instruction, curriculum and the school’s [teaching] and learning environment. These schools provided marginalized groups, such as low-income students, opportunities to be intellectually challenged through the curriculum. These faculty and students generally supported the accountability requirements; engaged in school practices that reflected a culture of success

and excellence; and respected and supported each other as they worked towards a common vision.

Alabama's Torchbearer Schools

The Alabama Torchbearer Program had humble beginnings. Just as other states around the country, Alabama sought ways to comply with federal mandates, meet required standards, and improve schools. In Alabama, several agencies set out to find ways to meet standards and to meet the needs of students. In an effort to increase the achievement of students in Alabama, the state department of education set out to support the development and the growth of instructional leaders from teachers to superintendents. The innovative initiative to accomplish this goal was the establishment of the Alabama Leadership Academy (ALA), a professional development initiative of the Classroom Improvement Section of the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE). The function of the academy was to increase the quality and the capacity of school leadership throughout the state (www.alex.state.al.us).

Within the state of Alabama there are many schools that have overcome the obstacles and problems associated with assuring student success in high-poverty schools. In an attempt to recognize these schools and share their success strategies with others, in 2004 the state established the Alabama Torchbearer School Program. The Alabama Leadership Academy in the Alabama State Department of Education launched the Torchbearers program as a way to recognize high-poverty public schools in Alabama that have overcome odds and stand out as high-achievement schools. The Torchbearer School Program recognizes the commitment and the work of Alabama administrators, teachers, staff, students, and their families. The schools that receive the Torchbearer designation are high-poverty, high-performing schools that make

academic excellence possible for all students in spite of the economic situations in which they live (Mangum, 2008).

The Torchbearer program was established by the ALA as an outgrowth of a book study of Samuel Casey-Carters' *No Excuses: 21 Lessons from High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*. This book study launched the search in Alabama for high-performing, high-poverty schools. After reading Samuel Casey Carter's, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-performing, High-Poverty Schools*, Alabama leaders noticed that there were no Alabama schools included in the case studies. Since schools illustrated in the book were primarily magnet schools, charter schools, or private schools, and there were no Alabama schools recognized, there was the implication that there were no high-poverty, high-performing public schools in Alabama. Such schools did exist, but there appeared to have been no effort to identify and to recognize these schools and the dedicated, hardworking professionals succeeding in providing high quality educations to poor children. Members of the ALA knew that there were high-poverty schools that were succeeding and decided to launch the Torchbearer Program to spotlight the schools and to help guide others to success. After successful schools were identified, school visits were made and surveys were conducted (Moore, Kochan, Kraska, & Reames, 2011).

In its first year of the Alabama Torchbearer Program, 13 schools met all criteria. Site visits were made to the schools to determine why Torchbearer Schools were succeeding. The visits revealed that the leaders though extremely effective had unique strengths. Thacker (2005) wrote "To be an educator is to be a part of a profession that is equal parts science and art" (p. iv). He affirmed, "The Torchbearer Schools excel because they are staffed with administrators and teachers who not only understand the science, but also embrace the art of teaching" (p. iv). He further noted that it is difficult task to determine how the schools are so successful because "in

every situation investigated, the principal gave credit to the faculty and staff for any success; and the faculty adamantly insisted that the support and guidance of the principal made the success possible” (p. iv).

In the early days of the program, schools considered for the recognition had to meet the following criteria: (a) at least 70% of the student population received free/reduced priced meals; (b) at least 70% of the students scored at level II or Level IV on all sections of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test; and (c) average percentile stands above 50 in reading and in mathematics on Stanford 10. The award requirements have changed since the awards inception. At the time of the current study to be eligible for a monetary reward, the Torchbearer School must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years and must have met additional criteria as applicable:

- Have at least 80% poverty rate (percent free/reduced meals).
- 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 mathematics 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.
- Identified as Meeting the Challenge School.
- Identified as Advancing the Challenge School.

- Identified as Exceeding the Challenge School.
- Be in existence at the time of the award. (ALSDE, 2011b)

Schools defined as Challenge Schools are schools that have met criteria set by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Soon after taking office in 2001, then President George W. Bush put forth his signature legislation called the No Child Left Behind Act. He said that the Act would strengthen Title I accountability by requiring States to implement statewide accountability systems for public schools and their students. These systems were to be based on challenging State standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3–8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. The Assessment results and progress objectives were set up by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency. Failing districts and schools were subject to interventions and restructuring measures aimed at getting them back on course to meet State standards. Schools meeting or exceeding AYP objectives or close achievement gaps became eligible for Academic Achievement Awards. The categories included: Exceeding the Challenge, Addressing the Challenge, Advancing the Challenge, and Meeting the Challenge. Schools could “Exceed the Challenge” by having more students in specific demographic groups pass standardized reading and math tests than state averages; and “Address the Challenge” for closing the achievement gap that exists between White and minority students by at least 15 percent. Schools with at least 80 percent of their students coming from families that are poor are eligible for two awards: 1) “Advancing the Challenge” by having more students score in the “advanced” category of the standardized tests than the state average and “Meeting the Challenge” for meeting state academic standards for at least two years in a row (Bush, 2002).

In his foreword to Carter’s, “No Excuses,” Adam Meyerson wrote, “Casey Carter’s book drives a stake through [the] culture of defeatism” (Carter, 2000, p. 2). Not only should students

in poverty not feel defeated before they begin, they should not see achievement as a goal for a select few. Meyerson wrote, “Educational excellence among low-income children [should not] be seen as the work of isolated superstars...” (Carter, 2000, p. 2).

School Performance in Alabama’s Torchbearer Schools

For the 2010–2011 reward year, to be in the Torchbearer School category (i.e., a high-poverty, high-performing school) and to be eligible for a monetary reward, the Torchbearer School must have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years and must have met the following additional criteria: “Torchbearer Schools are high-performing, professional learning communities where excellence in [both] teaching and learning...” are priorities (Mangum, 2008, p. 2). Table 1 shows schools that have received the “Torchbearer” designation since the inception of the program and the school year that each school received the recognition.

Table 1

Torchbearer Schools 2004–2013

Torchbearer Schools	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-2013
1. Albert Turner Sr.			2006-07						
2. Anna F. Booth ***			2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
3. Asbury	2004-05								
4. Athens		2005-06	2006-07						
5. Bluff City		2005-06	2006-07						
6. Bruce Craig									2012-13
7. Evergreen									
8. Calcedeaver *	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07		2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
9. Cedar Park									2012-13
10. Childersburg		2005-06	2006-07						
11. Cloverdale		2005-06	2006-07						
12. Collins-Rhodes						2009-10			
13. Councill		2005-06	2006-07						
14. Bruce Craig									2012-13
15. Dixon									2012-13
16. Donald			2006-07						
17. Dutton	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07						
18. E. D. Nixon				2007-08			2010-11		
19. Edgewood				2007-08					2012-13
20. Evergreen									2012-13
21. F. S. Ervin					2008-09				
22. Florala City Middle			2006-07						
23. Foley Intermediate	2004-05								
24. Frances Nungester									2012-2013
25. Fruithurst		2005-06	2006-07						
26. George Hall **				2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-2012	

Torchbearer Schools	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-2013
27. S. C. Harlan			2006-07				2010-11		2012-2013
28. Heard		2005-06	2006-07						
29. Hemphill			2006-07						
30. Highland	2004-05								
31. Highland Avenue *	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07					2011-12	2012-2013
32. Hillview									2012-2013
33. Holloway					2008-09		2010-11		
34. Huxford	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07				2010-11		
35. Indian Springs				2007-08	2008-09	2009-10		2011-12	2012-2013
36. J E Turner		2005-06	2006-07						
37. Jones Chapel		2005-06	2006-07						
38. Knox									2012-13
39. Lincoln				2007-08					
40. Linden High School			2006-07						
41. Mary Burroughs				2007-08					
42. Maryville **	2004-05								
43. McDavid-Jones		2005-06	2006-07						
44. Meadowlane						2009-10			
45. Midland City	2004-05								
46. Morningside							2010-11		
47. Morris Slingluff								2011-12	2012-2013
48. North Birmingham				2007-08					
49. Phillips								2011-12	2012-2013
50. N P Price			2006-07						
51. Peter Alba		2005-06							
52. Orchard								2011-12	
53. Saint Elmo	2004-05	2005-2006	2006-2007		2008-09				
54. Sophia Kingston									2012-2013
55. Spencer							2010-11	2011-12	
56. Sycamore School									2012-2013
57. T. S. Morris						2009-10	2010-11		

Torchbearer Schools	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-2013
58. Townley Jr. High		2005-06							
59. Walnut Park		2005-06	2006-07						
60. W. C. Griggs	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07						
61. W. D. Robbins								2011-12	
62. W. S. Harlan			2006-07						
63. Weeden									2012-13
64. West Jasper	2004-05	2005-06							
65. Western Heights	2004-05	2005-06							
66. Westview		2005-06							
67. Westhills									2012-2013
68. Wilkerson Middle *				2007-08		2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	
69. William H. Brazier								2011-12	
70. Woodmeade									2012-2013
Total # of Awardees each year	13	22	26	9	7	8	11	12	20

89

*Data compiled from Torchbearer maps and documents provided from Alabama State Department of Education. At this writing, 70 schools have earned the Torchbearer designation. Based on 2011–2012 test results, 20 schools earned the Torchbearer reward during the 2012–2013 award year.

Summary

Theoretical rationales supporting democratic leadership and democratic community in schools are abundant (Dewey, 1939; Furman & Shields, 2005; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Murphy & Meyers, 2009). Although leadership has been found to be crucial in transforming schools, in these days of accountability in teaching and learning, the building administrator must not be, nor expected to be, the sole instructional leader. Teacher empowerment through shared leadership not only promotes professionalism, but promotes school improvement and student success. As teachers assume roles of leadership and take on more responsibility for transforming schools, student learning is likely to increase (Greenlee, 2007).

CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY

The recurring push for accountability in education has once again drawn national attention. The current focus on high levels of learning for all students places significant attention on the knowledge, skills, and practices of education leaders at all levels (DuFour, 2004). Researchers have found that effective leadership promotes teacher and student success (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Walstrom, 2004).

This is particularly true for students from high-poverty backgrounds in schools that tend to be low-performing (Corallo & McDonald, 2002; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In Alabama, the state where this research occurred, the state has labeled schools in which high-poverty students are performing well as Torchbearer Schools. Students in these schools are performing at significantly higher levels than some of the non-Torchbearer Schools with similar populations. Students in Alabama Torchbearer Schools are succeeding at significantly higher levels than some of the non-Torchbearer Schools with similar populations.

Determining if Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer principals' perceived leadership practices, and their implementing and supporting democratic community are different but they may provide evidence regarding principles that make a difference in student outcomes among learners in high-poverty schools in Alabama. On the other hand, if there are no significant differences in perceived practices in high-performing and lower-performing schools, assumptions regarding whether leadership practices and democratic principles promote success among students will need to be explored further.

This chapter will delineate the methods used to conduct this study and to investigate the research questions. This chapter is organized into five sections: (a) research design, (b) participants, (c) measures and instrument, (d) procedures and (e) data analysis.

Research Design

The study compared teachers' perceptions of the practice of democratic community in Alabama's high-performing, high-poverty schools known as Torchbearer Schools and selected high-poverty, lower-performing Non-Torchbearer schools. The purpose of this study was to build on the empirical evidence that leadership that fosters democratic community plays a significant role in improving student outcomes and school performance, especially in high-poverty schools. This was done through the exploration of the extent to which differences exist and the extent to which leaders in high-poverty, high-performing schools and in high-poverty, lower-performing schools in Alabama promote and implement democratic community. The review of literature provided theoretical and empirical evidence regarding the need for strong leadership and the principles found in democratic communities. The instrument used assessed teachers' perceptions of individual, principal, and organizational use of democratic principles and democratic community. This mixed method study used a quantitative survey to gather data and open-ended questions to provide a more in-depth of understanding regarding participants' viewpoints, allowing participants to provide detailed information that they want to express regarding their experiences.

The purpose of this study was to build on the empirical evidence that democratic community and leadership play a significant role in improving student outcomes and school performance, especially in high-poverty schools. The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?
2. To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, lower-performing schools Report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?
3. To what extent do teachers' perceptions of the implementations of democratic principles differ in high-performing and lower-performing high-poverty schools as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?
4. What do teachers perceive as tangible evidences that democratic community exists or does not exist in the Torchbearer Schools and non-Torchbearer Schools?

Population and Sample

The unit of analysis for this study is at the individual teacher level. Participants from 12 schools were invited to be involved. Two groups were identified to participate in this study. Six of the schools have received the Torchbearer designation, and six non-Torchbearer schools that have similar demographics were invited to participate in the study. The group identified as Torchbearers are high-poverty and high-performing schools.

Fifty-six schools have received the Torchbearer designation since the inception of the program. Thirteen schools received the reward during the 2011–2012 award year. Of the 56 Torchbearer schools, three middle or junior high and one high school have received the designation. Since the pool of schools at the secondary level was so low, I chose not to include them in the study. Additionally, the one high school identified has not demonstrated sustainability as a Torchbearer School and was awarded this designation for only one year,

several years ago. One of the three middle/junior high schools has shown sustainability and has received the designation two consecutive years. One middle school and the one junior high school each received the designation once several years ago.

The comparison group consisted of a group of schools with similar demographics who did not meet the achievement criteria of the Torchbearer Schools and made less than 70% of their AYP Goals as indicated by their status in the 2011–2012 Title I Accountability Reports.

Instrumentation

The process for initiating this study included the presentation of the proposal to the Dissertation Committee and obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Auburn University. After receiving approval, the researcher sought the permission and support of district superintendents and building principals to conduct the research. Letters were sent to superintendents and principals of the selected schools. Follow-up telephone calls were made to each principal to encourage participation and to offer assistance in providing information to faculty members and to administer the survey.

The instrument for this study was the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS). The WBSS measures democratic community. The instrument consists of 38 questions, each with a six-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from one (1 – almost never) to six (6 – almost always). Kensler’s (2008) inquiry into the content validity of the WBSS for school settings resulted in 100% of the surveyed professional educators... reporting...each of the 10 democratic principles and corresponding survey questions as [clear and] relevant to democratic community.

The researcher included open-ended questions to provide a more in-depth understanding regarding individual viewpoints and personal experiences. The questions asked were:

1. What are some evidences that this school's administrator values stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes?
2. What are some evidences that your school administrator does not value stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes?

The WBSS was developed and used by Kensler (2008). Kensler's (2008) use of a principle-based measure of democratic community allowed for a quantitative investigation of democratic community in schools defining Democratic Community as a school community where the practices of individual staff members, administrators, and organizational systems collectively are indicative of the 10 democratic principles presented in the WorldBlu Democratic Design System.

Although the WorldBlu Democratic Design System (WBDDS) was developed originally for use in the business community, Kensler found the framework relevant to schools and she was able to test the relationship between democratic school community and the practice of democratic principles within a school. Using the same measure of community, this research sought to test the connection among democratic community, leadership, and school outcomes.

Inquiry into the content validity of the WBSS for school settings resulted in 100% of the surveyed professional educators... reporting...each of the ten democratic principles and corresponding survey questions as [clear and] relevant to democratic community. Kensler used a large sample size ($N = 883$ teachers) and piloted the study with a diversity of participating schools including urban, rural, suburban, elementary, middle, and high which indicated high reliability for varied subgroups. Kensler, Caskie, and White (2006) found the WBSS to be a highly reliable instrument as indicated by the internal consistency measure, *Cronbach's alpha*

($\alpha = .97$) (p. 59). Each of the ten democratic principles loaded significantly on the latent variable, 'Democratic Community' (Kensler, 2008, p. 59).

Procedure

This study involved administering the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS) to teachers in teachers in the Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer Schools. A comparison population of lower-performing elementary schools serving low income students was selected using data from the Alabama Department of Education's website (www.alsde.edu). First, the Alabama State Department of Education's list of Title I schools that did not make adequate yearly progress for the school year 2010 through 2011 was used to determine which school's met this criteria in order to assure the match school population, the Alabama State Department of Education database on those schools was consulted to identify which of those schools serve populations in which 80% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced price meals. The researcher identified Title I schools that did not make AYP as indicated by their 2011–2012 status. The researcher selected schools that made less than 60% of goals, schools that made 60–69.99% of goals, and schools that made 70–79.99% of goals respectively (ALSDE, 2011a)

The researcher contacted each superintendent and each principal in selected districts and requested to have their school(s) participate in the study. The method of distribution for this survey varied. The researcher mailed the surveys in bulk and the researcher and a non-administrative staff member administered the surveys on site. As appropriate, the central office distributed the surveys through the inter-office mail to the principals and schools who agreed to participate. A selected non-administrative staff at each participating school administered and collected the surveys and returned the information to the central office. The researcher collected the surveys from the central office. Where approved, the researcher made personal contact with

the principal of each school that participated in the study and met with staff to address the faculty to describe and explain the study. The researcher distributed the surveys and allowed voluntary and confidential participation in completing and returning the survey. After everyone had the opportunity to complete the survey, the researcher collected survey packets and began to analyze the data. There were a total of seven schools that were visited in person. In four Torchbearer and three non-Torchbearer schools the researcher was allowed to administer the survey. In the remaining five schools which participated in the study, the survey packet was mailed to the school principal. Personnel in the school administered the survey and the surveys were returned to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The researcher entered quantitative information into an Excel database. The database contained fields for participant demographic information. The remaining questions were in a Likert rating scale format. The researcher used software from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0 to analyze the data. Four research questions drove the study. Three quantitative questions sought to determine if there is a relationship between the dependent variable, the practice of Democratic Community, and the independent variables, Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools. Using WBSS, the researcher tested with a one-way ANOVA. The researcher clustered the qualitative responses. The data clusters served as the basis for the organization and the conceptualization of the data. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) address the frequent use of qualitative content analysis and assert that this methodology may address weaknesses of quantitative approaches. The qualitative questions used in this study were aimed at obtaining a deeper understanding of the quantitative data by looking at social interaction, obtaining valuable historical/cultural insights, interpreting relationships in an attempt to identify

what Patton (2002) called “core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). In analyzing the data derived from the open-ended questions, I looked for patterns and trends in the responses in order to reach conclusions as to what the data are revealing. I read through each response seeking to determine if common themes emerged. I created response categories. I coded the responses by assigning a label to each comment with one or more of the designated categories. After studying and analyzing the data, I summarized the data and the results appear in the descriptive text that follows.

Table 2

Guiding Research Questions

Research Questions	Data Analysis
1. To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?	Descriptive Statistics
2. To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, lower-performing schools Report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?	Descriptive Statistics
3. To what extent do teachers’ perceptions of their principals’ implementations of democratic principles differ in high and lower-performing high-poverty schools as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?	ANOVA

Table 2 (continued)

Research Questions	Data Analysis
4. What do teachers perceive as tangible evidences that democratic community exists or does not exist in the Torchbearer Schools and non-Torchbearer Schools?	Content Analysis

Conclusion

This chapter described the quantitative and qualitative procedures of this study. The instrument used to gather qualitative and quantitative data was also described. Additionally, data collection and analysis procedures were described and discussed. The following chapter describes the findings of the study based on the data that were collected.

CHAPTER FOUR. FINDINGS

This study examined teachers' perceptions of the extent to which their principals employed democratic leadership in high-poverty, high-performing schools (Torchbearer) and high-poverty, lower-performing schools (non-Torchbearer) in Alabama. The study sought to determine whether there was a relationship between perceived democratic leadership and student and school success.

The Torchbearer Schools program was established in Alabama to recognize schools that have been successful in assuring that children from high-poverty backgrounds succeed in schools. This program has highlighted the fact that, schools have been able to beat the odds and have low income students performing at high achievement levels. Because there was available data to compare high-performing, high-poverty Torchbearer schools with those schools that were not performing as well, the researcher hypothesized that something very different must be occurring in these two groups of schools. As suggested by Chenoweth (2007) in "*It's Being Done,*" schools can be successful with even the most neediest children if certain characteristics are in place within the school environment. The researcher sought to determine whether democratic leadership practices was related to this difference.

Survey

The data for this study were collected using a survey adapted from the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS). This survey measures democratic community. There were 40 items on the survey (see Appendix A).

The 37 quantitative survey items were related to three constructs. The instrument used a six-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Almost Never, (2) Usually Not, (3) Infrequently, (4) Occasionally, (5) Usually, and (6) Almost Always. The 37 items using the Likert scale used three constructs that included Individual, Leader, and Organizational practice of 10 democratic principles: Purpose and vision; Transparency; Dialogue and Listening; Fairness and Dignity; Accountability; Individual and Collective; Choice; Integrity; Decentralization; and Reflection and Evaluation. Item 38, asked for respondents' years of experience. Items 39 and 40 included two open-ended questions which provided an opportunity for respondents to further express their beliefs and opinions regarding the leadership practices in their school.

Kensler's (2008) inquiry into the content validity of the WBSS for school settings resulted in 100% of the participants reporting each of the 10 democratic principles and corresponding survey questions as [clear and] relevant to democratic community. Kensler found that "the WBSS is a highly reliable instrument as indicated by the internal consistency measure, Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .97$)" (p. 59). "Each of the 10 democratic principles loaded significantly on the latent variable Democratic Community" (Kensler, 2008, p. 59).

Demographic Characteristics

The data for this study were collected from a selected population of 345 Alabama teachers. The surveys were provided to 136 teachers in six Torchbearer schools and to 209 teachers in six non-Torchbearer schools. The return rate from the Torchbearer schools was 115 teachers representing 83.94% of the Torchbearer population and from the non-Torchbearer schools were 86 teachers representing 46.70% of the non-Torchbearer population. The Torchbearer responses represented 57 % of the sample and the non-Torchbearer responses represented 43% of the sample.

Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data for this study. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, means, and standard deviations. The inferential statistics included Independent Samples t-tests, ANOVA, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, and Eta Squared. The alpha level for all statistical tests was preset at .05. The Levene Test of Homogeneity of Variance reported no significant results at neither the individual ($p = .460$), the leader ($p = .770$), nor the organizational ($p = .766$) levels for variables in this study. This supports the assumption of homogenous variances. The Eta Squared test was used to rule out chance as an explanation for the results. The test allowed for the observation of estimates of effects of the variables of interest and to rule out no effect. Although measures of strength association of variables may be considered biased with a small sample size, the eta squared results in this study echoed the ANOVA findings in that there were medium to large effects in Integrity, Individual and Collective Responsibility, Decentralization, and Reflection and Evaluation.

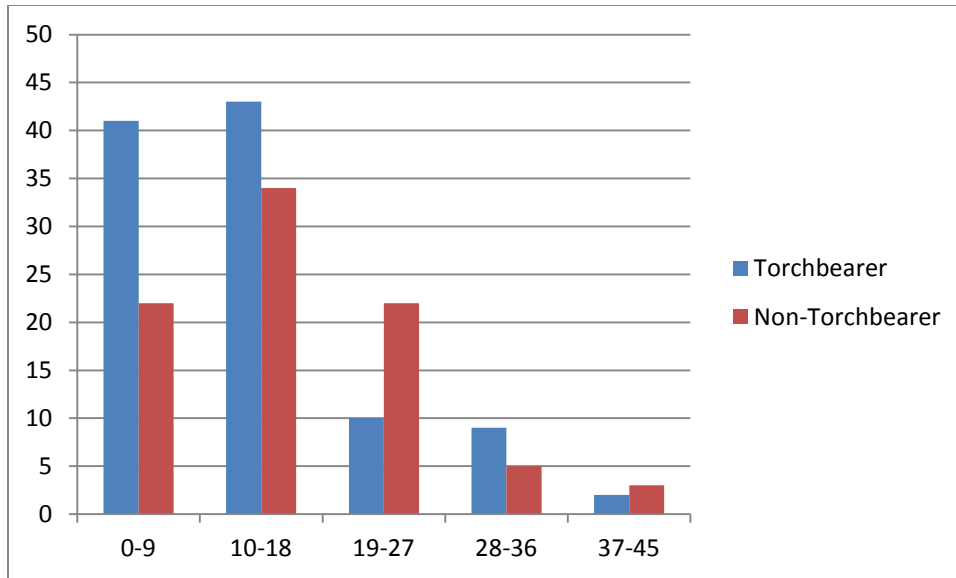
Table 3 reports the number of respondents by school type and mean years of experience. The number responding to the item from Torchbearer schools was ($f = 106$) and from non-Torchbearer was ($f = 83$). The data revealed significant variance in the number of years of teaching experience of teachers in Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools. The data revealed the mean years of experience for teachers in Torchbearer schools ($M = 13.05$) and the standard deviation to be ($SD = 8.80$). This is less than the overall mean of the sample ($M = 13.80$) and of the standard deviation ($SD = 8.74$). The mean years of experience for teachers in non-Torchbearer schools ($M = 14.75$) and the standard deviation ($SD = 8.62$) in comparison to the overall mean of 13.80 and the standard deviation of 8.74.

Table 3

Years of Experience of Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (f = 106) and Teachers in High-poverty, Lower- Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (f = 83)

School Type	<i>N</i>	<i>f</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range
Torchbearer	115	106	13.0519	8.80258	39.00
Non Torchbearer	86	83	14.7470	8.61627	45.00
Overall	201	189	13.7963	8.73895	45.00

Figure 2 shows a trend in years of experience. Torchbearer schools tended to have a greater number of early career professionals than the non-Torchbearer schools. In the non-Torchbearer schools, there were a greater number of the mid and late career teachers. The exception appeared in the 28 to 36 year range. Five of the six Torchbearer schools had teachers in the 28–36 years experience range. Three Torchbearer schools had one teacher in this range, and two Torchbearer schools had three teachers in this range. In the non-Torchbearer schools two schools had one teacher each in the 28–36 year range and one school had three teachers in this range. Several teachers chose not to disclose years of experience.



Graph compares Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer teachers' years of experience.

Y – Axis = number of teachers

X- Axis = Years of experience

Figure 2. Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation)

Teachers' years of experience ranged from one year to 45 years of experience. The mean years of experience is 13.79 years ($M = 13.79$ with a standard deviation of 8.73 ($SD = 8.73$)).

Figure 3 compares Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer teachers' years of experience for teachers with 10 or fewer years of professional teaching experience. The data indicated that in Torchbearer schools, 22 teachers had five or fewer years of experience and in the non-Torchbearer schools only 10 teachers had five or fewer years of experience. Forty-seven of 106 Torchbearer School respondents indicated they had 10 or fewer years of teaching experience (40.56%). Thirty-one of 83 non-Torchbearer respondents indicated they had 10 or fewer years of experience (37.40%). The data also revealed that 18 of the 106 Torchbearer respondents (16.98%) had more than 20 years of teaching experience and 20 of the 83 non-Torchbearer

respondents (24.22%) had more than 20 years of experience. The data on years of experience by school type revealed significance in the measures of association shown in Table 4.

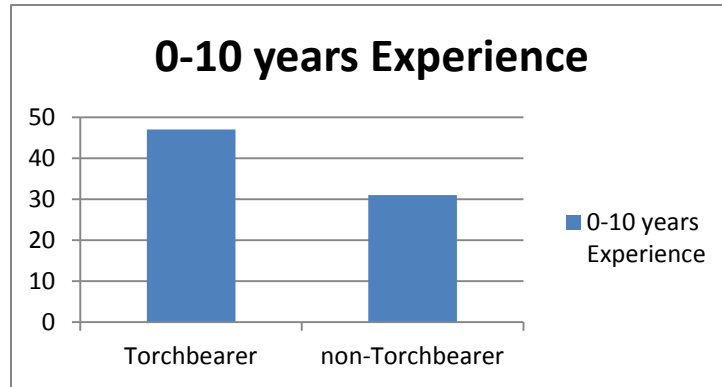


Figure 3. Comparison of Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer teachers' early career years of experience

Table 4

Measures of Association

	Eta	Eta Squared
DemComMean * School Type	.261	.068
Yrs. of Experience * School Type	.003	.000

Democratic Principles

The 10 democratic principles used in this study were: Purpose and vision; Integrity; Accountability, Choice, Individual and Collective, Decentralization, Transparency, Dialogue and Listening; Fairness and Dignity; and Reflection and Evaluation. Table 5 displays the comparison of teachers in Torchbearer schools to teachers in non-Torchbearer schools as to perceptions of the practice of each of the democratic principles. Teachers in Torchbearer schools scored the

practice of each of the democratic principles higher than teachers in non-Torchbearer schools. Both Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer teachers scored the practice of Integrity highest and Decentralization lowest. These trends will be described and discussed through the research questions that guided this study.

Table 5

Comparison of the Number of Respondents from Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer Schools and the Mean Scores for each Democratic Principle

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Purpose and Vision	Torchbearer	115	5.3493	.89507	.08347
	Non-Torchbearer	86	4.8837	.81291	.08766
Integrity	Torchbearer	115	5.5304	.82940	.07734
	Non-Torchbearer	86	5.1938	.86389	.09316
Accountability	Torchbearer	115	5.4980	.74579	.06955
	Non-Torchbearer	86	5.1628	.75740	.08167
Choice	Torchbearer	115	5.1014	1.08253	.10095
	Non-Torchbearer	86	4.7481	1.01741	.10971
Individual and Collective	Torchbearer	115	5.1339	1.10714	.10324
	Non-Torchbearer	86	4.5488	.93416	.10073
Decentralization	Torchbearer	115	4.8591	1.01220	.09439
	Non-Torchbearer	86	4.1808	1.04381	.11256

(table continues)

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Transparency	Torchbearer	111	5.1982	1.06494	.10108
	Non-Torchbearer	86	4.8682	1.00363	.10822
Dialogue and Listening	Torchbearer	111	5.0841	1.11959	.10627
	Non-Torchbearer	86	4.6124	1.01860	.10984
Fairness and Dignity	Torchbearer	111	5.3363	.99747	.09468
	Non-Torchbearer	86	5.0698	.82781	.08927
Reflection and Evaluation	Torchbearer	111	5.2635	1.05412	.10005
	Non-Torchbearer	86	4.7539	1.03065	.11114

Research Questions

There were four research questions in this study. Research questions one through three were addressed through quantitative research and research question four was addressed through the qualitative study. The following sections will address each of the three quantitative research questions, respectively. The quantitative data are arranged in tables and discussed in the narrative.

Research Question 1: To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?

The data in Table 6 present the perceptions of teachers in Torchbearer schools in relation to the individual teacher, the principal as leader, and the organizational systems and processes. On a scale of one to six, the data revealed a mean score for the individual teacher of $M = 5.32$.

The mean score for the principal is $M = 5.19$ and the mean score for the organizational systems and processes is $M = 5.17$.

Table 6

Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) Perception of practice of Democratic Principles at the Individual, Principal, and Organizational Levels (n = 115)

Torchbearer Schools	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Individual	5.3184	.76916	.07172
Principal (Leader)	5.1958	.98320	.09168
Organizational (Systems and Processes)	5.1714	.91363	.08520

Research Question 2: To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, lower-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?

Table 7 presents the data for teachers in non-Torchbearer schools in relation to the perceptions of teachers regarding the practice of democratic principles at the individual teacher, the principal, and the organizational levels. On a scale of one to six, the mean score for the individual teacher was $M = 4.84$. The mean score for the principal (leader) was $M = 4.80$ and the mean score for the organization was $M = 4.66$.

Table 7

Teachers in High-poverty, Lower-Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) Perception of Practice of Democratic Principles at the Individual, Principal, and Organizational Levels (n = 86)

Non-Torchbearer	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	Minimum	Maximum
Individual	4.8498	.76971	.08300	2.17	6.00
Principal (Leader)	4.7997	.88343	.09526	2.00	6.00
Organizational (Systems and Processes)	4.6571	.84887	.09154	2.55	6.00

Research Question 3: To what extent do teachers' perceptions of their principals' implementations of democratic principles differ in high and lower- performing high-poverty schools as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?

Table 8 arranges the descriptive statistics data for teacher in Torchbearer schools and teachers in non-Torchbearer schools. In addition to mean scores, it displays the standard deviation and Standard Error. In comparing the mean scores of the teachers in Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools, the largest standard deviation was in the perception of the leader for Teachers in Torchbearer schools (SD = .98) and non-Torchbearer schools (SD = .88). On a scale of one to six, the mean score for Torchbearer teachers' perceptions of the school leaders' practice of democratic principles was $M = 5.20$ and the mean score for non-Torchbearer teachers' perception of the leaders' practice of democratic principles was $M = 4.80$.

Table 8

Comparison of Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (N = 115)

and Teachers in High-poverty, Lower- Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (N = 86)

Perception of Practice of Democratic Principles at the Individual, Principal, and Organizational Levels

	<i>n</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	Minimum	Maximum
Individual						
Torchbearer	115	5.3184	.76916	.07172	1.92	6.00
Non-Torchbearer	86	4.8498	.76971	.08300	2.17	6.00
Principal (Leader)						
Torchbearer	115	5.1958	.98320	.09168	1.71	6.00
Non-Torchbearer	86	4.7997	.88343	.09526	2.00	6.00
Organizational						
Torchbearer	115	5.1714	.91363	.08520	1.73	6.00
Non-Torchbearer	86	4.6571	.84887	.09154	2.55	6.00

The between groups data (Table 9) revealed significance in all 10 democratic principles with the greatest variances in purpose and vision, individual and collective, decentralization and Reflection and Evaluation. In purpose and vision, individual and collective, and decentralization $p < .001$ and in reflection $p = .001$. The least difference appeared in fairness and dignity ($p = .047$.) These results verify what research says regarding democratic schools fostering student outcomes.

Table 9

Between Groups Comparison of Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (n = 115) and Teachers in High-poverty, Lower- Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (n = 86) Perception of practice of Democratic Principles at the Individual, Principal, and Organizational Levels

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Individual	10.803	1	10.803	18.250	.000
Leader	7.723	1	7.723	8.706	.004
Organizational	13.015	1	13.015	16.560	.000

Table 10 presents a comparison of Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer teachers' perceptions of the practice of 10 democratic principles in their respective schools. The data revealed a significant relationship between groups in each principle at a variety of levels. Table 10 shows the principles with significance and Table 11 shows the items with no significance.

Table 10

Significant Variances revealed in Comparison of Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (n = 115) and Teachers in High-poverty, Lower- Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (n = 86) Perception of Practice of 10 Democratic Principles

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Purpose and Vision1 *	12.648	1	12.648	12.986	.000
Purpose and Vision2 * *	8.665	1	8.665	7.373	.007
Purpose and Vision3 * **	10.567	1	10.567	11.734	.001
Integrity2 * *	6.266	1	6.266	5.219	.023
Integrity3 * **	12.483	1	12.483	13.300	.000
Accountability2 *	3.238	1	3.238	5.252	.023
Accountability4 * *	8.556	1	8.556	7.210	.008
Accountability5 * **	13.327	1	13.327	10.799	.001
Choice1 *	8.844	1	8.844	7.096	.008
Choice3 * **	4.763	1	4.763	3.789	.053
Individual and Collective1 *	35.885	1	35.885	6.813	.010
Individual and Collective2 * *	5.106	1	5.106	3.886	.050
Individual and Collective3 * *	7.329	1	7.329	6.136	.014
Individual and Collective4 * **	23.377	1	23.377	15.145	.000
Individual and Collective5 * **	22.353	1	22.353	17.710	.000
Decentralization1 *	22.481	1	22.481	11.175	.001
Decentralization2 *	31.213	1	31.213	19.244	.000

(table continues)

Table 10 (continued)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>
Decentralization3 * *	19.215	1	19.215	8.532	.004
Decentralization4 * **	33.164	1	33.164	23.289	.000
Decentrallization5 *	13.451	1	13.451	10.371	.001
Transparency3 * **	9.158	1	9.158	9.237	.003
Dialogue and Listening1 *	12.140	1	12.140	10.393	.001
Dialogue and Listening2 * *	9.066	1	9.066	6.331	.013
Dialogue and Listening3 * **	11.257	1	11.257	7.186	.008
Fairness and Dignity1 *	5.620	1	5.620	5.853	.016
Reflection and Evaluation1 *	6.449	1	6.449	6.644	.011
Reflection and Evaluation2 * *	19.207	1	19.207	12.894	.000
Reflection and Evaluation3 * *	15.553	1	15.553	10.831	.001
Reflection and Evaluation4 * **	10.379	1	10.379	7.778	.006

*Individual

**Leader

***Organizational

Table 11

Non-Significant Variances revealed in Comparison of Teachers in High-poverty, High-performing Schools (Torchbearer) (n = 115) and Teachers in High-poverty, Lower- Performing Schools (Non-Torchbearer) (n = 86) Perception of Practice of 10 Democratic Principles

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Integrity1 *	1.413	1	1.413	2.047	.154
Accountability1 *	1.822	1	1.822	3.550	.061
Accountability3 * *	3.718	1	3.718	3.319	.070
Choice2 * *	5.200	1	5.200	3.728	.055
Transparency1 *	3.213	1	3.213	2.062	.153
Transparency2 * *	4.295	1	4.295	2.471	.118
Fairness and Dignity2 * *	1.229	1	1.229	1.129	.289
Fairness and Dignity3 * **	4.359	1	4.359	3.430	.066

*Individual

**Leader

***Organizational

There was significant difference between groups in choice and in Fairness and Dignity at the individual level. The democratic principle of choice refers to individuals having the opportunity to make choices about what directly affects them, their work and learning. Choice empowers members and motivates them toward more committed, more substantive participation. By providing appropriate choices for stakeholders, leaders allow individuals to align personal skills and interests to the work, thus facilitating commitment and learning throughout the overall

community (Kensler, 2008; Senge, 1990). Recognizing and valuing each individual's worth and dignity is a basic and essential characteristic of a democracy (Gross & Shapiro, 2005; Kensler, 2008; Starratt, 2004).

There was significance between groups in recognizing individual and collective contributions. The individual contributions that a member makes to the organization are valuable and should be recognized. Recognizing accomplishments of individuals and of the collective group leads to the development of community and of cooperation. When teachers are empowered to take risks and to make choices for their students and for themselves, the outcomes can be rewarding, especially when they are supported by organizational systems that promote, encourage and practice collaboration (Marzano et al., 2005).

There was significant difference between groups in integrity at the administrator and organizational levels. The integrity of school and district leaders makes a difference to stakeholders and influences the culture and climate of a school community Blasé & Blasé (2001). Both individual and collective integrity are essential characteristics of a democratic community Blasé et al. (1995). For teachers and stakeholders to see the democratic principle of integrity in action, the leaders and individuals must be committed to ethical decision-making and follow through. They must choose to do what is right for the school community and to do what they say they are going to do (Kensler, 2008).

There was significant difference between groups in transparency at the organizational level. Organizations and their leaders are transparent when they are open and share information freely and responsibly. Teachers, students and parents tend not to trust leaders who are not open and do not share valuable information that they can use and that they need in order to complete tasks and to do their jobs effectively.

There was significant difference between groups in purpose and vision, decentralization, dialogue and listening, accountability, and reflection and evaluation, at the individual, administrator, and organizational levels. The data revealed that these differences occurred throughout the school community. The democratic principles of purpose and vision, dialogue and listening, accountability and reflection and evaluation are crucial throughout any organization. Every member of the organization must know and understand why the organization exists. Not only must they know, but they should participate in the development of the vision so that they have a stake in and a commitment to carrying out that vision. Visions developed from outside, or sent from the top-down are seen as forced and are not generally internalized, endorsed or carried out by the membership. Democratic leadership is characterized by the distribution and sharing of power and participation and collaboration between and among stakeholders. Educational reform movements such as school restructuring and site-based management highlighted the need for decentralization.

Kensler (2008) noted that research on the effects of efforts to decentralize was inconclusive and not all efforts to share power resulted in improved learning outcomes for students, but the key to success was found in building the capacity of all school stakeholders for their effective participation and contributions. Effective communication is another key element in any successful organization. Participants in organizations that practice the democratic principle of dialogue and listening have a voice and they welcome and hear what others have to say. Dialogue and listening promote substantive communications that bring out meaning and greater connections. Leaders and members in practicing democratic communities work to foster effective communications that can be used in purposeful and meaningful ways. It encourages

not only opportunities for stakeholder input, but opportunities for stakeholders to develop and practice skills for effective participation in the dialogue (Kensler, 2008).

In recent years, accountability has become a buzzword, frequently used jargon, in educational discussions. The most recent, sterner measures of accountability have caused major debates around how and why schools should be held accountable.

Qualitative Data Analysis and the Open-Ended Survey Responses

In addition to the quantitative data collected, this study sought to understand the experiences of teachers in high-poverty school settings to gain a clearer and deeper understanding of how teachers perceived the implementation of the democratic principles. The narrative part of the survey for both Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer teachers contained two open-ended questions. Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer teachers were sampled to determine what significant differences emerged in teachers' perceptions regarding the building administrators' practice of democratic community.

The open-ended responses were analyzed using a content analysis framework, a scientific, research technique which allowed for replicable and valid inferences from the written statements of teachers. These statements were used to gain deeper insights and to increase understanding of the results found in the quantitative data from the survey (Krippendorff, 2004). The responses were reviewed noting similarities and differences between the comments of teachers from Torchbearer schools and comments from teachers from Non-Torchbearer schools. The two questions were reviewed for the number of responses, percentages of positive and negative responses and the themes which emerged from the content analysis.

The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method looking for similarities and dissimilarities while compiling responses and organizing the responses by themes that

emerged (Patton, 1990). Each of the responses was hand-coded by the researcher into categories. Categories were created when the researcher organized and clustered the data under the 10 Worldblu Principles of Organizational Democracy. Patton (1990) referred to two key sources in the organization of data: the questions that were generated during the conceptual phase of the study and the analysis, insights, and interpretations that emerged through data collection (p. 378). Patton described this procedure as the creative process of discovering patterns themes and categories that captured the primary meaning of the data (Patton, 1990, p. 406). Words, phrases, or patterns may have stood out, which prompted more questions to determine the response's relevance to the study.

The researcher counted the responses from teachers at each school type and grouped the comments by emergent themes and sought to determine their relationship to the democratic leadership principles. The majority of evidences provided seem to fit the principles of dialogue and listening, and fairness and dignity, individual and collective choice, integrity, decentralization, and reflection and evaluation. The quantitative data revealed significant difference between groups in purpose and vision, decentralization, dialogue and listening, reflection and evaluation, and in accountability at the individual, administrator, and organizational levels. The open-ended questions sought evidences that the school administrator values participation in the decisions affecting student outcomes.

The patterns showed a high degree of commonality and few significant differences among the Torchbearer and the non-Torchbearer teacher respondents. The most powerful remarks are cited in the narrative to give voice to the teacher respondents. The statements were selected based on the importance of providing support to the democratic principles. Both positive and negative themes emerged.

Research Question 4: What do teachers perceive as tangible evidences that democratic community exists or does not exist in the Torchbearer Schools and non-Torchbearer Schools?

There are some tangible practices that teachers perceive as evidences of democratic community in their schools. Of the 115 Torchbearer respondents 70 (68.69%) provided evidences regarding the practice of democratic community. Of the 86 non-torchbearer respondents, 53 (61.63%) provided written comments regarding evidences that principals value or do not value stakeholder input. Both Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer respondents identified progress reports, surveys, newsletters, and conferences as best evidences that school administrators valued stakeholder input. Although limited in scope, these methods of communication are perceived by teachers as being evidence that school leaders provide opportunities for conversations that are engaging and that support teaching and learning. Teachers in Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools provided responses indicating that principals do value stakeholder input. There were few evidences that school administrators do not value stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes, but there were a few comments in this area that revealed areas of concern by teachers. Seventy Torchbearer teachers of the 115 survey respondents made comments regarding the school administrator valuing stakeholder input. Of the 70 respondents, 68 responded positively that the school principal does value stakeholder input. Ten of those who responded positively also provided at least one negative response in answer to the question that asked for evidences that the principal does not value stakeholder input. These 10 teachers were from the same school. Two additional Torchbearer teachers gave negative comments. One was from another school and one was from the same Torchbearer school as the 10. Since these comments came primarily from one school,

it would not be appropriate to generalize the comments as being characteristic of Torchbearer Schools.

Of the 86 non-Torchbearer survey respondents, 53 provided comments regarding the principals valuing or not valuing stakeholder input. Forty-seven teachers gave positive comments and three teachers gave negative comments. Four teachers gave one positive and one negative comment. The remarks indicating that the principals do not value stakeholder input came from four schools, but the participants were few at each site. Two schools had one negative comment, one school had two, and one school had three comments.

Purpose and Vision: Teachers identified their purposes and goals in terms related to student learning and student outcomes. They described their principals as individuals who cared about the children at school and in the community. The teachers felt that the principals in both settings valued stakeholders and families as members of the school community and saw their collective goal as helping students to learn and to succeed. One Torchbearer teacher wrote, “Our principal makes sure that parents are involved at school. She works/collaborates with the school’s parent liaison to provide beneficial parental workshops. The church...is our partner in education. They are very involved in the school. They ...provide school supplies for the children...”

Dialogue and Listening: Teachers indicated that their school administrators engage in conversations that involve students, parents, teachers and other stakeholders. Respondents used the term open-door or open to ideas six times in the Torchbearer comments and once in the non-Torchbearer remarks. Although these respondents noted being able to talk freely, they provided no examples in this study that their ideas are valued except by making the statements that ideas are welcomed. One teacher wrote that the principal has implemented changes based on new and

innovative ideas that were presented. Teachers wrote that the administrators are open to ideas; they send out surveys; and they host meetings and conferences. These forms of communication were provided more than 50 times by Torchbearer teachers and at least 25 times by non-Torchbearer teachers. Torchbearer teachers wrote comments regarding the school administrators' asking for "input from everyone involved" and stakeholders are "key members of school committees." The open door policies described might lead one to assume that there is also open dialogue. Responses from non-Torchbearer teachers were similar in that school administrators in these schools are open to stakeholder input, but few offered concrete evidences of communication that reflected a genuine connection between stakeholders and administrators. Statements such as: "Our school values stakeholder's participation and encourages it" is a restatement of the survey item. This response offered no example of how the participation is encouraged. Other examples of vague responses included the comment, "Our school has committees made up of teachers, parents, and administrators. These committees make decisions and changes for our school."

Decentralization: A critical characteristic of democracy is the right of the people to participate in decision-making. Power is decentralized when power is distributed among stakeholders, and training and support are provided for effective participation. Decentralization proved to be an issue in both the Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer programs. Teachers in Torchbearer schools only mentioned professional development (PD) five times and in-service training once. Non-Torchbearer teachers mentioned professional development opportunities one time as evidence of capacity building efforts in their schools. A Torchbearer teacher added that "the administrator makes decisions on what is being taught." Stakeholders are not involved and

when they are, “it is a select few that help make decisions. This might suggest there “still exists an in-group, out-group mentality. Other comments included:

“Have few opportunities to be a part in the decisions that affect me in the role I hold at the school.”

“We seem to only use the stakeholders on an as needed basis...” implying that the stakeholders are not active members of the school community.

Teachers in the non-Torchbearer schools addressed the issue of cliques. These cliques are indicative of in-group, out-group members. Torchbearer teachers who did not feel that their input was valued qualified their responses with comments such as:

“The administrator focuses primarily on test scores, regardless of outside input.”

“Many times programs and ideas are not considered because they are too costly.”

“The school really isn’t open to change, especially if new programs are costly...”

Focus on test scores and finances indicate that there may be problems beyond the principal’s control, but as Lindahl (n.d.) found in the Take 20 study, some schools and their personnel have had some success in getting teachers involved in limited decision making, but “have not fully embraced and implemented the concept for other important educational decision making and planning processes” (p. 5)

Fairness and Dignity: The quantitative data revealed a significant difference between groups in Fairness and Dignity at the individual level. Survey respondents from non-Torchbearer schools identified problems with difficulties in the principle. Two respondents mentioned cliques. One teacher wrote “Clique of teacher friends/principal; evident in Facebook posts. Those friends have preselected classes, additional aides, student cadet helpers, etc.)”. Another wrote “Our administrator is cliquish, distant and rarely involved in our day-to-day

activities. We go days without her presence or input. We see action only after small problems have grown into a full crisis!” Although numerous respondents communicated that there is dialogue, the data further revealed that “The administrator does not value stakeholder participation in decision that affect student outcomes because there are not conversations [concern] about ...student outcomes other than information...sent from central office.” Another wrote, “I do not feel as a stakeholder that my suggestions have been heard or ...taken into consideration.

Individual and Collective: Although the quantitative data revealed a significant difference between groups in the Individual and Collective principle, the respondents from Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools identified problems in this area. Torchbearer teachers wrote “I feel that [the] administration is concerned about only test scores. Another echoed this sentiment and wrote “Our administrator only cares about the scores on the almighty test.” Still another added that the administration focuses primarily on test scores,” while another chided that the school’s leaders are not always open to change...” In the non-Torchbearer schools one teacher wrote any success experienced at their school is because of the “dedication of true teachers and not those folks that happen to work in a school.” This suggested that the non-Torchbearer teachers gave little credit for learning to school leadership.

Accountability: One Torchbearer teacher wrote, “Our principal always makes decisions that are in the best interest of the students. She respects all employees, yet, sets high expectations.” This statement encompassed fairness and dignity as well as purpose and vision at this one school.

Transparency: In the transparent environment, the leader has the duty to ensure that information is frequently, responsibly, and openly shared. This sharing of information must be

consistent so that expectations are clear and progress is monitored. The quantitative data revealed a significant difference between groups in transparency at the organizational level. Some teachers saw transparency in that the administration updates everyone on what is “coming down from central office... [and that the faculty [has] a chance to express how best to go about these changes.”

Choice: Effective school communities encourage members to make relevant and appropriate choices about what is best for their students. The quantitative data revealed a significant difference between groups in Choice at the individual level. Regarding choice, a Torchbearer teacher wrote “My principal gives me the freedom to try new innovative ideas.” Another said that the school’s administrator “encourages teachers to take chances and individualize their instruction. She has offered to let teachers team-teach, and she has offered to come into their classes to see how they are taking risks and straying from the beaten path. She wants teachers to have a say in how they present material and that, in turn, has an effect on student performance.” Nevertheless, one Torchbearer teacher wrote, “I have few opportunities to be a part in the decisions that affect me in the role I hold at the school.” One non-Torchbearer teacher wrote, “The administrator does not value stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes because there are not conversations about her concern about student outcomes other than information that is sent from central office. This is information that has to be discussed. I don’t see where she is personally concerned and is mildly concerned professionally.”

Integrity: One Torchbearer summed it by praising the “High morale and a safe working environment ... embraced by outgoing principal and ... continued by our present principal. At

this school, the administrator believes in all children. Although the students face many challenges, we do not accept excuses.

We celebrate together and we cry together. It's about accepting people for who they are, and building a culture that nurtures the needs of all children, and often this includes the parents. Our goal is to bind the students together with a common thread of belonging, and then go from there. Once the relationship between school and home is cemented with trust, the learning process begins. We stress in our professional learning communities a need to respect the school populations' culture. This teacher recognized that to maintain high morale through leadership transition took discipline on the part of all involved. Stakeholders were committed to making decisions in the best interest of the learning community.

Reflection and Evaluation: A predominant theme in the survey responses was the importance of data and data meetings. Torchbearer teachers used data at least 15 times in response to stakeholder input. Parents and teachers had weekly or quarterly data meetings to discuss student outcomes and to make decisions that affect student achievement. Non-Torchbearer teachers noted data meetings and analysis five times. Understanding that meeting to be meeting is not sufficient. Feedback must be relevant and useful. One non-Torchbearer teacher wrote that the principal is in constant contact with stakeholders, providing feedback; but another wrote that the administrator at that site is "highly lacking in feedback."

Conclusion

This chapter reported the results and analyses of the survey responses. The research questions relative to the perceptions of teachers in Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools of the ways in which principals demonstrate that they value or do not value teacher input. Findings indicated that teachers in Torchbearer Schools perceive their principals as implementing

democratic principles at significantly higher levels than teachers in Non-Torchbearer Schools.

These findings have implications for leadership practice in high-poverty schools, for the training and development of principals and for the future research that should be conducted to expand the field's understanding of the findings and to further reveal its meaning. Chapter 5 discusses these issues.

CHAPTER FIVE. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Demographics

This study examined the perceptions of teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools called Torchbearer schools, and high-poverty, lower-performing non-Torchbearer schools. The study included responses from a stratified random sample of teachers from six Torchbearer schools that have shown sustainability by achieving Torchbearer status two or more years and from six non-Torchbearer schools.

The population for this study was teachers in high-poverty schools. They were selected because some high-poverty schools in Alabama have been successful in moving student achievement outcomes in a positive direction while other schools have not been successful. The researcher wished to explore what might be contributing to these differences.

The data for this study were collected from a selected population of Alabama teachers in Torchbearer and Non-Torchbearer schools. Of the targeted population including 345 teachers, there were 201 respondents. There were 115 teachers responding from the Torchbearer schools and 86 teachers responding from the non-Torchbearer schools. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data for this study. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, means, and standard deviations. The inferential statistics included independent samples t-tests, ANOVA, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, and eta squared.

An adaptation of the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS) was used as the measure of democratic community. Survey respondents gave their perceptions regarding the practice of

democratic community based on 10 democratic principles. Respondents were given the opportunity to further express their beliefs and opinions regarding their school's leadership valuing stakeholders and their participation in the school's functions and decision making processes.

The literature described several common elements that appeared to correlate with student achievement. Although the implementation of principles of democratic community was the main variable in this research study, the researcher included teacher experience because literature indicated that high-poverty, lower-performing schools tend to have less experienced teaching faculty. Data related to teacher experience is reported.

Democratic Principles

The between groups data revealed statistical significance in all 10 democratic principles of Purpose and Vision; Transparency; Dialogue and Listening; Fairness and Dignity; Accountability; Individual and Collective; Choice; Integrity; Decentralization; and Reflection and Evaluation. Teachers in Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools rated their schools' practice of integrity highest and the practice of decentralization was rated lowest.

Each of the 10 democratic principles has research-based evidences of practice in effective schools:

Purpose and Vision: Members of the school community understand why they exist and individuals in the school community have a sense of purpose and direction. Stakeholders participate in the development of a shared vision and collaboratively define the mission and identify desired goals of the school with a focus on learning.

Dialogue and Listening: School communities should avoid forcing a hierarchical position. Teachers, students, and parents should be able to engage in conversations that bring

about connections and understanding. When administrators say that they have an open door policy, stakeholders should feel free to present new ideas and should see evidence that their ideas and opinions are valued.

Decentralization: A hallmark of democracy is right of the people to participate in decision-making. Power is decentralized when the authoritative stance is put aside, power is distributed among stakeholders, and training and support are provided for effective participation.

Fairness and Dignity: This principle ensures that leaders treat members fairly and respectfully. In the school environment, teachers, staff, students, and parents receive the resources and support required to perform effectively and produce quality work.

Individual and Collective: The importance of reaching collective goals is important and in effective school each member understands the value of individual contributions and the responsibility of each participant to work to achieve those goals.

Accountability: All stakeholders have individual and collective responsibility for the success of the organization. Each individual is responsible to each other and to the community. The organization should have high expectations for members at all levels of the organization and each participant should receive fair and positive reinforcement.

Transparency: In the transparent environment, the leader has the duty to ensure that information is frequently, responsibly, and openly shared. This sharing of information must be consistent so that expectations are clear and progress is monitored.

Choice: Effective communities encourage each member to exercise individual rights to choose from diverse possibilities that are relevant to their personal interests. Teachers are able to make decisions as to what is best for their students.

Integrity: Doing the right thing takes discipline. Stakeholders should have the freedom to make ethical and moral decisions. Each participant should practice doing what they have agreed to do and keep the best interest of the group in mind.

Reflection and Evaluation: This is a commitment to authentic and continuous feedback with a willingness to learn and grow from experiences. Feedback should be regular and should be relevant.

Results

This study revealed significant differences between Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer practices in choice and in fairness and dignity at the individual level. There was significance between groups in recognizing individual and collective contributions. The study revealed significant differences between groups in transparency at the organizational level. At both principal and the organizational levels, the study revealed significant differences between groups in integrity. There was significant difference between groups in purpose and vision, decentralization, dialogue and listening, reflection and evaluation, and in accountability at the individual, administrator, and organizational levels.

The results of this study are presented following a framework based on the study's research questions. The study explored teachers' perception as to what extent teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles and to what extent teachers in high-poverty, lower-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)? It further sought to determine to what extent teachers' perceptions of their principals' implementations of democratic principles differed in the high and lower-performing high-poverty schools?

Research Question 1. To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?

Teachers in Torchbearer Schools self-reported the practice of democratic principles with mean scores above five on a one to six scale in relation to the individual teacher, the principal as leader, and the organizational systems and processes. The data revealed a mean score for the individual teacher of $M = 5.32$ on a Likert Scale rating of one to six. The mean score for the principal is $M = 5.19$ and the mean score for the organizational systems and processes is $M = 5.17$.

Research Question 2. To what extent do teachers in high-poverty, lower-performing schools report the practice of democratic principles at the individual, principal, and organizational levels as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?

On a Likert scale rating of one to six, teachers in non-Torchbearer Schools self-reported mean scores of less than five in the practice of democratic principles at all three levels: the individual, principal, and organizational. The mean score for the individual teacher was $M = 4.84$. The mean score for the principal (leader) was $M = 4.80$ and the mean score for the organization was $M = 4.66$.

Research Question 3. To what extent do teachers' perceptions of their principals' implementations of democratic principles differ in high and lower- performing high-poverty schools as measured by the WorldBlu School Survey (WBSS)?

There is significant variance between the implementation of democratic principles and the type of school. Teachers from Torchbearer schools had a higher mean on all three areas of democratic community. At the individual teacher level, principal level and organizational level,

Torchbearer teachers self-reported a higher mean in all three areas. In comparison, on the individual teacher level, the mean for Torchbearer schools was $M = 5.3184$ as opposed to $M = 4.8498$ for the non-Torchbearer schools. On the principal level the mean for Torchbearer schools was $M = 5.1958$ as opposed to $M = 4.7997$ for the non-Torchbearer schools. On the organizational level the mean for Torchbearer schools was $M = 5.1714$ as opposed to $M = 4.6571$ for the non-Torchbearer schools.

The practice of the 10 democratic principles seems to have a positive relationship with the higher performing Torchbearer schools. Teachers in Torchbearer schools were more positive about democratic community than were their counterparts from non-Torchbearer schools. This indicates that Torchbearer schools are stronger in principles of democratic community than are those teachers from lower- performing, high-poverty schools.

Teachers in Torchbearer and in non-Torchbearer schools self-reported on the practice of the 10 democratic principles in their respective schools. The current study provides results at the individual teacher level, the administrator or principal level, and at the organizational level. This study revealed a significant relationship between groups in each principle at a variety of levels, but there is some significant difference between groups in purpose and vision, decentralization, dialogue and listening, reflection and evaluation, and in accountability at all three levels: the individual, administrator, and organizational.

At the individual level there is significant difference in purpose and vision, choice, individual and collective, decentralization, dialogue and listening, fairness and dignity, and reflection and evaluation. There was no significant variance in the self-reporting at the individual level in integrity and transparency. In accountability, there was significance in one item and no significance in a second item at the individual level. There was no significant

difference in the response to understanding **to whom** teachers are responsible, but there was significant difference in response clearly understanding **for what** teachers are responsible.

At the administrator level, there is significant difference in purpose and vision, integrity, decentralization, dialogue and listening, individual and collective and reflection and evaluation. There was no significant difference in choice, transparency, nor fairness and dignity. Conversely, there was significant difference in one area of accountability and no significant difference in one area of accountability. Teachers reported that school administrators appropriately hold *themselves* accountable for achieving the school's objectives, but there was significant difference between schools when asked if the school's administrators hold *others* accountable for achieving the school's objectives.

In this study, one teacher noted that systems and processes are in place for the practice of each of these principles, but that few are being implemented. The study found significant difference at the organizational level in purpose and vision, integrity, accountability, choice, individual and collective, decentralization, transparency, dialogue and listening, and reflection and evaluation, validating her concerns. There was no significant difference at the organizational level in fairness and dignity.

Research Question 4: What do teachers perceive as tangible evidences that democratic community exists or does not exist in the Torchbearer Schools and non-Torchbearer Schools?

There is some degree of evidence that school administrators in Torchbearer Schools and in non-Torchbearer Schools value stakeholder participation that effect student outcomes. Of the 115 Torchbearer respondents 78 (67.83%) responded positively and of the 86 non-torchbearer respondents, 46 (53.48) responded positively. Both Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer

respondents identified minimum evidences of valuing input. They cited progress reports, surveys, newsletters, and conferences as best evidences that school administrators' valued stakeholder input. Although limited in scope, these methods of communication are perceived by teachers as being evidence that school leaders provide opportunities for conversations that are engaging and that support teaching and learning. Teachers in Torchbearer schools provided more positive responses regarding practices of the democratic principles.

The purpose of the open-ended questions was to identify evidences of practice and their outcomes that may account for the success of the Torchbearer schools. Torchbearer teachers wrote comments regarding the school administrators' asking for "input from everyone involved" and stakeholders are "key members of school committees." The open door policies described might lead one to assume that there is also open dialogue. Regarding choice, a teacher wrote "My principal gives me the freedom to try new innovative ideas." Another Torchbearer teacher wrote that the school's administrator "encourages teachers to take chances and individualize their instruction." Some of the teachers saw transparency in that the administration updates everyone on what is "coming down from central office... [and that the faculty [has] a chance to express how best to go about these changes."

Responses from non-Torchbearer teachers were similar in that school administrators in these schools are open to stakeholder input, but few offered concrete evidences of communication that reflected a genuine connection between stakeholders and administrators. Statements such as: "Our school values stakeholder's participation and encourages it" is a restatement of the survey item. This response offered no example of how the participation is encouraged. Other examples of vague responses included the comment, "Our school has

committees made up of teachers, parents, and administrators. These committees make decisions and changes for our school.”

There are some evidences that school administrators do not value stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes, but there were very few comments in this area. Teachers from four non-Torchbearer schools provided negative evidences regarding the lack of administrative concern for stakeholder input; and teachers from two Torchbearer schools provided negative evidences regarding the lack concern for stakeholder input by the administration. Of the 115 Torchbearer participants, 70 wrote responses to the open-ended questions. Although 68 participants responded to question 1 indicating that the leader values stakeholder input, 10 of the 68 also responded to question two indicating a lack of evidence that the principal valued stakeholder input. It is important to note, that these 10 teachers represented one Torchbearer school. Two additional Torchbearer teachers gave negative comments regarding a lack of concern about stakeholder input. Although the quantitative data revealed a significant difference between groups in the Individual and Collective principle, the respondents from both Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools identified problems in this area. Three Torchbearer teachers indicated that the principals are more concerned about test scores than they are people. One Torchbearer teacher wrote “I feel that [the] administration is concerned about only test scores. Another echoed this sentiment and wrote “Our administrator only cares about the scores on the almighty test.” Still another added that the administration focuses primarily on test scores,” while another chided that the school’s leaders are not always open to change...” In the non-Torchbearer schools one teacher wrote any success experienced at their school is because of the “dedication of true teachers and not those folks that happen to work in a school.”

This suggested that the non-Torchbearer teachers gave little credit for learning to school leadership.

Decentralization proved to be an issue in both the Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer programs. A Torchbearer teacher added that “the administrator makes decisions on what is being taught.” Stakeholders are not involved and when they are, “it is a select few that help make decisions. This might suggest there “still exists an in-group, out-group mentality.

Survey respondents from non-Torchbearer schools identified problems with transparency and difficulties with the principle of fairness and dignity. The quantitative data also revealed a significant difference between groups in transparency at the organizational level and in Fairness and Dignity at the individual level. Two non-Torchbearer respondents mentioned cliques. One teacher wrote “Cliques of teacher friends/principal; evident in Facebook posts. Another wrote “Our administrator is cliquish, distant and rarely involved in our day-to-day activities. We go days without her presence or input. We see action only after small problems have grown into a full crisis!” These comments came from one non-Torchbearer school. Although numerous respondents communicated that there is dialogue, the data further revealed that “The administrator [may] not value stakeholder participation in decision that affect student outcomes because there are not conversations [concern] about ...student outcomes other than information...sent from central office.” Another non-Torchbearer teacher wrote, “I do not feel as a stakeholder that my suggestions have been heard or ...taken into consideration. Torchbearer teachers who did not feel that their input was valued qualified their responses with comments that reflected the importance of test scores, financial barriers, or the administration’s unwillingness to change.

Discussion

This study investigated if there were differences among torchbearer and non-torchbearer school principals' practice of democratic principles in the school community. Research indicated that student achievement in Alabama Torchbearer Schools and non-Torchbearer Schools performed differently as indicated on the Alabama reading and math test ARMT. In Alabama, 70 schools have at one time, often more, overcome the obstacles and problems associated with assuring student success in high-poverty schools. The Alabama Leadership Academy in the Alabama State Department of Education launched the Torchbearers program as a way to recognize high-poverty public schools in Alabama that have overcome odds and stand out as high-achievement schools and to share the schools' success strategies with others. The schools that receive the Torchbearer designation are high-poverty, high-performing schools that make academic excellence possible for all students in spite of the economic situations in which they live (Mangum, 2008).

These success stories and others strike back at the "culture of defeatism" experienced by students, professionals, and other stakeholders in high-poverty communities (Carter, 2000, p. 2). Their successes should be celebrated and their strategies for success should be shared and not left as rewards for a select few achievers (Carter, 2000, p. 2).

It is worth mentioning that in the first year of the Torchbearer Program, 13 schools met all criteria. Site visits were made to the schools to determine why Torchbearer Schools were succeeding. The visits revealed that the leaders, though extremely effective, had unique strengths. The education profession requires recognizing that the field of education is as much an art as it is a science (Thacker, 2005). Thacker affirmed, "The Torchbearer Schools excel because they are staffed with administrators and teachers who not only understand the science,

but also embrace the art of teaching” (p. iv). He further noted that it is difficult task to determine how the schools are so successful because “in every situation investigated, the principal gave credit to the faculty and staff for any success; and the faculty adamantly insisted that the support and guidance of the principal made the success possible” (p. iv).

Not only have the requirements become more rigid overtime, but the number of schools reaching the goals has increased substantially. These increases indicate that the stories are being shared and more schools are implementing success strategies. Determining the perceived leadership practices of both Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer principals may provide noteworthy evidence about whether or not principal leadership makes a difference in the success of the students in these schools and whether or not leadership practices are a factor in students achieving at high academic levels.

It is imperative that school district and site administrators recognize teachers’ strengths, provide opportunities for involvement, and encourage teachers to participate in making decisions and choices that affect their work. Recognizing that occasionally radical change must take place, administrators must recognize and address the importance of empowering teachers if a school is going to be successful. When teachers are aware of their programs’ shortcomings, failures, and inequities, they are generally committed to effecting positive change. The work of the faculty, staff and other stakeholders in the Torchbearer schools should be recognized, but they should not be the exception. All students should be in schools where all stakeholders are valued and where hardworking professionals embrace the mantra Education for All. They should recognize the mission of the schools and practice the art as in Thacker’s (2005) research principals in Torchbearer schools credited teachers for their successes; and teachers credited the leadership. From these reciprocal kudos, one might infer that it truly does “take a village,” a teaching and

learning community that is shaped through collaboration and shared vision and supported through professionalism, stakeholder participation, teacher empowerment, school improvement with the focus on student achievement (Bell, 2001; Carter, 2000; Greenlee, 2007; Thacker, 2005).

The rapid attacks of public criticism, accountability policies, and decades of educational reforms has pushed parents and community leaders to need and to want to learn more about what goes on in the schools in local communities (Bogotch, Beachum, Blount, English, & Brooks, 2008). Education is blamed for many of society's ills, but the voices of school leaders and school stakeholders are often missing from the conversations regarding social development. The challenge confronting school leadership is to open the dialogue and to work with and build community support by engaging with and working with teachers, students, parents and the broader community to improve schools (Bogotch et al., 2008).

This research sought to examine schools in high-poverty settings to determine if the practice of democratic principles was related to student achievement outcomes. For this study, high-poverty schools are in two categories, Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools. The researcher used a sample of teachers from Torchbearer schools where students had high academic performance scores and teachers in non-Torchbearer schools where students had low academic performance scores. The goal was to determine if democratic principles were related to positive student learning outcomes. This study sought to examine the differences between Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer teachers' perceptions of democratic community.

The relationship of the income levels of the families historically has indicated that students are at risk of failure because they live in poverty. This expectation of failure supports a self-fulfilling prophecy that children who live in poverty cannot or will not achieve. "A legacy

of low expectations, low standards for teaching and learning, and underachievement for students who find themselves within this economic stratum [of poverty] has become reality” (Alabama Torchbearer Schools, 2008).

High-poverty schools in Alabama have been placed under a microscope through a number of initiatives in the name of school reform. For decades, the call has gone out for educators and schools to close academic achievement gaps. The Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act of 2001, also known as NCLB, mandated that schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) by ensuring that students improve their scores on tests each year. As students and educators crossed over into the 21st Century, the confidence in America’s schools has continued to diminish. A Nation at Risk, Goals 2000, and the most recent No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) have all put education on notice that goals are not being achieved and that there are considerable gaps in academic achievement among various subgroups: male-female, geographical, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic status (SES).

According to Goode (1997) and Weiss (1969), the American myth of success is based on the assumptions that the United States is a land of opportunity for all and that anyone can rise from poor circumstances based on one’s own efforts, and that race, creed, and background are not barriers to success. The results from this study have supported the use of democratic leadership in schools because it has a relationship to positive student learning outcomes and student success. The work of Razik and Swanson (2001) emphasized the collaborative nature of leaders and faculty members in democratic communities and suggested that these type of school organizations can best address the issues of school improvement.

In the 21st Century schools, students are being prepared to live and function in a world far different and more complex than the world that exists today. Researchers have advocated for change in the way we conduct school.

Research supports paying attention to high-performing schools. Lessons can be learned. The Alabama Torchbearer schools give us a unique opportunity to add evidence to what makes even the most difficult, impoverished school successful with its mission. There was evidence that something special occurs in these schools and that it is related to the leader, the teachers and the collective capacity of the organization. Most of these studies describe components of successful schools that are similar to the work on democratic community. For example, DuFour et al. (1998) reminded this researcher that organizational practices shape how an organization's members think, feel and act. These practices illustrate their views, reinforce their interpretation of events, and guide them in suitable conduct. Therefore, if the schools' practices are democratic in nature, the members will think, feel and act in ways to support the democratic community.

Educational leaders are responsible for providing a supportive and collaborative school environment that encourages student performance that foresees student success, and that provides opportunities for teaching and learning to meet those goals. The principal as the school leader must lead change throughout the school community. Structural change not supported by the values and the mission of the leader, and the faculty will fail unless there is commitment, cohesiveness, and stability. This study was grounded also upon an idea of Sarason (1996) that if we want to change and improve the outcomes of schooling, paying attention to the total environment is one of the most important characteristics that a leader can possess. The study highlighted the importance of the work of Reeves (2003) that delineates the characteristics present in schools with the greatest gains. Schools where the school leader is personally engaged

in the activities of schooling that include meeting with stakeholders, reflection and feedback, and allowing time for collaboration.

Many schools have broken the cycle of low achievement in high-poverty settings. A review of the literature on Turnaround schools, specifically high-performing, high-poverty schools, affirmed that the influence of organizational leaders such as the school principal is a key factor in the success of an organization (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Citing a 1977 U. S. Senate Committee Report, Marzano et al. (2005) identified the principal as the most important and the most influential person in the school as he or she “sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, professionalism, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become” (p. 5). This study used as a major premise of the work of Murphy and Meyers (2008) who believed that successful Turnaround schools almost always have good, if not exceptional, principals and that leadership is crucial. Other examples of schools with high-poverty that cultivate, support and nourish academic achievement come from the work of Ragland, Clubine, Constable and Smith (2002). Their concept is that high academic achievement in high-poverty schools is the exception rather than the rule but acknowledges that some schools do succeed at helping students to achieve in spite of socioeconomic conditions. In essence, high-performing high-poverty school evidence is beginning to be linked to important factors such as democratic leadership and democratic community.

Even though we cannot say for sure that democratic community caused the high performance of the Torchbearer students, we can say, as a whole, teachers who work in Torchbearer schools where student performance is high, also reported high in the principles of democratic community. Research shows that principals improve teaching and learning through their influence, teacher empowerment, practice of collaborative decision making, and building

consensus. The concepts of shared and collaborative leadership are grounded in democratic theory and principles. These findings are transferable to the larger global community.

Democratic leadership has been found to be related to positive student outcomes in other parts of the world. Studies in Uganda and in Greece found a positive relationship between democratic leadership and student performance (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Reeves, 2003; Spillane, 2005).

Research has shown that students in high-poverty environments have been less successful than their counterparts from more affluent families. Jensen (2009) noted that the economic divide is not just in the homes of the children and families, but in their schools as well. The high-poverty schools receive less money and often hire less qualified personnel. Among the barriers to success that might exist, one detrimental hindrance to positive student outcomes could be personnel perception of the working environment. Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) found that as the poverty and diversity of students served by a school increase, teachers' perceptions of the contexts in which they work become more negative. These negative perceptions, if allowed to develop, could entrench students in a school culture based on bias that perpetuates stereotyping and low expectations (Gorski, 2008).

At the same time, the present study indicates that this paradigm does not have to be the case (Bell, 2001; Carter, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Thacker et al., 2005). The 10 democratic principles associated with democratic community have a positive relationship with the higher performing Torchbearer schools. Students from high-poverty can succeed as have the students in Torchbearer schools.

Teachers at Torchbearer schools reported significantly higher than their counterparts in non-Torchbearer schools on the practice of democratic principles overall. Torchbearer teachers

felt they were encouraged to find alignment between their purpose and vision, values and schools; they were encouraged to carry out their duties in ethical and moral ways; they understand to whom and for what they are responsible; they are encouraged to responsibly take risks and have the opportunity to make relevant choices and to independently make decisions that affect them and the work that they do. Teachers in Torchbearer schools reported that they feel valued and are acknowledged for their individual contributions. In their freedom to make choices and to take appropriate risks, they are encouraged to try new ideas regardless of their position, title, or rank; and they are generally provided with the necessary information and resources to do their work. The teachers felt respected and a valued part of the educational community. This is not to say that the teachers in non-Torchbearer Schools do not experience the encouragement and the opportunities provided in the Torchbearer Schools, only that the Torchbearer teachers reported higher practices in their schools.

All stakeholders are vital to the success of the school community: teachers, school leaders, district leadership, parents and students. Even when the school is successful as with the Torchbearer schools in this study, groups should be consistently monitoring and evaluating to ensure cooperation and participation from not just the status quo, but healthy participation from everyone who has a stake in the success or failure of the schools' programs (Fullan, 2001). Successful schools acknowledge the value of each member of the community and they don't mind when others provide new and innovative ideas, and make responsible choices that positively affect the school and community. Although this study found that successful schools welcome innovators and risk takers, participants must have the best interest of the group at heart and must work to improve the learning community at large. The creative expertise of innovative

professionals is successful in an environment built not only on respect and trust, but on collaboration and relationships (Fullan, 2001; Kensler, 2008).

With state intervention activities and assistance provided through the collaboration between the State Department (ALSDE) and the professional organization (AEA), schools have improved and the labels of Alert and Caution have been changed to Priority. These schools and the students they serve are our priorities, and as such, must be provided continuous support and professional development of teachers and administrator; and training for parents and community members on effective school involvement.

The data revealed significant difference in the number of years of teaching experience of teachers in Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools. Although both Torchbearer and non-Torchbearer schools have veteran teachers with more than 25 years of experience, the Torchbearer faculties tended to have a greater number of teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience. This finding questions whether a younger teaching staff is more open to adapting to the needs of others specifically stakeholders in high-poverty environments. The implication might suggest that newer teachers might be willing to adjust to change and to the needs of the stakeholder.

Implications for Practice and Further Study

The results of this study could be valuable to the school principals participating in the study and to principals throughout the state and the nation, especially those principals leading in high-poverty, low achieving settings. The dissemination of the information presented here is relevant because the findings reinforce the idea that the principles of democratic community should be integrated into the profession. The higher evidences of the practice of democratic principles in the high-performing schools may provide enough evidence that democratic

leadership style and democratic principles are important in helping students to achieve. This research provides evidence regarding high-poverty students that allows us to look past traditional thought and perceptions. This study focuses on democratic leadership and it says to principals to practice or to be more diligent in the practice of democratic principles. The use of democratic principles creates a culture that values the worth of individuals, provides for greater collaboration and engagement, practices reflection for growth and improvement, and encourages active stakeholder participation. The research clearly indicates that family and community engagement enhances student achievement. The principal can use this study as a resource to begin or to grow family, school, and community programs. Additionally, the dissemination of these findings may prove valuable to schools of education and to district and local leaders as they work toward teacher and principal recruitment and the development and implementation of mentoring, training, and professional development programs.

Pre-service Educators and Education Leaders

This study has implications for educator preparation programs which prepare teachers and education leaders. The use of many of the democratic principles are integral to collaboration, fairness and dignity, shared leadership, teacher empowerment and other characteristics that effectuate achievement in schools. Pre-service educators can be informed of these practices and their relationship to student achievement. This study has implications for education leadership programs in that they can be informed and encouraged to utilize research and best practices for effecting change for school improvement and improved student achievement.

Recruitment of Teachers and Principals

The present study has some implications for practicing administrators in the area of teacher recruitment. One of the unintended outcomes of the research was the years of teaching experience. Torchbearer high-poverty high-performing schools tended to have a larger number of less experienced teachers than the non-Torchbearer schools. The Torchbearer faculties tended to have more teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience. This finding suggested that a younger teaching staff may be more open to adapting to the needs of these stakeholders in high-poverty environments.

In addition there are some important implications for systems when recruiting for administrative positions: Based on what was found is the case, high-poverty schools need teachers and school leaders who can lead using the democratic principles associated with democratic community; schools of education, in-service centers, and professional development agencies could recognize the value of implementing the study and practice of democratic community in their pre-service programming; local districts could find these principles and characteristics valuable in the recruitment of new staff and could be used as a tool in individual schools working toward improvement; and findings suggested that newer teachers might be more receptive to change and meeting the challenge of addressing the needs of stakeholders in high-poverty school communities. It is crucial for school districts to seek principals with leadership characteristics, skills, and practices that focus on student learning and school success (Murphy, et al., 2000).

Mentoring

Programs for school leaders could benefit from building leadership capacity by using successful principals to lead professional development activities. School principals that have

proven successes with improving schools and sustaining school improvement can mentor new and struggling school administrators, utilizing and emphasizing the 10 democratic principles.

Family/Community Stakeholders Training and Professional Development

According to Weiss et al. (n.d.) and the National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, there are decades of research affirming that family and community engagement lead to increased student achievement. The group's priorities for supporting and promoting stakeholder engagement can provide research based policy and practice information for any school looking to strengthen stakeholder relationships. The group's stated priorities could be the focus of stakeholder training and educator professional development. The priorities include: 1) providing a research-based definition and a coherent and comprehensive strategy for partnerships that promise student success; 2) proposing a federal, state, and local infrastructure that elevates family, school, and community engagement as a reform strategy; 3) promoting research and evaluation about programs and practices that promise to improve student learning and developmental outcomes; and 4) improving data systems for family engagement that support accountability and learning.

Stakeholder training and educator professional development opportunities should be made available. Opportunities should focus on recognizing the importance of leader-member exchange where, depending on their relationships with the leader, in-groups/out-groups are developed and may be detrimental to positive community. Understanding that teacher morale has an effect on student outcomes, this will have a bearing on the culture and climate of the school. The results of this study could prove valuable in the development of future leaders and improving and empowering veteran school leaders. Additionally, Professional Learning Units (PLUs) that are approved by the Alabama State Department of Education could include a year-

long study of the application of the 10 democratic principles by professionals holding administrator certification.

Conventional thinking makes one assume that since schools with high-poverty rates have met major challenges in attempts to educate students successfully, they are destined to fail because of their circumstances. Educators have begun to explore how schools with high numbers of students living and attending school in poverty could be as successful in student performance as schools in more affluent communities. Researchers have found that although students who live in poverty experience school differently from more affluent students, these high-poverty students can perform well (Carter, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Kannapel, 2005; Moore, 2010). Education district leadership and school principals, especially those in high-poverty environments, may find this study valuable in recognizing the value of all stakeholders. I believe that what is good for poor students is good for all students, therefore, all school settings could possibly benefit from the findings in this study.

Recommendations for Further Study

High-poverty schools face many barriers. The research of Carter (2000) and Moore (2010) confirmed that effective educators can improve the academic outcomes of students living in poverty and can provide them with the hope and the promise of a brighter future. Therefore, this study reviewed the demographics in relationship to teacher experience. This study did not investigate how many years teachers had been at their particular schools. It did investigate years of experience of the teaching faculty. Experience has been noted and analyzed to determine its role in creating student success in high-poverty schools. In a study conducted by Moore (2010), the principals in non-Torchbearer schools tended to have much less experience than those in Torchbearer schools. This study did not investigate principal experience but teaching faculty

experience. The data in this study is significant in that participating teachers in the high-poverty, high-performing schools in the study tended to have a teaching staff with less experience.

1. Further study should be conducted to explore the role teaching experience plays in the context of high-poverty school settings.
2. Future research might want to study tenure of the principal and teachers at a given school when looking at the effect on student outcomes.
 - a. In this study, there was an expressed concern that dealt with the longevity of school principals and the strides made by a previous administrator who had been moved from the surveyed school.
 - b. This study did not look at years of teacher or principal tenure at the current school or position.
3. State departments of education, as well as district and school level leaders should place a priority on understanding, supporting, and practicing the principles of organizational democracy. Further qualitative study should be conducted to document specific practices and outcomes resulting from those practices.
 - a. Findings suggested that principals who value stakeholders and practice the principles of organizational democracy may have a positive effect on high student outcomes in high-poverty schools.
 - b. Survey respondents reported that the ideas related to the principles are in place, but are not being implemented.
4. Additional research should include a qualitative study with interviews and focus groups to obtain more expansive responses.

- a. The qualitative data was limited and did not provide depth. Future researchers may want to seek deeper, more substantive examples of stakeholder involvement and the outcomes of the involvement.
 - b. Replications of the study should be done in other sections of the country and with different student populations to verify or refute the findings.
5. Further study should take a closer look at the democratic principles with the highest and lowest mean scores in this study. Since there was consensus that integrity had the highest mean score and decentralization had the lowest mean score, one could look more deeply into these principles and their effects on teacher efficacy and student outcomes.

Conclusion

This study, comprised of data from only 12 schools, set up the possibilities for generalizations that are unavoidably limited. The study aimed to explore to what extent the practice of democratic principles exist at the teacher level, the principal level and the organizational level of high-poverty schools. Research has shown that authoritarian forms of leadership are significantly present in schools experiencing serious weaknesses such as in a failing school context where immediate action is required; but schools that are improving offer opportunities for non-traditional leadership that will complement school and community needs. Harris and Chapman (2002) found that principals in their study had leadership approaches aimed at empowering stakeholders and effecting positive change. The emphasis given by these principals' empowering others and their sharing leadership responsibilities reflected leadership that was democratic in nature. This sharing of power was instrumental in their schools' successes.

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APPENDIX A

WORLDBLU SCHOOL SURVEY (WBSS)

Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of relationships and practices in schools. **Your answers are anonymous and confidential.**

Please indicate the extent to which each of the following statements is true or not true about your school, marking on the form provided, from (1) Almost Never to (6) Almost Always, filling the bubbles completely.

1. I am encouraged to find alignment between my purpose, vision, and values and those of the school in which I work.
2. My school's administrators set strategic priorities in order to live our school's values, achieve its vision, and fulfill its purpose.
3. Systems and processes are aligned with my school's purpose, vision, and values.
4. I am encouraged to do my work in a way that is ethical and moral.
5. My school's administrators model the ethical and moral behavior they expect from others.
6. Systems and processes are in place that provide ethical checks and balances for my school and protect it from fraud.
7. I clearly understand to whom I am responsible.
8. I clearly understand for what I am responsible.
9. My school's administrators appropriately hold *themselves* accountable for achieving the school's objectives.
10. My school's administrators appropriately hold *others* accountable for achieving the school's objectives.
11. Systems and processes are in place that bring a balanced approach to my school's accountability, not just a singular focus on test scores.
12. I have the opportunity to participate in making choices that affect my work and me.
13. My school administrators appropriately encourage me to make choices.
14. Systems and processes are in place that allow individuals a choice in key decisions that impact their work and job performance.
15. I am acknowledged for the unique contribution I make towards achieving collective goals.
16. My school's administrators model authenticity.
17. My school's administrators encourage me to express my individuality while still being responsible to the purpose and values of the school.
18. Systems and processes are in place to appropriately reward and recognize *individual* efforts and results.

19. Systems and processes are in place to appropriately reward and recognize *collective* efforts and results.
20. I am encouraged to take risks regardless of my title or rank.
21. I am encouraged to try new ideas regardless of my title or rank.
22. My school's administrators are more interested in sharing power than in building personal fiefdoms.
23. Systems and processes are in place so that my school can function with a minimal amount of bureaucracy and managerial hierarchy.
24. I have access to all of the timely, accurate, and relevant information I need to do my job well.
25. My school's administrators practice open communication.
26. My school's administrators are transparent with relevant financial information about my school.
27. Systems and processes are in place to keep me informed about my school's overall performance.
28. I am encouraged to converse in a way that brings out new levels of possibility, meaning, and connection.
29. My school's administrators engage others in effective two-way communication about relevant educational topics.
30. Systems and processes are in place that allow everyone to take the appropriate amount of time to dialogue and listen to ideas and suggestions.
31. I am encouraged to be respectful of others' views and opinions, even if they differ from mine.
32. My school's administrators engage in adult-to-adult rather than paternalistic relationships with me.
33. Systems and processes are in place allowing for individuals to excel regardless of rank, gender, race, national origin, religion, or age.
34. I am encouraged to develop myself through training, coaching, and/or mentoring.
35. My school's administrators authentically *give feedback* in order to facilitate personal improvement.
36. My school's administrators authentically *receive feedback* in order to facilitate personal improvement.
37. Systems and processes that encourage valuable performance feedback are in place.
38. How many years have you been teaching? _____

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Please respond to one or both questions as appropriate to your school situation.

1. What are some evidences that this school's administrator values stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes?
2. What are some evidences that this school's administrator does not value stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes?

APPENDIX B

WORLDBLU SCHOOL DEMOCRATIC DESIGN SYSTEM

The WorldBlu Democratic Design System™ (WBDDS) ©2006 WorldBlu, Inc.

Democratic Principles	Definitions	Research-based Evidences of Effective Schools Practices
Purpose & Vision	Organization is clear about and individuals know why they exist and have a sense of direction	Professional leadership has purpose; Develops shared vision and goals collaboratively; Maintain a focus on learning.
Dialogue & Listening	Organization avoids hierarchical stance. Members engage in conversations that bring out new levels of meaning and connection.	Professional dialogue and listening to varied perspectives is necessary for change.
Decentralization	Organizations that ensure power is shared and distributed among members throughout the organization.	Leadership takes a participatory approach. Professional development is provided to support effective participation.
Fairness & Dignity	Organizations are committed to treating members justly.	Organizations provide individuals the necessary resources and support for doing quality work.
Individual & Collective	Each member understands the value of unique contributions of each participant toward achieving the goals of the organization.	Individuals in effective schools have a strong sense of responsibility for collective goals.
Accountability	Organization avoids finger pointing. Each member of the organization is responsible to each other and their community.	High expectations exist at and for all levels. Clear and fair discipline characterizes positive reinforcement.
Transparency	Ideas flow freely; Information is openly and responsibly shared.	Frequently share information related to the school's expectations, purpose, and progress throughout.
Choice	Organization encourages each person to exercise their right to choose between meaningful and diverse options and possibilities.	Individuals have the opportunity to choose learning opportunities within an appropriate context and relevant to their personal interest

Integrity	The freedom and discipline to do what is ethically and morally right	Individuals consistently practice what they have agreed to do and do what they say they will do.
Reflection & Evaluation	Commitment to authentic and continuous feedback and development with a willingness to learn from the past and apply lessons to improve the future.	Organization provides appropriate evaluation at all levels; provides regular, relevant feedback. Reflective dialogue is critical to collective improvement.

Note: Democratic Principles, definitions, effective schools summary adaptation as presented by Kensler (2008) and ("Worldblu Principles of Organizational Democracy,"). Used with permission.

APPENDIX C

QUALITATIVE RESPONSES TO WORLDBLU SURVEY BY QUESTION

Question #1 Responses
1. We are notified of all visitors. We have an array of meetings for parents to gain further knowledge and participation.
2. Stakeholders are invited to quarterly school reviews.
3. We do everything as a team. We are updated through emails, newsletters, meetings, etc.
4. PST meetings, data meetings for math and reading, IEP meetings, Parent conferences & contacts
5. Involving Stakeholders on a daily basis.
6. PST meetings, in house PD, Quarterly Data Meetings
7. Our school's administrator holds meetings (Title I, PTO, Coffee with the Principal) in which all parents/ community members are invited to participate and give feedback, share concerns, etc.
8. Test scores, intervention strategies, data, and relationships with students.
9. My principal gives me the freedom to try new innovative ideas.
10. PTA & community Partnerships
11. All major decisions are made as a collaborative effort between administration and faculty.
12. We discuss decisions as a group to find the best outcomes possible. We are allowed to give our opinions and also vote at times. [The Principal] listens to her faculty in a realistic and positive manner.
13. My school administrator encourages stakeholder participation by inviting input from students, faculty, and community leaders several times throughout the school year. She holds monthly meetings that are titled "coffee with the principal." Parents and community members are invited to

<p>come and receive information as well as provide information to her. She also facilitates E-CIP reviews quarterly. At E-CIP reviews, school data is discussed as well as overall goals for our school. It is a known fact that our school administrator's door is always open literally. She is always available to listen. She is great about listening to the opinions of others before making a decision. Students, parents, faculty members, and people from the community are definitely aware that (they) have a voice at our school.</p>
<p>14. Responding to surveys.</p>
<p>15. Surveys</p>
<p>16. Surveys are sent out and newsletters.</p>
<p>17. Our principal makes sure that parents are involved at school. She works/collaborates with school's parent liaison to provide beneficial parental workshops. The church that is next door to the school is our partner in education. They are very involved with school. They adopt families for Thanksgiving and Christmas and provide school supplies for the children here at the school. Stakeholder participation is highly encouraged at this school.</p>
<p>18. Weekly faculty meetings, grade level meetings, data meetings, email; correspondence, professional development, and individual conferences with the administration all serve as evidence that the administration values me as a stakeholder and allows me to make decisions that affect student outcomes.</p>
<p>19. Our school administrator values stakeholder's participation in decisions that affect student outcomes through constant communication with the stakeholders through newsletters, surveys, signed papers and progress reports. Stakeholders are invited and encouraged to participate in various functions and programs throughout the school term. Stakeholders are made to know they are a vital part of their children's success.</p>
<p>20. Weekly faculty and grade level meetings are held to discuss student achievement and ways to improve or change instruction.</p>

21. Our administration offers workshops, conferences, professional development, partnerships in education, and other activities that include parents, teachers, and members of the community. We all work together to further student achievement and promote community within our school.
22. We, as a faculty, communicate with our parents. We invite our parents to visit their child's classrooms. We also view our students' data making the necessary changes in order to meet the needs of each student.
23. The school administrator values stakeholders participation in decisions that affect student outcomes by:
i. Encouraging classroom visits
ii. Encourage parents through newsletters
iii. Establishing community relationships
iv. Using local colleges/universities as mentors
v. Hosting meetings for local community leaders
vi. Creating a team atmosphere
24. Meetings and grade level chair agendas
25. Weekly data meetings
26. She takes time out to listen to the students as well as the teachers and parents. She is a hands-on administrator and she shows characterization in every day work in which you may want to follow as an educator.
27. They are invited to meetings.
28. Communication with parents via signed papers, progress reports, phone calls, and etc.
29. Grade level meetings and data meetings with administration and staff
30. They have a communication plan and encourage parental involvement.
31. Data meetings and Grade level meetings
32. Quarterly data meetings

33. [Our administrator] encourages parental involvement through the school year.
34. Many of our stakeholders, such as Partners in Education, are volunteers at our school. They come in and tutor our children.
35. The evidence that the schools administrators value stakeholders because they are involved in school functions. Communication plan encourages parental involvement.
36. The school's administrators have monthly meetings with partners in education to talk about different things that will affect our students.
37. School administrators encourage parents to get involved with their students learning. They also encourage parents to volunteer.
38. Some evidence that the school administrator values stakeholder participation in decisions is involving community members in school decisions.
39. Surveys (Parent/student/teachers) school newsletters, parent conference, calls, parent/staff in-services, and media.
40. The school's administrators hold monthly meetings with our partners in education. During the meeting stakeholders are given important information about current events and upcoming events that will help our community of learners.
41. The accreditation of our school. Community meetings with stakeholders
42. Surveys are sent home to stakeholders.
43. We have a very active PTO which holds monthly meetings. Our stakeholders are encouraged to attend each meeting and share their concerns.
44. They are open to ideas and feedback.
45. This school's administrator encourages teachers to take chances and individualize their instruction. She has offered to let teachers team-teach, and she has offered to come into their classes to see how they are taking risks and straying from the beaten path. She wants teachers to have a say in how they present material and that, in turn, has an effect on student performance.

46. School administrators are open to suggestions and new information about resources found by the teachers.
47. Administrators talk to teachers about how they think things should proceed. If we have a different approach, we are allowed to present it and it is evaluated as to its effectiveness. Some procedures are non-negotiable, but if not, our opinion is received.
48. High morale and a safe working environment was a way of life embraced by outgoing principal and is being continued by our present principal. At this school, the administrator believes in all children. Although the students face many challenges, we do not accept excuses. We celebrate together and we cry together. It's about accepting people for who they are, and building a culture that nurtures the needs of all children, and often this includes the parents. Our goal is to bind the students together with a common thread of belonging, and then go from there. Once the relationship between school and home is cemented with trust, the learning process begins. We stress in our professional leaning communities a need to respect the school populations' culture.
49. The administration is constantly updating everyone on what is coming down from central office as to any changes in curriculum, testing, etc. We, as a faculty, have a chance to express how best to go about these changes as well as are given lots of professional development when needed to properly implement changes.
50. She assigns everyone on committees to brainstorm and help make decisions that deal with school, student, and staff decisions. She corresponds to individual employees through email, text, phone calls and personal conferences or conversations.
51. [Principal] allows stakeholders to come in a help with very important decisions that will positively affect students lives, but makes sure it is of the best interest of the child. She likes everyone's input in decision making to help the student at all times.
52. Some evidences that our school's administrator values stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes are the following: PTO meetings, parent observation days, surveys. This

school administrator does value stakeholder participation on decisions that affect student outcomes.
53. Our principal always makes decisions that are in the best interest of the students. She respects all employees, yet, sets high expectations. She effectively communicates THROUGH EITHER EMAIL, TEXTS, OR PHONE CALLS. She is an advocate for all students in our school, including our special population. She welcomes community support.
54. Open door policy, regular Title I meetings, regular PTO meetings, school newsletter, parent opinion surveys, climate surveys, foster grandparents, parent volunteers, volunteer community, readers, very open with faculty and staff. She includes everyone in everything. She often reminds us that we are family.
55. Stakeholders are invited to participate in decisions affecting our school.
56. Off-campus professional development opportunities and return turn-around training providing substitutes and support to help increase faculty understanding and knowledge that will increase student learning!
57. Parent involvement is highly encouraged in all areas as well as community involvement.
58. She likes everyone's input in decision making to help the student at all times.
59. The school administrator looks at data, and participates in meetings. He listens to ideas that can help our students. He communicates well with others.
60. We have a good community with parents that want the best for their children. We are free to ask questions about anything we need.
61. This school's administrator values stakeholder participation by asking questions, and providing time to collaborate.
62. The administrator communicates with Parents to determine needs or desires for example he takes into account ballgame times and doesn't schedule academic events on those days. He also listens to teacher input if teachers suggest things that will improve academic or behavioral achievement of students he does what is necessary to make it happen.

63. Recognition at faculty meetings of achievements of test scores
64. I know we have a stakeholder committee that meets sometimes but I am not sure what they do. I think it is for the CIP plan maybe.
65. It is great evidence that we value decisions that will better our students. Being a Torchbearer school..., our administrator really pushes our testing grades to perform well. The lower grades are encouraged to train and equip students to perform well. Parents and stakeholders of the community meet and are welcome in our school to share ideas.
66. We include stakeholder participation by inviting these individuals to programs such as awards day, anytime that our school is being recognized.
67. We hold meetings with community members and stakeholders to discuss topics of school.
68. We have an open door policy for stakeholders. Parent meetings are held monthly.
69. Staying in contact with the community and the leaders. He has helped the parks and recreation teams by not scheduling things at the same times.
70. School administrators hold frequently scheduled grade level meetings and committee meetings to discuss and/or review student scores, possible changes to policies and procedures, and have teachers present information regarding workshops attended or courses completed.
71. The principal's door is always open – always has a listening ear and consistently asks for teacher input that affects student outcomes. He does this at faculty meetings, grade level meetings, etc. He does value stakeholder's participation. I noticed several questions state " <u>are in place</u> ".... We have a lot <u>in place</u> , but that doesn't mean they are <u>implemented</u> ...
72. Each grade have grade- level meetings to discuss ways to improve student's performance on test and ways in which students can best be rewarded for their accomplishments.
73. Grade level meetings give teachers a chance to share and discuss their ideas and strategies.
74. He values my opinion when dealing with issues relating to students. He tries to make the best decision for the student whether I agree with him or not.

75. My administrator seeks out opportunities to collaborate whenever possible. After any assembly parents are held for a briefing with principal. There is a pleasant working relationship with community leaders, faculty and staff. Everyone is treated with respect.
76. The easy and prompt access to data, allows us to be able to make decisions quicker than before. Besides the data, we also receive support from the administrator to use the data to the fullest extent.
77. Surveys, questioning, discourse
78. We all want the students to achieve. Anyone involved with the students is given an opportunity to keep them focused and on track. (All the students at our school are "OUR" students!)
79. We involve parents and classroom teachers in an attempt to help struggling students reach goals. All teachers are encouraged to motivate the strugglers to keep working hard.
80. Evidence that this schools administrator values stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes is that various surveys and questionnaires concerning these topics are analyzed and the data included in plans that drive our work here.
81. Encouragement to always do our best and be our best
82. We are encouraged by the administrator to attend professional development seminars on a regular basis. These seminars all have to do with bettering our students.
83. Stakeholders are valued because they are made a part of decision making through PTO or informal meetings.
84. Sending newsletters home.
85. Review test scores & adjust instructions as needed.
86. Classroom teachers and parents are a part of decisions. Teachers are able to work with students struggling in reading/math based on our determination parent input is always asked for and welcomed.
87. Weekly faculty and grade level meetings are held to discuss student achievement and ways to improve or change instruction

88. Our school Principal lives in this area. She is very active in the community. Her interest in the academic and well being of our students is very evident in the way she lives each day. She always puts our students first.
89. [Always] give the community[a] chance to participate in school activities.
90. Stakeholders are involved in CIP planning. Stakeholders are actively involved in PTA.
91. PTO meeting are regular and weekly grade level meetings are held to focus on student scores.
92. The school's administrator encourages parent and members of the community to work with the students to help student outcomes.
93. The school administrator informs stakeholder of issues going on; asks for their input; has open communication.
94. She is in constant contact with stakeholders, providing feedback.
95. The manner, the way we are treated with respect
96. Open to suggestions [and] is familiar with our data
97. We are given opportunities to serve on committees where student assessment and instruction decisions are made.
98. We work in teams to make group decisions about students and procedures.
99. Title 1 meetings, surveys, meetings
100. My administrators hold meetings to inform the teachers of valuable information to everyone. They allow us to share our opinions openly and freely. We are encouraged to present new strategies to other teachers to help improve our students' performances.
101. The evidence that the school's administrator values stakeholder by using parent surveys and allowing parents on the building leadership team.
102. We are respected
103. Committee set up to handle various school responsibilities.
104. Discussions during faculty and data meetings

105. Our administrator has an open door policy. We can bring issues to her at any time. She brings issues to faculty meeting and BCT meetings and actively seeks input to solve these issues. Each year she puts out a survey that allows stakeholders input for improvements and suggestions. She takes these into consideration and has implemented changes and new ideas based on these surveys.
106. PST meetings, Grade level meeting.
107. Data Driven
108. Our administration is always encouraging parents& community to be involved in what is going on at school. She encourages everyone to be involved & be part of these children's education.
109. She works to cooperate with other schools and businesses. She works hard to have parents participate in after school functions.
110. Data meetings, faculty meetings
111. Administrators ask for teachers help and input in creating goals and expectations for students.
112. Parent teacher orientation. 3 for me -- 3 hrs of parent participation
113. They are involved in some of our decision making processes and always welcome.
114. Our school values stakeholder's participation and encourages it.
115. Our school has committees made up of teachers, parents, and administrators. These committees make decisions and changes for our school.
116. Administrators constantly invite stakeholders to participate in various activities. They consider stakeholders to be partners with well respected ideas.
117. We have committees that have people from the community involved and we have grade level meetings to include everyone.
118. We have meetings that stakeholders are invited to. They are key members of school committees.
119. Meetings are held asking for input from everyone involved. Grade-level meetings are held to allow collaboration of teachers with principal attending.
120. My administrator values stakeholder participation. He attends all data meetings and always trying

to improve teaching of teachers to help promote student learning.
121. Community leaders & parents are involved in many decisions of our school. They are valued participates. They're on many committees & encouraged to volunteer as much as possible.
122. She writes down answers and shares them in a group setting.

Question #2 Responses

1. <i>Administrator makes decision on what is being taught. Stakeholders are not always involved in decisions. If stakeholders are involved it is a select few that help make that decision.</i>
2. <i>Our administrator only cares about the scores on the almighty test. Our faculty has tried to encourage our administrator to improve discipline in the school. The program is entitled "The Leader in Me." He won't talk to us about [it].</i>
3. <i>I have strived to encourage life skills in my classroom. For ex. Setting goals, being proactive, synergizing, and listening to others. Many times, I have tried to present a wonderful program to the administrator. He will not give me the time of day. There is no concern about student outcomes as far as life skills. I feel that administration is concerned about only test scores.</i>
4. <i>Focuses primarily on test scores, regardless of outside input.</i>
5. <i>Have few opportunities to be a part in the decisions that affect me in the role I hold at the school.</i>
6. <i>We seem to only use the stakeholders on an as needed basis...When we have to in order to do paperwork that we need for CIP plan.</i>
7. <i>Many times programs and ideas are not considered because they are seen as too costly. Often times it seems as if leaders are not willing for change.</i>
8. <i>The administrator does not coordinate well with the high school. He seems to have a line drawn in the sand when it comes to allowing students to purchase school T-shirts, going to ball games during the day, just showing school spirit.</i>
9. <i>The school really isn't open to change, especially if new programs are costly. Ex. Wanting to change our character education program.</i>

<p>10. <i>We are in behind in technology for the students. We would love to see a computer lab large enough for an entire class. A computer lab aide would be a great asset.</i></p>
<p>11. <i>Sometimes when new ideas are given finances are the reason for not implementation. This school's leaders are not always open to change unfortunately.</i></p>
<p>12. Extra time for students has been noted and dismissed without discussion. Highly lacking in feedback.</p>
<p>13. Sometimes we are told what to do or how it will be done without any input from the teachers.</p>
<p>14. A lot of suggestions and answers given never happen or take place.</p>
<p>15. Clique of teacher friends/principal; evident in Facebook posts. Those friends have preselected classes. (Additional aides, student cadet helpers, etc).</p>
<p>16. Our administrator is cliquish, distant and rarely involved in our day to day activities. We go days without her presence or input. We see action only after small problems have grown into a full crisis! The only reason our school does well is the dedication of true teachers and not those folks that happen to work in a school. There is a difference.</p>
<p>17. The administrator does not value stakeholder participation in decisions that affect student outcomes because there are not conversations about her concern about student outcomes other than information that is sent from central office. This is information that has to ve discussed. I don't see where she is personally concerned and is mildly concerned professionally.</p>
<p>18. I do not feel as a stakeholder that my suggestions have been heard or been taken into consideration. Testing dates/times, conduct Policy, Attendance Policy, enforcing retention policy, administration backing teachers (grades, discipline, expectations.)</p>

APPENDIX D

GRADIENT RATINGS FOR INTERPRETING LIKERT SCALE RESPONSES

Gradient Ratings for Interpreting Likert Scale Responses

- 6 Almost Always
- 5 Frequently
- 4 Occasionally
- 3 Rarely
- 2 Very Rarely
- 1 Almost Never

APPENDIX E
AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL
AND INFORMATION LETTER

**AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST for PROTOCOL RENEWAL**

For Information or help completing this form, contact: **THE OFFICE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH**, 115 Ramsay Hall
Phone: 334-844-5966 e-mail: hsubjec@auburn.edu Web Address: http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm

*Complete this form using Adobe Acrobat **Writer** (versions 5.0 and greater). Hand written forms will not be accepted.*

1. Protocol Number: 12-120 EX1204
2. Original IRB Approval Dates: From: April 1, 2012 To: April 14, 2013
3. Requested **ONE YEAR MAXIMUM** Renewal Period: From: April 14, 2013 To: April 14, 2014
4. PROJECT TITLE: "An Examination of Democratic Leadership in High-Performing and Low-Performing High Poverty Schools"

5. Brenda DeRamus-Coleman)	doctoral student	EFLT	334-444-5888	bdc0006@auburn.edu
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	TITLE	DEPT	PHONE	AU E-MAIL
<i>Brenda DeRamus-Coleman</i>	1305 Denson Drive, Opelika, AL 36801			bdc0006@gmail.com
PI SIGNATURE	MAILING ADDRESS			ALTERNATE E-MAIL
Dr. Ellen H. Reames	<i>Ellen H. Reames</i>	EFLT	706-573-7563	reamseh@auburn.edu
FACULTY ADVISOR	SIGNATURE	DEPT	PHONE	AU E-MAIL
Name of Current Department Head:	Ms. Sherida Downer			AU E-MAIL: downesh@aubur

6. Current External Funding Agency: None
7. List any contractors, sub-contractors, or other entities or IRBs associated with this project:
None
8. Briefly list (numbered or bulleted) the activities that occurred over the past year, particularly those that involved participants.

1. I mailed letters of requests to superintendents and principals of the selected schools.
2. I have received commitments from several schools, and the data collection process is still in progress.
3. I have visited several schools, and I have been allowed to conduct the study on four campuses to date.
4. I have tallied the surveys, and I have compiled the narrative responses to the open-ended questions from those four sites.
5. I have mailed follow- letters to the schools that have not responded.
6. I have conducted follow-up phone calls to those schools.

9. Explain why you are requesting additional time to complete this research project.



Additional time is requested in order to complete data collection and complete discussion and conclusion chapters.



10. Do you plan to make any changes in your protocol if the renewal request is approved?

(e.g., research design, methodology, participant characteristics, authorized number of participants, etc.)

NO

YES (If "yes", please complete and attach the "REQUEST for PROTOCOL MODIFICATION" form. The IRB will review both requests at the same time.)

11. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

a. How many individuals have actually participated in this research? 93
If retrospective, how many files or records were accessed? _____

b. Were there any adverse events, unexpected difficulties or unexpected benefits with the approved procedures?

NO

YES (If YES, please explain)

d. How many participants have withdrawn from the study? _____

None or Not Applicable.

NOTE: If any participants withdrew from the study, please explain.

e. How many new participants do you plan to recruit during the renewal period? 200 + None / NA

f. During the renewal period, will you re-contact any individual that has already participated in your research project?

NO

YES (If "YES", please explain reasons for re-contacting participants.)

None / NA

(If "YES" and the procedure to re-contact has not been previously approved, please complete and attach a "REQUEST for PROTOCOL MODIFICATION" form. The IRB will review both requests at the same time.)

12. PROTECTION OF DATA

a. Is the data being collected, stored and protected as previously approved by the IRB?

- NO (if "NO", explain) YES

b. Are there any changes in the "key research personnel" that have access to participants or data?

Attach CITI proof of completion for all new key personnel.

- NO YES (if "YES", identify each individual and explain the reason(s) for each change.)

c. What is the latest date (month and year) you now expect all identifiable data to be destroyed?

(Identifiable data includes videotapes, photographs, code lists, etc.)

DATE: _____

- Not Applicable – no identifiable data has been or will be collected.

11. Attach a copy of all "stamped" IRB-approved documents used during the previous year.

(Information letters, Informed Consents, Parental Permissions, etc.).

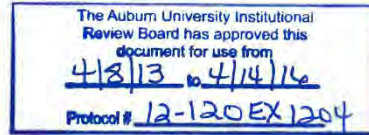
12. If you plan to recruit participants, or collect human subject data during the renewal period, attach a new copy of the consent document or information letter you will use during the extension.

(Be sure to review the OHSR website for current consent document guidelines and updated contact information:

<http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/sample.htm>.)

PLEASE NOTE: If you do not plan to collect additional data and/or you do not have access to any identifiable data (including code lists, etc.) you may be able to file a "FINAL REPORT" for this project.
Contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for more information.

When complete, submit hard copy with signatures to the Office of Human Subjects Research,
115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849



Auburn University
Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5221

Educational Foundations
Leadership and Technology

Telephone: (334) 844-4460
Fax: (334) 844-3072

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled
AN EXAMINATION OF DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP IN HIGH-PERFORMING AND
LOW-PERFORMING HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS.

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine teachers' perspectives on the leadership practices and implementation of elements of democratic principles used in improving school performance, especially in high-poverty schools. The study is being conducted by Brenda DeRamus-Coleman, a doctoral student, under the direction of Dr. Ellen Reames, Dr. Lisa Kensler, and Dr. Frances Kochan in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations Leadership and Technology.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a teacher and are age 19 or older. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a survey. Your total time commitment will be approximately twenty minutes. If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time. Your decision whether to participate or not will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology.

The researcher expects no risks or discomforts associated with this study. The instrument is an anonymous survey.

No personal benefits are provided to participants in this evaluation.

There will be no compensation provided to participants.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by assigning no identifying information to your survey that would identify you. Information collected through your participation may be published in a professional journal and/or presented at a professional meeting.

If you have questions or would like a copy of the results when they are ready, please contact Brenda DeRamus-Coleman by phone at 334.444.5888 or by email at bdc0006@auburn.edu; her advisor, Dr. Ellen Reames; her advisor, Dr. Lisa Kensler; or her advisor, Dr. Frances

Kochan (by phone at 334.844.3072). We would very much appreciate your assistance in completing this research, as it is our hope that this work will assist us in learning more about how leadership influences student outcomes in our schools.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone at 334.844.5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

Best Regards,

Brenda DeRamus-Coleman, Investigator

Investigator's signature

Date

Dr. Ellen Reames, Co-Investigator

Dr. Lisa Kensler, Co-Investigator

Dr. Fran Kochan, Co-Investigator

