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Cecilia L. Crear
May 2013

LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS IN HIGH PERFORMING HIGH POVERTY
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

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May 2013

Dedication

For Kenneth, Patricia, and Kennesha

Your support and encouragement have always inspired me to pursue my ultimate goals. You have been by my side during every phase of my life's journey rooting for my success. The faith you have in me has always been my source of motivation. Thank you for your patience and prayers throughout this process. Team Crear, I love you!

To my eternal guardian angels Florence Allen, Dolly Ann Crear and Clyde Crear, thank you for your divine protection, wisdom and guidance.

Psalms 91:11 - For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

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Abstract

Urban secondary school leaders not only have the pressures of accountability, growth, and mobility, but they also face a myriad of additional issues including poverty, drugs, teen pregnancy, and crime. Despite these challenges, some urban high schools continue to thrive and afford students an exemplary academic environment. Following an analysis of multiple academic achievement data elements, this qualitative study identified and implemented a selection criteria to invite principals of five secondary urban high-performing, high-poverty schools in Texas to participate in an interview process to identify the leadership practices that contribute to their schools' high academic performance. Analysis of the data uncovered six major themes associated with increasing student achievement, including high expectations and beliefs, instructional leadership, culture builder, vision, student interventions based on data, and collaboration with campus leaders in the decision making process. Solutions to urban school leader challenges and professional development recommendations for school leaders were also discussed.

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Introduction

How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of poor children? If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background. (Edmonds, 1979, p.22)

Brief Review

The underperformance in schools of minority children, particularly African American and Hispanic children has been an issue of concern for decades. Research suggests that socioeconomic status and family background play a huge role in determining academic achievement. According to the U.S Bureau of the Census (2010), Black children under the age of 18 represent 38.2% and Hispanic children represent 35% of the child population living in poverty. Many of these children will attend schools that are considered urban or high poverty and also underperforming.

The American government, usually at the urging of the President, will review the current state of the educational system and create laws or policies to address concerns regarding the achievement of American students. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy called for a Civil Rights Bill to be enacted to ban discrimination and provide equal opportunities for all. Due to the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, the new President, Lyndon B. Johnson, pushed the bill to be passed as soon as possible. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, which outlawed major forms of discrimination against African Americans and women, including racial segregation. This Act was a direct result of the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education* that declared separate public schools for black and white students

unconstitutional. Title IV of the Civil Rights Act specifically addressed desegregation of public schools. As a part of this Act, the Commissioner was required to conduct a survey and make a report to the President and Congress within two years of the enactment of this title concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels. The U.S Commissioner selected James S. Coleman and Ernest Q. Campbell to conduct this study. The most controversial finding of this report was that family background was the biggest determining factor that affected student achievement and that schools were relatively ineffective at overcoming the academic disparities that children bring with them. For the most disadvantaged children, improvements in school quality will make the most difference in achievement (Coleman, 1966, p. 21). His report was a catalyst to the creation of “compensatory education” programs that dominated school improvement throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s. The idea behind “compensatory education” is to “compensate” for economically disadvantaged children by expanding and improving the educational programs offered to children living in poverty. These programs were a result of the federal government’s commitment, through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), to bring equity to educational opportunity.

According to Ron Edmonds, these programs, provided through the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act, “taught low income children to learn in ways that conformed to most schools’ preferred way of teaching” (Lezotte, n.d.). His thought was that these programs focused on changing students’ behaviors in order to compensate for their disadvantaged backgrounds and made no effort to change their schools’ behaviors. After the Coleman Report, many research studies began, and the Effective Schools Movement

was created. Brookover, Lezotte, Edmonds, Rutter and others are those that are given credit for the study of effective versus ineffective schools and finding that family background does contribute to academic success; however, instructional leadership was the primary characteristic that helped schools counter those home effects. Ron Edmonds stated explicitly:

How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of all children? If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that basic pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background. Whether or not we will ever effectively teach the children of the poor is probably far more a matter of politics than of social science and that is as it should be. We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (Educational Leadership, 1979)

Michael Rutter, a professor of child psychiatry, and his London University team spent three years in a field study collecting information on 12 inner city London secondary schools. In their book *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children*, it was concluded that "schools can do much to foster good behavior and attainments, and that even in a disadvantaged area, schools can be a force for the good" (p. 205).

In the 1980's, the American educational system was reviewed again, and the 1983 report of President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education

was titled “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for School Reform”. This report was considered a landmark event in America’s educational history. It contributed to the sense that American schools were still failing and the country was in trouble. This report described America’s educational foundation as being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that was threatening America’s future as a nation and a people. At this point in history, other countries were matching and surpassing America’s educational attainments. This marked the beginning of a standards based testing era, where federal legislation required that states receiving federal aid have academic standards and tests in certain grades (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed for a reauthorization of the ESEA- the Improving America’s School Act (IASA) as another effort to reform education. In the Statement of Policy for Title I of IASA, the United States Congress declared that a

...high-quality education for all individuals and a fair and equal opportunity to obtain that education are a societal good and a moral imperative, and improve the life of every individual, because the quality of our individual lives ultimately depends on the quality of the lives of others. (U.S. Department of Education, 1995)

Further review of the educational system in 2001 revealed that the achievement gap among groups continued to increase. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002, which was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was signed into law by President George Bush in 2002 to ensure that schools were being held accountable for closing the achievement gap among groups; this Act requires an even greater increase of accountability by schools.

With this increased era of accountability, the demand for school leaders has changed. Leadership is more critical now because of the challenges to meet rising standards while students seem to be coming to school less prepared, particularly in schools with high poverty. Research shows the leadership in these schools will be the primary factor in their sustained success. According to a report by Arthur Andersen LLP (1997), the following recommendation was made:

The key factor to the individual school's success is the building principal, who sets the tone as the school's educational leader, enforces the positive and convinces the students, parents and teachers that all children can learn and improve academically. Our overall assessment is that the school principal has the greatest single impact on school performance. As a result, we believe that increased attention and funding needs to be directed towards programs that attract, evaluate, train and retain the best principals. (p.27)

Statement of the Problem

The underachievement of minority students in schools continues to be a cause for concern among those that have a vested interest in education. Particularly, African American students with low socioeconomic status (SES) continue to perform the lowest of all groups ultimately contributing to the increasing achievement gap. Children living in low SES neighborhoods will almost certainly attend schools in their area that are considered urban. Urban schools are located in large cities, mostly characterized by poverty, and have the challenges of that environment: unemployment, violence and crime, and lack of educational values and parental involvement. These schools also face the challenges of the school environment: large student populations, staffing effective

teachers, lack of resources, low student attendance rates, high student mobility rate, and high populations of special education and immigrant students. With all of these challenges, there are actually some urban schools that are meeting and exceeding expectations for achievement with their urban students. Educational literature shows that the leadership in these schools is one of the primary factors that counters the challenges and creates an environment of high performance. Students that live and go to school in these areas deserve the same quality education as students living in suburban areas. A report released from the Education Trust (2001) identified approximately 3,600 schools in the U.S. that were “high performing-high poverty schools”. This is not a bragging right, considering that for the 2009-2010 school year there were approximately 98,800 public schools reported in the U.S according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. That is only approximately 4% of schools that are high performing-high poverty. It is time for research to be completed that will impact a large number of urban schools across the country. As an educational leader, I cannot accept that high performing schools in urban areas are the exception and not the rule.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the qualities of effective leaders in high performing, high poverty secondary schools. In this study, an investigation revealed the most common characteristics of effective school leaders that contributed to the academic achievement of high poverty students.

Based on Effective Schools research, there are seven correlates that contribute to high achievement in schools, particularly urban schools: a clear school mission, high expectations for success, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student

progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, safe and orderly environment, and home/school relations. The study sought to find out what current principals at high performing, high poverty schools attribute to their success. Aristotle said “one can demonstrate the possible by studying the actual”. This paper describes an analysis of success with replication of the leadership characteristics as my goal and the purpose of writing this dissertation.

An analysis of reasons for success is a far more challenging task than constructing rationales for failure. The schools that have been investigated have successful strategies that have been implemented and, similar to the achievement gap solutions, have been a complex challenge that requires an ongoing, sustained and multifaceted approach. In this study, principals were interviewed to determine the common leadership characteristics that emerge.

Significance of the Study

This study provides insight to all who are seeking to improve student achievement in high poverty areas, to face the challenges secondary leaders face in increasing student performance, and to create leadership development programs in school districts in critical needs areas. As a result of the study, school district personnel in high poverty areas will be able to recognize the leadership characteristics an applicant possesses and make an informed decision; consequently, they will have a higher likelihood of retaining quality leaders. School districts need to be more attentive to the processes of succession planning and school leadership recruitment and retention (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). This study will affect change not only in school buildings but in school district systems and processes as well.

Low student achievement in high poverty schools continues to contribute to the achievement gap. “The best evidence comes from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the ‘nation’s report card’” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). NAEP was created by Congress in 1969 to periodically test nationally representative samples of elementary and secondary students in grades 4, 8, and 12. Olsen (2007) reports that based on NAEP results, “the achievement gaps based on race and class remain daunting” noting that near the end of high school, Black and Latino students “have reading and math skills that are virtually the same as those of eighth graders” (p. 42).

Education has been coined as the “great equalizer”. If schools are not effective in helping to decrease the achievement gap, this racial inequality in our society will continue to contribute to our educational crisis. The achievement gap greatly influences the life chances and choices of a student. Under-educated and uneducated minorities will not be able to function in this highly technological and global society. “In the 21st century, education, knowledge, and technological training are among the most valuable assets a citizen can have to find employment and to act as a thoughtful, social, responsive, and reflective individual” (Corwin, 2009). In other words, addressing the achievement gap is critical to ensure students reach their fullest potential in order to flourish in this society.

Decades of reform efforts have fallen short of significantly decreasing the achievement gap. Why does our educational system continue to struggle with closing these gaps? Educators accept the issues of poverty, academic coursework and instruction, peer pressure, student attendance and mobility rates, disparities in resources, parenting,

pre-school, teacher quality and attitudes, teacher expectations, media, test bias and genetics as an explanation for the achievement gap. All of these are contributing factors that cause the solution to closing the gap to be very complex; however, the NCLB act is attempting to readdress the failure of previous reform efforts by increasing accountability for districts and schools so that no child is left behind. Who takes on the responsibility of reaching and exceeding these standards? Williams (2003) states, “Principals are key to the success of any school but are especially important in schools focused on eliminating the achievement gap”.

A growing body of research indicates that principals can exert a measurable positive influence on student achievement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), especially in schools serving low socioeconomic communities (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997). The principal is no longer in the classroom; however, he or she still has the responsibility to ensure that all students are reaching their maximum academic potential. Current educational research has shown that effective school leadership has an indirect influence on student achievement (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; and Supovits, Sirinidies, & May 2009). Gardner defines indirect leadership as the impact individuals exert through the works that they create (2010). This research sought to determine what actions have been taken by leaders in high poverty schools that create high performing academic environments so that current and future leaders may replicate these practices.

The leaders in the 4% of high performing, high poverty U.S. schools may have intrinsic leadership qualities that have contributed to their success. If the educational community wants to see more high poverty schools attain this high performing status,

leadership training and development must be provided for leaders in high poverty areas. The quality of training principals receive prior to taking a position, as well as the professional development they receive throughout their careers, is a major factor in their success as the demands of accountability continue to increase. The skill set required to lead and transform 21st century schools is a much greater challenge than before. In the 21st century, the principal's role will be different from the role of principals of other generations (Blackmore, 1989; Calabrese, 1996; Gorton, 1993). The 21st century principals will face different problems and concerns. These problems will be more complex and involve outside variables (Calabrese, 1996).

As districts seek to hire and retain quality principals for high poverty schools, they must also be prepared to support these principals in achieving the goals set before them. Qualitative research on urban leaders shows that the scope and nature of district support positively influence effective leader actions (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996). Some urban districts are offering support in collaboration with local universities through improved leadership preparation, new principal induction and mentoring, and focused leadership development (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2007). This study sought to provide information to all constituents that provide leadership training and development and those that are interested in pursuing leadership development opportunities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) To what extent do these high-performing, high-poverty secondary campuses exhibit correlates of effective schools?

- 2) What do leaders of high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools perceive as significant issues that hinder student achievement and how are these issues addressed?
- 3) What recommendations do you have for university programs to assist secondary leaders in high poverty campuses in improving their leadership strategies?

Definition of Terms

The following are operational terms used in this study:

- **Academic achievement** – determined by the scores reported on state mandated norm referenced achievement tests.
- **Gold Performance Acknowledgement** – acknowledges districts and campuses for high performance on indicators other than those used to determine accountability ratings.
- **High-Performing Schools** – for the purpose of this study, high-performing schools scored at least 75% in Math and 80% in Reading on the state mandated norm referenced achievement tests.
- **High-Poverty Schools** – for the purpose of this study, high-poverty schools have at least a 50% free and reduced lunch rate.
- **Meta-analysis** - allows researchers to form statistically based generalizations regarding the research within a given field.
- **TAKS Assessment**– Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills standardized assessment used in Texas primary and secondary schools to assess students' attainment of reading, writing, math, science, and social studies skills required

under Texas Education standards. Scores are used to determine schools' accountability ratings.

- **Turnaround Schools** – schools that have demonstrated positive dramatic student outcomes in a short period of time.
- **Urban Schools**– typically exist in large, possibly bureaucratic school systems that may lack resources to handle the challenges faced in educating every student given the diversity they represent.

Literature Review

The review of literature for this study was specific to high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools which I considered effective schools. This review summarizes the history of educational reform efforts in the United States over the last 50 years, the correlates of effective schools, characteristics of the leaders in these schools, and leadership training and development. While analyzing the complex dynamics involved in securing academic success in public education, the realization came that the solutions to the challenges of school reform could only be answered by those that had a sincere interest in student success and were willing to dedicate themselves towards researching solutions. Sociologist James Coleman was one of the pioneers in investigating concerns in education. In 1964, James Coleman was selected by the U.S. Commissioner of Education to conduct a study following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The purpose of the study was to research the lack of availability of equal educational opportunity by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels. One of his many findings was that family background was the biggest factor that affected student achievement. He concluded that public schools did not make a significant difference and his findings also proposed that children from poor families and homes that lacked the value or conditions to support education could not learn, regardless of what the school did (O'Neill & Jackson, 2003). This report marked the beginning of federal legislation aimed at lowering the "achievement gap". The achievement gap is described as the difference in academic performance between students from low socio-economic environments compared to students from higher socio-economic environments and between minority and non-minority students (McCall,

Hauser, Cronin, Kingsbury, & Ronald, 2006). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the legislation that first aimed at reducing the gap between high-poverty and low-poverty students. The ESEA created a partnership between federal, state, and local governments to “confront poverty and its damaging effects by targeting federal aid to poor students and schools” (Ohio Education Association, 2007). Title I of ESEA was established specifically to distribute funding to K-12 schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families (McLaughlin & Milbery, 1975).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was reauthorized in 1994 as the Improving America’s School Act (IASA). The United States Congress recognized that although the achievement gap between high-poverty and low-poverty children had been drastically reduced since the passage of the original ESEA of 1965, a sizable gap remained (Riddle, 1994). The most urgent concern for educational improvement was in schools with a large population of high-poverty children, children with limited English proficiency, and children with disabilities. The IASA focused on changing the delivery of instruction for children, promoting comprehensive school reform at all levels, providing professional development that aligned to high standards, improving accountability, and promoting the coordination of resources to improve education for all children (Riddle, 1994).

In 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB required an increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools; parents would have greater choice in schools if their child attended a low- performing school; there would be a greater emphasis on reading;

and there would be more flexibility for states and local education agencies in the use of federal education money (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

NCLB requires states to implement statewide accountability systems that must be based on challenging state standards in all core content areas: math, science, social studies, and language arts. States must implement annual testing for all students in grades 3-8 in an effort to ensure that all student groups reach proficiency on statewide objectives within 12 years (Hamilton, 2003). NCLB requires assessment results be broken down by ethnicity, race, socio-economic levels, disability, and limited English proficiency to determine progress in each sub-group. School districts and schools are expected to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency. If schools or school districts do not meet AYP, corrective action can be taken as an attempt to get them on track to meet standards. Also, parents and students in high-poverty, low-performing schools have the choice to attend more successful schools within the district.

James S. Coleman and colleagues (1966) conducted the landmark Equality of Educational Opportunity study, also known as the Coleman Report, to determine the extent that equal educational opportunities were available to students of varying race, color, religion, and national origin. The most controversial finding from this report was that school resources had little effect on academic achievement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Despite this finding, Coleman (1966) concluded that schools differ in the degree of impact they have on student achievement. He found that a school's strengths and weaknesses have less of an effect on non-minority student achievement than on minority student achievement; therefore, the achievement of minority students depends more on the schools they attend than does the achievement of

non-minority students (Coleman, 1966). The findings from the Coleman report created a new definition of the concept of equal education by focusing on results. Coleman (1968), as stated in Gamoran and Long (2006), reveals, “In this definition, equality of educational opportunity is equality of results, given the same individual input” (p.14).

The Coleman Report laid the foundation for later research on school improvement efforts such as the effective schools movement which had the notion that schools should be effective in providing students with the skills necessary to become contributing members of society (Mace-Matluck, 1987).

Effective Schools research emerged as a result of a quest to find solutions on how to educate children from urban, impoverished areas. Several factors were identified by Weber (1971) that effect student achievement in inner-city, low income schools: strong leadership, high expectations, orderly climate, careful evaluation of student progress, and emphasis on reading. Rutter and his team (1979) authored a book *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children*. The title was based on the amount of time students devote to schooling. During a three year field study, they examined twelve London inner city schools’ attendance and delinquency rates to determine if the schools had similar outcomes. The researchers concluded that each school had its own “ethos”, or overall tone, which contributed to its success or failure. Schools with good ethos had several things in common: positive student-teacher relationships, high expectations, frequent assessment and rapid feedback, strong emphasis on academic achievement, and an orderly climate. Lezotte, Edmonds, and Ratner (1974) reported that effective schools have better discipline and high expectations for student success.

The core beliefs of Effective Schools research are: all children can learn and come to school motivated to do so, schools have sufficient control of the variables to assure that students do learn, schools should be held accountable for measured student achievement, and schools should disaggregate the measured student achievement in order to be certain that all students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or social class, are successfully learning the intended curriculum (Lezotte, 1991). Schools that strive to be high performing must be anchored in these beliefs.

Effective Schools Research

Effective Schools Research emerged in response to the Coleman report and its controversial finding that family background was the biggest determining factor that affected student achievement and that schools were relatively ineffective at overcoming the academic disparities that children bring with them. The leader of the effective schools movement was Ronald R. Edmonds. Edmonds and other researchers set out to find schools where kids from low income families were highly successful and thereby prove that schools can and do make a difference. They looked at achievement data from schools where student populations were comprised of poverty backgrounds. Nationwide, they were able to find schools where poor children were learning, and they were able to contradict Coleman's conclusion. They were then curious as to why some schools made a difference but others did not so they compared successful schools with similar schools in like neighborhoods where children were not learning or learning at a low-level. Characteristics of these schools were observed and documented, and one primary conclusion was that there are unique characteristics and processes common to schools

where children are learning, regardless of family background. These characteristics are correlated to student success; hence, they are called correlates (Lezotte, 1991).

The correlates are the means to achieving high and equitable levels of student learning. It is expected that all children (whether they be male or female, rich or poor, black or white) will learn at least the essential knowledge, concepts and skills needed so that they can be successful at the next level the next year. Further, it has been found that when school improvement processes based upon the effective schools research are implemented the proportions of students that achieve academic excellence either improves, or at the very least, remains the same. (Association of Effective Schools, 1996)

Ronald Edmonds, who, along with his colleagues, convinced the field of education and many practitioners in the field that schools could be changed and reformed to become effective schools for all students. The quotation from his now famous article “Educational Leadership” (October 1979) reads as follows:

It seems to me, therefore, that what is left of this discussion are three declarative statements: (a) We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us; (b) We already know more than we need to do that; and (c) Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

In effective schools studies, an influential and involved principal is one of the most important components; thereby, I have used effective schools research as a theoretical framework for this study. Effective schools are led by effective principals, so examining

educational leadership is my starting point for determining its impact on student outcomes.

Effective Schools Correlates

There are seven correlates of effective schools.

Safe and orderly environment. The first correlate is a safe and orderly environment. In effective schools, “there is an orderly, purposeful, business-like atmosphere, which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive, and is conducive to teaching and learning” (Lezotte, 2001, p. 6). How do you achieve a safe and orderly environment? According to Marzano (2003), a safe and orderly environment is achieved by establishing rules and procedures for behavioral problems that might be caused by the school’s physical characteristics or the school’s routines (ex: narrow hallways, or overlapping lunch periods). Establish clear school wide rules and procedures for general behavior. These rules and procedures should be clearly communicated and made highly visible. Establish and enforce appropriate consequences for violations of rules and procedures. Consequences must be fair and consistent. Establish a program that teaches self-discipline and responsibility to students. Show students appropriate behavior and engage their cooperation in the design of a school wide disciplinary program. Create a system that allows for the early detection of students who have high potential for violence and extreme behaviors.

High expectations for success. The second correlate is a climate of high expectations for success. In the effective school:

There is a climate of high expectations in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can obtain mastery of the school’s essential

curriculum. They also believe that they, the staff, have the capability to help all students obtain that mastery. (Lezotte, 2001, p. 7)

Benard (1995) describes the value of high expectations in schools: “Schools that establish high expectations for all students and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations, have high rates of academic success” (Brook et al., 1989; Edmonds, 1986; Howard, 1990; Levin, 1988; Rutter et al., 1979; Slavin et al., 1989).

Conveying positive and high expectations to students occurs in several ways. One of the most powerful ways is through personal relationships in which teachers and other school staff communicate to students that the work is important, and the teachers know the students can do it. This high expectation allows students to internalize the belief and in turn develops their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Schools also communicate expectations in the way they structure and organize learning (Weinstein et al., 1991). Schools that encourage critical thinking and inquiry are especially effective at communicating the expectation that students are capable of complex problem solving and decision making (Kohl, 1994; Mehan et al., 1994). Another aspect of curriculum that leads to high expectations is the need for schools to imbed multicultural content into the curriculum. This honors students’ home cultures and gives them the opportunity to study their own and other cultures and to develop cultural sensitivity. Schools must learn to do this without offending or intensifying stereotypes. Hilliard (1989) concludes after years of studying the role of learning and teaching style in the education of youth of color:

The explanation for the low performance of culturally different minority group students will not be found by pursuing questions of behavioral style...The children, no matter what their style, are failing primarily because of systematic

inequities in the delivery of whatever pedagogical approach the teachers claim to master—not because students cannot learn from teachers whose styles do not match their own. (p. 68)

How we group children in our classrooms and schools indicates the expectations we have for them. Research by Oakes (1985) and others documents the negative effects of tracking on low-achieving students. Conversely, recent research demonstrates positive academic and social outcomes as a result of heterogeneous, cooperative learning groups (Wheelock, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1990; Slavin, 1990). Evaluation is also a component of schooling through which we convey either high or low expectations. Schools with high expectations use several assessment approaches including authentic assessments that promote student reflection, critical inquiry, and problem solving, and assessments that validate children's different intelligences, strengths, and learning styles. A final area in which expectations play a role is in motivating students and instilling within them a responsibility for learning. Schools with high expectations actively engage students in a variety of rich and experiential curricula that connect to their interests, strengths, and real world activities (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Weinstein et al., 1991). In addition, they count on students' active participation and decision making in the daily life of the classroom and school to build responsibility and ownership for learning.

Instructional leadership. Instructional Leadership is the third correlate. In an effective school:

The principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and continually communicates the mission of the school to staff, parents, and students. In addition, the principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional

effectiveness in the management of the instructional program. Clearly, the role of the principal as the articulator of the mission of the school is crucial to the overall effectiveness of the school. (Lezotte, 2001, p. 5)

The principal is not the sole leader; he or she is a “leader of leaders” (Lezotte, 1991, p. 3) empowering teachers and including them in decisions about the school’s instructional goals. “In order to achieve significant changes in classroom practice, teachers must have an opportunity to participate in shaping a school’s vision...” (Cibulka & Nakayama, 2000, pp. 5-6). According to Hallinger (2009), effective schools have principals who work with the staff to ensure that the school has clear, measurable, time-based goals focused on the academic progress of students. The principal should also have coordination and control of instruction and curriculum. The principal should be deeply engaged in supervising and monitoring teaching and learning in the school. Their leadership should also focus on building teacher capacity through professional learning, peer to peer networking, or peer coaching in order to yield better results for changing teacher practices and supporting student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004, 2007; Marks & Printy, 2003).

Clear and focused mission. The fourth correlate is a clear and focused mission. In effective schools, “there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff shares an understanding of and commitment to the instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures and accountability. The staff accepts responsibility for students’ learning of the school’s essential curricular goals” (Lezotte, 1991, p. 6). Haberman (2003) puts the responsibility on the principal to create a clear school mission. However, for teachers to be an integral part of the change process, they should become partners

with the principal in creating the vision (Cibulka & Nakayama, 2000). An effective school's mission will be anchored around "learning for all" outcomes. The staff believes that all children can learn, and, in order to reach this goal, they readily change the "what", "when", and "how" in order to reach all learners at all levels.

Opportunity to learn and student time on task. The fifth correlate is opportunity to learn and student time on task. In an effective school, "teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential skills. For a high percentage of this time students are engaged in whole class or large group, teacher-directed, planned learning activities" (Lezotte, 2001, p. 9). Due to accountability and high stakes testing, teachers now have to become more skilled at interdisciplinary curriculum and learn how to prioritize what content is most valuable. The issue of time continues to be a challenge and effective schools recognize that some students need more time to achieve mastery.

Frequent monitoring of student progress. The sixth correlate is frequent monitoring of student progress. In the effective school, "pupil progress over the essential objectives are measured frequently, monitored frequently, and the results of those assessments are used to improve individual student behaviors and performances as well as to improve the curriculum as a whole" (Lezotte, 2001, p. 8). In his paper, "Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation", Lezotte (1991) cites that after what he terms the "first generation" of frequent monitoring of student progress is accomplished, schools will need to advance into a "second generation" of frequent monitoring and progress. During the second generation, the use of technology will permit teachers to do a better job of monitoring their students' progress (Lezotte, 1991). It also

allows students to monitor their own learning and adjust their own behavior.

Computerized practice tests, the ability to get immediate results on homework, and the ability to see correct solutions developed on the screen helps to assure student learning.

Home school relations. The final correlate is home school relations. In effective schools, “parents understand and support the basic mission of the school and are given opportunities to play important roles in helping the school to achieve its mission” (Lezotte, 2001, p.8). A good deal of the effective schools literature has focused on the need for schools to serve and educate not only the child, but the entire family (Goodman, 1997; Johnson, 1997). The idea is for schools to do whatever they have to in order to get the parents involved and strengthen the parent-child-school relationship. Because the home environment is so valuable, it is important to understand how to positively affect that environment. According to Marzano (2003), the home environment is composed of three different elements: 1) Communication about school, (2) supervision, and (3) parental expectations and parenting styles (p. 128). Communication about school refers to parents’ interest in and communication about the schoolwork of their children. The most commonly mentioned ways to communicate are parents having frequent and systematic discussions with their children regarding schoolwork, parents encouraging their children regarding schoolwork, and providing resources to help their children do schoolwork (Marzano, 2003). Supervision generally refers to the extent to which parents monitor and control their children’s behavior to optimize academic achievement. Specific behaviors commonly associated with effective home supervision include monitoring the time spent doing homework (Fehrmann, Keith & Reimers, 1987; Peng & Wright, 1994), monitoring when students return home from school and what they do after school (Ho Sui-Chu &

Willms, 1993), and monitoring the extent to which students watch television (Paik, 1995). Parental expectations and parenting styles are considered the most important element of the home environment. The method and extent to which parents communicate their high expectations for academic achievement have a high correlation to enhanced achievement (Boersma & Chapman, 1982; Cohen, 1987; Marjoribanks, 1988; Scott-Jones, 1984). Effective schools impact home school relations by providing training and support for parents to enhance their communication with their children about school, their supervision of their children, and their ability to communicate expectations to their children within the context of an effective parenting style (Marzano, 2003, p. 131).

Case Studies of High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

The literature review revealed that high-performing, high-poverty schools are succeeding through proven methods. In 2000, the Heritage Foundation launched the *No Excuses* campaign in a national effort to mobilize public pressure on behalf of better education for the poor. Samuel Carter, author of *No Excuses*, researched 21 high-performing, high-poverty schools from all parts of the United States. This group is represented by private schools, charter schools, a religious school, a rural school, and public schools that had 75% or more of their students on free/reduced lunch. Ten of the 21 schools scored above the 65th percentile on national academic achievement tests, while 11 of the 21 scored above the 80th percentile. Schools with 75% or more students on free/reduced lunch typically score below the 35th percentile. The success of these high-performing, high-poverty schools was the result of hard work, common sense teaching philosophies, and successful leadership strategies that can be replicated (Carter, 2000). Carter's research found that there are seven common traits of high-performing, high-

poverty schools: principals must be free to decide how to spend their money, whom to hire, and what to teach; principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement; master teachers bring out the best in a faculty; rigorous and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement; achievement is the key to discipline; principals work actively with parents to make the home a center of learning; and effort creates ability.

Doug Reeves is known for his research on “90/90/90” schools, where 90% or more of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90% or more of the students were members of ethnic minority groups, and 90% or more of the students met the district or state academic standards in reading or another area (Reeves, 2000). The research consists of students in a variety of school settings, from elementary through high school. In researching these schools, he sought to identify the extent to which there was a common set of behaviors exhibited by the leaders and teachers. His findings indicated the following five characteristics: a focus on academic achievement; clear curriculum choices; frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement; an emphasis on nonfiction writing; and collaborative scoring of student work.

In a report from the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, research was done in eight high-performing, high-poverty Kentucky elementary schools to determine how they broke the pattern of low achievement. The schools were selected based on several criteria: 50% or more of students on free/reduced lunch, academic test scores of 75% or higher for minority students and students on free/reduced lunch, and an achievement gap of fewer than 15 points between low and middle income students and

between White and African American students. The common characteristics of the eight schools in this study were: high expectations; relationships; academic instructional focus; student assessment; leadership and decision making; faculty work ethic and morale; and teacher recruitment, hiring and assignment (Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpsman, 2005).

A report by the Council of Chief State School Officers and The Charles A. Dana Center in Texas (2002) described a case study of five high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in Texas. At four of the schools the majority of the students were Latino, and one of the schools had an African American student majority. Three of the schools had 85% or more of their students on free/reduced lunch, and two of the schools had slightly more than 50% of their students on free/reduced lunch. The similarities that these five schools shared as strategies that maximized student performance were: high expectations, instructional alignment, and collaboration among staff for improvement, using assessment data to drive instruction, student-centered learning culture, and parent participation in the educational process.

Driven to Succeed (2002) is a case study analysis of how seven high-poverty middle schools progressed so that they were performing at the same level or better than higher-income schools in their states. At least 50% of the school's students were on the free/reduced lunch program, average achievement scores were at or above the state average in mathematics and reading, and all schools were public, non-charter and non-magnet. Four characteristics emerged at these schools: high expectations for all students, dedicated to collaborative environments, implementing organizational structures that

support teaching and learning, and providing extra support to ensure no child was left behind (Picucci et. al, 2002).

Reform literature extensively describes practices observed in schools that are high-performing and high-poverty with the following characteristics: high expectations, visible and attainable goals, laser-like focus on learners, strong leadership, collective sense of responsibility among staff for improvement, instructional alignment, relevant staff development, parent and community engagement, additional instructional time, frequent monitoring of student progress, adequate resources, and perseverance.

The leaders in these high-performing, high-poverty schools have characteristics that influence instructional practices, which impact student performance. Leaders in high achieving schools create and maintain a school-wide focus on instruction and high expectations, develop multiple support systems for students with special needs, and capitalize on the strengths of teachers to enhance student outcomes (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). According to Nettles and Herrington (2007), school effectiveness can be predicted by the effectiveness of the school leader in maintaining a school-wide focus on critical instructional areas, monitoring school and student progress, and communicating expectations of high performance. It is imperative that school leaders understand the magnitude of the positive effect they can have on achievement by becoming more involved in the instructional process. In order to achieve a positive influence on student achievement, school leaders must become effective instructional leaders (Nettles & Herrington, 2007).

Leadership

According to Leithwood and Riehl (2005), at the core of leadership are two functions: providing direction and exercising influence.

Leadership is an elusive concept that, at times, can be vague and ambiguous. As a result, there are no set rules or formulas for leaders to follow. There are only guidelines and concepts, perceptions and ideas, abstractions and generalities. This is why the art of leading people is so difficult to master and teach and why there is such a great need for role models. (Phillips, 1992)

Leaders do not just impose goals on followers, but work with others to create a shared sense of purpose and direction. Leaders primarily work through and with other people to help create conditions that enable others to be effective. Finally, leaders understand that leadership is a function more than a role.

The concept of leadership dates back for centuries. According to Bass (1981), the study of leadership is an ancient art. There are many theories of leadership; however, for the purpose of this study, I focused on instructional, transformational and distributed leadership practices. “In contrast with many earlier leadership models applied to school administration, these models focus explicitly on the manner in which the *educational* leadership exercised by school administrators and teachers brings about improved educational outcomes” (e.g. Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999b; Southworth, 2002). Ron Edmonds (1979) found that one clear difference between improving and declining schools was that, in improving schools, the principals acted as instructional leaders.

Instructional Leadership Effects on Student Achievement

Instructional leadership models emerged in the early 1980's from effective schools research. Effective schools identified strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction from the principal as a characteristic of elementary schools that were effective at teaching children in poor urban communities (Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). During the 1980's and 1990's, this model became so popular it was deemed the 'model of choice' by many principal leadership academies (Hallinger & Wimpelberg, 1992). The growing popularity of this leadership style was the result of research studies that examined change implementation, school effectiveness, school improvement, and program improvement. Instructional leadership is viewed as targeting 'first-order' variables in the change process; influencing conditions that directly impact the quality of curriculum and instruction given to students. The research consistently found that the skillful leadership of school principals was a key contributing factor to these affecting these areas.

In seeking to define the characteristics of instructional leadership, there are several observations: 1) instructional leadership focuses predominantly on the role of the school principal in coordinating, controlling, supervising and developing curriculum and instruction in the school (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985); 2) instructional leaders are 'strong, directive leaders' (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986); 3) instructional leaders combine expertise and charisma. They are hands-on, 'hip-deep' in curriculum and instruction, and unafraid of working with teachers on the improvement of teaching and learning (Cuban, 1984; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986); 4) instructional leaders are goal-oriented, focusing on the improvement of student academic

outcomes; and 5) they are viewed as culture builders. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2000, pp. 7-8) identified several behaviors that characterize instructional leadership:

- Understanding the school's mission and stating it in direct, concrete terms in order to establish a focus and unify the staff.
- Portraying learning as the most important reason for being in school.
- Demonstrating the belief that all students can learn and that the school makes the difference between success and failure.
- Establishing standards and guidelines that can be used to monitor the effect of the curriculum.
- Protecting learning time from disruption and emphasizing the priority of efficient use of classroom time.
- Maintaining a safe, orderly school environment.
- Monitoring student progress by means of explicit performance data and sharing those data with the staff.
- Establishing incentives and rewards to encourage excellence in student and teacher performance.
- Allocating resources according to instructional priorities.
- Establishing procedures to guide parental involvement.
- Maintaining two-way communication with parents.
- Expressing the expectation that instructional programs improve over time.
- Involving staff and others in planning implementation strategies.
- Monitoring the implementation of new practices and programs.

- Celebrating the accomplishments of students, staff, and the school.
- Knowing, legitimizing, and applying research on effective instruction.
- Making frequent classroom visits to observe instruction.
- Focusing teacher supervision on instructional improvement.

Hallinger (2000) formulated a model that proposed three dimensions of the instructional leadership construct: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. Within these dimensions, it is assumed that it is the principal's responsibility to ensure that the school has a clear academic mission and to communicate it to the staff, to ensure the development of the academic core, and to create a climate that supports teaching and learning. Harri (2011) cites Reitzug, West, and Angel (2008) as stating instructional leaders impact teaching and learning in a variety of ways, yet the most effective instructional leaders focus on school systems that encourage shared instructional practices and collegiality among staff.

With the school restructuring that came to be in the 1990's, new terms such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership emerged. Many people started to become unsatisfied with the instructional leadership model because they believed it focused too much on the principal as the primary person with expertise, power, and authority. It started to become characterized as directive, top-down, and controlling. This evolution of the educational leadership role into a transformational role has been labeled as reflecting 'second order' changes (Leithwood, 1994) as it is aimed primarily at changing the organization's normative structure.

Transformational Leadership Effects on Student Achievement

Transformational leadership focuses on developing the organization's capacity to innovate. A transformation leader's goal is to develop a shared vision and shared commitment to school change. This leader understands the needs of the individual staff rather than 'coordinating and controlling' them towards the organization's desired goals. Transformational leadership seeks to generate 'second order' effects by creating the conditions under which others are committed and self-motivated to work towards school improvement without specific direction.

Transformational leadership is the favored style of leadership given that it is assumed to produce results beyond expectations (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders form "a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (p. 4). Transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Ashkanasy and Tse (2000) concluded that transformational leaders possess special qualities, including the "ability to communicate enthusiasm and vision, a positive outlook, intuitive insight, and emotional competency" (p. 221). This type of leadership provides incentive for people to attempt improvements in their practices. This is why Avolio and Bass (1988) refer to transformational leadership as "value added." Leithwood and Poplin's research (1992) suggests transformational leaders are in pursuit of three fundamental goals: 1) helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; 2) fostering teacher development; and 3) helping them solve problems together more effectively. Many transformational

leadership models view this leadership as an organizational entity rather than the property of a single individual.

According to Jingping and Leithwood (2012), there are specific leadership practices that transformational leaders possess that have an effect on student achievement:

- *Developing a shared vision and building goal consensus.* This involves the leader identifying, developing, and articulating a shared vision that inspires staff; achieving goal consensus among the staff, motivating staff with challenging but achievable goals, communicating optimism about future goals, and giving staff an overall sense of purpose for their work.
- *Providing intellectual stimulation.* The leader must challenge staff's assumptions, stimulate and encourage creativity, and provide information to help them evaluate, refine, and perform their tasks more effectively.
- *Providing individualized support.* Leaders act as mentors or coaches to staff members and support their professional development.
- *Modeling behavior.* The leader "walks the talk." They provide a role model of ethical behavior, instill pride, respect, and trust in staff, symbolize success, and demonstrate a willingness to change their own practices as a result of new learning.
- *Holding high performance expectations.* The leader demonstrates through their own behavior that they expect a high level of professionalism from staff, hold high expectations for students, and expect staff to be effective innovators.

- *Providing contingent rewards.* Leaders reward followers for completing agreed-upon work.
- *Management by exception.* Leaders monitor the work of followers but intervene only when performance deviates from the leaders' expectations.
- *Building collaborative structures.* Leaders ensure that staff have adequate involvement in decisions about programs and instruction, establish work conditions that facilitate staff collaboration for planning and professional growth, and distribute leadership broadly among the staff.
- *Strengthening school culture.* Leaders promote an atmosphere of caring and trust among the staff, build a collaborative culture that reflects the school vision, and encourage ongoing collaboration for program implementation.
- *Engaging communities.* Leaders demonstrate sensitivity to community requests, incorporate community values in the school, and actively encourage parents to become involved in their children's education.
- *Improving the instructional program.* Leaders plan and supervise instruction, provide instructional support, frequently monitor school progress, and buffer staff from district or state initiatives that are potential distractions from school priorities.

Distributed Leadership Effects on Student Achievement

Distributed leadership has also become the object of recent research. The concept of distributed leadership is that the initiatives or practices used to influence members of the organization are exercised by more than a single person (Gronn, 2002). The concept of distributed leadership overlaps other well developed concepts of leadership such as

shared, collaborative, collective, democratic, and participative leadership in that it is essentially a set of practices that are taken on by people at all levels rather than only those at the top. Distributed leadership reflects the division of labor experienced in the organization on a daily basis and reduces the chances of error from decisions based on the limited information available to a single leader. It also increases the opportunities for the organization to benefit from more of its members ideas, allows members to take advantage of their individual strengths, and develops a fuller sense of appreciation of interdependence in the organization and how one person's behavior affects the organization as a whole. Distributed leadership is, simply put, collaboration and support with those that have a responsibility to educate children. This concept is being embraced by many principals due to the enormous amount of responsibilities and accountability they continue to face. Harris (2011) argues that the movement toward accountability has made collective leadership and shared decision-making essential, and the role of principals is to act as an analytical guide to provide resources and support to teachers and "work together with teachers to monitor progress toward accomplishment of common goals."

Instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership styles have similarities and differences. The similarities are much more significant and allow a principal to see the value in integrating each style for the benefit of his or her staff and students. Distributed leadership plays an integral part in both leadership styles; however, the style used most often should be specific to the context of the situation a principal is challenged with. As an effective leader, you will have to adapt your leadership style to the changing conditions in your school. Effective schools research consistently determined that strong

leadership is necessary to build instructional capacity and foster student achievement. This led to further research on the role instructional leaders play in improving student achievement. In schools that consistently fail to meet academic standards, i.e. turnaround schools, research shows that instructional leadership is paramount to achieving academic goals.

Turnaround School Leadership

High stakes accountability and the pressure for schools to perform have placed a spotlight on schools that have proved to be under performing according to state standards. These schools have been the focus of recent research and have been labeled “turnaround schools.” According to Fullan (2006), many times the leadership practices in these schools lead the school from “awful” to “adequate”. The turnaround leaders’ tasks are daunting: raise test scores, reduce the number of dropouts, narrow the achievement gap, fix endless problems, make unpopular decisions, and convert skeptics. The leadership characteristics of a turnaround principal are much more complicated than the characteristics of those leaders whose schools are in the school improvement process. Both leaders have a goal to improve student achievement by changing how schools and classrooms operate; however, turnaround leaders must have quick, dramatic improvements within three years, while school improvement leaders can have steady, incremental improvements over a longer period of time (Herman et. al., 2008). Turnaround leadership should be anchored in school improvement practices and strategies, so the approaches of the two leaders are common, but the implementation is different due to the rapid and substantial changes the turnaround leader must make.

Turnaround leaders must first succeed in getting people to internalize the expectations of standards-based accountability systems by modeling commitment and focus using face-to-face relationships, not bureaucratic controls (Fullan, 2006). These leaders must work to help staff members unlearn old behaviors and learn new behaviors and values that are associated with collective responsibility for teaching practice and student learning. Building a committed staff is essential and contributes to the level of achievement in schools. Turnaround leaders must challenge the belief system of their staff to ensure the staff not only believes all children can learn, but that they believe in themselves and their ability to provide effective instruction (Duke, 2004). Leaders must ensure the staff is committed to the vision and are willing to do whatever it takes to meet goals and raise student achievement. A distributed style of leadership is the practice that these leaders use to establish school commitment, create school support teams, develop lead teachers, and create this culture that shares the responsibility for student achievement.

Turnaround leaders establish a clear and strong internal focus on instruction, student learning, and expectations for teacher and student performance by focusing on analyzing student data and monitoring progress. In turnaround schools, the use of data to drive instruction is paramount. Data is used to set goals for instructional improvement, make changes to affect instruction immediately and directly, and continually reassess student learning and instructional practices to refocus the goals (Herman et. al 2008). There is a consistent focus by this leader on developing strategies to improve instruction.

According to Herman et al. (2008), it is also important that turnaround leaders provide visible improvements early in the turnaround process in an effort to rally the staff

around the effort and overcome resistance. This allows the leader to set the tone for change and establish that student achievement is possible, hence, establishing a climate for long-term change. Another strategy to overcome resistance according to Salmonowicz (2009) is that turnaround leaders should present teachers with research which shows that teachers have a bigger impact on student achievement progress than any other factor, including race, socioeconomic status, and class size.

Salmonowicz (2009) has several recommendations for leaders of turnaround schools. First, the leader must ensure that more than enough resources are available, from personnel, to technology, to discretionary funds. Salmonowicz (2009) cites John Carroll (1963) as making the case that time is the primary factor affecting student learning; aside from money, it may be the most important resource to be managed by a turnaround leader. Adding time to the instructional day, changing instructional schedules to maximize learning time, creating common planning times for teachers to collaborate on analyzing data and planning aligned instruction and protecting instructional time by not allowing assemblies, visits, or interruptions in core academic areas are strategies that allow student achievement to be maximized (Johnson, 2011). Second, the turnaround leader should make literacy the centerpiece of the school's action plan. Literacy must be addressed comprehensively. Staffing, course scheduling, resource allocation and professional development should all revolve around the literacy plan. Lastly, provide frequent, targeted, professional development for teachers and administrators to ensure collective capacity building. The professional development should be aligned with the school goals and purposefully intended to increase student outcomes.

The research is clear that leadership behaviors have an impact on student achievement; however, there does not seem to be a “silver bullet” or “recipe” that leaders can follow. With the pressures of high stakes accountability, school leaders must have “tools” or a basic set of practices they rely on in the context of their school needs. As the research shows, the leadership behaviors that greatly affect student achievement are those that impact teacher attitudes and performance. Collective and collaborative decision making has enormous and powerful effect on teacher attitudes. When teachers feel empowered and have a voice in decisions that are made, it starts to build leadership capacity in the organization. According to Williams (2009), building leadership capacity is vital to successfully sustaining improvement in schools. The role of the principal is to place the right people, with the correct training, professionalism, and drive into the right positions of leadership and into the decision-making processes of the school. Walstrom and Louis (2008) determined that leadership practices that share power created greater motivation, increased trust and risk taking, and built a sense of community and efficacy among its’ members. These practices lead to a strong and effective school climate. According to Styron and Nyman (2008), collaboration between the instructional leaders and staff of high performing schools was imperative in order to establish a positive and productive school climate, which enhances the learning environment.

Leadership and Achievement

Over the past several decades, a growing body of research has made it clear that leadership matters when it comes to improving school achievement. Marzano (2005) cites a 1977 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity that identified the principal as the single most influential person in a school:

In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He or she is the person responsible for all activities that occur in and around the school building. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become.

The principal is the main link between the community and the school, and the way he or she performs in this capacity largely determines the attitudes of parents and students about the school. If a school is a vibrant, innovative, child-centered place, if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the principal's leadership as the key to success. (p.56)

In a meta-analysis of studies on the effects of leadership on student achievement, Hallinger and Heck (1996) reported that school leaders account for almost 5% of the variation of test scores or of roughly 25% of all in-school variables. Waters et al. (2003) used a meta-analysis approach and concluded that there is a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement by finding the average effect size to be .25. This correlation was based on specific behaviors related to principal leadership. From 69 studies in a meta-analysis, the researchers identified 21 categories of behaviors that are referred to as "responsibilities". Each of these responsibilities was found to have a statistically significant relationship with student achievement. The .25 correlation is interpreted as a one standard deviation improvement in leadership practices (21 responsibilities) is associated with an increase in average student achievement from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile. Research by Leithwood et al. (2004) concluded that

effective leadership ranks second only to the quality of teaching in influencing student learning. Scheerens and Bosker (1997) concluded quality leadership is particularly important in schools serving students in poverty.

Other current research has determined that the effects of school leadership on student achievement have an indirect influence and that the effects are difficult to measure (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). In a quantitative meta-analysis of studies into the effects of educational leadership on student achievement, Witziers et al. (2003) found there to be no evidence for a direct effect of educational leadership on achievement in secondary schools, but instead, leaders had an indirect effect by improving the learning climate through teacher job satisfaction, an orientation towards achievement, and the evaluation and feedback process. They believed that shaping the school's culture was the greatest indirect influence a leader has on improving student achievement. Supovits, Sirinides, and May (2009) found that principals have an indirect effect on student achievement through their association with the teachers who interact with students each day. Hallinger and Heck (1996) argue that "although it is theoretically possible that principals do exert some direct effects on students' achievement, the linkage between principal leadership and student achievement is inextricably tied to the actions of others in the school."

The behaviors of educational leaders clearly influence instructional practices, which impacts student performance. Leaders that concentrate on instruction, foster community and trust, and communicate the school's mission and goals were found to have a positive influence on teachers' instructional practices, which in turn influences students' performance (Supovits et al., 2009). According to Nettles and Harrington

(2007), school effectiveness can be predicted by how the educational leader maintains a school-wide focus on addressing critical instructional areas, monitoring school and student progress, and communicating expectations for high performance.

There is little evidence in current educational research that will support the belief that school leaders have a direct effect on student achievement. Instead, the common themes are that school leaders have an indirect effect through their influence on school systems such as curriculum, instruction, and teacher practice (Witziers et al., 2003; Nettles & Herrington; Supovits et al., 2009).

Leithwood (2006) concludes that almost all successful school leaders have the same set of basic leadership practices, and it is the enactment of the practices, not the practices themselves, that is responsive to the context. One of the core practices that may account for the largest proportion of a leader's impact involves the principal setting direction. The principal must clearly articulate to all stakeholders that all school decisions and practices will be good for students and improve their learning. The leader must identify and articulate a vision, foster group goals, create high performance expectations, and use data to track progress and performance. Another core practice is developing people. Leaders must provide teachers and staff with the necessary training and support to succeed. To motivate and positively influence teachers, the leader can offer intellectual stimulation, provide individualized support, and provide models of best practice and beliefs that are fundamental to the organization. The third core practice is redesigning the organization. The leader ensures that the conditions of the school fully supports rather than inhibits teaching and learning. This is accomplished by building a collaborative

culture, structuring the organization to facilitate work, creating positive relationships with families and connecting the school to the community.

Based on this research, the common practices that school leaders, regardless of the context, must focus on are: focusing the goals and mission of the school, maintaining a school-wide focus on critical instructional areas, supporting instructional improvement by supervising the teaching and learning process, monitoring school and student progress, and communicating expectations for high performance.

Methodology

The underachievement of minority students in schools continues to be a cause for concern among those that have a vested interest in education. Particularly, African American students with low socioeconomic status (SES) continue to perform the lowest of all groups ultimately contributing to the increasing achievement gap. The achievement gap is one of the most pressing education policy challenges that states currently face (Grant, 2009). Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the “nation’s report card”, shows that reading achievement has barely budged since 1992, and high school achievement remains flat. The report emphasized that near the end of high school, Black and Latino students have reading and math skills that are virtually the same as those of eighth graders (Grant, 2009).

Children living in low SES neighborhoods will almost certainly attend schools in their area that are considered urban. Urban schools are located in large cities, mostly characterized by poverty, and have the challenges of that environment: unemployment, violence and crime, and lack of educational values and parental involvement. Urban schools also face the challenges of the school environment: large student populations, staffing effective teachers, lack of resources, low student attendance rates, high student mobility rate, and high populations of special education and immigrant students. Often, urban schools are part of a large, centralized bureaucracy that may be slow to respond to the needs of the schools. Students come to school carrying the burdens of poverty, hunger, and poor housing. These are the realities of urban schools (Peterson, 1994). The achievement gap is the product of multiple social and economic factors in society that place minority students at a disadvantage. Students in urban areas experience lack of

access to health care, inadequate nutrition and housing, and cultural clashes in society that frequently cause some students to disassociate with academics (Grant, 2009). With all of these challenges, there are actually some urban schools that are meeting and exceeding expectations for achievement with their urban students. Educational literature shows that the leadership in these schools is one of the primary factors that counters the challenges and creates an environment of high performance.

Description of the Research Design

The purpose of this study was to identify the practices of effective leaders in high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools. In this study, an investigation revealed the most common characteristics of effective school leaders that contribute to the high academic achievement of students in secondary settings.

A qualitative approach was used in this investigation to allow the researcher to take part in another person's perspective, which can be assumed to be meaningful and able to be made explicit (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2013) stated, "we conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored." The issue of there being very few high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools made this study one that benefited from using a qualitative approach. This study was a form of phenomenological study in that it describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences. Creswell (2013) describes a phenomenological study as "research that describes lived experiences as a phenomenon and has a strong philosophical component."

Phenomenology is also defined as a single concept or idea; a heterogeneous group participating in a philosophical discussion typically through an interview process. This multi-site study incorporated semi-structured interviews with predetermined topics.

Principals in high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools were asked open ended questions related to their leadership characteristics, greatest challenges, and professional development. An analysis of the responses was done to find common themes. I used a standardized, open-ended interview approach with the exact wording and sequence of the questions determined in advance. Principals answered the same open-ended questions in the same pre-determined order. The intended result of this study was to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the impact of effective leadership by focusing specifically on the leadership characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools.

Research Questions

- 1) To what extent do these high-performing, high-poverty secondary campuses exhibit correlates of effective schools?
- 2) What do leaders of high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools perceive as significant issues that hinder student achievement and how are these issues addressed?
- 3) What recommendations do leaders of high-poverty secondary schools have for university programs to assist secondary leaders in high-poverty campuses in improving their leadership strategies?

Setting

For the purpose of this study, five urban secondary principals were asked for an interview, and their identities were documented with pre-determined codes to maintain confidentiality of the results, for example P1, P2, P3, etc.. Two middle school principals and three high school principals were sought to interview.

Two of the principals were from a large urban school district located in the Gulf Coast region of Texas, which encompasses 36.6 square miles. It is the most ethnically diverse of school districts of comparable size in Texas. More than 80 dialects are spoken in its 45,000 student enrollment. There are 45 campuses: 24 elementary, 6 intermediate, 6 middle schools, and 5 high schools. The representative demographics of the district are 50.5% Hispanic, 32% African American, 12.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.2% White, and 0.2% Native American. Of the student population, 80.8% qualified as Economically Disadvantaged, 35.9% Limited English Proficient, 18.5% Bilingual, and 7.7% Special Education. 2,968 teachers and 155 campus administrators serve this diverse population of students with an average experience of 10 years. During the 2011-2012 school year, this district earned a Texas Education Agency (TEA) ranking as a “Recognized” school district as documented on the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report.

One principal was from a large, suburban school district located in the Gulf Coast region of Texas, which encompasses 170 square miles with 74 campuses: 45 elementary schools, 14 middle schools, and 11 high schools and include over 69,000 students. This district is one of the most diverse school districts in Texas and in the nation with over 100 languages spoken. The representative demographics are 26.2% Hispanic, 29.5% African American, 21.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 19.5% White, and .51% American Indian. Of the student population, 38% qualified as Economically Disadvantaged, 14% Limited English Proficient, 13% Bilingual, and 6.4% Special Education. 4, 571 teachers and 229 campus administrators serve this population with an average experience of 12 years. During the 2011-2012 school year this district earned a TEA ranking of “Acceptable” on the AEIS report.

One principal was from a growing, diverse, and urban district located in the Gulf Coast region of Texas, which encompasses 57 square miles with 38 campuses: 24 elementary schools, 1 third-fifth grade intermediate school, 1 pre-kindergarten-second grade primary school, 1 middle school of choice, 6 sixth-eighth grade middle schools, 1 high school career academy, 1 early college academy, and 3 5A comprehensive high schools and includes over 36,000 students. The representative demographics are 40.4% Hispanic, 40.2% African American, 14% White, 4.3% Asian, 0.9% two or more races, and 0.2% American Indian. Of the student population, 71.6% qualified as Economically Disadvantaged and 18% Limited English Proficient. 2,984 teachers and 110 campus administrators serve this population with an average experience of 8 years. During the 2011-2012 school year, this district earned a TEA ranking of “Acceptable” on the AEIS report.

One principal was from the largest district in the state of Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States. This district has 279 schools and more than 203,000 students. The representative demographics are 61.9% Hispanic, 26.2% African American, 7.8% White, 3.1% Asian, 0.7% two or more races, 0.2% American Indian, 0.1% Asian/Pacific Islander. Of the student population, 80.6% qualified as Economically Disadvantaged and 30.5% Limited English Proficient. Over 11,800 teachers and 545 campus administrators serve this population with an average experience of 11 years.

Subjects

Principal one (P1) is the leader of a high school with a total student population of 2,863. The representative demographics for this school are 43.8% Hispanic, 41.9% African American, 68% Economically Disadvantaged, and 12.7% Limited English

Proficient (LEP). In 2010-2011, this school achieved 90% TAKS proficiency in Reading, 75% TAKS proficiency in Math, and received a Gold Performance Acknowledgement (GPA) for commended Social Studies scores on the TAKS test.

Principal two (P2) is the leader of a middle school with a total student population of 912. The representative demographics for this school are 96.1% Hispanic, 2.6% African American, 94.5% Economically Disadvantaged, and 40.2% Limited English Proficient (LEP). In 2010-2011, this school achieved 84% TAKS proficiency in Reading, 88% TAKS proficiency in Math, received a “Recognized” Accountability rating, and received several GPA’s for attendance, commended scores on Science, and commended scores on Social Studies TAKS tests.

Principal three (P3) is the leader of a middle school with a total student population of 1,248. The representative demographics for this school are 40.4% Hispanic, 40.8% African American, 70.2% Economically Disadvantaged, and 11.1% Limited English Proficient (LEP). In 2010-2011, this school achieved 92% TAKS proficiency in Reading, 84% TAKS proficiency in Math, received a “Recognized” Accountability rating, and received several GPA’s for commended scores on Reading, Writing, and Social Studies TAKS tests.

Principal four (P4) is the leader of a high school with a total student population of 2,799. The representative demographics for this school are 32.1% Hispanic, 62.6% African American, 69% Economically Disadvantaged, and 4.4% Limited English Proficient (LEP). In 2010-2011, this school achieved 86% TAKS proficiency in Reading, 75% in Math, and received a GPA for commended scores on the Social Studies TAKS test.

Principal five (P5) is the leader of a high school with a total student population of 2,151. The representative demographics for this school are 42.8% Hispanic, 36.7% African American, 51% Economically Disadvantaged, and 6.6% Limited English Proficient (LEP). In 2010-2011, this school achieved 93% TAKS proficiency in Reading, 75% in Math, and received several GPA's for attendance, college-ready graduates, and commended scores on the Social Studies TAKS test.

Table 3-1 illustrates the demographic information of each school's population. Table 3-2 illustrates state assessment scores in Reading and Math, Accountability ratings, and the number of Gold Performance Acknowledgements that each school received for the 2010-2011 school year.

Table 0-1

Demographic Information of Student Population

<i>Campus Level</i>	<i>Student Population</i>	<i>Hispanic Student Population</i>	<i>African American Student Pop.</i>	<i>Eco. Dis. Percentage</i>	<i>LEP Percentage</i>
Middle School	912	96.1%	2.6%	94.5%	40.2%
Middle School	1,248	40.4%	40.8%	70.2%	11.1%
High School	2,863	43.8%	41.9%	68%	12.7%
High School	2,799	32.1%	62.6%	69%	4.4%
High School	2,151	42.8%	36.7%	51%	6.6%

Source: AEIS Reports (T.E.A.)

Table 0-2

State Assessment Scores, Accountability Rating, Gold Performance Awards

<i>Campus</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>2010-2011</i>	<i>2010-2011</i>	<i>T.E.A.</i>	<i>Number of Gold</i>
<i>Level</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Math TAKS</i>	<i>Accountability</i>	<i>Performance</i>
		<i>TAKS</i>		<i>Rating</i>	<i>Acknowledgements</i>
Middle School	912	84%	88%	Recognized	3
Middle School	1,248	92%	84%	Recognized	3
High School	2,863	90%	75%	Acceptable	1
High School	2,799	86%	75%	Acceptable	1
High School	2,151	93%	75%	Acceptable	3

Source: AEIS Reports (T.E.A.)

Selection criteria

The primary resource that was used to locate the schools that fit the criteria for this study was the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website. Information retrieved from this website was the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports by campus. This report gives information on Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores, Gold Performance Acknowledgements (GPA), school demographic information, economically disadvantaged percentages, ethnic makeup, student/teacher ratios, and other information related to campus programs. Additionally, the Great Schools website was useful in determining information on school performance and in comparing the demographics of schools within the district, city, or nearby areas.

The TAKS test is a standardized test used in Texas schools in grades 3-8 and 9-12 to assess students' comprehension of reading, writing, math, science, and social studies skills as set forth by Texas education standards. In secondary schools, all of these tests must be mastered at the exit level or students cannot graduate. Texas schools are "graded" by the TEA based largely on TAKS scores; however, there are many factors that are considered. There are four categories schools can be rated as with this accountability system: *Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Unacceptable*. The chart in Appendix E of this report illustrates the 2011 requirements for each category.

The Gold Performance Acknowledgement (GPA) system acknowledges districts and campuses for high performance on indicators other than those used to determine accountability ratings. These indicators are determined by the Commissioner of Education. Acknowledgement is given for high performance on:

- Advanced Course/Dual Enrollment Completion.
- Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate Results.
- Attendance Rate.
- College Ready Graduates.
- Commended Performance on Reading, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Writing, Science, Social Studies.
- Comparable Improvement on Reading, Mathematics.
- Recommended High School Program/Distinguished Achievement Program.
- SAT/ACT Results (College Admissions Tests).

- Texas Success Initiative – Higher Education Readiness Component in English Language Arts, Mathematics.

In order to receive an acknowledgement, the campus or district must be rated *Academically Acceptable* or higher, has results to be evaluated, and has met the acknowledgement criteria on one or more of the indicators (TEA Accountability Manual, 2011).

Free and reduced lunch numbers indicate the percentage of economically disadvantaged students on a campus or in a district. Children in households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are eligible for free lunch regardless of the household income. Children in households that have incomes within the limits on the Federal Income Chart are eligible for reduced-price meals. Schools are considered disadvantaged or high-poverty if they have 40% or more students that qualify for free or reduced lunch. Table 3-3 below gives the federal income qualifications for the 2012-2013 school year.

Table 0-3

Federal Income Qualifications for Free/Reduced Lunch

<i>Household Size</i>	<i>Yearly</i>	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>Weekly</i>
1	\$20,665	\$1,723	\$398
2	\$27,991	\$2,333	\$539
3	\$35,317	\$2,944	\$680
4	\$42,643	\$3,554	\$821
5	\$49,969	\$4,165	\$961
6	\$57,295	\$4,775	\$1,102
7	\$64,621	\$5,386	\$1,243
8	\$71,947	\$5,996	\$1,384
Each additional person	\$7,326	\$611	\$141

Source: Child Nutrition Guidelines 2012-2013

Using information from the above resources, schools were identified as they met the criteria described below. Approval for conducting this research was obtained from the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. A copy of the approval letter from the University can be found in Appendix A. Participants in this research study identified their approval on the *Consent to Participate in Confidential Research* letter found in Appendix B. Copies of the written approval forms from the university, school district, and participants have been confidentially maintained by the researcher.

Identified principals were contacted via email. Email to potential participants can be found in Appendix F. After waiting for responses, participants were told in the *Consent to Participate* letter that participation in the research project is voluntary, and they could refuse to participate, withdraw at any time, or refuse to answer any question during the interview. Participation in the research study was voluntary with the only alternative being non-participation. There was no consequence for anyone identified to participate in the study that chose not to participate.

Every effort was made to maintain the confidentiality of participants in this research project. Participants were confidentially paired with a code number by the researcher, and the code number does not appear within the results of the project. The list pairing the participants' names with code numbers was kept separate from all research materials, available only to the principal investigator. Names of participants or schools were not included in the study's results.

Purposeful sampling was used to select cases that provided insight into and in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon. In order to identify high-poverty, high-performing secondary school for the purpose of this study, the following selection criteria was used:

- The schools have Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores that meet 80% standard in Reading and Math or meet 75% floor and required improvement standard as defined by the Texas Education Agency accountability manual in 2011. The schools received Gold Performance Acknowledgements (GPA) in one or more areas in 2011.

- The schools have at least 50% or more students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.
- The high schools have a student population of 2000 or more. The middle schools have a student population of 900 or more.

Procedures

The University of Houston, Committee of the Protection of Human Subjects, granted approval of this study after reviewing my IRB. A copy of the approval letter can be found in Appendix A. To remove all identifiers that might indicate individual schools or districts, the interviewed principals' schools, districts, and names were replaced by predetermined codes to maintain an anonymous procedure for reviewing the data. Each principal that volunteered to participate in this research study signed a "Consent to Participate in Research" form before interviews were conducted (See Appendix B).

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in their entirety by the researcher. In order to analyze the interview data, the researcher used the data analysis spiral described by Creswell (2013): 1) create and organize files for data, 2) read through the text while making notes to get a sense of the data, 3) form codes based on the data, 4) interpret the data, and 5) represent the data in text, tabular, or figure form (See Figure 1). Participants' personal experiences were described along with the practices these secondary school leaders implement to create high academic achievement in high-poverty environments. The researcher deconstructed the data using codes to identify emerging themes. The data was classified into themes by reviewing significant statements and grouping them accordingly.

Instruments

This research study used a semi-structured interview setting with a set of specific questions created by the researcher. As a research tool, interviews created opportunities for open-ended examinations of phenomena from the unique perspective of the interviewee (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The interview included questions about the principal's history and experiences in education, questions related to his or her leadership characteristics and practices, and his or her professional development recommendations for educational leaders. Interviews provided opportunities to not only find out what people thought and felt, but also to observe non-verbal responses that added depth to this study. In *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, Irving Seidman (1998) stated:

Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior.

Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provide access to understanding their actions. (p.4)

Interviews for this study were predicted to last 45 to 60 minutes each. Participants were asked 11 open ended questions in a predetermined order. The interview questions were grouped into three sections: Introductory information, Leadership practices and challenges, and Professional Development Recommendations. The first question provided data regarding the participant's educational background, length and time in current position, and career history. The second and third questions focused on the participant's leadership philosophy and leadership style. The fourth question asked participants to describe their campus culture and climate. Question five asked participants about specific effective practices that they have implemented to improve student

performance. Question six focused on participants' belief systems and how they translate those beliefs into action. Question seven asked participants to describe their greatest challenges and how they overcome them. The next three questions focused on professional development. Participants were asked what professional development they engage in to stay current, what professional development contributed to their leadership skills, and what professional development recommendations they had for university programs to assist current and future urban leaders in increasing and sustaining student achievement. The final question asked participants to tell what three major legislative changes they would make to the educational system if they had the power. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

Limitations

Due to the small number of high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools in the Gulf Coast area, this study only had five study participants and may not be used as a generalization of best practices for all principals in high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools.

Qualitative interviews were used as the only source of data, which could be subject to other interpretations. Multiple sources of data (i.e. school walkthroughs, observations, and artifacts) could be included in future research to add depth to the study and allow a researcher to triangulate data to strengthen the study.

The qualitative interview process involved the principal only; future research could include interviews with students, teachers, and parents to gain knowledge from their perspective.

A limited number of years were examined for this study; an analysis of multiple years could be included in future research. Future studies could also look at trend data or growth measures when determining high-performance.

A limited number of indicators were examined using statewide assessment (TAKS and Gold Performance Acknowledgement) data. Also, examining SAT, ACT, specific number of minorities that graduated from these schools, etc. could extend this study.

This study focused on traditional public schools only. Future study could include charter schools.

Results

The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership characteristics of secondary school principals leading their high-poverty schools to high-performance in order to determine the extent their characteristics align with the correlates of effective schools, their perception of the most significant issues that hinder student achievement and how they address these issues, and their professional development recommendations for university programs to improve current and emerging principals' leadership strategies. Chapter Four provides the results of the data analysis, focusing on the information obtained from individual interviews conducted with five secondary school principals. Included in this chapter is information about the interviews, data from the transcribed interviews, themes from the data, and findings for each research question.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer three research questions:

- 1) To what extent do these high-performing, high-poverty secondary campuses exhibit correlates of effective schools?
- 2) What do leaders of high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools perceive as significant issues that hinder student achievement and how are these issues addressed?
- 3) What recommendations do leaders of high-poverty secondary schools have for university programs to assist secondary leaders in high-poverty campuses in improving their leadership strategies?

Secondary Principal Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with each of the five secondary school principals. Each interview was conducted in January 2013, with the researcher following a specific process: the principals were provided a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview and at the beginning of each interview, and a script was read aloud by the researcher in an effort to further clarify the purpose of the interview and the interview process. A copy of the script is found in this study as Appendix F.

A semi-structured interview format was used for this study to obtain information about the participant's background and experiences as a school leader, his or her leadership practices and challenges, and his or her professional development recommendations. During the interview, the researcher was able to obtain more detailed information as a result of the participant's responses; this enhanced the data collection by allowing the researcher to observe nonverbal cues, facial expressions, and gestures. Following the interviews, the information was transcribed, and each participant was assigned a code number (P1-Principal 1, P2-Principal 2, P3-Principal 3, P4-Principal 4, P5-Principal 5) in order to maintain confidentiality. Each question was highlighted in a different color and relevant comments were highlighted according to the color; consequently, common themes emerged from the coded data. Data from the interviews is identified in this study through the use of coding representing each principal P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5.

Description of Results in Terms of the Population Sample

Information regarding the frequency and percentages for each variable within the sample for this study is provided in Table 4-1 through Table 4-4. Purposeful sampling, as

outlined in Ch. 3, was used to identify five secondary principals from Texas schools that are considered high-poverty and high-performing. Three of the principals were high school leaders, and two of the principals were middle school leaders. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic data of the principals that participated.

Table 4-1 provides the gender analysis that show more of the participants were men ($n = 3$, 60%) than women ($n = 2$, 40%).

Table 0-1

Gender of Participants (Frequency and Percentage)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent of Sample</i>
Male	3	60.0
Female	2	40.0
Total	5	100.0

Table 4-2 provides data regarding the race of the participants, showing that the majority of the majority of the participants in this study were African American (n = 3, 60%, followed by Hispanic (n = 1, 20%), and then White (n = 1, 20%).

Table 0-2

Race of Participants (Frequency and Percentage)

<i>Race</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent of Sample</i>
African American	3	60.0
Hispanic	1	20.0
White	1	20.0
Total	5	100.0

The five participants averaged 21.4 years of experience in education, ranging from a low of 4 years to a high of 34 years. Four of the participants had 20 or more years of experience in education.

Table 0-3

Experience and School Level

<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Total Years Ed.</i>	<i>Total Years</i>	<i>Total Years at</i>	<i>School Level</i>
	<i>Experience</i>	<i>As</i>	<i>Current</i>	
		<i>Principal</i>	<i>Position</i>	
P1	20	15	6	High
P2	4	4	2	Middle
P3	25	20	6	Middle
P4	34	19	3	High
P5	24	14	7	High
Average	21.4	14.4	4.8	

As shown in Table 4-4, the majority of the participants in the sample had obtained a doctorate degree (n = 3, 60%). One is currently working on the doctorate (20%) and one had obtained a Master's degree (20%).

Table 0-4

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Highest Degree Earned

<i>Post Graduate Level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent of Sample</i>
Master's Degree	1	20.0
Master's/ Doctorate in Progress	1	20.0
Doctorate	3	60.0
Total	5	100.0

Teaching Background and Administrative Experience

All participants hold the appropriate certification for being a principal. From the interview responses, two of the participants spoke of being a dean of instruction in their administrative career, two spoke of being both associate and assistant principals, and one spoke of being only an assistant principal before the principalship. P1 was a middle and high school music teacher for five years, assistant principal for two years, associate principal for three years, spent five years as a middle school principal, and is currently in his sixth year as a high school principal. All of his administrative experience has been at very large urban middle and high schools. P2 was a dean of students for one year, an assistant principal for one year, and a middle school principal for two years. P3 was a social studies teacher for five years, magnet coordinator for three years, dean of instruction for three years, assistant principal for two years, associate principal for six years, and currently in his present position as middle school principal for six years. P4 was a middle and high school band director for 15 years, middle school assistant principal for eight years, middle school principal for eight years, and currently in her present position as high school principal for three years. P5 was a high school business teacher for ten years, high school assistant principal for four years, high school associate principal for two years, and high school principal for eight years. All of the participants had secondary teaching and/or administrative experience only.

Research Question One Themes and Summary

The first research question focused on the extent that the participants' campuses exhibit correlates of effective schools. Several interview questions were asked to address this research question. The questions were focused on leadership philosophies, styles, and

practices. Table 4-5 provides six themes with the frequency they were identified by the study participants regarding their philosophies, styles, and leadership practices.

Following the table is a discussion of each of these themes.

Table 0-5

Themes Identified by the Researcher of Study Participants' Philosophies, Styles, and Leadership Practices

<i>Leadership Philosophies, Style, and Practices</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent of Sample</i>
High Expectations/Beliefs	5	100.0
Instructional Leadership	3	60.0
Culture Builder/Relationships	5	100.0
Vision	3	60.0
Student Interventions	5	100.0
Collaboration	5	100.0

High expectations. All five of the participants discussed high expectations as a major factor in their belief system. Statements from the study participants were:

- School culture is nothing but beliefs. The big idea is that we are not going to allow students to be failures. If they are failures then we are failures. So, setting high expectations is the new normal for this campus. I've stayed on the same mantra since I've gotten here – "Failure is not an option" for this campus! When you lead from that philosophy and that mantra, people follow that philosophy and

you hire from that philosophy so you surround yourself with people that believe students can and will achieve. (P1)

- I believe all children can learn; however I have to ensure my staff has that belief system as well. Five years ago, my administrative team and I developed a motto “Believe in the Possibilities” because I felt the teachers did not believe in the ability of the children. A couple of years ago, we addressed the motto and decided to add “Expect Success”. For the last few years, the students knew the motto and staff would hear them recite in times of trouble. The impact was a change of culture because the students began to expect more of themselves and the teachers were empowered as a result. (P5)
- The atmosphere that I create at my school is one of learning is the priority and “can do” achievement. My staff has embraced this philosophy and are very good about “pushing the envelope”, pressing students to go beyond their level of comfort because they know and believe they can achieve at high levels. (P4)
- I believe all students no matter background, culture or economic status can achieve at the highest of all levels. I frequently and emphatically communicate my passion to my students and teachers. I lead by example and create a culture of high expectations, no excuses, desire for student success, and respect and accountability for all. High expectations for teaching and learning on my campus are a non-negotiable. (P2)
- I have high expectations for my students. We are very strict about rules and policies because I know it is the little things that have to be worked on so students will buy in to the belief system that you are here for a purpose. The purpose is so

that we can educate you. We have a reputation of academic excellence and students see and feel that high level of expectation. Here, we accept no excuses.

(P3)

Instructional leadership. A second theme emerging from the data in the study was instructional leadership. Three of the principals (60%) described themselves as instructional leaders or referred to instructional leadership practices during the interview process. Study participant statements were:

- There is an expectation that my administrative team (including myself) conduct 15 classroom walkthroughs per week. Mandatory reflective conferences are held with the teacher and administrator within 48 hours of the walkthrough. Teachers are evaluated on specific areas including alignment, engagement, rigor, and student outcomes. (P2)
- Certainly, part of the leadership style on this campus is that every administrator is expected to be an instructional leader and in classrooms every day. What gets monitored gets done. That's the culture of this campus. Our teachers know that we are going to be in those classrooms. When we are monitoring the instructional and teaching and learning process it seems to improve because of the feedback and extra set of eyes in the classroom. (P1)
- Principals must be an instructional leader and be visible in classrooms. We work with our teachers to help them understand the importance of rigor, relevance and relationships to improve student achievement. (P5)

Culture Builder. A third theme that emerged was culture. All five participants (100%) commented about school culture and relationships. Statements by the participants linked to this theme include:

- It is up to the leader to set climate and culture. The success or failure of the school is a direct correlation of the school leaders. I work very hard to ensure our culture is one of learning and excellence. We have to be careful as leaders to pay attention to culture because it is a huge factor. “What is the school saying about you?” I consistently share with my staff and students my expectations. As a leader, you must “walk the talk.” Be visible, be compassionate, be flexible. Your campus culture will change to reflect your actions. (P5)
- We have a very good climate here. I recently did a climate survey and the results were positive. Most teachers felt like they have a voice in the decisions that are made on the campus. I also have an open door policy (even when the door is closed) so people are comfortable walking in and speaking with me about their concerns. The biggest thing we do here is celebrate. I have a morning message that highlights staff life events (birthdays, weddings, babies), I also celebrate student successes; academic and extracurricular. I believe in the power of relationships and getting to know people. Staff and students will push themselves to achieve more if they know you genuinely care about their success. (P3)
- Students here believe they can trust and have relationships with the staff. Certainly one of the big things I focus on when I interview potential staff is the relationship piece even more than the content. This school has always had a good culture but I believe we’ve maintained a good culture by making relationship

building a primary goal on campus. As a result, students want to come to school because they see it as a safe-haven, a place where they know they can find caring adults. We make it a priority to create a safe climate. We also celebrate and encourage school pride. Every Friday we ask to see a “Sea of Red” – everyone wears a red school shirt (red is our primary school color) to build a sense that we are proud of our school. I believe our students perform well because of the connection and pride they have in their school. (P1)

- I have purposely created the culture of my school to be one that is open and hears voices from all of the layers at my school – students, parents, teachers and the community. The culture/climate is positive and the atmosphere is one of learning. I have many students that have parents that never graduated from high school and sometimes their parents are among those saying “It’s ok – you can’t make it either.” My job is to create a climate and culture that stops those voices! (P4)
- When I first became principal, bullying was a major issue. Understanding that student safety is a priority in the quest to improve student achievement, we created a no tolerance for violence and bullying policy that received state and national attention labeling our school as the #1 safe and secure school in the state. The culture began to change to one of pride and high expectations. We celebrate successes for students as well as teachers. When teachers and students score well on benchmarks and assessment, they are celebrated. We have success fests! I believe incentivizing the work propels a huge increase in the work ethic of all. (P2)

Vision. A fourth theme that emerged from the data in this study is vision. Three (60%) of the principals spoke about vision and the need for all stakeholders to know and buy in to the vision. Study participant statements were:

- “I am a visionary leader.” It is vital and of high importance that all educators, parents, community members and stakeholders understand and embrace my vision for student success. (P2)
- Everyone in this building knows my vision is that we make sure every student “can” – whatever their dream is! I make certain I use community relations to put the achievements of my students at the forefront. I find that staff and students quickly buy in to that vision when they see their principal celebrating and making a “big deal” out of their accomplishments. (P4)
- My staff and students are aware that my vision is and always will be student success. I constantly articulate my vision for this campus. (P1)

Interventions. A fourth theme that emerged was the need for student interventions in these high-poverty schools. All five (100%) of the participants identified interventions. Almost all of the participants linked interventions with data based on student assessments and the need to assist teachers in this process. Statements about interventions include:

- We created a specialized tracking report for our students based on the most current data we have. Those that struggle are placed in mandatory tutorials, we monitor their progress, and we work with teachers through professional development and coaching to help assist them with practices that enable this population of students to be successful. (P2)

- There has been a strategic plan in looking at every child making certain every child gets that individualized education plan. It's almost impossible to do, but it's how we have made the difference. I believe strongly in bringing in bringing in additional resources, such as reading and math interventionists for tutorials. I have Title I money that I use for that. And again, I expect my administrators and content specialists to be in classrooms monitoring first line instruction so we can assist teachers with making improvements. (P1)
- Prescriptive tutorials have been a major intervention at my campus. It has proven to be very effective. (P5)
- We use PEAK (Performance Excellence for All Kids) Learning Systems to assist our teachers with resources and strategies that will assist them with reaching our learners. We also hold mandatory tutorials with identified students after assessments. We look at campus assessment data, district data, and state data to provide the specific assistance that each student needs. (P4)
- I have hired extra staff with Title I money to reduce class sizes in the greatest areas of need. I also hire tutors with Title I money for after school tutorials, Saturday tutorials, ZAP (Zeroes are not permitted) tutorials, pull-out and push-in tutorials. We have very targeted interventions for our kids based on current data. (P3)

Collaboration. Statements were made by all participants about their campus teams being very collaborative. This final theme includes the following statements:

- I always bring things to department leaders, campus based leadership team, administrative team, which includes my counseling team, and together we decide what is best for students. (P5)
- I am not a fan of big staff meetings so I use our PLC (Professional Learning Community) meetings to disseminate information and to allow staff members to have a voice in what is happening on campus. I believe teachers are very professional and they understand my vision. At the end of the day, the decisions that are being made will be about what is best for students, not adults. (P3)
- I feel that leadership is a process which must include the participation of stakeholders at every level. Making sure that as the leader, I provide opportunity for “buy-in” from those closest to the issue has proved successful for me. (P4)
- I am collaborative because I have found that it is a process that allows us to help formulate decision making. I meet with my administrative team, counseling team and content specialist team each week to talk about issues. I meet with my department chairs and team leaders once a month to disseminate information and hear their updates or concerns about the happenings on the campus. All of my leaders know that all decisions made on this campus are in the best interest of students. (P1)

Research Question One Summary

When identifying the extent to which these high-performing, high-poverty campuses exhibit correlates of effective schools, there were obvious themes that arose that were highly aligned with effective school correlates, and, many times, there were responses within the themes that directly aligned with the correlates. There are seven

effective school correlates. The two correlates that were not thematic in participant's responses were opportunity to learn and student time on task and home school relations. The participants mentioned at least five of the correlates in their responses. These include, in no preferential order:

1. High Expectations – Benard (1995) states, “Schools that establish high expectations for all students- and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations-have high rates of academic success.”
2. Safe Environment - Research examining the impact of school climate in high-risk urban environments finds that a safe, supportive school climate can have a particularly strong impact on the academic success experienced by urban students (PSEA, 2010).
3. Instructional Leadership - Effective schools identified strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction from the principal as a characteristic of schools that were effective at teaching children in poor urban communities (Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982).
4. Clear vision/mission – In the effective school, there is a clearly articulated mission for the school through which the staff shares an understanding of, and a commitment to, the school's goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability (Lezotte, 2001).
5. Frequent monitoring of student progress – Kirk and Jones (2004) cite Lezotte (2001) as saying, “In the effective school, pupil progress over the essential objectives are measured frequently, monitored frequently, and used to

improve student behaviors and performances, as well as to improve the curriculum as a whole.”

Research Question Two Themes and Summary

The study’s second research question involved the leaders of high-performing, high-poverty schools’ perception of their greatest challenges. During the interview, participants were asked “What are your most significant issues that hinder student achievement and how do you overcome them?” Based on responses to this question, three themes emerged and are identified in Table 4-6.

Table 0-6

Themes Identified by the Researcher of Study Participants' Perceptions of Current Challenges to High-Performance

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Sample</i>
Retaining Highly Effective Teachers	5	100.0
Time Management/Monitoring Instruction	4	80.0
Instructional Challenges	4	80.0

Retaining highly effective teachers. Challenges concerning the ability to retain highly effective teachers were identified by each of the participants (100%). Ingersoll (2004) reports that urban schools and districts are unable to compete for the available supply of adequately trained teachers and end up with large numbers of under-qualified teachers. Data shows that high-poverty public schools, especially those in urban communities, lose, on average, over one-fifth of their faculty each year.

- I can get quality staff hired, I just haven't figured out a way to keep them here.
(P2)
- I take my time and explain to applicants the challenges they are up against. My students come from high-poverty homes, and the challenges that come along with that such as high crime, homelessness, drug addictions, etc. It takes a special person to come into my school to teach. I'm very direct, open, and honest about the challenges in my school and the difficulty that applicants will face. Many times they say they are up for the challenge and initially they are. They become some of the best teachers I have on campus. However after two to three years teaching students with so many challenges, I find that they simply want to go somewhere where they don't have to work as hard. (P1)
- This is a very difficult job. Teachers that give their all just seem to burnout after a few years. I don't know the answer, but I know it presents a great challenge to sustaining high performance. (P5)
- It is very challenging to hire great teachers! Especially in this era of accountability, teachers just don't want the extra stress. I find hiring math and science teachers extremely challenging and these are the areas we need effective teachers the most. I think those that make decisions about education need to look at increasing salaries. These people need to be paid more for the work they do.
(P3) Ingersoll (2004) reports that school staffing problems are primarily due to a "revolving door" where large numbers of teachers depart. One reason for high rates of turnover in urban schools is, not surprisingly, teacher compensation.

- I am very intentional about the recruitment and hiring process. I look for certain responses in interviews that indicate whether the potential applicant has or will have high structure and high consistency in the classroom. These characteristics are very important for a teacher to have on a high poverty campus. I also involve my specialists and team leaders in the interview process. I want the right people asking the right questions so we can collaborate on which candidates would be the best hire. Unfortunately, even after all of that, I still cannot retain these teachers for more than 4-5 years. I believe monetary incentives may help keep some of these teachers around. (P4)

Time management/monitoring instruction. A second theme that emerged from research question two was time management and monitoring instruction. Four (80%) of the participants identified this as a challenge. Statements from the participants include:

- I am required to go to meetings at least 4 times a month which hinders my ability to get into classrooms and monitor instruction. Personnel issues, student issues, etc. also take up much of my time. My administrators know it is my expectation for them to be in classrooms, so I have to depend on their observations. Instructional leadership is very important to this organization and I find it very frustrating when I as the principal, can't be fully immersed in that process. (P4)
- I find myself building in time for instructional leadership. I have to schedule teacher meetings before or after the regular school day. I have to call parents before or after the school day. I have to answer emails before or after the school day. I have to send my associate to the low priority meetings because

if I don't make instructional leadership my priority, it simply will not get done. (P1)

- Sometimes I am overwhelmed with the amount of management tasks I am expected to accomplish. It seems that there is just not enough time in a day to get everything done. Monitoring instruction is what drives the performance of this organization so I am working to find a balance between management and leadership. (P3)
- I was struggling with finding a good balance between being a technical leader and being an instructional leader. I found myself working on things that could have been delegated and it consumed my time daily. I attended a professional development on time management and it has helped me determine what things I must do and what things could be done by others. I still haven't perfected this, but it is helping me prioritize so that I can get into classrooms to monitor instruction. (P5)

Instructional challenges. Instructional challenges associated with the continual increases in accountability standards and/or increases in number of students with enormous deficiencies was identified by four (80%) of the study participants. Statements made by the participants were:

- I find it very difficult to keep up with the increase in accountability standards for each of the sub-populations. My campus is a very large and diverse high school and we have students that arrive from other countries almost every day. Many times these students come in not only illiterate in English, but illiterate in their native language. I try to support my teachers with professional development

opportunities to increase their knowledge of instructional strategies that work, but let's just be honest – it's not enough. (P1)

- I recently had a new population come to my school via several other schools being closed down in the same area. This influx created a very challenging environment for academics. The students came in with very low expectations and low value systems in regards to education. They have tremendous gaps in their learning and it is taking time to create new systems and interventions to meet the needs of these students. My teachers are still expected to have a “no excuses” mentality; however I can sense their frustration when their instructional strategies are not successful. (P2)
- I find it challenging to ensure my teachers do not get frustrated with the multiple days of assessment associated with our new/old state assessment. We are transitioning from TAKS to EOC and we have campus formatives, district benchmarks, field testing, actual testing, and re-testing for grades 9-11. This makes it challenging for my teachers to really go into depth in their content area. They are concerned about the amount of instructional days that are lost with the all of the testing that takes place. It is difficult as the leader to assure them their students will be successful when they have legitimate concerns about days of lost instruction. (P4)
- As I stated earlier, it is difficult to retain highly effective teachers and it becomes extremely challenging to assist those teachers that are not highly effective. Many times they are resistant to change and refuse to admit their instructional practices no longer work. The challenges in attempting to support an ineffective teacher are

time-consuming and many times unsuccessful. It frustrates me that these kinds of teachers are not easily terminated from the educational setting. (P4)

Research Question Two Summary

When study participants were asked about their greatest challenges, three themes arose. When asked how they overcome these challenges, their responses were very general; many times they simply did not know how to overcome these challenges. The three themes that arose from the responses regarding their greatest challenges were:

1. Retaining highly effective teachers. This is highly aligned with current research that states:

Few educational problems have received more attention in recent years than the failure to ensure that elementary and secondary classrooms are staffed with qualified teachers. We have been warned repeatedly that the nation will need to hire at least 2 million teachers over the next ten years and our teacher training institutions are simply not producing sufficient numbers of teachers to meet the demand. The inevitable result is high levels of under qualified teachers and lower school performance. (Ingersoll, 2004)

2. Time management with regard to monitoring instruction.

Finding time for what is important is a huge issue for principals. It has never been more crucial than it is now for principals to be true instructional leaders in their buildings, and at the same time there has never been more paperwork piled on. (Hopkins, 2012)

Hess and Kelly (2007) argue, “Leadership during this Age of Accountability has become more stressful, more political, more complex, and more time-consuming”. Principals are responsible for coordinating all school programs, providing a sound educational program, maintaining high teacher morale, overseeing discipline, maintaining high student achievement and a positive learning environment, evaluating teachers, providing staff leadership, and establishing effective school/community relations. The job of the principal is too complex and time management techniques will not solve all of their time management problems (Robertson, 1999).

3. Instructional challenges. Recent research shows that teachers may not know accountability standards and new state assessments sufficiently enough to create a rational change in their practices. If teachers understood accountability systems and what they need to know and implement to influence the results in a serious way, they would be willing to learn (Berry et.al, 2003).

In response to overcoming the challenges of retaining highly effective teachers, P4 stated that they were very intentional about the hiring and recruiting process. They involved their key leaders on campus in the interview process to ensure the applicant was open to growing as a teacher and open to the support systems they have established. This has helped with retention. P2 and P3 stated that they used teacher incentives and teacher celebrations as a means to retain highly effective teachers. They spoke of celebrations increasing morale, thereby increasing teacher contentment. P5 stated they have a new teacher mentor program that is run by one of their assistant principals. New teachers and their assigned mentors meet monthly with the assistant principal to discuss any pertinent

information that needs to be shared and to address instructional or behavioral concerns they have. This meeting becomes a sharing and discussion time for solutions and ideas to address their concerns. P1 stated when they interview potential applicants, they are very frank and honest about the challenges their school has. Making academic and behavioral expectations for teachers very clear has helped determine which candidates would be a good fit.

In response to the challenge of time management with regard to monitoring instruction, P5 stated they attended professional development geared toward time management that helped them prioritize and balance their schedule so monitoring instruction took precedence over managerial tasks. P1 and P4 spoke about setting priorities. P1 stated, “My focus is keeping the main thing, the main thing, and that is student achievement.” P4 used the term “big rocks” when describing how she sets priorities. “Once I decide on what’s most important, for example, if getting into classrooms is priority, I have to delegate other tasks to the appropriate staff so I can achieve my goal.” P2 spoke about having a to-do list to focus on all of the things they want to get accomplished in a day. P3 uses post-it-notes to remind himself of all must-do tasks: “I feel so good when I can take that post-it note off of my desk because it reminds me that I accomplished something that day.”

There were no responses geared toward how to overcome instructional challenges; however, P1 spoke about wanting prescriptive professional development for teachers, particularly in the area of math. The other principals did mention their frustration with increasing accountability standards and the constant pressure they have to put on teachers to improve their instructional practices.

Research Question Three Themes and Summary

The third research question asked participants “What recommendations do you have for university programs to assist secondary school leaders in high-poverty campuses in improving their leadership strategies? Participants were asked three questions regarding professional development:

1. What professional development activities so you engage in to stay current on best practices for educating high-poverty students?
2. What professional development activities have you experienced that have contributed to your leadership skills?
3. What kinds of professional development do you think university programs can provide to urban school leaders in an effort to increase and sustain success?

Professional development for current best practices. In response to interview questions about professional development to stay current on best practices, the five study participants provided the information contained in Table 4-7. The table provides the list of activities and experiences mentioned as well as the number of study participants that mentioned each.

Table 0-7

Professional Development Experienced to Stay Current on Best Practices for Educating High-Poverty Students

<i>Professional Development Activity or Experience</i>	<i>Number of Participants Identifying the Activity</i>
Reading current literature	5
Networking with colleagues	5
Harvard Principal Leadership Institute	2
Schlechty Center	1
Attending NASSP Conferences	3
Attending TASA Conferences	1
Twitter Account	2
Attending ASCD Conferences	3
Adjunct Professor	2
Rice (REEP) Program	2
A+ Houston	2
Leadership Houston	1
Professional and Community Organizations	4
Mentor	1
Superintendent Program	1

From the 15 professional development experiences identified by the study participants, the most frequently mentioned items are identified in Table 4-8. Participant statements are discussed following Table 4-8.

Table 0-8

Most Frequently Identified Professional Development Activities that Study Participants Engage in to Stay Current on Best Practices for Educating High-Poverty Students

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent of Sample</i>
Reading Current Literature	5	100.0
Networking with Colleagues	4	80.0
Member of Professional and/or Community Organizations	3	60.0

Reading current literature. All of the participants (100%) responded that they read current literature as a professional development activity to assist them with staying current on best practices associated with educating high-poverty students. Statements from the study participants were:

- To be quite honest, I just read. I read a lot about culture and leadership practices.
(P5)
- I read a lot. I probably have over 10 subscriptions to leadership magazines and journals. Anything I can do to become a better leader is always of interest to me.
(P3)

- I stay current by reading literature and daily updates from a variety of educational and leadership organizations. (P2)
- I am an adjunct professor for a local university so I have to keep up with current educational trends if I am going to be effective in my classes. I read all of the time. I read books, and journals; I follow educational professionals on twitter and on LinkedIn. I read because I have a thirst for new knowledge. Anything to make me a better leader for my teachers and students. (P1)
- I am currently in a doctoral program so I read tons of information about leadership practices. I find myself reading constantly. (P4)

Networking with colleagues. Four (80%) of the participants responded that networking with colleagues helps them stay current on best practices for educating high-poverty students. Participant statements were:

- I make it a priority to have professional conversations with my colleagues. (P5)
- I follow many high-poverty educational leaders on twitter. I also network with other principals in high-poverty schools as well as principals in schools of affluence. (P4)
- I enjoy meeting with my colleagues that have similar demographics to discuss what new and innovative systems they are currently implementing on their campuses. (P2)
- Networking and hearing what other effective principals in high-poverty high-performing schools are doing. It's all about networking and talking to people that make it happen. (P1)

Members of professional and/or community organizations. Three (60%) of the study participants responded that they are members of professional or community organizations that help them stay current on best practices for educating high-poverty students. Participant statements were:

- I am an executive member of ASCD as an emerging leader and I am an adjunct professor for leadership development. These two activities keep me in the loop of best practices. (P2)
- I am in a leadership position for TASSP in the Region IV area. Again, this allows me to network and be privy to “hot off the press” information that helps guide me in decision making for my campus. (P1)
- I attend the NASSP and TASA conferences as a means to stay abreast of current trends that will assist me as a leader on my campus. This year I am actually presenting at TASA so it will be an exciting experience to be able to network with the other presenters. (P4)

Professional development contributing to leadership skills. In response to interview questions regarding professional development contributing to leadership skills, the study participants provided the information provided in Table 4-9. The table provides the lists of activities and experiences mentioned as well as the number of study participants that mentioned each.

Table 0-9

Professional Development Contributed to Leadership Skills

<i>Professional Development Activity or Experience</i>	<i>Number of Participants Identifying Activity</i>
Harvard Principal Center Leadership Institute	3
Mentors	3
Houston A+ Leadership Academy	3
Serving on District Committees	2
Rice REEP Program	2

From the 5 professional development activities identified by the study participants, the most frequently mentioned activities are identified in Table 4-10. Participant statements are discussed following Table 4-10.

Table 0-10

Most Frequently Identified Professional Development Activities Contributed to Study Participants' Leadership Skills

<i>Professional Development Activity or Experience</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Sample</i>
Harvard Principal Center Leadership Institute/Networking	3	60.0
Houston A+ Leadership Academy/Networking	3	60.0
Mentors	3	60.0

Harvard principal center leadership institute. Three (60%) of the study participants identified the Harvard Principal Leadership Institute as a professional development that has contributed to their leadership skills. Statements from the participants were:

- I have to say the Harvard Principal Leadership Institute has had a tremendous effect on my leadership skills. I went through the “Art of Leadership” training one summer and I was truly impressed with the program and all of the things I learned

via the presentations and the opportunities for networking. I was so impressed I went back the very next summer for training specifically geared toward “Urban Leaders”. I was able to come back to my campus after both of those trainings and immediately implement many of the ideas that were presented. (P1)

- The professional development that has had the most dramatic influence on my leadership skills was the Harvard Principal Leadership Institute. I have never attended any other professional development where there was so much knowledge in one place. I had the opportunity to network with administrators from all over the world, including Australia. The learning community was rich with ideas and strategies on how to assist us all in becoming better leaders. I have recommended to all of my administrators that they try to attend this training because it leaves such a lasting impression and truly improves your leadership skills. (P3)
- The Harvard Principal Center “Art of Leadership” training was the best professional development I have encountered in all of my years as an administrator. Before you get to the training, you have to submit an issue that you are dealing with on your campus and when you get there they assign you to a group so you get to network with people from all over the world and from all kinds of schools. There were people in my group from private schools, charter schools, suburban, and urban schools. In our group sessions, we shared our issue and were able to get ideas from each other on how to attack these challenges. It was a professional development like no other. (P4)

Houston A+ leadership academy. Three (60%) of the study participants identified the Houston A+ Leadership Academy as professional development that contributed to their leadership skills. Study participant statements were:

- Houston A+ had a leadership academy that I attended several years ago. This training helped me really understand the concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLC's). I was able to change the culture of my campus through PLC's because once teachers bought into the idea; my scores across all content areas increased and have been sustained throughout the years. (P3)
- I attended a leadership academy through Houston A+ that was an intense two years of reading, writing, and talking about leadership. I became a better leader as a result of this training partly due to the networking with the other principals from around the city. (P1)
- When I was an assistant principal, my principal recommended that I apply to the Houston A+ Leadership Academy which was the first professional development I had encountered as an academy. For two years I read a lot about leadership and had opportunities to discuss my thoughts on leadership with other principals. We had time before the end of each meeting to write reflections and I think that has greatly attributed to the skills I have as a leader. (P2)

Mentoring. Three (60%) of the study participants identified mentoring as a professional experience that has contributed to their leadership skills.

- Honestly, having worked for really good principals has shown me several sides to being a good leader. One of my principals was very relationship-oriented and the

other I learned a lot from was a coach. I think I have taken parts of both of their styles and it has contributed to my leadership skills. (P3)

- My mentor was actually in a very high district level position when we met. I observed his actions and saw how he was able to take tough situations and bring win-win resolutions to the table. I really admired that about him and I found/find myself modeling my actions after his and it has proven to be very successful. (P2)
- I find myself mimicking the style of my last principal who was my mentor. He was very skilled in bringing the best and the brightest together to get the job done. He was not afraid to delegate because he knew he had the right people on his team doing the right things. My leadership skills are a good combination of my own personality and the traits I have learned from my mentor over the years. (P5)

Professional development recommendations for university programs. The five study participants identified recommendations for university programs. Table 4-11 illustrates the most frequently identified recommendations.

Table 0-11

Most Frequently Identified Professional Development Recommendations for University Programs

<i>Professional Development Recommendations</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Sample</i>
Urban Leader Preparation Programs	3	60.0
Cultural Responsiveness Training	3	60.0
Field Based Experiences/Internship	3	60.0

Urban leader preparation programs. Three (60%) of the study participants identified urban leader preparation programs as a professional development recommendation for university programs. The study participant statements were:

- Universities should have a focus on urban schooling. Stop trying to prepare students for suburban schools! America has changed! We've got to prepare leaders for how to deal with urban issues. (P1) According to Hess and Kelly (2007), 67% of principals report that "typical leadership programs in graduate

schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today's school districts.”

- The tenure for a principal in an urban high school is three years. The work pace and challenges are so extreme and expansive that principals burnout! Universities need to prepare people and give them skills and strategies. Give them a “toolkit” on things to do or you will continue to see a revolving door and that's what hurts urban schools. (P5)
- Hire urban school principals to be adjunct professors so they can show students as a practitioner what is expected. Research alone is not going to be the key. It's practitioner based work. (P2)

Cultural responsiveness training. Three (60%) of the study participants identified cultural responsiveness training as a professional development recommendation for university programs. Study participant statements were:

- I believe university programs need to begin addressing the African American child and how he/she learns and then teach teachers how to teach African American children. We are taught how to teach in a White society and African American children have to adapt to that. Many of our African American children have issue adapting. (P5)
- Poverty and socio-economic issues bring a lack of social skills and a lack of social capital. Education is typically not a #1 priority in the family so it is challenging to re-program a kid in 6 hours. University students need to come out of university programs that address learning styles of high-poverty students so they enter schools with a vast knowledge base of best practices. (P1)

- Minority and high-poverty students require specific methods of instruction for effective learning. University programs should require a minimum number of coursework hours geared toward cultural responsiveness. (P3)

Field based experiences/internship. Three (60%) of the study participants identified field based experiences as a professional development recommendation for university programs. The study participant statements were:

- I truly think universities should require students to shadow an urban school leader for a week. Textbooks and videos don't address what I do on a daily basis. (P4)
- I wish I could have students come to my school and study what goes on here on a daily basis. People really need to be prepared to do this job and what better way than them coming and observing a real-life scenario. (P5)
- You know student teachers come to my campus and observe all of the time. I think potential school leaders need to come and do the same. As a matter of fact, I have extra radios and they could jump right in! This job is not for the weak at heart, people really need to know the demands of what we do every day. (P2)

The final question that was asked of the participants was "If you had the power to make three major changes (imagine that you are a legislator empowered to make changes to our educational system) that would contribute to success, what would be these three changes?" This question was given to see if any themes arose related to major educational changes for the high-poverty leader. Participant responses in no particular order were:

1. More federal and state money to support schools and not necessarily districts as a whole.

2. Mandate the use of the Common Core Standards in every state.
3. Mandatory advanced and college/career pathways for all children in grades 6-12.
4. Additional support for at-risk schools as it relates to human resources.
5. Stipends for math and science teachers in all at-risk schools.
6. Alternative learning centers for students that cannot reach success in a traditional school.
7. Longer school calendar.
8. More reasonable accountability system.
9. Reduction in testing.
10. Change the image of public education – elevate it to the level of doctors and engineers.
11. Better teaching quality.
12. Change policy.
13. Differentiated staffing for schools with high-poverty – more staff and skilled staff.
14. Higher pay to staff at high-poverty schools.
15. Required parent involvement in high-poverty schools for those that qualify for free and reduced lunch. Make it a part of getting the application accepted!

Research Question Three Summary

There were many relevant professional development activities and experiences identified by the study participants. The common themes that emerged for professional development they have experienced were:

1. Reading Current Literature
2. Networking

3. Being members of professional organizations

The common themes that emerged for recommendations to University programs were:

1. Providing urban leader preparation programs
2. Mandatory cultural responsiveness training/coursework
3. Making urban leader observations a part of program requirements

The most common response for what participants would change in legislature if they had the power was fiscal support. Participants stated they would:

1. Add additional money to hire more human resources in high-poverty schools
2. Add additional money for current staff in high-poverty school
3. Add additional money for programs and academic resources

Chapter Four Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of effective leaders in high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools. The results of this study have been presented in Chapter Four using data from interview transcripts. Exact wording from the transcribed interviews have been used to emphasize the genuine thought processes and fervor that the study participants had during the interview process.

Chapter Five discusses the results and overview of the study, implications for school leaders, and implications for future research.

Conclusions

The underperformance of minority children, particularly those in high-poverty environments, has been an issue of concern for decades. Educational research suggests that socioeconomic status and family background play a huge role in determining academic achievement. Students from poor, urban environments and schools frequently underperform on national and state assessments in comparison to their counterparts in more socio-economically advantaged environments and schools. Olsen (2007) reports that based on NAEP results, “the achievement gaps based on race and class remain daunting.” Children living in poor and urban neighborhoods will almost certainly attend schools in their area that are considered urban. These urban schools are typically characterized by poverty and have the challenges of the environment: unemployment, violence and crime, lack of educational values and parent involvement. These schools also face the challenges of the school environment: large student populations, staffing effective teachers, lack of resources, low student attendance rates, high student mobility rates, and high populations of special education and immigrant students. With all of these challenges, there are actually some urban schools that are meeting and exceeding expectations for student achievement. Many elementary level high-performing, high-poverty schools have been studied to determine their characteristics; however, secondary level high-performing, high-poverty schools have not been sufficiently studied to determine characteristics that will improve achievement in similar schools on the secondary level.

Current research has established that effective principal leadership has a positive impact on student achievement. Other research has determined that the effects of school

leadership have an indirect influence on student achievement and the effects are difficult to measure (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). The research remains unclear; however, there is no clearly defined set of principal behaviors that contribute to student achievement, particularly in high-poverty secondary schools.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the qualities of effective leaders in high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools. The goal of this study was to identify the most common characteristics of secondary school leaders that contribute to the high academic achievement of students in secondary school settings. These characteristics were investigated at campuses that met the criteria set by the researcher.

This study was conducted to address the need for further research into the high academic achievement of high poverty secondary schools and to increase the knowledge base of the leadership characteristics needed that contribute to student success.

Research Questions

The three research questions explored in this study were:

1. To what extent do these high-performing, high-poverty secondary campuses exhibit correlates of effective schools?
2. What do leaders of high-performing, high-poverty schools perceive as significant issues that hinder student achievement and how are these issues addressed?
3. What recommendations do leaders of high-poverty secondary schools have for university programs to assist secondary leaders in high-poverty campuses in improving their leadership strategies?

Discussion of Results

To what extent do these high-poverty, high-performing secondary campuses exhibit correlates of effective schools?

Elements of Effective school correlates were evident by the results of the participant interviews. Lezotte (1991) studied high-performing, high-poverty schools and concluded that there are unique characteristics and processes common to these schools. These characteristics are correlated to student success; therefore, they are called correlates. To a great extent, effective schools research was primarily on elementary level schools; this study sought to determine if the characteristics or correlates were closely related to the characteristics of secondary level schools. Six out of the seven (86%) correlates were discussed by the participants; however, high expectations was the characteristic that every participant mentioned during many different phases of the interview process. As cited by Benard (1995), “schools that establish high expectations for all students and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations, have high rates of academic success.” It is important to note that each of the principals stated the most important thing you can do to set high expectations is to be consistent in your message. Be very visible. Talk the talk and walk the walk. Hold everyone accountable to your expectations.

Instructional leadership was a second characteristic that was derived from the interview responses. Although two of the participants did not mention this in detail during the interview process, the other three participants were very emphatic that instructional leadership was second only to high expectations. They described the expectation of themselves in addition to their administrators as being in classrooms

frequently to monitor the teaching and learning process. Their responses also focused on allocating resources for instructional improvement, establishing incentives and rewards to encourage student and teacher performance, celebrating accomplishments and successes of students and staff, involving their leadership team in planning, and monitoring student progress through performance data. These behaviors have been identified by the research of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1990) as those that characterize instructional leadership.

I thought it was interesting that only two of the participants mentioned a safe and orderly environment as being especially important in high-poverty schools. Participants responded that due to their external environment being chaotic, they must create a safe and orderly learning environment in the school to maximize the potential for student success. Perhaps the low number of responses on safe and orderly environments was due to the fact that these participants already had safety systems in place and this was not a current area of difficulty.

I also found it interesting that only one of the participants mentioned home school relations during the interview process. This participant spoke about engaging parents in the educational process. This participant saw parental involvement as an opportunity to help educate the community thereby increasing the culture of high expectations on campus. The low number of responses for participants on home school relations could be due to the enormous challenge secondary schools have in getting parents involved. Traditionally, secondary schools have low parent participation in the educational process; even more so in high-poverty schools. Secondary high-poverty leaders may perceive that

they are entirely responsible for educating students because strategies to involve parents have proven to be unsuccessful.

None of the participants spoke about the opportunity to learn and time on task as a leadership behavior; however, they did speak about this as being a challenge they are having during this era of high stakes accountability. I will address this in my response to the next research question.

What do leaders of high-performing, high-poverty schools perceive as significant issues that hinder student achievement and how are these issues addressed?

The data from the interviews concerning significant issues and how participants overcome them was very clear in that hiring and retaining highly effective teachers was a significant issue for them. One hundred percent of the participants indicated this as a challenge. According to the responses, most participants felt they could hire effective teachers; however, retaining these effective teachers was very difficult. They spoke about the lack of social skills that students from urban areas bring to school. When education is not a priority in the family, it becomes very difficult to re-program students in a six hour school day. Teachers work longer hours to meet student needs thereby increasing the potential for burnout. Many of the participants were not sure how to address this issue. Some responded that teachers should be paid more; perhaps that would help attract a better crop of people into the field of education. The limited number of effective and quality teachers would increase and higher salaries would help retain them. One participant responded that they involve their leadership team in the hiring process to help decipher whether applicants are the right fit and have the right characteristics to work on their campus. They provide an enormous amount of instructional and managerial support

to these teachers, and this has proven to be successful. This challenge is aligned with the case studies in the literature review, where high-performing, high-poverty schools have the freedom to decide how to spend their money, and to recruit, hire, and assign teachers based on campus needs.

Time management, monitoring instruction, and instructional challenges were also significant issues according to these participants. Specific professional development for time management has proven to be successful for one of the participants; others still struggle with balancing management tasks and leadership expectations. The increase in accountability standards has proven to be very difficult for participants on the large and highly diverse campuses. Participants did not have clear responses on how they would address this challenge, as accountability standards continue to increase while the deficiency levels of students continue to increase as well.

What recommendations do you have for university programs to assist secondary school leaders in improving their leadership strategies?

The data from the responses revealed three most frequently mentioned recommendations for university programs to assist secondary school leaders in improving their leadership strategies. The first recommendation was urban leader preparation programs that focus on leading urban schools instead of programs that prepare leaders to lead “traditional” schools. These programs should make courses available that are focused only on leadership and specific skills and strategies is something urban school leaders need. Participants recommended hiring urban school principals as adjunct professors for courses so they can exclude the traditional theoretical application and teach

the practical skills necessary for leaders to achieve success and sustain themselves through the challenging times.

Cultural responsiveness training was another recommendation for university programs. There are specific aspects to culturally responsive teaching and leading: educators that care, educators that know how to communicate to students, and educators that know how to provide relevant curriculum and instruction. Educators should be mindful that communication is essential to the teaching and learning process; the more knowledgeable they become about the discourse styles of high-poverty students, the better they will be able to communicate differently with them to improve academic achievement. University programs should mandate courses in cultural responsiveness for emerging teachers and leaders, and they should offer cultural responsiveness courses to those already in leadership positions.

The third recommendation was urban leader observations. The participants suggested that emerging leaders get “real” experience by serving in a role similar to student teachers. The participants recommended “shadowing” leaders for a period of time so they can get a true idea of the daily demands and skill set necessary before they make the decision to lead these urban institutions.

Summary

The participants’ interviews revealed the spirit and character of their belief systems. From that data, six common themes emerged that gave substance to this study. High expectations, instructional leadership, culture/relationship builders, vision, student interventions, and collaboration were dominant topics for discussion. In this study, the principals were very determined to make a difference in the lives of their students. It did

not matter that their students came from environments of high-poverty, crime, drug use, broken families, or dilapidated homes. These principals were relentless and passionate about their purpose as a leader and they believe they have an essential role in impacting student achievement.

In leading these high-poverty schools, it was made very clear that school culture, leadership, and prescriptive improvement plans for students was vital to the performance of these organizations. High poverty schools with a strong academic culture are more effective than those without and school leaders have a significant impact on establishing that culture (Styron, & Nyman, 2008). These school leaders understood that developing a strong academic culture comes by allowing teachers to collaborate with each other on academic issues and by empowering teacher leaders to have input on campus decisions. In terms of leadership, these leaders were convinced that in conjunction with reading current literature, collaborating and networking with school leaders with similar demographics were the experiences that had a major impact on molding their behaviors as a leader. In terms of academic improvement plans, these instructional leaders worked closely with their staff to ensure individual student needs were being met by assessing data and using the data to create interventions specific to their areas of deficiency.

With expectations of high achievement, involvement in activities that ensure they are current on best practices, and accountability for all, these secondary school leaders have overcome the odds in providing a high quality education to students that some would deem incapable of academic achievement at high levels.

Implications for School Leaders

An analysis of this study's findings along with prior research on leadership characteristics in high-performing, high-poverty schools has created implications for practice of school leaders. This study focused on leadership characteristics in high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools, and the results of the study should provide useful information to current and future leaders on practices that improve student achievement.

Leaders in high-performing, high-poverty secondary schools were very clear that a fundamental characteristic is that one must establish a school culture of high expectations. This involves all stakeholders being committed to the vision of academic excellence for all students. The development of a strong school culture is accomplished by being consistent in your message to all stakeholders, being visible and building relationships, allowing staff and students to have a voice in decisions through collaboration, monitoring the teaching and learning process, holding staff and students accountable to your standards and expectations, and celebrating successes. For those aspiring to become urban school leaders or for those that are current urban school leaders, this study will provide literature and research based upon interviews with current high-poverty, high-performing school practitioners. After a review of this study, current and future urban school leaders will have a "handbook" or "manual" of leadership characteristics that, if replicated, will assist them in creating environments of high performance.

As a secondary principal, this research has provided me with proven strategies of high-performing, high-poverty leaders that I can implement in my own school setting. I

not only know the characteristics to employ, but I also have strategies for overcoming challenges that before doing this research study I struggled with. This study also provided me with opportunities to see the value and benefits in networking; I plan to become more active in professional organizations and reach out more frequently to comparable leaders as a result. I will also encourage and provide time for my assistant principals, teacher leaders, counselors, etc. to network so they can become better leaders as well.

This study has caused me to ponder some things as well. I really think about the parental component that many of the principals failed to mention. Is that the piece of the puzzle that is missing in secondary schools? There are so many more high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools; what happens when they enter secondary schools? I recognize that there is a loss in transition from elementary to secondary schools. Is it the physiological aspect? When students suddenly start growing up, does their focus become social instead of academic? As a secondary leader, these questions provide me a starting place to attempt to counter some of these issues by encouraging, promoting, and placing emphasis on secondary clubs, organizations, and extracurricular activities when students first enter the school building. Perhaps this is also a missing piece of the puzzle. There are many areas that have caused me to ponder, have allowed me to reflect, and really begin to think about my leadership practices. As a result, I have and will continue to become a better leader.

This study has provided district level administrators with specific professional development activities to support school leaders such as providing time for collaboration with their colleagues and encouraging membership in professional organizations. Districts need to have focused efforts and create structured ways to allow principals to

connect and talk to other principals about ways to increase student success. Perhaps during scheduled principals meetings there should be a segment of the meeting dedicated to reading articles focused on current leadership practices. The knowledge leaders gain from participating in these activities can be transferred to their schools in order to promote student achievement. District level administrators can then use this knowledge as a guide to formulate policy and leadership development programs that improve administrator efficacy, increase recruitment and retention, and provide relevant support to leaders in implementing these research based behaviors. The impact of effective leadership, particularly in high-poverty schools, should be fully understood by district level leaders so quality decisions can be made. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) state “school districts need to be more attentive to the processes of succession planning and school leadership recruitment and retention.” Districts can also assist leaders by partnering with universities and organizations that have teacher preparation programs. It is important for districts to communicate what their needs are so these programs can tailor their requirements to produce more highly effective teachers.

University programs geared toward educational leadership have recommendations from this research for their leadership preparation programs. With the rise of changing demographics, principal preparation programs should begin to approach leadership from the urban leader perspective. This is a huge shift from the current preparation programs that focus on leadership practices from the “traditional” school perspective. Currently, there is almost no research that systematically documents the content studied in the nation’s principal preparation programs, the instructional focus, or the readings assigned to students (Hess & Kelly, 2007). According to the study participants, urban school

leaders need less theory and more practical application. They need university programs to provide them with opportunities to “shadow” current urban school leaders and provide a mentorship component to course work. Courses in cultural responsiveness should be included in university programs for current and future leaders. University programs must educate urban leaders on ways to communicate and build relationships with students from high-poverty backgrounds if they are going to effectively lead these challenging organizations.

For leaders at the state level, the information provided in this study shows how important leadership development is in ensuring districts keep quality leaders. States may need to require districts to submit action plans that demonstrate structures and systems in place for leadership development. State leaders should take on the responsibility of ensuring principal preparation programs are of high-quality. This research proves that there needs to be specific requirements within these programs such as specific coursework, field based experiences, and perhaps urban school leaders as the staff that lead these programs.

This study also reveals the frustration that urban leaders have concerning the increasing accountability standards. Perhaps one of the reasons effective teachers leave the profession is due to the extreme pressures of teaching for testing purposes, instead of teaching to grow life-long learners. Secondary leaders may be leaving because the accountability standards are causing students to drop out; however, the leader takes on the full responsibility for ensuring students that come several grade levels below are educated to the same standard as students that come on level. States may need to look at a value-added accountability system or a modified system that looks at optional indicators

for graduation if we are going to stop the revolving door on effective secondary educators.

There are also implications on the national level. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010), there are 49% minority children in the U.S. younger than age five. A population greater than 50% is considered “majority-minority.” The demographics of the U.S. are quickly changing to majority-minority, so our educational institutions are changing as well. Leaders and educators in general need to have strategies for working with minority groups to ensure academic success. National policies should require that certification tests for educators in all states and on all levels include cultural awareness and sensitivity topics to ensure they are fully prepared on how to work with students from all cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. National policies should also require states to set standards within their principal preparation programs that encompass what this research and other current research shows an effective principal needs to do to lead urban schools and improve student achievement.

Implications for Further Research

The research from this study is based upon responses from five principals in high-poverty, high-performing secondary schools regarding their leadership characteristics. Further research is recommended in several areas to better solidify which characteristics have the greatest effects on positive student achievement in high-poverty schools.

Because this is a limited qualitative study, further study of this topic using a quantitative analysis with a greater number of participants would give the study more validity and reliability. It would be interesting to see if a quantitative analysis would reveal additional patterns and themes and to see if the findings would be consistent with

this study. The quantitative analysis would strengthen the answer to determining the extent of alignment between effective school correlates and participants responses hence proving that these characteristics really work.

An extension of this study would be to examine the perceptions that secondary students, teachers, and parents have of their principals in high-performing, high-poverty schools. What is it about the principal that causes them to perform at high levels? Further research may show that there are common characteristics that would help to ground the research.

I believe further research is necessary after the completion of this study in addition to the studies that have already been done on leadership in high-poverty, high-performing schools. In this era of high stakes accountability, where standards continue to increase, leaders in high-performing, high-poverty schools need true research that pinpoints what successful principals do. There is no time for trial and error leadership strategies. Urban leaders need to know what works!

A study of the characteristics of leaders in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools and the leadership characteristics of the middle and high schools they feed into is also needed. Further research may help determine characteristics that secondary school leaders can benefit from: creating opportunities for more high-poverty secondary schools to achieve high-performance.

An examination of the Southern Association Accreditation reports may be a future study that will provide additional insight for school leaders into school effectiveness and leadership characteristics that are associated with improvement of student outcomes.

Conclusion

The reality that urban secondary school leaders face is one of students from poverty stricken homes, crime-ridden neighborhoods, academic skill deficiencies, minimal parental involvement, and mindset changes to view education as a priority. With all of these challenges, there are urban school leaders that are making a difference in spite of the odds. Research has shown that effective leaders can have a significant impact on student achievement and this study has given me and other current and future leaders a guide of successful strategies that work. With the accountability system continuing to increase standards, it is important for educational leaders to have and understand research based strategies that will assist leaders in their quest to improve student achievement. My entire educational career has been on the secondary level and at high-poverty schools. I am passionate about making a difference in these students' lives, and my passion has always been to create avenues for these students to experience the highest levels of success. This study has caused me to rethink my leadership style to include the characteristics that were mentioned in this study. I have learned ways to overcome frequent challenges that arise in being a leader in high-poverty schools as well as professional development ideas that will keep me informed on current educational trends. I began this study with a quote from Ron Edmonds, "How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of poor children?" As a secondary urban school leader, I only need to see one. After this study, I am confident that high-performing, high-poverty schools will soon become the rule, not the exception.

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Appendix A
**Approval from the University of Houston Human Subject Research
Committee**

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON
DIVISION OF RESEARCH

January 23, 2013

Cecilia Crear
c/o Ms. Rayyan Amine
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Cecilia Crear,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "Leadership Characteristics In High Performing High Poverty Secondary Schools" was conducted on December 12, 2012.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 2** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Nettie Martinez at 713-743-9204.

Sincerely yours,



Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **December 1, 2017**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 13169-EX

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Research Form

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS IN HIGH-POVERTY
HIGH-PERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Cecilia Crear from the Department of Education Executive Ed.D Program at the University of Houston. This research is a part of a dissertation is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Rayyan Amine.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question. If you are a student, a decision to participate or not or to withdraw your participation will have no effect on your standing.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate the leadership characteristics of secondary principals leading high-poverty high-performing schools. This study will investigate the extent to which these principals exhibit characteristics of effective schools. The intent is to provide current and future leaders with best practices that

contribute to the academic achievement of high-poverty secondary schools. This study will include interviews of five principals who are currently leading high-poverty high-performing secondary schools. The interviews will take place during a one month period of time however; each interview will last approximately 1 hour for each principal.

PROCEDURES

A total of __5__ subjects at __5__ locations will be asked to participate in this project. You will be one of approximately __1__ subjects asked to participate at this location.

The single interview will take place either at your campus, at a day and time that is convenient to your schedule. The study is a phenomenological study of qualitative design. The actual interview should not take more than one hour of your time. You will be asked eleven questions about your experience, instructional leadership philosophy and practices. I will send you the eleven questions the day before the interview so you can feel prepared. The interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed with the results used to identify common themes relevant to the research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number by me, the principal investigator. This code number will appear within the results of this research project. However, the list pairing the names of subjects to the assigned code numbers will be kept separate from all research and will be available only to the principal investigator. No

names of participants will be included in the study's results. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There should not be foreseeable risks, discomforts or inconveniences during this study.

BENEFITS

By answering these questions about your instructional leadership practices, your participation may help investigators better understand the leadership practices that contribute to the academic success of high poverty secondary students. This may also help you reflect on your current practices to make adjustments that will further improve academic achievement for your students.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio/video taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

- ☐ I agree to be audio taped during the interview.
 - ☐ I agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
 - ☐ I do not agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.

- ☐ I do not agree to be audiotaped during the interview.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Cecilia Crear at (281) 352-4082. I may also contact Dr. Rayyan Amine, faculty sponsor, at (713) 743- 4965.
6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any

question.

7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigator Dr. Rayyan Amine. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Principal Survey Instrument

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me briefly about your experience and background as a school leader.
2. As principal, what is your philosophy of leadership?
3. How would you describe your leadership style?
4. How would you describe the culture/climate at your school?
5. Describe the practices at your school that you believe contribute to your students' high performance?
 - a. What are the three most effective things you have done over the last 3-5 years to improve student performance?
 - b. Can you talk about some specific effective practices that impacted the performance of minority students? Economically disadvantaged students?
6. How do you think your beliefs impact student achievement? How do you translate those beliefs into action?

7. What are your most significant challenges this year and how does your school overcome them?
8. What professional development activities do you engage in to stay current on best practices for educating high-poverty students?
9. What professional development activities have you experienced that have contributed to your leadership skills?
10. What kinds of professional development activities do you think university programs can provide to urban school leaders in an effort to increase and sustain student success?
11. If you had the power to make three major changes (for example, imagine that you could be a legislator empowered to make changes to our educational system) that would contribute to students success, what would be these three changes?

Appendix D

Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study. There are 11 open ended questions in today's interview. The questions are grouped into sections: Introductory information, leadership style, philosophy, and practices, and professional development experiences and recommendations.

In the introductory section you will be asked about your educational background. The purpose of this question is to communicate what subject area you taught and the length of time, how many years you have been an administrator, degrees and certifications, and how many years you have been at your current campus.

In the next section, you will be asked about your leadership style, leadership philosophy, campus culture and climate, and leadership practices you have implemented that have contributed to your school's academic success.

The last section of the interview will focus on professional development. You will be asked about professional development activities you have experienced that have contributed to your leadership style, professional development experiences you engage in to stay current on best practices, and professional development recommendations you have for university programs to assist current and emerging urban school leaders.

The final question asks you to imagine you are a legislator and have the power to make changes to our educational system. What changes would you make?

If there are any questions during the interview that you need clarification on, please let me know so I can make the questions more understandable. At this time, let's get started with the interview.

Appendix E

Diagrams

Table 8: Requirements for Each Rating Category

	Academically Acceptable	Recognized	Exemplary
Base Indicators			
TAKS (2010-11) (including TAKS (Acc), -Alt, and -M) All Students and each student group meeting minimum size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> African American Hispanic White Econ. Disadvantaged 	Meets each standard: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading/ELA..... 70% Writing..... 70% Social Studies..... 70% Mathematics..... 65% Science..... 60% OR Meets Required Improvement	Meets 80% standard for each subject OR Meets 75% floor and Required Improvement	Meets 90% standard for each subject
ELL Progress Indicator (2010-11) TELPAS or TAKS All ELL Students ≥ 30	N/A	60% at or above criteria OR Meets Required Improvement	60% at or above criteria OR Meets Required Improvement
Commended Performance (2010-11) (including all TAKS) if meets minimum size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Students and Econ. Disadvantaged 	N/A	Meets 15% standard for Reading/ELA and Mathematics	Meets 25% standard for Reading/ELA and Mathematics
Completion Rate I (Class of 2010) if meets minimum size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Students African American Hispanic White Econ. Disadvantaged 	Meets 75.0% standard OR Meets Required Improvement	Meets 85.0% standard OR Meets floor of 75.0% and Required Improvement	Meets 95.0% standard
Annual Dropout Rate (2009-10) if meets minimum size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Students African American Hispanic White Econ. Disadvantaged 	Meets 1.6% standard OR Meets Required Improvement	Meets 1.6% standard OR Meets Required Improvement	Meets 1.6% standard OR Meets Required Improvement
Additional Provisions			
Exception(s) (See Chapter 3 for more details.)	May be applied to TAKS indicators if district or campus would be <i>Academically Unacceptable</i> due to not meeting <i>Academically Acceptable</i> criteria.	May be applied to TAKS or ELL indicators if district or campus would be <i>Academically Acceptable</i> due to not meeting <i>Recognized</i> criteria.	No more than one may be applied to TAKS or ELL indicators if district/campus would be <i>Recognized</i> due to not meeting <i>Exemplary</i> criteria.
Check for Academically Unacceptable Campuses (District only)	N/A	A district with a campus rated <i>Academically Unacceptable</i> cannot be rated <i>Recognized</i> .	A district with a campus rated <i>Academically Unacceptable</i> cannot be rated <i>Exemplary</i> .
Check for Underreported Students (District only)	N/A	A district that underreports more than 150 students or more than 3.0% of its prior year students cannot be rated <i>Recognized</i> .	A district that underreports more than 150 students or more than 3.0% of its prior year students cannot be rated <i>Exemplary</i> .
Federal Race/Ethnicity Provision (See Appendix J)	If recalculated African American and White student group performance results in a higher rating for a campus or district, the higher rating will be assigned.		

Appendix F

Text of email to potential research interview participants

I am conducting interviews as a part of research for a doctoral program in Educational Leadership with the University of Houston. My research, entitled “Leadership Characteristics in High-Performing High-Poverty Secondary Schools” relies on input from secondary campus principals regarding the leadership practices they attribute to their campus high performance. I am conducting this research within several school districts in the greater Houston area as a student at the University of Houston. This project has been approved through the Alief ISD research application process.

The details of my research are outlined in the attached “CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH” document. Please read this document. If you are willing to respond and take part in my research, I ask that participants please inform me by December 7, 2012.

Thanks,

Cecilia Crear

ceciliacrear@uh.edu