SUCCESS DESPITE SOCIO-ECONOMICS: A CASE STUDY OF A HIGH ACHIEVING, HIGH POVERTY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Brent Tilley. SUCCESS DESPITE SOCIO-ECONOMICS: A CASE STUDY OF A HIGH PERFORMING, HIGH POVERTY SCHOOL. (Under the direction of Dr. Samuel J. Smith). School of Education, April, 2011. Effective school leadership is becoming more difficult than ever with the challenges of increased accountability and high stakes testing that are components of federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. These challenges are more pronounced in schools with high rates of poverty. This was a case study of a high performing, high poverty school that has consistently been one of the highest performing elementary schools in the state. The purpose of the study was to describe the leadership that exists at the school, the culture of the school, and programs that contribute to the school's success. The researcher conducted observations at the school site and interviews with school personnel. School personnel also completed the School Culture Survey regarding school culture and the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) survey leadership. The study revealed school leadership that had high expectations for staff members and emphasized small group instruction, collaboration, and continuous improvement in instructional practices. The culture of the school was that of excellence, continuous improvement, school pride, and collaboration.

Keywords: leadership, high performing schools, poverty, culture, collaboration

DEDICATION

I thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for blessings too many to count and for the strength and perseverance to complete this project. I thank my wife Rhonda for her love, patience, and continual support throughout this process. I love you. I thank my parents for their love and guidance, for teaching me work ethic and responsibility, and for being great examples to me as Christians and parents. Every day I appreciate you and love you more. I thank my sister for being my friend, my encourager, my accountability partner, my supporter. I thank my three children for their love and support and for making me the proudest Dad in the world. I dedicate this dissertation to my Pappaw and my Granny. I regret that neither of them was able to see me complete this journey before going to be with the Lord. My Pappaw was more proud and more excited about my pursuit of this degree than anyone else I knew and I wish he could have seen me finish. I know my Granny would be proud because she was proud of everything I ever did. I love and miss you both.

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Accountability has altered educational discourse and practices significantly in recent years. The passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 resulted in more frequent testing, consequences for low performing schools, demands for improvement in student achievement, and pressure for schools to ensure that all students succeed (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Success in the context of NCLB is measured by student performance on standardized assessments. Failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on these assessments as prescribed in the NCLB legislation comes with sanctions that include school choice, restructuring, and the overtaking of low achieving schools by state departments of education (Guilfoyle, 2006). Educators are charged with reaching and maintaining high achievement levels regardless of limited resources, students with disabilities, and other factors that have historically been predictors of low achievement, such as socioeconomic status (Jencks et al., 1972).

The call for increased accountability in education can be explained in part by economics. Education is the largest expenditure for many state governments. In the budget year 2007-2008, total education expenses in the State of Florida were over $23 billion, the largest expenditure by the legislature for any single department. Of that amount, over $13 billion was spent on public schools. This is more than 55% of the state's budget (State of Florida, 2008). The education budget for the federal government for fiscal year 2009 was $59.2 billion (United States Government Printing Office, 2008). Budgets of this magnitude will undoubtedly garner scrutiny and criticism.

Quality in education is also a goal of the accountability movement. The Florida Legislature set a goal of improving the quality of educational services provided by schools through alignment of financial resources and performance expectations (Florida Department of Education, 2008a). State and federal governments measure school success in the State of Florida according to student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). This criterion-referenced test is based on the Sunshine State Standards and measures achievement in reading and math for student in grades three through ten. Science is assessed in grades five, eight, and eleven, and writing is assessed in grades four, eight, and ten (Florida Department of Education, 2008b).

The State of Florida, as part of its accountability system for public schools, assigns school grades based on student performance on these tests. The FCAT was administered in 2,585 schools in the state of Florida in 2009-10 (Florida Department of Education, 2010). Florida schools are assigned grades based on the following factors: students achieving at or above grade level in reading, math, science, and writing; students demonstrating learning gains in reading and math; and the percentage of the lowest performing 25% of students showing learning gains in reading and math (Florida Department of Education, 2008b).

In 2009-2010, 95 of the 96 elementary schools that were rated D or F were high poverty schools (Florida Department of Education, 2010). For the purposes of this study, high poverty schools are defined as those with greater than 50% of students being eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch (Illinois Board of Education, 2001; University of Texas at Austin, 2002). All educators are faced with the challenge of overcoming obstacles to student learning. Given the aforementioned Florida testing data and

available research about the relationship between poverty and student achievement, the significant effect of poverty on student achievement is evident. Satisfying school accountability requirements is a difficult demand placed on every educator. However, overcoming the limitations of poverty to satisfy those requirements is an exceptional challenge overcome only by exceptional educators and schools.

The success of such schools leads to some important questions. For example, how do schools overcome the challenges inherent in high poverty schools to help their students learn and reach high achievement levels? What do these schools do differently in regards to leadership, instruction, and school culture to develop a learning environment in which all students can thrive?

Educational researchers have made efforts to answer these questions. Quantitative and qualitative studies have been conducted to examine high poverty schools that have seemingly defied the odds stacked against them and demonstrated high levels of student academic achievement. Further research in this area can expand the knowledge of the successful leadership practices in high poverty schools that lead to improved student achievement, as well as support prior findings about effective educational leadership in high poverty schools.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous studies have examined the practices of highly effective schools. One common component found in high achieving schools is a leadership focus on teaching and learning in the classroom (Newstead, Saxton, & Colby, 2008). Another common factor identified in effective schools is a positive culture for student learning and teacher performance (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007). Such studies have

identified factors that are present in effective schools, as well as the traits and actions of effective leaders in schools.

Likewise, many studies have identified correlations between socioeconomic status and student achievement. For example, one survey of school performance found that only 1% of high poverty schools consistently perform in the top third of their state in academic achievement and low poverty schools are 89 times more likely to achieve in the top third as high poverty schools (Harris, 2007). Other research has found low income students to be lower achievers academically and more likely to drop out of school than their higher income counterparts (Taylor, 2005).

As a result of these findings, studies have been conducted regarding high achieving, high poverty schools. These studies have contributed to the knowledge base about effective educational leadership, particularly leadership in high poverty schools. However, no studies have been conducted to assess the leadership, culture, and programs at high performing, high poverty schools in Florida since the advent of accountability and FCAT testing. A qualitative study of this nature could examine in depth a school that has bridged the gap, achieving at a high level despite a high poverty rate. Ascertaining how schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students close the achievement gap is of particular interest to educational leaders at the school, district, and state level. Studying schools that have succeeded in spite of high percentages of low SES students can provide insight into effective leadership practices that could be implemented in other high poverty schools.

Conceptual Framework and Background

I approached this study through the conceptual framework of the social development theory and the work of Vygotsky. Three themes of Vygotsky's work are (a) the significant role of social interaction in learning and development, (b) the role of a More Knowledgeable Other in learning, and (c) the significance of the Zone of Proximal Development in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The literature review in Chapter 2 and the conclusions in Chapter 5 will be considered in the context of this framework.

Research conducted over a 40 year span has determined that poverty is a reliable predictor of student academic achievement. Studies in the 1960s and 1970s found that socioeconomic status and family background were the strongest predictors of student achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972). More recently, on the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Process, the percentage of students in poverty who were not proficient was more than double that of students not living in poverty (Murnane, 2007).

Schools with high percentages of students living in poverty are typically lower performing. Students in more affluent schools have been found to have more high quality educational opportunities than do students in schools located in low income neighborhoods (Atweigh, Bleicher, & Cooper, 1998; Oakes, 1990; Tate, 1997). Further, the effect of student achievement in high poverty areas spills over into instruction. High poverty schools tend to focus on rote instruction of basic skills instead of higher level and critical thinking skills (Haberman, 1991; Knapp & Woolverton, 1995).

The link between poverty and low academic achievement is so pervasive that some writers have resigned themselves to the consideration that effort and hard work are

not enough, that the effects of socioeconomics are too strong and schools cannot in isolation overcome them (Levin, 2007). However, many high poverty schools have overcome the effects of poverty through careful planning, effective leadership, and the combined efforts of administration, teachers, parents, students, and staff (Harris, 2007).

Some key leadership factors have been identified that are frequently present in effective, high achieving schools, as well as actions commonly taken by effective school leaders. A meta-analysis of educational leadership studies (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) led to the conclusion that there is a significant correlation between leadership and student achievement.

There is a significant amount of research to support these findings. Research reveals that effective schools have strong school level leadership, a strong emphasis on academics, a safe learning environment, individualized instruction, and close monitoring of student progress (Weber, 1971). In an analysis of over 100 research studies about effective leadership, nine characteristics were identified that are present in effective schools. These were instructional leadership, school site management, school wide staff development, curriculum articulation and organization, parental involvement and support, staff stability, district support, school wide recognition of academic success, and maximized learning time (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

Still other studies identified different characteristics of effective schools. Researchers have identified five components of effective school leadership that principals employ that lead to higher academic achievement. These are establishing goals and objectives, creating a climate of learning, reordering priorities as needed, emphasizing professional development, and focusing on results (Quinn, 2002). Additional research

has suggested that the organizational and instructional leadership of the principal directly affect student learning by influencing academic expectations, opportunities for learning, and instructional organization (Johnson, Livingston, & Schwartz, 2000).

In a more specific study of high achieving, high poverty schools, researchers sought to identify the characteristics that contribute to school success, to identify teacher beliefs, knowledge, and practices about curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and to determine the impact of technology resources. The research identified seven characteristics of highly effective schools: 1) teaching and learning are prioritized to support high academic expectations; 2) supplemental support is provided for student learning; 3) a strong and well defined sense of purpose is present in the faculty; 4) faculty members collaborate and support each other; 5) an explicit focus on test preparation is present; 6) teaching resources are available; and 7) teachers have regular access to professional development opportunities (Kitchen, DePree, Celedon-Pattichis, & Brinkerhoff, 2004). Many of the characteristics described in effective school leadership are also considered components of instructional leadership.

Instructional leadership is defined as "the ability of a principal to initiate school improvement, to create a learning oriented educational climate, and to stimulate and supervise teachers in such a way that the latter may exercise their tasks as effectively as possible" (Van de Grift & Houtveen, 1999, p. 373). Others (Hoy & Hoy, 2003), when describing the importance of instructional leadership, stated that a principal must have a strong grasp of effective instruction and emphasize continuous professional development to improve teaching and learning. Still others (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) stress the

importance of having a focus on professional development, providing feedback on the teaching and learning process, and communicating shared goals.

The common perception of what constitutes instructional leadership has changed over time. Broadly speaking, instructional leadership describes the manner in which principals influence teaching and student learning. Principals influence student learning through instructional leadership in a number of ways. Principals with backgrounds as strong classroom instructors provide instructional leadership by using their knowledge and experience to develop curriculum, provide professional development opportunities, and monitor the implementation of effective instructional practices by teachers in the classroom (Edmonds, 1979). Much of the literature from the 1980s emphasized the role of the principal in instructional leadership, particularly in areas such as curriculum development and supervision, which had a direct effect on classroom practice.

More recent literature advocates shared instructional leadership, which enables principals to build capacity for school wide change and improvement in student learning (Ylimaki, 2007). Likewise, a call for decentralization and restructuring has led to the desire for a new transformational model of leadership with the guiding principle being for the school leader to model the desired behavior and then empower the faculty to achieve it (Hallinger, 2003). The most effective school leaders have demonstrated the ability to "share instructional leadership" (Ylimaki, 2007), creating an environment where changes and improvement in instructional strategies come from not only the principal but also instructional staff. Effective principals draw on prior experience to build and increase the capacity for instructional leadership in the faculty.

Mentoring is an area of effective school leadership that could be considered part of instructional leadership. Mentoring includes the training and development of new teachers. Ideally, a comprehensive training, induction, and mentoring program would be in place to ensure the teachers are prepared for success in their first years (Ellis, 2008).

Mentoring provides necessary support for new teachers, providing a platform for discussion, assistance, and answers to critical questions for new teachers. More importantly, it provides new teachers with a broader and deeper knowledge of curriculum, instructional and behavior management strategies, and professional responsibilities--all essential components for successful teaching (Klein, 2007).

The development of a positive school culture is another key component of instructional leadership demonstrated by effective principals (Edmonds, 1979). Researchers have also discovered some common themes in terms of the culture and climate present in effective schools, in contrast to the climate in less effective schools.

Researchers (Hoyle, English, & Steffy, 1985) have noted the importance of school climate, stating that a positive school culture is one of the foundations of a successful instructional program. Additional studies (Montoya & Brown, 1990) and (Stronge & Jones, 1991) found that school climate was strongly related to student achievement.

However, much of the research has failed to compare cultural factors at high performing schools versus low performing schools or to attempt to determine causal relationships between the culture characteristics and student achievement. Some researchers sought to make those connections. They first found notable differences in the philosophies of high achieving and low achieving schools. Low achieving schools had failed to develop and express a shared vision or philosophy for the school (Van der

Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel, & Coetsee 2005). The effect of setting a vision and mission on a school's culture was emphasized in the research of Habegger (2008) as well.

Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005) found that effective schools placed emphasis on values, in particular academic achievement, order and discipline, respect, and pride, to a much greater degree than did ineffective schools. The emphasis on these values served to bind the stakeholders at the school together, while lack of shared values was detrimental to the cohesion and unity at ineffective schools.

While it would be assumed that most effective schools would display most or all of these characteristics, it is uncertain whether these factors are the only ones that set apart highly effective high poverty schools from the rest. Highly effective, high poverty schools will undoubtedly display many of the leadership and culture characteristics described in the aforementioned literature. Yet to be determined is the degree to which those characteristics are displayed and if any other critical or pertinent characteristics are evident in highly effective, high poverty schools.

Purpose of the Study

An in depth study of a highly effective, low income school was undertaken to provide insight into the leadership practices and culture that contribute to the school's success. Because of the nature of this qualitative case study, a formal hypothesis was not developed prior to the study. I instead utilized the grounded theory, used data collection from multiple sources, coded the data, then grouped the codes to ultimately identify themes and form theories to explain the phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

After conducting qualitative analysis of the sample school, I began to describe school leadership, instructional leadership, culture, and programs while identifying

themes of leadership that may contribute to the school's success. School leadership reflected principles from research about effective school leadership, instructional leadership, and school culture. Specifically, I answered three questions about the school.

Research Questions

The three research questions answered during this study were as follows.

1. What components of school and instructional leadership exist?
2. What is the culture?
3. What programs or other factors contribute to the school's success?

Definitions of Key Terms

Several key terms are prevalent throughout the study. Schools are frequently described as "high performing" schools. The school selected for this study is an elementary school that has achieved an *A* grade on the state of Florida school accountability grading system for the seven consecutive years from 2004 until 2010. In addition, the school has achieved 100% of its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in accordance with federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

On the FCAT since 2006, the school performed in the top 15% of all elementary schools in Florida. It has performed in the top 7% of all high poverty elementary schools. In 2009-2010 the school performed in the top 6% of all elementary schools in Florida and in the top 1.6% of high poverty elementary schools. As a result of accomplishing these goals, the school is identified as a high performing school. Definitions of highly successful schools and other key terms are listed below.

High Performing Schools

Schools that achieve in the top 10% of comparable schools in their state, region, or country are defined as high performing schools.

High Poverty School

A high poverty school is a school with greater than 50% of its students eligible for free or reduced lunch (Illinois State Board of Education, 2001; University of Texas at Austin, 2002).

School Leadership

Leadership is defined as those actions by the school principal or other school leaders that facilitate student achievement.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is defined as the actions by school leaders that influence the instructional strategies, practices, and programs of the instructional teaching staff.

Culture/Climate

The attitudes of the students and staff and the norms of the organization that create or hinder the learning environment, especially as they are perceived by the students, staff, parents, and community members.

Programs

Programs are curriculum and instructional initiatives or special academic support programs thought to enhance academic achievement. Examples may be Accelerated Reader, community involvement initiatives, tutoring programs, or others.

Academic focus

Academic focus is defined as the emphasis and relative importance that the school faculty, staff, and students place on academics and student achievement.

Summary

This chapter served to provide background information about public schools and schools' efforts at meeting accountability requirements and the challenges faced by high poverty schools in overcoming barriers to academic achievement. Research indicates that poverty is a strong predictor of academic achievement, and that schools with high poverty rates typically do not perform as well as schools with less poverty. Research also indicates the positive influence of effective educational leaders, particularly through their leadership in instruction and teacher development. Effective leaders also create positive school cultures, which have a positive effect on student achievement. Chapter One also identified the purpose of the study and the research questions to be answered.

Chapter Two will present a comprehensive review of the literature addressing school accountability and the response of the state of Florida to it. Literature will also be included about successful schools, school leadership--particularly in high poverty schools--school culture, mentoring, and teacher development that may be applied to high poverty schools. Chapter Three will describe the methodology to be used in the case study. Chapter Four will present the findings and Chapter Five will be a discussion of the implications of the findings and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Low income students have traditionally underperformed when compared to their middle or upper class counterparts (Taylor, 2005). While many studies have identified leadership practices and programs that contribute to high achievement in schools, far fewer have described the leadership and culture at high poverty, highly successful schools. A comprehensive review of relevant literature can allow for greater understanding of effective leadership practices, school programs, and culture that can be implemented in schools to increase achievement.

Chapter two will review literature and research in several areas. School accountability, the effects of poverty on student achievement, effective school leadership, instructional leadership, mentoring, and school culture and climate are topics that will be addressed.

Conceptual Framework

The research of Lev Vygotsky that led to the social development theory was the basis from which this research was grounded. Vygotsky (1978) found that social interaction played a critical role in learning and cognition and that learning at multiple levels first originated with relationships with others before occurring on an individual level. He also found that the most learning occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development and described the role that a More Knowledgeable Other played in facilitating that learning.

This review of the literature will examine the actions of effective school leaders in the context of social development theory. It will also explore the structures in place in successful schools to support instructional leadership, culture, and mentoring, and the role that school leaders play in those structures.

Accountability

"The cornerstone of current federal educational policy has been expansion of school accountability based on measured student test performance. Although many states had installed state accountability systems by 2000, a central campaign theme of George W. Bush was to expand this to all states" (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). School accountability is now in place across the United States, with all states reporting standardized test results.

In 2002, the Federal Government amended and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This revision became known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Primary among the purposes of this legislation was ensuring "high quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation and training" and "closing the achievement gap between…minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers" (Kysilka, 2003). Many educators would agree that the law was well intentioned, aiming to improve student achievement and ensure that all educators are highly qualified to teach all students. However, many unforeseen consequences of NCLB have arisen that have caused educators to question the effectiveness of the Act.

In adhering to accountability standards as defined by NCLB, Gunzenhauser & Hyde (2007) found that:

> public school accountability in the United States takes its form most strongly in the state level accountability systems that are required by federal education legislation. To receive certain forms of federal education aid, the federal government mandates that states require that their districts periodically and regularly measure (through the use of standardized, grade level tests) student achievement of the state determined content standards in core areas in reading, math, and soon, science. (p. 493)

The A+ Accountability Plan in Florida was a precursor to NCLB. A number of interesting insights come from examination of the Florida A+ plan. Florida's plan identified schools with a "grade" of *A, B, C, D,* or *F* based upon their performance on the FCAT. Students at schools making an *F* two out of four years are given a voucher to transfer to a passing public school or to a private school (Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004).

In 2000, the Florida legislature changed the method that it used to recognize school achievement within its state accountability system. Florida's A+ plan, which was in effect prior to NCLB, awarded letter grades to schools based on achievement and improvement on the FCAT. Schools earning an *A* were previously rewarded with up to $100 per student. The legislature also acted to reward schools financially that improved a letter grade or showed significant improvement (Sandham, 2000).

In terms of intervention, researchers have declared that states are being required to do something that "no state in the country has done completely and for which no proven models exists" (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005, p. 299). It is uncertain how successful state intervention can be, how it should be done, and what strategies to use-in

part because so few intervention programs have been studied systematically (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008).

Perhaps more significantly, NCLB significantly affects schools with the highest percentages of low income students. Because schools with higher numbers of low income students receive a greater amount of federal Title I dollars, they are subjected to greater scrutiny and sanctions for failing to meet adequate yearly progress. Under NCLB, Title I schools which fail to make adequate progress will be required to divert Title I funds to school choice initiatives and other sanctions, thus removing resources from the schools that need them the most. Because low income schools are the ones that receive Title I funds and the NCLB sanctions apply to Title I dollars, NCLB disproportionately affects schools with high percentages of low income and minority students (Figlio, 2003).

One of the primary complaints about NCLB has been that accountability places an excessive emphasis on testing and test scores instead of more appropriate measures such as academic achievement, discipline, and creating safe learning environments (Weingarten, 2008). Others believe that the emphasis on the core subjects of math and reading have led to less instruction in social studies, music, art, and physical education, and in some cases some of those subjects are eliminated completely.

Research found some expected and unexpected effects of the plan. The lowest performing schools saw significant improvement, but it is uncertain whether the improvement was motivation due to the threat of vouchers, the stigma of being a failing school, or simply statistical regression to the mean (Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004). Others came to the conclusion that more resources were directed to failing schools, which

led to increased achievement, while teachers and administrators reported that being identified as a failing school forced them to self reflect and adjust their practice in order to improve (Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004).

Other schools, however, experienced a negative effect. Teachers reported a much narrower focus of instruction, presumably to focus on the tested subjects. Parents and teachers reported increased stress and anxiety levels associated with the testing and the desire to avoid being labeled a failing school, or in some instances anything less than an *A* rated school (Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2004).

While NCLB has staunch opponents and has been controversial, research has found that it has led to increased student achievement. While the effects of differing degrees of rewards and consequences are uncertain, research found that states introducing accountability systems with consequences showed more significant gains in student achievement than states that did not (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). The same research found that school report cards had little effect on student achievement compared to more direct, tangible consequences or rewards. Also, increases in achievement by various racial and ethnic groups were significantly lower than for Caucasians, and were lower for African-Americans than for Hispanics. In summary, school accountability has shown to have a positive effect on student achievement and a more significant effect when tied to substantial consequences. However, it does nothing to close the achievement gap between the aforementioned groups (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005).

Most of the accountability systems developed after NCLB include measurements of students meeting a certain proficiency level on a standardized test. Some research found unintended consequences from such accountability systems. For example, a study

in Chicago (Neal & Whitmore, 2007) found that with NCLB and a similar reform movement in the late 1990s, students “in the middle” showed far greater improvement than extremely high or low achieving students. Specifically, the study found that systems focusing on proficiency level provided “weak incentives….” to students who had “little realistic chance” of passing the test.

Gunzenhauser and Hyde (2007) have noted a fundamental belief among those in support of accountability systems - that rewards and punishments will motivate schools to achieve. They have also found that while most educators and educational theorists have no serious objections to accountability, they do object to the “high stakes accountability” that places undue emphasis on testing.

Others fear that the heavy emphasis on test scores and achievement will lead to other problems. Some districts have implemented performance pay for teachers, with pay based upon student performance on the standardized test (Rothstein, 2008). Such programs inevitably lead to concerns from stakeholders about the credibility of the accountability system, the motivations of teachers, and validity of classroom instruction. Educational theorists fear overemphasis on the subjects tested will be a detriment to the other content areas that are believed to contribute to a well rounded educational experience.

Among several phenomena that have been found to result from accountability systems is the effect on student achievement. Studies show that students who performed just slightly below the passing mark showed the greatest improvements on the test. Researchers speculate that this is due to the increased emphasis on those students that could most positively impact the school rating. Alternately, high performing students did

not show significant improvements in their test performance, nor did low achieving students (Reback, 2008). Presumably, these groups of students did not receive the same level of intense instruction because of their limited ability to improve the school's rating. Such studies exacerbate fears of teaching to the test held by educators, parents, and stakeholders.

One of the most complicated and most hotly debated aspects of NCLB is the expectations for students with disabilities (SWD). Prior to NCLB, educators disagreed about expectations for SWD, including whether they should be expected to meet the same standards as the general education population. They also disagreed about the most appropriate methods for helping these students achieve (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). That debate has intensified due to the NCLB legislation stating that all students, regardless of disability, must eventually meet proficiency levels.

Educators argue over the appropriateness of the assessments for SWD, the appropriate instructional methods for these students, and the ultimate result for students held to this standard. While many believe that NCLB makes the educators of SWD accountable for their students' learning, others find the requirements to be an unfair and inappropriate measure of student success. Some educators fear that holding SWD to the same standards hampers the ability to individualize instruction as needed. Others fear that holding everyone to the same standard will ultimately result in lowering the standard for all so that SWD will be able to achieve it (Hardman & Dawson, 2008).

Many researchers fear that NCLB not only takes the role of education out of the local school districts, but places it in incapable hands. A fear exists that state departments of education are not equipped to do the kind of work that NCLB demands

(Tucker & Toch, 2004), and requiring state governments to involve themselves in instruction places them in an unfamiliar role for which they are not prepared or capable to handle (Reville, Coggins, Shaefer, & Candon, 2004). Studies of interventions attempts by state governments have shown that fiscal intervention (intended to address financial difficulties) has been beneficial. However, state interventions designed to improve academic achievement have not proven effective. Academic improvement is complex and dynamic and cannot be easily replicated through the use of a model program (Seder, 2000).

Accountability systems are in place throughout the United States, and appear to be a permanent fixture in public education. The history of school accountability efforts show varied results in terms of improving student achievement. Initial test score increases that follow accountability measures can be explained by the dedication of fiscal resources to instruction and significant attention to instruction in tested subjects by teachers and school administration.

Educators have had a wide range of reactions to accountability. Fears abound of a much too narrow focus of instruction as a result of testing and accountability. Accountability systems with rewards and consequences have proven to have a greater positive influence on student performance. The financial costs of accountability are significant, but proponents believe that the costs are worth the outcome of improved instruction and student achievement. Figlio (2003) perhaps summarized the discussion about accountability best, saying that

> In spite of the general consensus that school accountability in some form is desirable and important, considerable debate remains regarding key questions

> involved in implementing an accountability system. People differ substantially on the extent to which students should be tested, the means of assessing performance, the coverage and frequency of these examinations, and the ways in which student performance should reflect on schools. In addition, considerable controversy exists regarding the degree to which explicit rewards and sanctions should be employed. (p. 6)

The Effect of Poverty

Historically, a significant amount of educational research (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972) found socioeconomic status and family background to be the single strongest predictor of student achievement. These studies found that the school itself minimally affected student achievement.

Some of the most well known research about poverty in education was conducted by Jonathan Kozol. In his research prior to writing Savage Inequalities, Kozol (1991) found drastic differences in the educational opportunities that existed in schools located in less affluent versus more affluent neighborhoods. In St. Louis, New Jersey, and New York, Kozol found schools in poorer areas to be in great physical despair, inadequately staffed, and poorly funded when compared to more affluent schools nearby.

Research in the 1990s supported earlier studies on education and poverty, finding that students from more affluent areas have greater access to high quality educational opportunities than do students from low income neighborhoods (Atweigh, Bleicher, & Cooper, 1998; Oakes, 1990; Tate, 1997). Schools in low income areas, instead of stressing high level thinking and the development of critical thinking skills, focus on rote instruction of low level skills (Haberman, 1991; Knapp & Woolverton, 1995). Schools in

low income areas often have poorer facilities, a higher percentage of novice teachers, teachers teaching subjects that were not their college major or minor, and teachers without appropriate teaching certification (Ingersoll, 1991).

Research after the turn of the century has produced similar findings. Socioeconomic status continues to be the single most powerful influence over student educational outcomes. This has proven true in the United States, Canada, and several European countries (Levin, 2007). Over time, family incomes continue to be very reliable indicators of student achievement. Students in poverty are more likely to under-achieve than their peers, and are more likely to drop out of school. They are also more likely to be suspended from school, expelled, or retained (Wood, 2003). Sirin (2005), in a meta-analysis of studies regarding the relationships between SES and student achievement from 1990-2000, found a moderate to strong predictive relationship between family SES and student achievement.

Other studies also provide evidence of this connection. On the 2005 assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP), 13% of children living in poverty scored proficient, compared to 40% of students who were not poor. Also, 49% of students in poverty scored below the threshold of basic competency, compared to only 21% of students not living in poverty (Murnane, 2007). Students in poverty are outperformed by more affluent students in every subject area. NAEP reading, math, writing, and science test results show students qualifying for free and reduced lunch score lowest, while those who do not score the highest. These statistics hold true for students in 4th, 8th, and 12th grades. Similarly, student scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test are correlated to family income (Taylor, 2005).

High poverty schools have fewer high quality teachers and lose them at a higher rate than other schools (Machtinger, 2007). High poverty schools are often at a disadvantage in terms of resources, financial and otherwise. In many districts, high poverty schools received significantly less money per student than in wealthier districts (Machtinger, 2007). Dilapidated classrooms, school buildings, and facilities are typical results of this funding dilemma.

In fact, the effects of poverty are so profound that some have suggested education courses about multiculturalism should include teaching about the effects of poverty. Advocates for students in poverty fear that low achievement is frequently attributed to lack of effort and ability with little or no consideration given to the root causes and significant effects of poverty (Taylor, 2005).

As a result of these studies and others, a common belief has developed in the educational community that schools with large percentages of low SES students are hindered in their abilities to achieve academically. However, educational researchers found exceptions to the SES rule. Their studies found a number of high achieving, low SES schools, and also some common components of effective leadership in those schools. The differences that exist in such schools are in the areas of instructional leadership, academic focus and high expectations, and school climate.

Some have proposed that accountability is a means of improving the performance of students in poverty. Accountability, incentives, and capacity are listed as three initiatives to improve achievement of students in poverty (Murnane, 2007). Murnane's recommendations of increasing accountability standards, including making test score objectives more attainable for low income students and adjusting graduation requirements

to reflect the skills needed to succeed post high school, address the symptom and not the cause.

Another recommendation, building the "instructional capacity of the school so that it can educate low income children" (Murnane, 2007, p. 163) more directly addresses student achievement. The next logical step is to determine how to build the capacity to educate low income children. However, this area has typically been given the least attention by standards based reform efforts (Murnane, 2007). Murnane points to needed improvements in teacher preparation and training, and suggests competitive matching grants to attract and retain quality teachers in high poverty schools. The natural question for an educational leader, especially at the school level, is what can be done to develop high quality teachers? Mentoring and teacher development will be addressed later in this chapter.

In terms of academic needs, researchers assert that students in poverty need a "rigorous curriculum with meaningful homework and assessment" (Machtinger, 2007, p. 4). However, the education that students in poverty often receive is quite the opposite. A lack of quality teachers limits the quality of education in poverty stricken schools (Resnick, 1995).

These issues prompt difficulty questions. How do schools overcome the effects of poverty? Many argue that it is a matter of effort, assuming that working harder and smarter will be a remedy. Others claim that the effects of socioeconomics are too strong and schools cannot in isolation overcome them (Levin, 2007).

Such research can be discouraging to educators. When the common belief is that schools with high percentages of students living in poverty cannot expect to have their

students achieve like more affluent schools, it leads to many questions, concerns and challenges to school leaders in high poverty schools. How can a high poverty school overcome such perceptions? More importantly, how can the school overcome the challenges? What areas of instruction, leadership, and community involvement are critical to the development of a high achieving, high poverty school? Examining successful, effective schools, particularly those in low income areas, can shed light on the leadership needs of such schools.

Effective Schools and Effective Leadership

Leadership has been defined as "an observable set of skills and abilities that are useful….in any campus, community, or corporation" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 386). Leadership has also been called the most important factor that differs between major changes in an organization that succeed from those that fail (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). This is certainly true of school leadership just as it is for leadership in any organization. Some components of leadership, however, are specific to an educational environment.

There has been extensive study of effective school leadership for a number of reasons. Among them are an increased demand for accountability of schools and their leaders, increased complexity of schools, and the belief that high quality school leadership is lacking (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2008). As a result, educators are searching for the keys to effective school leadership and the practices demonstrated by effective school leaders.

Studies in the 1970s and 1980s examined instructionally effective inner city schools in an effort to determine which factors positively influenced student achievement. The studies found that these schools had strong school level leadership, a strong

academic emphasis (particularly in reading), an orderly and safe learning environment, individualized instruction, and closely monitored student progress (Weber, 1971). Many of these characteristics can be categorized or described as instructional leadership. They refer to the school leader's role in influencing the act of teaching and learning.

A study by Edmonds (1979) identified five key components of effective school leadership. These components were strong school leadership, a positive climate with high expectations, an orderly environment, a strong emphasis on student learning, and assessment or monitoring of student progress.

After analysis of over 100 research studies about effective leadership, nine leadership characteristics were identified as being present in effective schools. These were instructional leadership, school site management, school wide staff development, curriculum articulation and organization, parental support, staff stability, district support, school wide recognition of academic success, and maximized learning time (Purkey & Smith, 1983). A common component from each of the aforementioned studies is the school leader's emphasis on teaching and learning, high expectations in academics, and student achievement. It is reasonable to propose that student achievement will naturally improve when it is emphasized by the school leader.

Nearly two decades after the research of Edmonds (1979), Purkey, and Smith (1983), researchers conducted analysis of TIMMS test data. Researchers found that opportunities provided at home by the family, such as access to reading materials, were the most common characteristics that distinguished schools with students who were high achieving in math and science from schools with students who were not high achieving

(Martin, Mullis, Gregory, Hoyle, & Shen, 2000). The same analysis found that the nature of the instruction given by teachers had significantly less effect.

Despite those findings, it is generally assumed that effective schools are schools that have effective teachers. Research has shown that teachers who consistently structure their lessons, maintain appropriate pace, and work to develop important concepts have higher performing students than teachers who do not demonstrate those techniques (Brophy, 1979). Additional research found that students in classes where instruction and curriculum focus on content mastery instead of mere coverage, reasoning instead of memorization, and constructing value instead of completing tasks, outperformed students in classes where teachers did not employ those strategies (Newman & Wehlage, 1995). School leaders striving to improve student achievement must not only be aware of the teacher actions and strategies that lead to student achievement, but they must also be able to encourage and inspire teachers to utilize such practices through coaching, modeling, and motivation.

A meta-analysis of educational leadership studies (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) concurs with the importance of the school leader, reporting a significant correlation between leadership and student achievement. A study of effective urban schools identified several strategies and factors that improved student performance, among them consistent leadership with an emphasis on student achievement, continuous professional development, and data driven assessment (U.S. Department of Education and Council of Great City Schools, 2000).

Additional reviews of the research have led educators (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) to conclude that school leadership can have a positive effect on student achievement.

Understanding the significance of the educational leader, determining the components of effective school and instructional leadership, and implementing them in schools to improve student achievement is essential to school leaders.

In a study of high achieving, high poverty schools, researchers sought to identify the characteristics that contribute to school success, to identify teacher beliefs, knowledge, and practices about curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and to determine the effect of technology resources. The research identified seven salient characteristics of highly effective schools:

1. teaching and learning are prioritized to support high academic expectations
2. supplemental support is provided for student learning
3. a strong and well defined sense of purpose among the faculty
4. faculty collaborate and support each other
5. explicit focus on test preparation
6. teaching resources are available
7. teachers have regular access to professional development opportunities (Kitchen, et al., 2004).

While these characteristics are needed and important in any school, they are particularly critical in high poverty schools. In such schools, a sharp focus on instruction and learning is essential.

Researchers found all of these characteristics to be present in all or nearly all of the nine schools that were studied. The prioritization of teaching and learning was evident in discussions with teachers, staff, administration, and students. Doing “whatever it takes” to ensure that students achieve academically was a common theme in all of the

schools, and the words and deeds of the staff reflected this belief (Kitchen et al., 2004). The teachers and administrators shared the prioritization of student learning and achievement, making it the top priority. This was accomplished through trust and cooperative relationships between administration and faculty members. Teachers reported that they felt supported and trusted, while being challenged to excel and help their students do the same. Teachers were also challenged to continually evaluate the curriculum and instructional practices and to adjust both as necessary (Kitchen et al., 2004). Such practices reflect instructional leadership, effective school culture, and high standards/high expectations.

Supplemental support to students differed in form among the schools, but was present in all. Some schools offered extensive after school tutoring with staff or local college students. Some required additional tutoring for students that were failing. Others planned schedules so that students could receive additional help during the day. Some looked to other students for support, pairing high achieving students with struggling ones (Kitchen et al., 2004). Regardless of the form, support was provided in all the schools because it was deemed necessary to achieve the priority of academic achievement in all students.

The other two characteristics that were present in 100% of the schools studied were a well developed sense of purpose among the staff and good collaboration among teachers. The sense of purpose stemmed from leadership provided at the school level. School administration set the tone and expectations for the school, encouraging and motivating staff members to share those beliefs as well as recruiting new staff members who shared them. Teachers shared a strong belief in the importance of learning and

student achievement. This belief influenced their actions, as horizontal and vertical planning occurred in all of the schools, contributing to cohesion and leading to collaboration (Kitchen et al., 2004). In these schools, a culture was developed and supported that centered on the importance of continuous improvement in regards to teaching and high expectations for student achievement.

Collaboration was planned, and careful scheduling allowed the administration at the schools to provide the time and resources for teachers to collaborate. By explicitly sharing its beliefs about collaboration, the administrations inspired staff members to share ideas and strategies. Collaboration also led to stronger feelings of mutual support among teachers and increased cohesion. It also strengthened the common sense of purpose (Kitchen et al., 2004). Indeed, teacher collaboration and sense of purpose seemed to go hand in hand. As teachers worked through problems, identifying gaps in instruction and curriculum and working together to correct them to improve student learning, the teachers were motivated by their successes and emboldened to collaborate to a greater degree.

The importance of strong school leadership and the role that leadership plays in developing common goals among stakeholders cannot be overstated. Newstead, Saxon, and Colby (2008) have said that “when a school is able to execute a good design successfully, everyone – leaders, teachers, administrators – agrees about what drives student achievement” (p.9). To be effective, a school leader must make it a priority to create an environment where goals for the school are shared among stakeholders.

Another critical component of effective leadership is focusing on the right priorities. The time of school leaders is often consumed with non-critical tasks, at the

expense of more essential tasks. Leaders frequently find little time to dedicate to what happens in the classrooms, which is what matters most (Newstead, Saxon, & Colby, 2008). Effective leaders find ways to make time to devote to improving instruction. Whether it is through working longer hours, prioritizing activities, or other methods, the most effective leaders work to improve instructional quality. Leaders at lower achieving schools fail to do so. "At less successful schools, leaders spend less than one quarter of their time on student learning, teacher professional development, and school culture. Leaders at more effective schools spend more than half of their day devoted to these high value activities." (Newstead, Saxon, & Colby, 2008).

In a study of three highly effective schools, researchers found common themes in the schools. The primary focus at the YES Prep school was on teacher recruitment, training, and development (Newstead, Saxon, & Colby 2008). YES Prep spent significant time and resources to identify traits and characteristics evident in high quality teachers and sought to bring them to the school. Once there, school leaders worked tirelessly to train and retain the teachers to improve instruction in the classroom and to maintain continuity with the staff. Leaders believed that excellence in teaching was paramount to a successful school.

At the KIPP school, the second school in the study, leaders emphasized the importance of finding a strong school leader. Time and resources were spent to locate and train leaders that could hire, motivate, and lead a teaching staff, encouraging extraordinary effort and quality instruction (Newstead, Saxon, & Colby, 2008).

The third school in the study, Envision Schools, placed greater emphasis on high quality, innovative instruction. Professional development for teachers and a culture of

seeking continuous improvement in instruction are critical at Envision Schools (Newstead, Saxon, & Colby, 2008). Each of these three schools has proven to be extremely successful in achieving academic results with its students. Although each has a different focus (leaders, teachers, instructional strategies), the three share the common theme of continuous improvement and striving to excel. Strong leadership, excellent teachers, and excellent instruction are fundamental to improving student learning and achievement. Study of these effective schools highlights the importance of all three areas and the strong connections between the three.

Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson and Ylimaki (2007) identified three components that are necessary for effective school leadership. These three were setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization. In setting direction, the researchers refer to articulating and developing shared goals and a common sense of purpose. Leaders develop people by modeling appropriate behavior, stimulating and motivating teachers to achieve and improve, and providing them the necessary support to do so. Redesigning the organization refers to positively affecting school cultures, adjusting school structures as needed, and developing collaborative processes within the school. This research coincides with other educational leadership research findings, highlighting the importance of leadership (setting direction) and quality teachers and teaching (developing people).

The three leaders in the Jacobson et al. (2007) study exhibited strong leadership and the ability to have faculty and staff follow their lead. All three emphasized that nothing should happen at the school that was not in the best interest of the students and didn’t improve their learning.

In the Jacobson et al. (2007) study, the principals worked diligently to ensure that the school was a safe environment for students to learn. They changed policies, procedures, personnel, and attitudes wherever it was necessary to ensure safety and security for the students. Each believed that the development of a safe, secure educational setting for the students was critical before any significant improvement in academic achievement could occur. Because each of these schools had previously existed in an unsafe, unsecure learning environment, it is possible that making security a top priority is more common in urban, high poverty schools. However, creating or maintaining a safe, nurturing environment for students is a component of successful school leadership in any setting.

The Jacobson et al. (2007) study also revealed leaders' beliefs in the professional development of teachers. The school leaders provided the maximum support for professional development that they were able given their current resources, financial and otherwise. Perhaps more critical than support with resources was the support provided in instructional leadership. Each of the leaders modeled effective instructional practices for their teachers and worked with them to ensure implementation of those practices. Additionally, the leaders worked to create structures that allowed and encouraged collaboration among faculty members.

At times, the leaders found that the instructional leadership and development of collaborative processes was met with resistance by some teachers. Each of the leaders believed strongly in the need for all teachers to share the goals of the school and beliefs about how those goals should be accomplished. When teachers did not adapt their attitudes and practices to coincide with change, they were released or encouraged to

transfer (Jacobson et al., 2007). Such actions were undoubtedly difficult for the leaders and upsetting to some teachers. However, each of the leaders' commitment to what is best for the school and the students superseded any other concerns.

Liethwood (2006) identified four major components of leadership as necessary for success in any school. Those components are setting direction, developing people, designing the organization, and managing the instructional program. Taking these abstract concepts and putting them effectively into practice is a challenge for any educator. Youngs and King (2002) described ways to facilitate organizational learning through a collaborative process to build capacity among the staff members. The principals focused efforts on the improvement of instruction and student achievement as well as developing and maintaining professional caring relationships. Among the formal structures that enabled success were planning teams, mentoring, common planning times for grade levels or departments, faculty meetings, and formal professional development activities. Informal structures include cross grade or cross department task forces.

The importance of effective leadership in schools cannot be understated. The effects of a good leader are far reaching. Research indicates that effective leaders do several things. First, they have a clear vision of what the organization should be and know how to communicate it to the staff members. Secondly, they work diligently to hire, develop, and retain high quality staff. Finally, they have a sharp focus on improving instruction, including developing structures and programs that allow collaboration and improvements in teacher knowledge and ability.

Instructional Leadership

Traditionally, views of the role of principal included the principal as primarily a manager. Principals were believed to be needed to supervise and manage the operations of the facility and finances, and that the scope of such duties made instructional leadership difficult if not impossible. The broad concept of educational leadership includes components such as management of personnel, facilities, and the daily operations of the school.

However, instructional leadership is more specific. Instructional leadership can be defined as "the ability of a principal to initiate school improvement, to create a learning oriented educational climate, and to stimulate and supervise teachers in such a way that the latter may exercise their tasks as effectively as possible" (Van de Grift & Houtveen, 1999 p. 373).

The essential nature of instructional leadership has come to the forefront of educational discussion. Daresh (2007) described the need for principals today to become more actively involved in improving instruction and leading the instructional program at their schools. In fact, the term *principal* was derived from a teacher being designated as a principal teacher. It was generally assumed that the principal had more knowledge and expertise than any other teacher in the building, and as such should serve as a leader in instruction (Hoerr, 2008). Although countless other expectations now exist for the school principal, this concept of the principal as instructional leader remains prominent.

Instructional leadership has been described (Hoy & Hoy, 2003) as having a clear vision of "instructional excellence and continuous professional development consistent with the goal of the improvement of teaching and learning" (p.2). Additionally, it

encompasses a focus on professional development, providing feedback on the teaching and learning process, and communicating shared goals.

Principals influence student learning through instructional leadership in a number of ways. Principals with backgrounds as strong classroom instructors provide instructional leadership by using their knowledge and experience to develop curriculum, provide professional development opportunities, monitor the implementation of effective instructional practices by teachers in the classroom, and develop a positive school culture (Edmonds, 1979).

In the 1980s, much of the literature on principals favored instructional leadership that directly affected classroom practice. Activities such as curriculum development and direct supervision were prominent means of instructional leadership. Such principal centered instructional leadership models were criticized because they often ignored the opinions and ideas of teachers and staff members (Ylimaki, 2007).

Instructional leadership approaches of this nature remained present in school leadership training programs well into the 1990s. Recent literature advises principals to share instructional leadership in ways that build capacity for school transformation and improvement in student learning (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy 2003). Also, views on instructional leadership changed when decentralization and restructuring led to the desire for a new transformational model of leadership. The guiding principle behind transformational leadership was for the school leader to model the desired behavior and then empower the faculty to achieve it (Hallinger, 2003).

Hallinger (2003) proposes a theory of shared instructional leadership with several components. The components of shared instructional leadership:

1. A climate of high expectations and educational innovations and improvement

2. A shared sense of purpose in the school

3. A reward structure that reflects the school's mission and goals for staff and students.

4. A variety of activities designed to intellectually stimulate the faculty and staff and continuous professional development for them.

5. Pedagogical knowledge and skills.

There is much educational leadership research to support Hallinger's view on transformational, shared leadership. Marks and Printy (2003) described how effective principals model instructional leadership behaviors and invite teachers to participate. They found that when teachers approve of the methods of the school leader they grow more committed and willing to embrace the change in instructional leadership.

In a study of highly effective schools, Jackson (2000) found shared, transformational leadership to be evident. In these schools, a leadership model was present in which principals included teachers in a shared process of improving learning through instructional leadership activities.

Unlike the schools in the Jackson study, the research of Ylimaki (2007) was based on four diverse, high poverty schools. It examined the differences in leadership in terms of instructional leadership. Two of the schools experienced significant improvement in student achievement and generally positive feedback from faculty and staff. Two of the schools experienced sporadic and inconsistent improvements in achievement and more negative feedback than the other schools. When examining the differences in the two schools, one factor that seemed critical was the prior experiences of the school principals.

The principals who had previous experiences leading and “turning around” high poverty, failing schools were more successful than those with little or no experience.

However, a critical characteristic was evident in the more effective schools that could be replicated by any principal. The more effective school leaders demonstrated the ability to share instructional leadership (Ylimaki, 2007). The principals drew on prior experience to build and increase the capacity for instructional leadership in the faculty. After developing those capabilities in the faculty, they knew when and how to turn over those responsibilities to them. As a result, faculty members were committed to and felt responsible for the successes and failures of not only the students in the school but also of the instructional leadership initiatives that were implemented. In essence, the effective leaders had a vision for shared instructional leadership and worked with faculty and staff to make that vision a reality.

In today’s educational climate, the principal may no longer always be the most knowledgeable person on the school campus about teaching strategies and curriculum. However, principals can display instructional leadership by facilitating teachers’ learning and improving their instructional practice. Principals can encourage teacher learning by having teachers talk to each other about students, develop curriculum together, observe each other while teaching, and teach one another (Hoerr, 2008). While these components of teacher learning may occasionally occur naturally, they frequently require careful planning and consideration by a principal to happen consistently and effectively.

Researchers have identified five components of effective school leadership that principals employ to lead to higher academic achievement. These are establishing goals and objectives, creating a climate of learning, reordering priorities as needed,

emphasizing professional development, and focusing on results (Quinn, 2002). Additional research has suggested that the school leadership and instructional leadership of the principal directly affects student learning by influencing academic expectations, opportunities for learning, and instructional organization (Johnson, Livingston, & Schwartz, 2000).

The leader of any organization wields immeasurable influence on those within that organization. From explicitly stated expectations for professional conduct and production to unspoken and implied expectations, the leader sets the tone for the organization. School principals clearly have a tremendous influence in their schools. Effective instructional leaders not only attempt to influence the attitudes and actions of their teachers but they also use whatever resources that are at their disposal to provide them the support that they need (Jacobson et al., 2007). Such support may come in the form of opportunities for training and other professional development activities for teachers. It can also come in the form of modeling instructional practices by the leader. Finally, instructional leadership can enhance the school culture and improve collaboration among teachers (Jacobson et al., 2007).

One of the primary components of effective instructional leadership involves observation of teaching that occurs in the classroom and providing feedback to teachers to prompt reflection and improvement in instructional strategies. Many principals struggle with finding time to complete such activities, allowing themselves to become engrossed in time consuming management tasks. Some programs have been developed to provide guidelines and structure to school principals in systematically observing

classroom instruction and working collaboratively with teachers to improve it. Classroom Walkthrough (Dryli, 2008) is an example of such a program.

Classroom Walkthrough has been implemented in a number of schools and school districts. Research has shown the use of Classroom Walkthrough to be well received by teachers and administrators and to have a positive effect on student learning and achievement. The key components of Classroom Walkthrough are frequent administrator visits to classrooms to observe instruction, a clear focus for administrators on instruction and learning, and effective feedback provided to the teacher from the principal. The data gathered from the visits is used to identify trends in instruction and help teachers to recognize areas of needed improvement (Dyrli, 2008).

As improvement in teacher performance is a desired outcome for any educational leader, it is understandable that teacher training and staff development is a point of emphasis for educators. A critical question for an instructional leader to answer is "What role does teacher training and professional development play in improving instruction and teacher effectiveness in my school?" Some research indicates that much of the professional development activities in which teachers participate is low intensity and lacks appropriate follow up and accountability to be truly effective (Jacob & Lefgren, 2004). Although this is true in many educational settings, a considerable amount of other research exists to illustrate the positives and negatives associated with teacher staff development activities. Consideration of this research will reveal effective methods for an instructional leader to employ when seeking to improve teacher instruction.

Unfortunately, some research indicates that teacher training does not have a tremendous impact on student performance. In a meta-analysis of 93 studies of teacher

staff development, only 12 of the studies found teacher staff development to have a significant impact of student performance (Kennedy, 1998). Another extensive study of schools and their efforts with teacher training focused on Chicago schools on probation. Findings from this study revealed that training had no significant effect on student achievement (Jacob & Lefgren, 2004). Others, however, have shown positive effects on student achievement. Studies such as those conducted by Dildy (1982) and Bressoux (1996) found teacher training to have positive effects on student performance.

The challenge for educational leaders, particularly those leaders intent on being instructional leaders and improving teaching, is to determine what he can do to improve teacher instruction. The research indicates that the most important aspects of the principal as instructional leader are providing knowledge and expertise about instruction and curriculum, creating opportunities for shared instructional leadership and collaboration among teachers, observing instruction and providing feedback, and providing opportunities for professional growth and development. An effective instructional leader will strive to incorporate these strategies into his leadership style.

Mentoring

In order to improve student learning, improving the effectiveness of teaching is essential. Numerous educators have studied, discussed, and debated how best to improve teacher instruction and increase effectiveness. Staff development and training, the influence of a strong instructional leader, and the influence of a positive school culture are all believed to be necessary factors for improving teacher performance and ultimately student performance. Another significant contribution to improving teacher performance is mentoring. Mentoring may be considered a component of effective instructional

leadership. Effective leaders create and foster mentoring relationships that can improve teacher confidence, knowledge of the content and effective instructional strategies, and effectiveness in classroom management.

Ideally, schools would have a comprehensive training, induction, and mentoring program in place to ensure that teachers are prepared for success in their first years. Ellis 2008) describes a proven program that includes a week long training prior to the beginning of school in classroom management, instructional strategies, and district policies. Follow through and accountability is achieved through additional training based on a needs assessment conducted by the teachers and a strong mentoring program. Teachers are assigned mentors for their first three years of teaching in the district. The mentor is a full time teacher who is at the same school site. Teachers also have access to a support teacher who is relieved of full-time teaching duties to provide support to beginning teachers. The support teachers provide support to first year teachers across several school sites.

Ellis (2008) concluded that this program was very effective, listing several reasons for the program's success. One critical factor that is noticeably absent from most mentoring programs is the existence of the support teacher. The support teacher is able to provide much needed support to the beginning teacher because he or she is not bound by the responsibilities of being a full-time teacher. Typical mentor relationships involve two full-time teachers, with the mentor overloaded with traditional teaching duties in addition to mentoring responsibilities.

Mentoring, as with most other educational initiatives, is not frequently effective when used in isolation. Mentoring programs have proven to be most effective when they

foster close, professional relationships between staff members. Professional relationships of this nature are not nearly as common as close personal relationships among teachers (Klein, 2007).

Wong and Wong (2008) found that the instructional support and assistance typically associated with the term coaching has proven effective. Although mentoring is typically available for the first year of a teacher's profession, coaching continues for years. There are several keys to effective coaching. Defining responsibilities given to a coach is one key component. Establishing clear expectations for the role of the coach helps to ensure accountability. Another key component is the extensive work in the classrooms by coaches. Coaches work closely with classroom teachers to model lessons, share instructional strategies, observe instruction, plan lessons, test students, and evaluate student data. The depth of the work completed by a coach and the relevance of those duties to the instruction of a classroom teacher contribute to the coach's effectiveness. Traditional mentors fail because they fail to provide teachers with the skills and support needed for success. Coaching fills that role, helping teachers improve by providing specific support to teachers in the areas of classroom management and instruction.

Additionally, mentoring has proven to be more beneficial when it occurs as part of a widespread climate in the school that is conducive to intimate professional relationships. Effective mentoring programs result in a reciprocal effect on a collaborative culture. The establishment of clear expectations for a mentoring program reinforces to the staff that sharing knowledge and skills with new teachers is desirable, and that new teachers should seek out experienced teachers for guidance and assistance (Klein, 2007).

Mentoring provides necessary support for new teachers, providing a platform for discussion, assistance, and answers to critical questions for new teachers. More importantly, it provides new teachers with a broader and deeper knowledge of curriculum, instructional strategies, behavior management strategies, and professional responsibilities; all essential components for successful teaching (Klein, 2007).

There are numerous problems with traditional mentoring programs. Among these problems are the lack of experience and training for new mentors. As a result, mentors are uncertain about their roles and responsibilities as a mentor (Forsbach-Rothman, 2007). Uncertainty about roles and responsibilities will limit the effectiveness of the mentor and thus the mentoring relationship.

Forsbach-Rothman's (2007) research revealed that a common problem with mentoring is the typical means of selecting mentors. Often, mentor teachers are chosen based on their strength and competency in teaching ability. However, interpersonal skills such as communication and skills in mentoring would be much more critical to mentoring success than instructional skill. Recommendations to improve mentoring programs include providing time for teachers and mentors to discuss teaching, instruction, and their roles as mentor and teacher. Additionally, roles and relationships should be clearly defined and understood by both parties. A final recommendation is adequate mentor training.

The school principal is critical to the success of a first year, novice teacher. In creating a mentor relationship for the new teacher, it is important that the principal consider two important facts about mentoring. First, mentoring must include the development and scheduling of regular, developmental meetings. The second is the

provision of meaningful, instructive feedback to teachers (Roberson & Roberson, 2009). These factors are so important to the mentoring process because they emphasize the importance of teachers learning and reflecting on their instructional practice.

A challenge facing educational leaders is to induct new teachers in a way that promotes high levels of classroom practice and instruction, ensures the academic success of all students, and encourages ideas and strategies for novice teachers. In order to accomplish this goal, educators must understand the issues and concerns of novice teachers as well as the expectations for principals and colleagues of novice teachers. Additionally, developing strategies to meet the needs of first year teachers and helping to ensure first year success are essential (Roberson & Roberson, 2009).

One of a first year teacher's greatest issues and concerns is the fear of the unknown and dealing with the consequences of the unknown. A new teacher has very little knowledge or understanding of what a teacher should do and how to do it, and is therefore unable to accurately evaluate her own performance or to identify what she should be doing when interacting with students, colleagues and parents (Roberson & Roberson, 2009). This poses a problem, as principals expect new teachers to be knowledgeable about the curriculum, to demonstrate professionalism and a positive attitude, to have good classroom management and communication skills, and to exhibit a desire to help every student learn. New teachers naturally look to the school principal for guidance, perhaps because of the relationship established during the hiring process, or perhaps because the principal is ultimately the leader and authority figure at the school.

As a result, new teachers expect that school principals will communicate frequently with them, in particular to express the expected criteria and standard for good

teaching. They also expect classroom visits and feedback about teaching performance to determine their level of success in achieving the aforementioned standard of good teaching (Brock & Grady, 1998). The importance of the role of principal in developing, guiding, and encouraging new teachers cannot be overstated. The actions of the school principal are pivotal to teacher development. Whether through direct, interpersonal guidance and tutoring with a teacher or through a well-planned, organized mentoring and induction program developed by the principal, the school leader has a considerable influence on teacher development.

Research has suggested that some particular strategies help ensure early success for new teachers and contribute to the success of a mentoring program. Knowledge of the content is important, and teachers should thus be allowed to teach the content with which they are most familiar. Teachers should be provided opportunities to refine their lessons and to see the results of lessons taught to different groups of students. Distractions should be minimized by reducing outside responsibilities that could interfere with her growth as a teacher. Additionally, a new teacher should be assigned to the same subject area or grade level as their mentor teacher and in close proximity to that teacher to make opportunities for communication, sharing, and observation easier. Finally, a new teacher should have numerous opportunities to observe highly effective teachers (Roberson & Roberson, 2009).

One suggestion to help school leaders foster teacher growth in their first years is to establish regular staff development meetings with new teachers. Such meetings provide the new teacher with regular opportunities to learn pertinent information about effective teaching. Such meetings should provide teachers with opportunities to ask

questions, thus dictating the nature of the meetings and reflecting about what they need to know. The meetings should also generally move from an operational theme (what we need to have and know to survive) to an instructional theme (what we need to do to improve instruction and student learning). These meetings should be attended by all new teachers, should be held regularly, and should include or be led by the school principal (Roberson & Roberson, 2009).

A second strategy is to provide teachers with meaningful, instructive feedback. This is an area where many principals frequently fall short. It is uncertain whether this occurs because they become too involved with managerial tasks, they lack the knowledge or confidence to work to improve instruction, or other reasons, but many principals do not provide the meaningful feedback necessary for teachers to improve.

Because new teachers lack the relevant experience of teaching and working with students, they often don't understand the importance of implementing school and district initiatives to help improve student achievement. Therefore, it is essential that they receive training and feedback at critical junctions throughout the school year, not just at pre-service trainings and orientations (Roberson & Roberson, 2009).

Feedback should occur in three forms. One form is feedback from outsiders. This includes feedback from the principal and other teachers, and includes information about the job, discussions between the teacher and those providing feedback, and the results of classroom observations. The second type of feedback is feedback from work. Such feedback is measuring job performance against an external standard. Often, new teachers lack the knowledge to compare themselves against such a standard, being forced to rely on feedback from others to fill that gap. The third type of feedback is feedback

from personal standards. This is a measure against the teacher's own standard for how hard they should work. A new teacher must develop an accurate conception of what is an acceptable level of work and effort to be a successful teacher (Roberson & Roberson, 2009).

Mentoring programs exist in numerous formats and are implemented to different degrees, in various ways, and with varying degrees of success. Common components of some of the aforementioned effective mentoring programs include having a defined structure and clearly defined roles and expectations for teachers, school leaders, and mentors. Feedback is frequently provided to the novice teacher. New teachers have frequent opportunities for communication and to have questions answered. Mentor teachers are selected not solely on the basis of teaching ability, but also on communication and mentoring skills.

Climate and Culture

School climate has been described by Hoy and Feldman (1987) as the health of the technical (the teaching and learning process), managerial (administrative process), and institutional (school's interaction with its environment) controls within the school. They found that a school with a healthy climate has harmony among these three areas. Goldring (2002) described culture as the invisible structure that lies beneath the network of teachers, support staff, and students. Its power rests in the fact that it controls everything about that group, from its discussion to its common beliefs to the values that it teaches. Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005) defined culture as "the intangible foundation that encompasses common values, assumptions, norms, and convictions which serve as guidelines for the behavior of individuals in an organization" (p. 93).

Culture is an intangible but very vital component of a school. Studies conducted in the 1980's revealed the importance of school climate, stating that a positive culture is one of the most important components of a successful and instructionally sound school (Hoyle, English, & Steffy, 1985). Studies conducted in the 1990s revealed strong links between positive school climate and student achievement (Montoya & Brown, 1990; Stronge & Jones, 1991).

One interesting aspect of school culture is that its effect is often not realized. Over time, the influence of culture on every aspect of the school becomes invisible and is taken for granted. These become unspoken norms and guide the words and actions of the members of the school (Goldring, 2002).

Researchers have identified six key components of school culture. The presence or absence of each of these aspects of culture has a tremendous influence on student achievement and the overall success of the school. The key components of culture are having a shared vision, traditions, collaboration, shared decision making, innovation, and communication (Goldring, 2002). The following paragraphs will describe these components of culture and discuss their relevance to a positive and effective school culture.

Vision is an idea, vision, or picture of the future of the organization. A shared vision is one that has been collectively developed by members of the organization. A shared vision gives the group members a sense purpose and direction for their work. It reflects the values of the group and what the group members believe is most important, the environment that should be present in the school, and the way that members will interact with each other (Goldring, 2002).

Traditions are the tangible, visible occurrences at schools that express the values, beliefs, and unspoken norms of the organization. Traditions may include ceremonies, metaphors, symbols or actions that reinforce the beliefs of the members and they express to members and outsiders what is important to the organization (Goldring, 2002). Traditions, symbols, and rituals are important because they serve as strong reminders to group members of the shared vision and beliefs held by stakeholders at the school. The visible reminders are often stronger than spoken or written words, even words written on vision or mission statements posted throughout the school.

School faculty and staff members demonstrate collaboration when they work cooperatively together to accomplish tasks. Collaboration can occur on a large scale with the entire faculty or staff or in small group settings. In either case, collaboration is dependent on the group members having an understanding of the spoken and unspoken norms for behavior within the group (Goldring, 2002). Collaboration is an important component for a positive school culture for a number of reasons. In an organization as complex as a school, successfully accomplishing many required tasks and objectives requires the cooperation and collaboration of staff members. Without effective collaboration many essential school goals would be difficult or impossible to complete. Working collaboratively also serves to strengthen the relationships between faculty and staff members. It provides opportunities for teachers to share ideas and strategies, which helps to improve teachers' instructional practices.

Formal and informal decisions made by a group translate the values of the group. Shared decision making, involving others in the decision making process, brings a variety of perspectives to decision making and strengthens the sense of community and

collaboration (Goldring, 2002). Shared decision making allows a smoother and more rapid facilitation of change to occur. Involving stakeholders in decision making makes others more likely to accept and support change initiatives than if they were handed down by school administration. Shared decision making is also a means of strengthening collaboration. The act of shared decision making is collaborative in nature, and the cohesiveness that is created through the shared decision making process enhances collaboration.

"Innovation is demonstrated when a new element is introduced into a group for their benefit" and it also "includes dealing with change, which challenges the existing assumptions and beliefs of the culture, and introduces uncertainty" (Goldring, 2002, p. 33). A positive school culture will at its best have a spirit of innovation, and will be open to considering change, including new or different ways of doing things. Schools with cultures that are averse to change will undoubtedly remain the same. New methods, strategies, and programs are rarely implemented in a school that is unwilling to consider change. The result is stagnant instruction and student learning. Schools with a culture of openness to change are much more likely to modify what they do in an effort to improve instruction and student learning.

Communication is the means through which a group expresses itself. Effective schools have efficient means of communicating internally within the organization as well as with outsiders (Goldring, 2002). Communication is critical to school effectiveness and to its culture. It is the common thread to all of the aforementioned traits of culture. Vision, values, and beliefs are shared through various means of communication. Teachers and staff must communicate with each other in order to work collaboratively for

any purpose. Principals must be effective communicators to share expectations and goals with teachers and staff members. Verbal and written communication is essential to coming to consensus when participating in shared decision making. Without effective communication, it is nearly impossible for schools to operate efficiently and effectively. A positive culture is entirely dependent on the effective communication of the organization's stakeholders.

Some characteristics are consistently present in effective schools with positive cultures and are absent in low performing schools. These are support from school administration, shared values and a positive atmosphere, safety and order, collaboration in teaching, commitment to student learning, teacher relationships with students and job satisfaction (Van der Westhuizen et al., 2005).

Numerous research studies have identified cultural factors present at high performing schools. However, much of the research failed to compare cultural factors at high performing schools versus low performing schools, or to attempt to determine causal relationships between the culture characteristics and student achievement. Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005) conducted research to attempt to make those connections. They first found notable differences in the philosophies of high achieving and low achieving schools. Low achieving schools had failed to develop and express a shared vision or philosophy for the school. The effect of setting a vision and mission on a school's culture was emphasized in the research of Habegger (2008) as well.

Van der Westhuizen et al. found that effective schools emphasized values, academic achievement, order, discipline, respect, and pride to a much greater degree than did ineffective schools (2005). The emphasis on these values served to bind the

stakeholders of the school together, while lack of shared values was detrimental to the cohesion and unity at ineffective schools.

Effective schools demonstrated a high degree of cooperation in regards to the achievement of goals and objectives associated with the mission of the school. Low performing schools, in contrast, demonstrated little or no understanding of the schools mission or shared beliefs in the core values for the school (Van der Westhuizen et al., 2005). Logic would seem to confirm this conclusion. Without agreement about the direction an organization should be headed and how it should get there, it is unreasonable to expect it to be successful in any endeavor.

Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005) also described tangible and intangible factors that compose the two categories of characteristics of school culture. Intangible factors were those like the aforementioned values, beliefs, mission, aims and objectives, and philosophy. Tangible factors are the more visible components of culture. One example is school ceremonies and the recognition of heroes in the school. Often recognition occurs in the form of ceremonies, awards, honor rolls, or through display of student work and achievements. High performing schools make particular efforts to recognize and reward the top academic achievers in their schools. Finally, school leaders in effective schools implemented components of shared leadership and decision making and involved others in planning, leadership, and implementation of change in the school.

Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005) stressed the importance of developing a positive school culture and its effect on student achievement. High and average performing schools all emphasized the components of effective culture to a far greater degree than low performing schools. Research indicates that involving students, parents, teachers,

and other stakeholders is one of the most effective means of developing a positive culture. Also critical is the role played by the leader in developing an effective school culture.

The principal's role in changing or creating a positive school culture is significant, as is the importance of the principal being successful in that role. The principal's role in creating a positive culture has been described as "imperative" and that it was the "deliberate decision by the principals that I studied to focus their time on creating a positive school culture that allows the other areas (e.g., designing instruction for student success) to also achieve noteworthy outcomes" (Habegger, 2008, p. 43).

There are also examples of how the principal's determination to create a positive school culture allowed other areas of successful schools to flourish. One example presented by Habegger (2008) was the method that the principal used to develop ideas for improving reading comprehension. Rather than handing down instructional strategies to the teachers, the principal sought input and suggestions from the teachers. From these suggestions, they developed action plans to implement to improve reading comprehension. This perpetuated a culture of continuous improvement in the school and is an example of collaboration and shared decision making. It instilled in the teachers the belief that their opinions matter and created a culture where they were comfortable taking risks and striving for improvement. The principal's efforts to develop a positive culture in this instance served to encourage teachers' efforts at continuous improvement.

Habegger's (2008) research also found that there are two important types of activities that principals engage in to promote positive school culture. These two activities are creating a sense of belonging for teachers and students and setting a clear

direction for all stakeholders. For students, creating a sense of belonging meant developing positive, caring relationships with adults in the school. For principals seeking to create positive cultures, this desire was greater than the desire for improved test scores. The principals believed that having positive relationships with adult staff would motivate and inspire students in ways that nothing else could.

Other school culture research reveals beliefs about the relationship of culture to academic achievement. One belief is that there is a positive relationship between an effective school culture, the motivation level of teachers and students, and student achievement. Another is that an effective organizational culture can lead to a reduction in failures and drop out rates. Also, the quality of work life of the teachers and staff has a direct effect on the organizational culture and climate. Effective discipline, respect for teachers, and high attendance rates are believed to be a reflection of a positive school culture. The quality and condition of the facilities are also a reflection of the culture. Finally, norms and values form an important part of the organizational culture of the school (Cheng, 1993).

Within the broad scope of school climate, researchers found one area of climate in particular to be strongly correlated to student achievement. This area is academic focus. Researchers (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000) found high levels of academic focus in schools had the strongest correlations to student achievement. Similar findings were discovered in other research (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000). Schools in which academic achievement is emphasized and valued (high academic focus) had consistently higher performing students.

Some researchers contend that climate is easily visible but cannot be defined, measured, or manipulated. However, other climate and culture research, such as that conducted by West (1985) found that climate has a very measurable impact on student achievement. Specifically, West found higher student achievement in schools that had strong instructional leadership, high expectations, and an emphasis on academic achievement and mastery of basic skills.

A positive school culture is manifested when teachers work collaboratively and have a strong belief in the need for continuous improvement. When guided by this belief, teachers work together to develop more productive environments for teaching and learning. The role of the principal is critical in this development. The principal must communicate to students and staff the school's vision and expectations for teachers and students, create a safe learning environment for students, and perhaps most importantly develop a productive work environment for teachers with optimal learning time and incentives for learning and achievement (Shann, 1999).

The study by Shann (1999) was one of the first to demonstrate that school culture can be measured and manipulated. Shann (1999) found that schools in which students perceived a greater degree of care, concern, and commitment by their teachers demonstrated higher academic achievement. The research went as far as to suggest that a synergy exists between a culture of caring and student achievement.

There were some differences found in the cultures of the two highest performing schools in the study. Both schools had a low percentage of antisocial behaviors, but the higher performing school had a higher percentage of prosocial behaviors and had a "happier" environment. The lower performing school had more of a boot camp, law-and-

order type of environment. Rules were strictly enforced and interaction among students was limited between classes, before school, and during lunch (Shann, 1999). Such restriction may have limited opportunities for the development of prosocial behaviors. In the higher performing school, students were allowed to have communication and interaction that nurtured a more caring culture. In this school, teachers were perceived as more caring and collegial, contributing to an overall pleasant learning environment at the school (Shann, 1999). The results of this quantitative study are encouraging to proponents of the positive effects of school culture. The study supports the efforts of educational leaders to create positive, caring cultures with a focus on academic achievement and the effect that such cultures can have on academic performance.

Other research has demonstrated the importance of positive relationships on student success in school and relates to the aforementioned research about poverty. The research of Payne (2003) found that for students in poverty, relationships were their primary motivation for success. In another study, Karns (2005) stated that learning can only take place when teachers have positive relationships with their students and with each other. When this takes place, students are more easily able to make connections and relate material to their background knowledge. This makes instruction more responsive to the students. This research emphasizes the importance of culture, specifically the development of positive relationships between teachers and students. It behooves a school principal to consider the impact of school culture and the influence of positive student relationships with faculty and staff as they can have a tremendous impact on student satisfaction in school and academic success.

A sense of belonging is important for teachers as well and is beneficial to teacher success. Teacher participation in collaborative work and teamwork as part of a professional learning community can build a sense of belonging. Principals can encourage this by providing common planning time to allow teachers to plan and work together. Implementing professional learning communities in a school can produce significant benefits. These communities contribute to increased individual and collective efficacy, a collective responsibility for student learning, increased teacher cohesion and decreased isolation, improved teacher morale, increased learning about good teaching, increased job satisfaction, and greater enthusiasm (Habegger, 2008).

The second type of activity that principals participated in was setting clear direction. The principals emphasized the importance of setting goals for students. The students were taught concepts of goal setting, developing action plans, and charting progress. Doing so developed a sense of awareness and ownership of academic achievement for the students (Habegger, 2008).

For teachers, having a principal set clear direction will result in a "cohesive, school wide focus" (Habegger, 2008). Kotter (1990) proposed that once a cohesive focus is developed, needs assessment data can be analyzed, which leads to shared, informed decision making about instructional issues. Principals in effective schools in Habegger's study were very familiar with the mission statement of the school. In addition to being familiar with it, they conveyed the importance of that message in word and deed. The school's mission truly guided the decisions made at the school level.

Finally, a clear direction set by the school principal creates a school culture in which collaboration occurs frequently for the purpose of sharing best practices and

improving instruction. Many of the schools in the study conducted curriculum mapping, which contributed to instructional cohesion in the school (Habegger, 2008).

Much of the literature about effective school cultures describes a culture in which there are high expectations for students and teachers and a sense of collaboration and collegiality among the staff members. However, simply understanding that such a culture is present in effective schools is not enough. Effective school leaders must also determine how to develop cultures like this in the school setting. Cavanagh (2003) described this process as re-culturing. As teacher beliefs and values about student learning are a central component of school culture, school re-culturing should begin in the classroom in order to change and renew classroom cultures of teaching and learning (Glickman, 1992; Hargreaves 1995). Transforming the culture of the school requires teachers to develop new beliefs, attitudes, and values about instructional processes that will lead to change in classroom practice and improve educational outcomes (Halsall, 1998).

In order to facilitate effective school renewal, it is necessary to question the common practices and attitudes in the school about teaching and student learning. Cavanagh's (2003) research found that classroom culture had a significant effect on student educational outcomes. Not only were academic outcomes improved, but when teacher beliefs and attitudes were changed, students' perceptions about the classroom, the school, and learning were significantly improved. The implications for educational leaders are that identifying and implementing plans to assist teachers in developing appropriate attitudes, values, and beliefs will result in improved learning outcomes.

Perhaps most significantly, Cavanagh (2003) identified objectives for school leaders in fostering positive school culture, in particular a culture that will positively influence educational outcomes. He found that essential components of culture included stressing the importance of not only learning but also implementing effective instructional strategies based on a common pedagogy while reinforcing acceptable attitudes and behaviors.

An important aspect of the role of school leadership is coaching and mentoring other members of the staff in the techniques of building and maintaining school culture. This includes modeling appropriate behaviors and also continually espousing the beliefs, values, and attitudes that constitute the ideal school culture and are enshrined in the school's vision (Cavanagh, 2003).

Giles (2007) described a culture that is created in effective schools. Effective leaders work to set direction in the school, develop people, design the organization and manage the instructional program. In emphasizing these four components of leadership, school principals create a culture that stresses the importance of student learning, continuous improvement in instruction, and positive professional relationships that encourage collaboration and professional growth.

A characteristic of effective schools that is closely tied to climate is academic focus. Academic focus is a description of one area of the climate of a school. Hoy and Hannum (1997) defined it as:

> the extent to which the school is driven by a quest for academic excellence. High but achievable academic goals are set for students, the learning environment is

orderly and serious, teachers believe in their students' ability to achieve, and students work hard and respect those who do well academically" (p. 294).

Having a strong academic focus has been found to affect teaching and learning positively in a school. In such schools, teachers are more likely to utilize diverse instructional strategies, collaborate with colleagues, and ensure their own professional growth (McEwan, 1998). Throughout educational research, academic focus has been found to affect student achievement positively (Weber 1971; Purkey & Smith 1983; Hoy & Sabo 1998). It has also been a theme consistently found in effective schools (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983).

Summary

Considerable research has been conducted to identify and describe effective school leadership. The challenge of educational leadership has become more profound with the onset of school accountability measures. The school accountability movement has led to an increased emphasis on standardized test scores and student achievement, some would say at the expense of other vital components of education. Nevertheless, the pressure is on for schools to perform on state standardized tests.

Research reveals that some characteristics are consistently present in high performing schools and noticeable absent from lower performing schools. Generally speaking, these factors can be collectively described as effective school leadership. Leadership includes instructional leadership, motivation, teacher development, and mentoring. Another factor that is frequently present is a positive school culture with high expectations for teachers and students and a belief in the necessity of collaboration and continuous improvement. Aforementioned research has linked the presence of such a

culture to school leadership, proposing that strong leaders work to develop and cultivate positive cultures. High performing schools most frequently have leaders who place emphasis on instruction, continuous improvement, collaboration, and achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three will describe the research design and methodology for the study. Overcoming the limitations and obstacles frequently present in low income schools is a considerable challenge and is critical to improving teaching quality and student achievement. Addressing these issues in the era of school accountability has proven to be even more challenging. Socio-economic status is one of the strongest predictors of student achievement. Therefore, determining how to succeed in spite of the limitations of poverty is an essential question for any educational leader. Effective school leaders must find ways to overcome these issues. Therefore, an in-depth case study of the leadership and culture of a high performing, high poverty school can be beneficial to all educators by identifying the leadership and culture at such schools.

My aim was to identify the leadership practices evident at the school, describe the culture at the school, and identify any programs that were in place that contributed to the school's achievement. Examining effective practices at a high achieving school was expected to yield leadership principles and strategies that can be replicated to achieve success. Programs found to be beneficial to the school can be utilized in other schools as well.

For a qualitative case study of this nature, a formal hypothesis was not developed prior to the study. I instead utilized the grounded theory, using data collection from multiple sources, coded the data, then grouped the codes to identify themes and form theories to explain the phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). After conducting

extensive observations at the school, conducting interviews with administration and staff, and analyzing surveys completed by staff members, I was able to describe the leadership and culture present in this high performing school.

I anticipated many of the effective leadership strategies described in the review of the literature would be on display by the school leadership. Review of relevant literature would indicate that a positive school culture would be evident. A culture centered on student achievement, high expectations for students, and continual improvement for teachers is frequently present at high performing schools, and I anticipated that such a culture would be found in the case study. The literature review indicated that strong leadership, particularly instructional leadership, by the principal would most likely be present in such a high performing school.

Problem and Purposes Overview

Research has found a strong correlation between poverty and school achievement. The problems and limitations faced by high poverty schools are significant and legitimate. Observation and analysis of the leadership, culture, and programs at a highly effective, high poverty school can illuminate the effective practices at the school. Identifying strategies to overcome those limitations, particularly leadership strategies that could produce positive effects school wide, could be tremendously beneficial to educators. School leaders in high poverty schools can improve their instructional leadership through study and replication of the effective practices of school leaders in highly successful schools.

Research Questions

Examining schools that have proven to be successful in spite of the limitations of poverty can add to the existing literature about effective school leadership in high poverty schools. This study was designed to examine one such school and identify themes of leadership and school culture that existed at the school.

Three questions were answered by this study:

1. What components of school and instructional leadership exist?
2. What is the culture?
3. What programs or other factors contribute to the school's success?

Research Hypothesis and Design

Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative studies do not typically begin with a hypothesis (Gall et al., 2007). However, after conducting qualitative analysis of the sample school, I sought to describe school leadership, instructional leadership, culture, and programs present at the school, identifying themes that contribute to the school's success. Examining whether the school leadership reflected principles from research about effective school leadership, instructional leadership, and school culture was a primary objective of this study.

The design was a single case study of an elementary school. The school was chosen because of its high rate of poverty and high performance on state assessments when compared with other school in the district and state. The sustained success that has been achieved by the school is the primary reason for it being chosen as the subject of the case study. A second reason for the selection of this school is because the school experienced a significant improvement in student achievement after the current principal

was hired. A comparison of the current school leadership to the previous leadership may provide insight as well.

I believed that a case study could allow the observation of effective school leadership in action and provide insight into practical applications of leadership principals at other school sites. I conducted observations, surveys, interviews, and document analyses as part of the case study.

Participants

The school selected for this study was Cinco Elementary School, a pseudonym, a school that has achieved an *A* grade on the state of Florida school accountability grading system for seven consecutive years from 2004 until 2010. In addition, the school has achieved 100% of its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in accordance with federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. During that same time period, the school has scored higher than any other elementary school in the county on the FCAT from 2004 until 2010 and since 2007 has performed in the top 15% of all elementary schools in Florida. It has performed in the top 7% of all high poverty elementary schools. In 2010 it ranked in the top 6% of all elementary schools and in the top 1.6% of high poverty elementary schools. The school has received district and state recognition for its high level of student achievement and is a source of pride in its community. As a result of accomplishing these goals, the school is identified as a high performing school.

Each member of the teaching and support staff is considered highly qualified by NCLB standards. A highly qualified teacher is one who is fully certified by the state of Florida and demonstrates competence in the core academic subject taught through coursework or a subject area exam. Class sizes are regulated by the state department of

education as a result of a voter initiative. The class size averages in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade are 18 students each. The fourth and fifth grade classes average 22 students each.

The school serves a rural population with approximately 64% of its students qualifying for the federal free or reduced lunch program. Approximately 88% of the student population is Caucasian, 7% is African American, and 3% is mixed race or other ethnicities. Currently, 11% of the population (79 students excluding gifted and speech) receive special education services and have active Individual Education Plans (IEPs). There are two English Language Learners (ELL) at the school.

Table 1

Demographic Data of the Students in the Participating School

Characteristic and category	*n*
Grade Level	
PK	12
K	133
1	128
2	133
3	105
4	114
5	126
Total	751

Table 2

Demographic Data of the Students in the Participating School

Characteristic and category	*n*	%
Racial/ethnic category		
African American	48	6.4%
American Indian	0	0%
Asian	1	<1%
Hispanic	2	<1%
White non-Hispanic	682	88%
Multi racial	18	3%

Setting

Cinco Elementary School is located in a rural county in north Florida. The school serves grades PK through 5 and is composed of 83 instructional and non-instructional staff and 751 students. The administration and student support staff includes one principal, one assistant principal, two guidance counselors, and a reading coach. Other staff members include 17 paraprofessionals, five custodians, six food service workers, and two office staff members. The school serves a rural population and is part of a school district that serves approximately 11,000 students and includes 16 schools, with

nine elementary schools, three middle schools, three high schools, and one combination middle-high school. The demographics of the school staff are reflective of the demographics of the community and student population.

Procedures

The methods and criteria for sampling are not as stringent when conducting qualitative research. The flexibility that is allowed in sampling in a qualitative research design "reflects the emergent nature of qualitative research design, which allows researchers to modify their research approach as data are collected" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 177). Samples from qualitative research studies are typically small, as in this case. I employed a single case study design with purposeful sampling. The single case study identifies one particular school of interest. When using purposeful sampling a researcher desires to understand and gain insight and thus selects a sample from which much can be learned (Patton, 2002). Because of the high rate of success that the school has demonstrated over time, it is assumed that it will provide abundant information relative to the research questions of this study.

In implementing a single case study design, I sought to develop a deeper understanding of the case. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained that qualitative methods are used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to learn things that may be difficult to measure in a quantitative study. I conducted observations during on site visits and analyzed survey and interview results from participants with different perspectives on the school to provide a deeper understanding

of what makes this subject school different and explore potentially different causes of school success.

I was granted permission by the district superintendent of schools and the principal of Cinco Elementary to conduct the research. I was also granted approval to conduct the research by the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University. At a faculty meeting I informed participants of the purpose and nature of the study. I provided assurances of confidentiality during my introduction in the faculty meeting and through the use of informed consent forms for interview participants. I explained that pseudonyms would be used for interview and observation participants, the school, and the district. I assured participants of the anonymity of the surveys and described security procedures for data collection and storage.

At the aforementioned faculty meeting I also distributed the surveys and requested volunteers to complete them. Participation was voluntary. Interviewees were selected based on their level of experience, grade level taught, and position in the school. I sought to interview a variety of school personnel to get a wide range of responses.

The Researcher's Role

I was an outsider to the school, having never been an employee of the school. However, I did have knowledge of the school and several of the staff members because I worked as a principal at another school in the district at the time the study was conducted. I was a colleague of the principal at Cinco and had a professional relationship with her prior to conducting the study.

My familiarity with some of the staff could possibly have affected the findings. However, survey and interview questions were primarily subjective and provided

participants with an opportunity to share their opinions and feelings about various aspects of the school and its leadership. Familiarity with me should have had little effect on the accuracy of responses from school personnel or on my findings. While I was certainly aware of the success of the school over several years, that knowledge should not have resulted in bias. The knowledge of the school's success was the reason for the study. The results were simply a summary and synthesis of the statements and survey responses provided by school personnel, leading to a description of the leadership and identification of what factors make the school different from its peers.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The extensive observations, surveys, and interviews generated a significant amount of data. Data management was a critical component of the research and included organization and filing of data. Interview data were transcribed and classified according to whether the interviewee was an administrator or teacher. I then read and analyzed the transcriptions of the interviews, identifying themes from the interview results. Survey data were analyzed to identify themes in leadership and culture.

As themes began to emerge, I provided a detailed, rich description of the leadership and culture at the school. Such a detailed narrative provided a sense of time, place, and culture within the school. Thick descriptions assisted in understanding the perspectives of members of the organization (Patton, 1987). The description extensively addressed the leadership of school administrators and the staff's perception of that leadership. The description also addressed the school culture, the role of the school administration in developing that culture, and how it is maintained.

Observations

Observations are a critical component of data collection in qualitative studies. While interviews and surveys do provide insight into the inner workings of the environment, they are restricted by the memories, communication abilities, and openness of those participating in the interview.

During the study, I conducted on-site observations of the following routine events at the sample school: academic activities, school and community events, and meetings of the faculty, staff, grade-level teams, and leadership. In so doing, I was able to fill the role of participant-observer. In this role, the researcher observes and interacts closely with participants without engaging in activities that are at the core of the group's identity (Stake, 1995). I took field notes to document data gathered from the observations. Additionally, I used two observation protocols (Appendixes A and B) to help clarify the data gathered during the observations.

While observing, I noted the actions of the school principal, where and how her time was spent, and the nature of the principal's interactions with teachers, staff, students, and parents. During classroom observations, I focused on the methods and content of instruction, the level of engagement and the actions of the students, the classroom learning environment, the role of support staff in the classroom, the interaction between teachers and students, and the attitudes and actions of the teachers and students.

Observation of faculty meetings focused on the leadership of the principal. The focus and content of the meeting (as set by the principal), the responsiveness of the staff, and the interaction between the two were also areas of note. Similarly, I observed grade level and leadership team meetings to gain insight into the content, leadership, and focus

of those meetings. Observing school and community members at parent involvement events provided me with an understanding of the attitudes and beliefs of parents about the school and staff and provide vivid examples of interactions between parent and teacher.

Interviews

I conducted interviews of administrators and teachers to gain insight into the leadership, culture, and programs of the school. I developed the interview questions based on the literature and personal experience in an effort to address in detail the guiding questions of the study. Validity of interview questions is addressed by grounding the questions in the literature. An item by item analysis of the questions is found below. The interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Research reveals that leaders in successful schools had strong leaders with high expectations for teachers and students and who emphasized teaching and learning (Edmonds, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Kitchen et al., 2004; Newstead, Saxon, & Colby, 2008; Hallinger, 2003). Questions 1, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 addressed these leadership components from a variety of perspectives. Questions 1, 12, and 13 were open ended and allowed participants to share their opinions about causes for school and student success. Questions 15 through 19 were also open ended and allowed participants to share what they believed were the most influential actions and activities that they have experienced, which could have included responses about school leadership and expectations of the principal.

Research found that effective leaders were instructional leaders with knowledge and skill in improving the instructional practice of teachers who emphasized collaboration and sharing best practices (Newstead, Saxon, & Colby, 2008; Jacobson et

al., 2007; Kitchen et al., 2004). Questions 2, 4, and 13 were asked to allow participants to describe ways they were supported, which addressed instructional leadership. These questions were also intended to reveal the extent of collaboration among faculty members.

Successful schools offer supplemental academic support (Kitchen et al., 2004). Questions 1, 2, 10, and 13 were designed to address programs in place that contribute to student achievement. Questions 1, 2, and 13 were structured to elicit responses about school success that could include discussion of academic tutoring. Question 10 directly asked about programs that contributed to student achievement.

Emphasizing a positive culture of improvement, student learning, consistent staff development, and celebration of success is critical to school success (Newstead, Saxon, & Colby, 2008; Liethwood, 2006; Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Hallinger, 2003; Goldring, 2002). Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 addressed culture. Question 2 asked participants to describe what made the school different compared to other schools. Questions 3 and 4 spoke directly to support given and received, which are components of collaboration and culture. Question 6 addressed communication, another component of culture. Question 8 addressed culture in the context of staff recognition and celebration of successes. Question 9 addressed mentoring new teachers, which reflects a culture of learning and staff development.

Effective leaders are able to communicate clearly with all stakeholders, including communicating a vision for the organization (Jacobson et al., 2007; Goldring, 2002). Questions 6 and 7 directly addressed communication within the faculty and between

faculty and parents. Question 11 explored communication in the context of implementing school initiatives.

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of sharing leadership and empowering staff members to build capacity (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Jackson, 2000). Question 5 directly addressed the decision-making process and the role that others played in sharing leadership and decision making with the leader. Question 14 was a broad question intended to encourage participants to discuss those on the faculty that are viewed as leaders. Explaining why staff members other than the principal are viewed as leaders reveals the extent of shared leadership at the school.

Mentoring provides necessary support for new teachers, providing a platform for discussion, assistance, and answers to critical questions for new teachers (Klein, 2007). Questions 3, 4, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, and19 addressed mentoring. Questions 3 and 4 did so by asking about support given and received. Different forms of mentoring would be included in responses to such questions. Question 9 addressed new teacher experiences at the school which may include mentoring. Questions 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 asked participants to describe experiences that have been most beneficial to them. The questions were asked to examine the level of collaboration and mentoring revealed in the responses.

I requested volunteers from school administration and other school personnel. When choosing participants for interviews, I sought to obtain a sample with a wide range of experiences. I included new teachers with very little experience so that I could see what their experiences were in being acclimated to the school, how they were mentored, and how they were trained. I also included teachers with a moderate level of experience

to provide a contrast to the perspectives of the new teachers. Finally, I included veteran teachers that had more than 10 years experience, as well as teachers that had worked at other schools and under other administrators. Interviewees ranged from first year teachers to those with 34 years of experience. I reviewed a list of all teachers that listed their years of experience and consulted with the principal to identify teachers that had teaching experience at other schools. I chose three new teachers (zero to five years experience), four teachers with a moderate level of experience (five to 10 years), and four veteran teachers (10 or more years of experience). I then contacted them to see if they were willing to participate in the interview. All staff members that were asked to participate consented to being interviewed. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured for each participant.

The interviews were conducted in person, at the school site. All interview participants consented to having their interview session audio recorded to ensure accuracy. The interviews added depth to the findings from the surveys. Interviews allowed the participants to elaborate on topics and allowed the researcher to gain further insight into their perceptions of the participants about reasons for the success of the school.

Surveys

Surveys were also used as a means of data collection. Two different survey forms were distributed. The School Culture Survey (Valentine & Greunert, 1999) addressed staff perceptions of the school culture. This survey provides information about collaboration, collegial support, professional development, learning partnerships, and unity of purpose. There were 35 survey items that were rated on a Likert scale from one

to five. The survey has reliability coefficients for each factor of the survey ranging from 0.65 to 0.91 (Valentine & Greunert, 1999).

The other survey, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED; Condon & Clifford, 2010), was used to examine principal leadership. It assessed the principal in six processes of leadership; high standards of learning, rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, culture of learning and professional behavior, connections to external communities, and performance accountability. In the aforementioned areas, respondents rated the principal on a Likert scale from one to five. VAL-ED had a 0.98 alpha reliability coefficient (Condon & Clifford, 2010).

The surveys were anonymous and were distributed at a staff meeting, at which time I shared with the staff the purpose of the research and the surveys. I provided return envelopes to respondents to facilitate collection of the surveys. My desire was that the survey responses would illuminate the beliefs of the staff about the importance and effectiveness of the school leadership and would help describe the school climate and culture.

Document Analysis

I analyzed data such as standardized test scores to provide a full picture of the success of the school. I examined scores school-wide and by grade level, student disability, and qualification for free or reduced lunch. No information identifying any individual student was used, only totals and averages for each of the aforementioned groups. Additionally, I analyzed documents such as school improvement plans, mission statements, and newsletters in an effort to provide a well rounded view of the sample school.

Data Analysis

Interpretational Analysis

Following data collection from observations, surveys, and interviews, I conducted significant data analysis. I utilized both interpretational analysis and reflective analysis in analyzing the data from the case study. Interpretational analysis has been defined as "examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 466). Interpretational analysis greatly assisted me in answering the research questions. Identifying constructs, themes, and patterns of effective school leadership in high poverty schools was one of the primary goals of the research. To accomplish this, I coded data from observations, interviews, and surveys to identify themes in leadership. Items were coded according to the four primary categories of leadership, instruction, culture, programs, as well as a fifth category labeled other factors. I coded the factors that teachers identified in interviews or surveys as being significant in one of these categories.

Reflective Analysis

In reflective analysis, the researcher relies "primarily on intuition and judgment in order to portray or evaluate the phenomenon being studied" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 472). Because of the nature of the study and the extensive use of observations, evaluation of field notes, and personal interviews, reflective analysis was utilized. My observations and experiences combined with interpretational analysis based on data collected provided a well rounded view of the factors that make the school a success and led to clear answers to the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Member checks were conducted to ensure validity of the information gained from the interviews. Member checks were informal and typically occurred during and immediately following the interviews. I read back interviewees' comments to them and rephrased or summarized their comments to ensure accuracy. These techniques allowed the participants to correct and clarify information as needed.

I used a variety of instruments to collect the data, and the findings were made more valid through triangulation (Yin, 2003). Triangulation of data sources and analytical perspectives increases accuracy and credibility of the findings (Patton, 1987). Triangulation was achieved in this study by collecting data that represented several different viewpoints about the same situation. This was accomplished through personal interviews of school administrators, teachers, and support staff. Surveys were completed by representatives from the same group of people. Likewise, observations of administrators, teachers, students, and support staff provided additional information about the sample school.

Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identify several types of triangulation. One type is methods triangulation, which is checking consistency and validity of findings generated by different data collection methods. Another type is triangulation of sources, which examines the consistency of information from different data sources. A third is analyst triangulation, using multiple analysts to review findings. A fourth is theory/perspective triangulation, which uses multiple theoretical perspectives to examine and interpret data. This research incorporated methods triangulation and triangulation of sources.

An audit trail exists to provide a clear picture of the research steps taken from the beginning of the project. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe a number of categories for reporting information in an audit trail. These categories are (a) the original raw data, (b) data reduction and summaries of data, (c) data reconstruction and synthesis (including themes that arise), (d) all notes, and (e) information about instruments and any potential instrument development. I used each of these in the development of an audit trail in this research.

Because the study was conducted in only one school setting, transferring or applying these findings to other school settings should be done with caution. Likewise, the fact that the school was an elementary school may limit the recommendations that can be made to secondary schools because of the significant differences between elementary and secondary schools.

Ethical Considerations

All data, including interview transcriptions, the audio recording device, field notes, and surveys, were stored in a locked cabinet. Interview transcriptions used pseudonyms for confidentiality. The interview transcriptions and other data stored on computer were under password protection. Both the School Culture Survey and the VAL-ED survey were anonymous. Interview participants gave informed consent, and those signed forms were stored along with the other data. There only potential harm to any participant would be a teacher fearing that an administrator would discover comments that may have been made about them. The use of pseudonyms for interviews and observations and the anonymity of surveys would eliminate any potential risk to the participants.

Summary

Cinco Elementary School is a high performing school that has achieved success despite having a high poverty rate. Data collection at the school included the following: (a) extensive observations, (b) interviews of administrators, teachers, and staff members, and (c) surveys completed by the administration, faculty and staff. The data gathered from the observations, interviews, and surveys were examined and organized to identify themes regarding the leadership, culture, and programs that are essential to the school's success.

Implications of this study are very relevant to school leaders and administrators. A great challenge facing educators is overcoming the real and perceived limitations of low income students. This research can provide insight into what actions successful educational leaders have taken to accomplish this, making their schools effective and helping students achieve regardless of the circumstances.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS/FINDINGS

This case study was conducted to examine the leadership, culture, and programs at a school that was a high performing, high poverty school. In 2009-2010, 64% of the students at Cinco Elementary School were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school also had limited resources and limited ability to recruit quality teachers due to the school's rural location. Data were collected from observations, surveys, and interviews. The data were then used to examine the leadership, culture, and programs in place at the school that contribute to its high level of success. The school was chosen because it consistently demonstrated a high level of achievement compared with other elementary schools in the district and state. The school's achievement is particularly impressive when compared with other schools of similar socioeconomic composition.

Organization of Data Analysis

The data were presented in relation to three research questions. A method of thick description was used to provide detail regarding findings and to present the themes that arose from the various sources. Quotes and summaries of findings from interviews and surveys are included in the description. Quantitative data were collected from each survey in order to support the findings from the observations and interviews. Findings for each research question are described separately and summarized.

Participant Analysis

The three categories of participants in this study were: (a) all students and school personnel, (b) faculty who replied to either of the two surveys, and (c) the 11 school

personnel who were interviewed. The first category of participants, students and school personnel, were observed during normal activities throughout the duration of the observation. Participants were not interacted with in a deliberate manner. Observation settings included classrooms, the general school, parent involvement events, and meetings of the faculty, staff, leadership, and grade-level teams.

Faculty that replied to the two surveys comprised the second category of participants. These participants voluntarily and anonymously completed the surveys. Participants were certified teachers at the school with work experience ranging from one to 34 years. Of the 50 School Culture Surveys that were distributed, 36 were completed for a completion rate of 72%. I distributed surveys to all teachers at a faculty meeting. During that meeting I explained the purpose of the research and gave the directions for the survey. Of the 30 staff members that were selected to complete the VAL-ED online survey, 16 were completed for a completion rate of 53%. The 30 teachers were randomly selected and provided an anonymous login to the VAL-ED online survey.

The final category of participants included 11 members of the instructional staff who consented to an interview. All participants in the interviews were certified educators with experience ranging from two to 34 years. All of the participants were female and included classroom teachers, a reading coach, an assistant principal, and the principal. The teachers had teaching experience only at the elementary (K-5) level. The assistant principal had teaching experience at the middle school level.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a variety of methods and data collection instruments. Over the course of two months, I spent approximately 80 hours observing various

activities at the school, noting elements of the culture and school leadership. I took notes relating to observations and completed observation protocols (Appendices B and C). Members of the faculty completed two surveys. The School Climate Survey (SCS) was administered to determine faculty opinions about school culture. The Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership (VAL-ED) was given to examine the effectiveness of the leadership of the principal.

A number of teachers participated in audio recorded interviews (Appendix A). I collected the interview and survey data and compiled it in separate charts to help to identify themes related to research questions. I also examined articles and documents such as the School Public Accountability Report (SPAR), the school improvement plan, the teacher handbook, school newsletters, and classroom newsletters as they applied to the research questions.

In order to create reader interest and to provide a comprehensive description of events at the school through the words and actions of its staff, I used a method called thick description (Patton, 1987). Narrative descriptions of events and phrases and quotes from participants were included. This method provided detailed context to the reader and a greater understanding of the participants' actions and intentions.

Cinco Elementary

As a visitor to Cinco Elementary School (a pseudonym), I entered a parking lot that was clean, orderly, and well maintained. As I walked towards the office building, I passed landscaped flower beds filled with a variety of plants, shrubs, and bushes surrounded by mulch. The sidewalks were spotless, the flower beds were weed free, and there was no sight of a stray piece of paper or trash. Two banners hung from the covered

walkway, one announcing “Success begins with believing you can!” and the other stating “Our school is a place where everyone fits.” The school entrance was clean, bright, warm, and welcoming.

Upon entering the front door, I noticed a shiny, clean tile floor. I was greeted by a staff member with a smile and offered assistance and a visitor’s pass. I was in the front office and noted a small waiting area. The area was simple, tidy, and functional. I asked for Mrs. Royal, and she quickly came out of her office to greet me. I heard children’s voices nearby, and Mrs. Royal told me that it was lunch time and invited me to join her in the cafeteria.

Upon entering I noticed pictures of several classes on the bulletin boards on the wall. As I looked closer, I discovered that these pictures were a celebration of success, recognizing classes that had high achievement in the Accelerated Reader program. I turned to see approximately 20 tables with students seated and eating. One class was moving through the lunch line getting their food. Another class was lining up to leave, being directed by a staff member on duty, their teacher waiting for them. The students were smiling, laughing, and talking with each other or with the staff members on duty. The environment was pleasant and warm, but very structured and orderly. The students clearly knew the routine and knew what was expected of them.

After a few minutes Mrs. Royal and I left the cafeteria, and she asked if I would like to go ahead and visit some classrooms. I replied that I certainly would, so we made our way to our first classroom. Upon entering, I noticed a classroom filled with activity. The walls were covered with student work, word walls with math and reading

vocabulary, rules and expectations, and learning aids such as “steps for solving a word problem” or “parts of a paragraph.”

I saw four students sitting at a table working with a parent volunteer. The students were working on math vocabulary words on index cards. The three computers in the classroom were occupied by students who were working on skills on math websites. Another group of three students were playing a game. I asked the students about the game, and they told me that the questions were about math. When I questioned them further, they told me they had already learned those math skills “a while back.” When they answered questions correctly, they could move their player piece further along the board. A group of five students was working independently at their desks on a math worksheet. A final group of four was at a table with the teacher.

The teacher and students each had a small dry erase board and a deck of cards. The teacher was flipping through the cards, asking the students math questions based on the numbers from the cards. The students would frequently write on their boards, compare answers, and discuss with the teacher. After a few minutes each group of students moved to a different learning center, and the activities started again. The teacher was encouraging the students, challenging them to think, helping them when they struggled.

We left that classroom and walked past the media center. A class was leaving, having just checked out new books. Another class then entered and the media specialist began her lesson for the class. While she taught her lesson about literature, I noticed three separate pairs of students enter the library within five minutes. The students returned books and quickly moved to the shelves to find another. A paraprofessional

helped them with the process while the media specialist continued her lesson. In the 10 minutes I was in the library, I saw six more students follow the same pattern of entering the library, returning books, and checking out new ones. The media center was obviously a very vibrant part of Cinco Elementary.

Later that afternoon at a faculty meeting I observed teachers being recognized for various accomplishments. The principal praised some teachers for their class's achievement on Accelerated Reader. Others were recognized for a kind word or praise that was given by a parent to the principal. Some were praised by peers for extra efforts to assist and support a colleague. Teachers were given opportunities to recognize one another, and the principal recognized some as well. The meeting closed with a call to remain focused on the goals of the school, which were focusing on academics and utilizing instructional skills and strategies to help students learn.

Pride and a commitment to excellence were evident during this visit. The immaculate grounds and facilities reflected care and concern for the appearance of the school. Detailed lessons were evidence of careful planning by teachers. Staff interaction with students demonstrated kindness and concern for student learning and well being. Actions at a staff meeting revealed recognition and celebration of effort and success and a common goal for student learning and teacher growth. The experiences during this visit were an excellent illustration of a typical day focused on student learning at Cinco Elementary.

Research Questions

The three research questions answered during this study were as follows.

1. What components of school and instructional leadership exist?

2. What is the culture?
3. What programs or other factors contribute to the school's success?

Research Question # 1: What Components of School and Instructional Leadership Exist?

High expectations for students and staff. I discovered several clear themes about school and instructional leadership from interviews with staff members, survey results, and observations at the school. A primary finding was the high expectations of the principal for student achievement, teacher performance, and professional growth.

Teachers described the high standards set by the principal in terms of student achievement. The expectations focus on the actions that a teacher should take to ensure learning and improvement for all students. The assistant principal, Ms. Lynn, explained the constant drive for improvement and high expectations held by the principal, Ms. Royal.

> She is always striving for improvement. She'll say, 'We're an A school, OK, let's make it better.' Or, 'that's not acceptable, let's make it better.' It could be 80 percent of the kids did this well, but she wants them to get 90 percent. When Mrs. Lynn was asked how teachers receive being constantly pushed to improve, she replied, "I think they really try. I think the higher expectations you have, the higher they rise."

Ms. Black, the Reading Coach, stated that the principal

> knows exactly what it takes for students to succeed and to make the progress that is needed. She is very knowledgeable about good teaching, and she expects it to

> be evident in teachers' classrooms. She will not accept anything less than high quality instruction from her teachers. When teachers do not deliver high quality instruction, she will work with them until they do. If they cannot, she helps them find another place to work. Ms. Brown, a second grade teacher, spoke of the principal's high expectations when conducting classroom visits.
>
> She takes initiative with the teachers...she identifies their strengths and weaknesses and helps them to excel. She does a lot of classroom walkthroughs, and she expects to see evidence of quality instruction when she walks into your class.

A first grade teacher, Ms. Rain, believes that Ms. Royal's high expectations result from her strong personal motivation for excellence. She explained her reasoning as she compared Ms. Royal to previous principals.

> Our principal is very driven. She wants to be the best. I've worked under different principals at this school, and it's not always been the same. Because she's so driven, she wants everyone else to be the same. She wants us to achieve as much as possible. She wants for the school to be successful, and because she's driven, she has very high expectations for students and staff. She instills it in the staff, and the ones that don't have high expectations, they don't last.

Ms. Jumper, a fourth grade teacher, said that the principal's high expectations for the teachers can at times be intimidating.

> She's one of those administrators that, if you're not doing your job, she's going to make sure you're doing it and doing it right. Sometimes that makes you uncomfortable. I have to remember that I know I'm doing my job like I'm

> supposed to and there's no reason for me to worry. It's not that she's asking me to jump through hoops or anything like that. The things that she's asking us to do are just good teaching practices.

On the VAL-ED survey, the Summary of Core Components in the area of High Standards for Student Learning, Ms. Royal received a mean rating of 4.33 on a five point Likert scale, which is in the 96th percentile of school leaders and is considered in the highest range of all leaders evaluated. The survey results lend support to the conclusion that the principal has high standards and expectations for student learning. Staff members perceive the expectations as a contributing factor to the school's success.

In addition to having high expectations, the principal has specific expectations. She requires teachers to identify their students' performance levels and to set specific targets for their improvement in content areas. Goals are set using the FCAT test, as well as tests such as FAIR, Lexia, STAR reading assessment, and Accelerated Reader. Ms. Lavender, a fifth grade teacher, noted a change in her thinking and in her teaching when she was asked to begin targeting specific students and skills for improvement.

> There is definitely accountability here. We sit with the principal and she asks us, 'what are you doing with the lowest students in your class?' You have to know who your lowest kids are and document in your lesson plans what you are doing with them to help them. It's accountability for us. At my previous school I didn't even have to turn in plans. My principal now reads my plans, comments about my plans. I have to note what my small groups are doing, what my paraprofessional is doing. It makes me accountable. Teachers don't always like it, but I understand that it makes us get better and it is necessary.

Ms. Brown also spoke of the specific nature of the principal's expectations, in particular with regard to lesson plans and classroom instruction. Ms. Brown said the principal is very aware of what she is doing in her room with her students.

> Lesson plans are checked and looked over closely by our principal. She looks for standards, differentiated instruction for low performing students, centers activities. We have lots of accountability with test scores, including FAIR, FCAT, and Accelerated Reader (AR). Lots of classroom walkthroughs to see what you're up to in your class. She will also look at your plans and check to see if instruction matches what the plans say, not necessarily that you're following exactly but to see that in general the concepts reflected in the plans are actually being taught.

Ms. Tin, a third grade teacher, revealed that during the classroom visits, the principal expects to see small group instruction as a means of helping struggling students.

> The principal is very aware of what's going on in the classrooms because she visits often and you never know when she's going to show up. Because of that, you know you had best have small group instruction. And for your struggling kids, you need to be doing extra to help them improve. We're accountable with our lesson plans each week. She expects to see what's in the plans in your instruction in the class.

The principal's standard makes it unacceptable for any student to fail to show improvement or to learn. The expectation is that every teacher will do all he or she can to improve as a teacher, to try different methods to help their students learn, and to find ways to motivate, inspire, and encourage their students to achieve. Most teachers related

that the principal clearly communicates the message that being complacent is not sufficient. According to the principal, teachers are expected to look continuously for ways to improve. Ms. Law, a fourth grade teacher, detailed her experience.

> She is good about noticing when you're complacent. She noticed that I was possibly getting complacent, and she talked with me at evaluation time to discuss some weaknesses and discuss options, like moving to another grade level to change things up. You always need someone on your grade level to lead so you make sure you're not getting complacent. I believe that over the years you may become tired and stagnant, but at that point you have to realize it's not about you, it's the kids.

Ms. Topper, a fifth grade teacher, said that she works so all of her students will improve and achieve. A considerable amount of time is invested in helping her lowest performing students. Because she feels responsible for their test scores, she spends extra time preparing her students. Activities are planned for the tutors to work with her students after school so that they can get additional help with the skills in which they are deficient. She explained the accountability she had regarding her students' test scores.

> I put together materials for the paraprofessionals to work with my students during tutoring. I feel accountable to my kids, for their learning, their well being. To the principal I am accountable primarily with things related to instruction in the classroom.

If teachers do not recognize the need for improvement or do not seek ways to improve on their own, the principal will intervene. Ms. Law chronicles how this was done.

> She was very strategic with sharing and having us observe one another, putting people that work well together, and when it didn't work out she would move them as needed. Sometimes it was intimidating, but it wasn't a bad thing. She just wanted to make us better, and if you're willing to take that and use it, you'll get better. The design was, she partnered us with people she thought we needed to watch. She had identified an area of weakness or improvement in me, and sent me to someone that did that well. I had an issue with a particular skill in small group, she sent me to a teacher to observe. She then followed up with the teacher I observed, and also with me. I have had the opportunity to observe four or five different people. I follow up with the administration, but there is more follow up with the teacher. I did feel like I could go the principal to discuss things with her at any time.

Ms. Lavender elaborated on the effects of the principal's high expectations. She described Mrs. Royal's emphasis on the need for teachers to differentiate their instruction for struggling students.

> In the past, I knew who my struggling students were, but I didn't necessarily plan anything to do differently with them, I taught them like everybody else. I gave them attention, but not different instruction. Now [because of the expectations of my principal] I do that for them. And I have seen a noticeable difference in what those lowest kids do and how they perform. When she first started doing that and she would ask me who my lowest kids were and what I was doing for them, it caught me really off guard, but now I know, I plan for them, and it's much better.

The principal's expectations have a tremendous effect on the teachers and staff at Cinco. Her expectations influence the attitudes and actions of the teachers, in particular, the approach to teaching their students and their expectations for what students can achieve. It is evident that the expectations of the principal have a positive effect on the teachers' willingness to take ownership of the success of their students and to strive to improve.

Collaboration. Teachers at Cinco identified collaboration as a critical factor to school success and a strong component of the principal's leadership. Although the development of such collaboration took place over several years, collaboration had not always functioned like it did under Ms. Royal. Ms. Topper recalled that collaboration efforts at the school began with the development of common assessments to ensure that every student at each grade level was being assessed in the same way.

> It started several years ago with the development of common assessments, giving the same chapter or unit tests to all students in the same grade. She asked us to plan together, asked us to develop common tests, and be on the same page in our grade level. We didn't have to teach it the same way because we have different personalities and styles, but we should be on same pace and on same page as a group. It started from there, with common tests.

Veteran teachers recognize the differences between the current and previous administration. The environment transformed from one with little collaboration to one where collaboration is encouraged and expected. Collaboration has greatly influenced the growth and improvement of the teachers at Cinco. One teacher, Ms. Tin, details her experience:

> Collaboration between teachers is expected, it's not an option. When I started here there was no collaboration at all, no ideas being shared; everybody did things their own way. Collaboration is good for new teachers because it helps them learn. It also helps veteran teachers because it brings new ideas. Sometimes all the collaboration (weekly) is a bit much because of all the things that I have to do. But I think weekly contact is necessary for us to share and learn.

Despite common assessments, collaboration, and common planning, the manner in which a teacher teaches still varies. This provides for autonomy in teaching style. Ms. Rain characterized the autonomy that remains.

> We do still have our own individuality, but we work together. I sometimes have a hard time with all of the teamwork, but I still have the liberty to do things individually, to do the things that work with my kids in my classroom. We teach the same things, same concepts, but we do them different ways, and we share ideas to get better.

Collaboration most frequently takes the form of weekly grade level meetings. During meetings, teachers discuss ideas about upcoming lessons and units. They share resources and activities that have been used in the past, and they brainstorm about other ways to teach. Ms. Lynn recounted how grade level meetings changed from information dissemination and complaining sessions to opportunities for growth.

> We moved from simply meeting with your grade level to expecting you to discuss curriculum and instruction; it went from just meetings about things to being really directed on learning. For example, she would have them teach each other how

> you teach something. Like sharing a little mini lesson and teaching the other teachers how you did that.

Ms. Jumper, who worked at a different school, talked about collaboration at Cinco compared with her previous school, and how beneficial she believes it is.

> When I was at my other school there was [no collaboration] whatsoever. You did your own thing, no one helped. On my grade level now, it's 'what can I do to help you?' I don't know if it's that way with all grade levels, but that's how it is with ours. We plan together and create lessons. There are two people in our grade level that were not from education backgrounds and so we're helping them; they're learning, but after time they are able to help as well. I help others in my grade level, share instructional ideas, share materials. We have a new teacher in our grade level and I try to help her out as much as I can, and I know that our grade level chair does as well.

Ms. Law also noted how valuable grade level planning and collaboration is to her.

> The grade level is a community of sharing among the teachers, not just common planning, but sharing ideas about how to teach a concept. We start sharing, brainstorming with each other about what we can do in our classrooms. When you leave, everybody will teach the skill, but you have five ways to choose from, so nobody has to teach it the same way. That goes back to the principal and her leadership.

Ms. Lavender is another teacher who praises the power of collaboration at Cinco.

> We strive to do things differently and not do the "same old same old." We could easily pull out plans from last year, but we don't. Instead, we try to find

> PowerPoints, Discovery Ed videos, and technology to add to our teaching. Compared to a previous school I worked at, I had to do everything myself there, we never worked together. Here, there are always ideas shared. I'm not very creative, and collaborating with other grade level teachers gives me ideas and helps me. Sending centers back and forth to each other, writing tests for each other, planning together, all of those things help me.

Many teachers cited collaboration as the most beneficial factor in teacher improvement. When asked to name some activities that she thought contributed to the success of the school, Ms. Brown immediately mentioned collaboration.

> I think one of the things that makes us successful is being able to work with a team. Here, it does play a big factor in being successful, the constant support from your team and ability to share ideas. The ability to share struggles, celebrate successes, and learn from each other.

Ms. Jumper gave a similar response when asked what had helped her grow the most as a teacher at Cinco.

> The thing that has probably helped me the most is the collaboration with my fellow teachers. You see what works for them, you see ideas that they put out, you see how well it works, and then you change and you tweak to make it better for your class and students.

Ms. Lavender echoed those sentiments and went on to elaborate on the facets of collaboration at the school, including the value of having one grade level present instructional strategies to another grade level. She portrayed a recent example:

> We just had a meeting the other day with the third, fourth, and fifth grade math teachers. Fourth grade had to present to the rest of us how they did their centers, whole group instruction, and how they were teaching some skills. They demonstrated how they do their centers, what activities the students do, how they do their whole group. The fifth grade teachers have to do it next time we meet. It was an opportunity to give and share ideas with someone other than your grade level. I like it, even though it takes my planning time. Having that forces some teachers to share and learn when they might not otherwise.

On the VAL-ED survey, Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior was rated 4.49 on a five point Likert scale, which ranked the principal in the 93rd percentile of evaluated school leaders. According to the survey's rating system, this rating placed the principal in the distinguished category, the highest rating possible. On the School Culture Survey, the two statements that had the highest mean rating on the five point Likert scale were "Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem" and "Leaders in our school facilitate teachers working together," each with a mean score of 4.61. The next highest rated item on the survey was "Teachers are encouraged to share ideas," with a mean score of 4.58. These statements illustrate the value of and emphasis placed on collaboration at Cinco Elementary.

Knowledgeable instructional leader. The teachers at Cinco characterize the principal as having a high level of knowledge about curriculum and effective teaching. The principal is a hands-on leader in classroom instruction, often working with a teacher or group of teachers to develop lessons, learning centers, or instructional games and

materials. Ms. Jumper discusses a time when the principal worked with the fourth grade teachers on small group math activities:

> She met with us and we did a lot of hands-on stuff when it came to our small groups for math. She was telling us 'ok this is what we're going to do, this is what we're going to make' so we made all this stuff. She was like, 'Ok, this is what they have to know for place value. What can we make and what can we have the kids use and manipulate to help them understand place value better?' and that's how we came up with a lot of the things that we use now. Which now, our scores are way better.

Ms. Law had a similar experience and talks about the principal's knowledge of effective instruction and commitment to showing teachers how to implement strategies in their classes.

> She would give direction, show us how to improve. She would give us materials to help; she would sit down and work with us. If needed, she would send us to someone who could teach us how to do it.

Teachers respect the principal's willingness to get personally involved and help them plan activities. They are confident in her knowledge due to the success of the strategies that she has helped them implement. Ms. Black expounds on the principal's knowledge of effective teaching:

> She knows exactly what it takes for students to succeed and to make the progress that is needed. She gives helpful hints, suggestions, and ideas along the way about how to do it and gives them a chance to take care of it on their own. When that doesn't work, she steps in and shows them how to do it. If not, they're not going to get any better.

Ms. Black also shares some of the principal's strategies for helping teachers improve. She talks about a recent time when the principal had identified areas for improvement with several teachers and planned for them to observe other teachers.

> She gets a lot out of her walk through observations. She gave me a list Friday and said these were the ones that I needed to cover their classes so they could go and observe other teachers, which is invaluable. In her walk through, she had pinpointed several things that needed attention. She doesn't get all bent out of shape if they're struggling with something new and we're trying to learn it and trying to make it work. But things that are basic and fundamental to good teaching, they get her attention right away.

The principal demonstrates a strong combination of knowledge of the curriculum, effective instructional strategies, and a willingness and ability to help teachers plan and create lessons and activities that will help students learn. These skills directly help improve the quality of instruction at Cinco.

Emphasis on small group instruction. The principal's emphasis on small group instruction and differentiation for struggling students is one of the foremost components of her leadership style. In the small group instructional model, the class is divided into three to five learning groups. One group is a teacher-led group. Teachers often arrange their groups according to ability level or skills and concepts in which students are deficient. In the teacher-led group, the teacher works with students on specific skills or areas of need. Another group is a computer group where students practice skills on websites or on instructional software. Others are groups of three or four students playing a game to reinforce skills that they had already learned, or a group led by a parent

volunteer. Occasionally, one of the other groups may be an independent reading group, a listening station for reading, or an independent work group.

Teachers note that when the school became a Reading First participant, the result was an emphasis on small group reading instruction. Ms. Topper talks about the implementation of small group instruction at that time:

> When we started Reading First in K-3 the principal had to really push the teachers to implement small group instruction. She was very assertive, she told us that she knew that we'd never done literacy centers, but we were going to get trained on how to do them, and she was going to buy the materials to put into them. She stressed to us the importance of small group time and differentiated instruction. She told us that this was effective practice, and something that we were all going to do. When we saw results, she took it right into the intermediate grades.

After seeing the success of small group instruction in reading, the principal pushed for the program to be used in other subject areas. Many teachers had initial frustrations with being expected to design lessons that included small group instruction and differentiated activities for students. Ms. O'Hara, a second grade teacher, voices the frustrations of many of the teachers:

> Teaching in small groups and differentiating, the way Ms. Royal wanted us to, was very different than most of us had ever taught before. If we had used small groups in the past, it wasn't in the way that she wanted it to be done now. Before, small groups were simply chances for cooperative learning. Now, Ms. Royal wanted small group to be for the purpose of reteaching and reinforcing skills that

> we had already taught, as well as giving us an opportunity to work with a small group of students to address deficiencies and more closely monitor their progress.

Despite initial frustration, the teachers quickly saw impressive results and they too became believers in the method. Small group instruction soon spread from reading to other subjects, and the emphasis on elevating the struggling students became each teacher's passion. Ms. Law describes the change:

> Even though I was frustrated in the beginning with trying to implement small groups the way she wanted us to, I'm a believer now. I see how much it helps my students, and helps me know what my kids need. It makes me think differently about what I'm teaching, and how I teach it; I teach with more of a purpose now.

Ms. Lavender also felt frustration and was uncomfortable with the change in the early stages, but can now clearly see the benefit for her students.

> Now I have to plan what my small groups are doing, what my paraprofessional is doing, which students are working on what skills. It makes me accountable. I don't always like it, but I understand but it makes us get better and it is necessary. I knew who the lowest were back then, but I didn't necessarily plan anything differently for them, I taught them like everybody else. I gave them attention, but not different instruction. Now that I do that, I have seen a noticeable difference in what those lowest kids do and how they perform.

The principal's desire for teachers to identify learning deficiencies in their lowest performing students, and to change how they teach them to address those deficiencies, is one of her strongest, most emphasized, and most communicated beliefs. She clearly conveys the message that when students do not understand the first time, they cannot be

left behind, nor can an issue be corrected by simply giving them more practice. Ms. Royal describes her fundamental belief about student learning:

> If we teach a lesson or a unit and three or four of the students don't master the concepts taught, we can't just keep moving and leave them behind. I'm not saying stop everything until they get it; that's where the importance of small group instruction comes in. In a small group setting, a teacher or a paraprofessional can go back and work with those students who failed to master the concept the first time and provide individual support and remediation. They can use manipulatives, games, and other strategies to teach it in a different way. The small group setting also allows the teacher to review concepts to students who did master it the first time it was taught. But if we don't spiral review and reteach those concepts, they will forget what they have learned. That is the essence of the small group instructional model, and it is what we have taught and implemented here for the last several years. I am a strong believer in the effectiveness of small group instruction.

The principal demands that teachers utilize small group instruction, hands on materials and manipulatives, games, technology, and motivational techniques to help students improve. She has an excellent knowledge of the types of successful activities for small group instruction that yield positive results with student learning.

Accountability for teachers. The principal's emphasis on collaboration, small group instruction, differentiation for struggling students, knowledge of curriculum and effective instructional practices, and expectation that they be used, are enveloped in the theme of accountability. Teachers are accountable for nearly everything, and they all

report a feeling of accountability for student performance on FCAT and SAT 10. Ms. Tin gives some examples:

> We're accountable with our lesson plans each week, and certainly our FCAT scores. She expects to see what's in your plans to be in your instruction during class. However, because of all that we're asked to do, it's impossible to do all that we're supposed to do at the level that's expected. So, if you want to find fault, you can find it. But I think she understands that we can't do it all. She places higher priority on instruction and the things that matter versus more petty or insignificant things; she expects us to prioritize.

Ms. Lavender depicts the detail in which she is held accountable for good instruction in her classes:

> You have to know who your lowest kids are and document in your plans what you are doing with them to help them. It's accountability for us. My principal reads my plans, comments about my plans. I have to note what my small groups are doing, what my paraprofessional is doing; it makes me accountable. We certainly are accountable for all kinds of test scores, including baseline testing and showing improvement in those areas.

Teachers are held accountable for their professionalism, including punctuality, dealing with parents appropriately, personal dress code, and meeting deadlines on time. They are also accountable for student AR achievement, improvement on FAIR or baseline testing, implementation of effective teaching strategies as observed in classroom visits, and significant attention to the lowest performing students in terms of differentiation. They are expected to handle their professional responsibilities and

complete them at a high level. Not to do so risks an address by the principal. Ms. Rain explains;

> If you have issues, you will have a discussion with the principal. Depending on the issue, she may be in your room more often. If parents come to her with concerns, she may check on your more frequently to see if the concern is valid.

The principal has high expectations for all teachers and will hold them accountable to meeting all of their professional responsibilities.

Focus on teaching and learning. The teachers recognize how critical instructional focus is to the principal, and they believe that it is a major reason for the school's success. When asked about the school's success, teachers spoke about how common planning, collaboration, and the development of common assessments and instructional pacing guides allow them to pinpoint areas of student weakness, refine their teaching, and share ideas more readily. There is an emphasis on identifying how state standards are taught as well as how they are assessed. The teachers try to incorporate questions into their lessons that are written and worded like those on the FCAT. Ms. Tin delineates this process:

> We spend a lot of time creating activities that prepare our students for the FCAT. When we make tests, we use questions that are in FCAT format. When we create games and activities for small groups and centers, we are mindful of the way that FCAT skills are assessed.

A critical aspect of instructional leadership and a focus on learning identified as important by the teachers is vertical planning between grade levels. Grade level teachers come together to plan and identify gaps in student learning. Through open conversation,

they talk about student needs and share ideas about how to best meet those needs and fill in the gaps in instruction. On the School Culture Survey, the statement "Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects" had an average rating of 4.25 on a five point Likert scale, indicating strong agreement from the faculty. Ms. Rain cites an example of vertical integration:

> A few years ago we began meeting in the spring with the grade level above and below us to discuss vertical planning. The teachers in the subsequent grade identified consistent areas of weakness that our students seemed to have. The experience was eye opening, because we were shocked when the teachers reported that our students acted as though they had never been taught certain concepts when we knew they certainly had been. It reinforced to us the importance of spiral review and utilizing small group instruction. Although they had been taught a concept and assessed on it, we realized that often the students hadn't truly learned.

The principal's emphasis on literacy was another theme that permeated teacher discussion of teaching and learning. Ms. Black shares with new teachers that a literacy rich environment in the classroom is one of the principal's non-negotiable items. She says, "I tell new teachers that there are three big things that are non-negotiable. One is having a literacy rich environment; get it up on the walls, get it where they can see it, get some student work up."

Literacy is emphasized in all grade levels, but with extra intensity in the primary grades. Reading is encouraged through successful programs like AR. Every teacher that was interviewed mentioned the AR program as one of the major contributors to school

success. The AR incentive program, which includes an AR store, is very successful. At the end of each nine weeks, students who have won points can purchase prizes from the AR store.

Parent involvement in events such as Reading Night and Bingo for Books further emphasizes the importance of reading and puts books in the hands of the students. Attendance at these events is excellent. The media center is open daily and used by all classes and students. An emphasis on literacy affects student achievement in other subjects as well. Many teachers believe that improving their reading instruction carried over to other subject areas and helped them become better teachers those subject areas as well. Ms. Rain reflects:

> The changes that resulted from Reading First made me a better teacher overall. Utilizing the small group instructional strategies were definitely important. But what I learned in terms of teaching reading carried over to other subjects as well. I use those strategies when teaching science, social studies, language arts, and even math.

A focus on teaching and learning is clearly evident at Cinco. The principal sets the tone for this focus through her actions and the emphasis is felt by teachers, staff, and students.

Research Question #2: What is the Culture?

Pride. Faculty and staff at Cinco Elementary take an immense amount of pride in the school, the students, and the job they do each day. During my visits and observations, I noted that school pride was evident across the entire campus. One area that I noticed immediately was the excellently maintained grounds and immaculate facilities. In fact, I always saw a member of the custodial staff outside working on the grounds—trimming

hedges, weeding flower beds, trimming trees, pressure washing sidewalks, or completing other similar duties. Inside the building I was equally impressed—everything was clean, well maintained, and orderly. The emphasis on a clean and welcoming school environment was evident throughout the school.

After a parent involvement event that I attended, several hundred chairs needed to be stacked and stored, and tables needed to be collapsed to prepare for lunch the following day. Although no custodial staff was present to clean and set up, teachers and parents began stacking chairs and putting them away, while another teacher mopped the cafeteria floor. Teachers and parents worked together to put away tables so they would be ready for lunch the next day. The scene demonstrated the willingness of countless staff members and parents doing what needed to be done, regardless of the task or their assigned duties. Both staff members and parents demonstrated their school pride by cooperating and doing a little extra.

In classrooms, I observed teachers working to create an exciting and welcoming learning environment. Student work was displayed and celebrated throughout each classroom. Learning tools such as posters that remind students of skills, concepts, and rules were handmade by teachers and prominently displayed. Classrooms were bright and vibrant, showing that the teacher cared about its appearance just as she cared about the students that came there to learn.

In conversations with staff members, their speech reflected school pride. Teachers quickly pointed out to me the tremendous accomplishments of their students' daily work and in their FCAT performance. They also acknowledged their own roles in that achievement, citing the hard work it took to help students succeed. The comments

were not arrogant; the teachers were humble about their roles in the school's success, while being proud of how they helped make it happen.

Although the teachers recognized that they were a small piece of the school's success, they all truly desired success for all students, not just their individual classes. On the School Culture Survey, the third highest rated items were "Teaching performance reflects the mission of the school" and "Teachers support the mission of the school" with mean ratings of 4.50.

Teachers' pride stemmed from the effort, commitment, and dedication they devoted to becoming great teachers. They recognized the expectations of the principal and worked hard to meet those expectations. The desire to see their students and their school succeed was strong enough to overcome any feelings of fatigue and frustration that may have resulted from the job. The pride and satisfaction of achieving at such a high level seemed to validate all of the struggles and pressures associated with the job.

Caring. An attitude of caring, which is closely tied to school pride, permeated the school and was a prominent aspect of school culture. Caring began with how the principal demonstrated her care for the students through words and actions. When I observed her interacting with students, she was kind and concerned about their well being. She also demonstrated that she cared about the success of the school by devoting a large amount of time to plan and prepare for school-related activities, such as modifying the instructional practices of fourth grade math teachers, purchasing items for the AR store, or cleaning up after a parent involvement event. Teachers and staff members commented to me that when they saw her willingness to pitch in and help

wherever she was needed, they knew that she truly cared. This also sent a message to others that it was important to show care and concern for the school and students.

Teachers exhibited that same level of caring when they discussed the jobs that they were given. They readily admitted that it was impossible to do their job at a satisfactory level by working only their contracted hours. Ms. Topper related the time requirements of being an effective teacher:

> A lot of people today are still of the mindset that this is an easy profession, and it's not. You can't walk in here and clock in at 7:30 a.m. and go to class and leave at 3:00 p.m. and get the job done. It's a hard job and it's very demanding. It takes a lot of preparation and a lot of planning to do the job right.

Teachers devoted countless hours of their personal time each week, whether at home or school, ensuring that their lessons were at a high level and that their students would learn. During my observations, I regularly observed teachers at work up to two hours after their contracted work time had ended. Teachers believed that more effort was required to plan lessons that address the needs of their students compared with simply using lesson plans from previous years. They said that even though it was tough, their students deserved their very best, and they were unwilling to take the convenient way out. Ms. Bass, a first grade teacher, shared her beliefs about time spent on planning:

> It is time consuming to plan the way you need to. But I know that Ms. Royal expects quality lessons. And more than that, my kids need it. I always try to think about a different way to try to teach something or to motivate one of my students. I know that each one is someone's child, and that child deserves the best. It takes a lot of my time and effort to give them the best.

Statements like the one from Ms. Bass indicate the commitment of the staff members at Cinco to providing the best education possible for their students. This level of caring had an incredibly positive impact on the school.

High expectations for staff and students. The leadership of the principal had a strong influence on the culture of the school. High expectations set for teachers and their students by the principal created a sense of urgency at the school as everyone strived to improve. In addition, the principal emphasized continuous improvement and avoidance of complacency in the teaching staff. These two aspects of the principal's leadership, high expectations and seeking continuous improvement, helped transform the school culture.

Teachers were pushed to work collaboratively and change teaching methods as necessary in order to employ the best practices for continuous improvement. Over time, teachers who were unwilling to share the principal's drive either chose to move to another school or job, or were removed from the school for unsatisfactory work. The principal aspired to hire teachers who were motivated to excel and who had high expectations for themselves and their students. Ms. Rain stated that the principal "has very high expectations for staff members. The ones that don't have similarly high expectations for themselves and their students don't last."

A culture of excellence was the result of high expectations. Hard work was the standard among the faculty. A drive for continuous improvement was achieved through sharing and collaboration. The teachers knew they were doing their best because they had worked hard to maintain the current level of performance.

Collaboration of teachers. Collaboration is a theme that quickly emerged in every interview conducted with a Cinco teacher. Teachers spoke of the importance that the principal placed on collaboration, describing its origin in a reading initiative and the development of common assessments several years ago. Ms. Topper recalled this development:

> It started several years ago with the development of common assessments—giving the same test to all students in the same grade. She asked us to plan together, asked us to develop common tests and be on the same page in our different classes. We didn't have to teach it the same way because we have different personalities and styles, but we should be on same pace and on same page as a group. It started from there, with common tests.

The level of appreciation for such extensive collaboration varied among the interviewed teachers. However, when asked about the influence of collaboration on teacher effectiveness and student learning, teacher opinion was nearly unanimous. Ms. O'Hara spoke positively about the effect of collaboration on her growth as a teacher:

> Without my grade level teachers, I don't think I ever would have made it. They taught me so much about working with students, about how to teach. Without that sharing, I probably would have survived, but I could never grow and excel like I have with their help.

Teachers believed that collaboration was the single greatest influence on their effectiveness. At Cinco, the teachers stated that it was more powerful than the principal, staff development program, or any other factor. Ms. Brown said the most influential thing that she had experienced was being able to work with a team. She claimed that at

Cinco teamwork was a big factor in being successful, and that there was constant support and idea sharing. She had greatly benefited from being able to share struggles, celebrate successes, and learn from fellow team members.

Teachers revealed that, while sharing and collaborating was very important, its implementation and effectiveness would be limited without a focus on collaboration based on best practices. The guidance of an effective instructional leader was critical in this area. Interviews, survey results, and observations indicated this area was one of Mrs. Royal's strengths.

Parent involvement. The final theme revealed from observations, interviews, and surveys was the involvement and support of parents. Parent involvement was evident in volunteerism at the school. I witnessed volunteers at work in a large percentage of classrooms at every grade level. Volunteers were utilized for academic support, working with students on reading and math skills, but not for administrative duties. Parent support was present for events after hours, such as the Read In, a night when the library was opened and parents were invited to come and read with their children. Another big event was Math Night, an event where a meal was provided for attendees and dozens of math games and activities were available for students to participate in. Attendance at each of those events was in the hundreds.

Likewise, events like the fall festival, a carnival fundraiser for the school, were heavily attended. Bingo for Books is one of the most popular events at the school each year. At this event, one of the school's business partners provides a meal free of charge for all that attend. Students play bingo to win books and each student typically goes home with four or five new books.

Several teachers emphasized that parents were welcome at their school. They described the staff working to create an environment where parents felt welcomed, wanted, and needed. The large number of volunteers and high attendance at after school events supported that belief.

A related theme under parent involvement was communication. Teachers believed that effective communication was a major contributor to parent involvement and support. Parents were always made aware of what the students were doing and needed to do, most notably through weekly classroom newsletters. Teachers reported to me that they were required to send home a folder with each student once a week that includes work samples and a newsletter. Every teacher interviewed praised the value of the newsletter in keeping parents informed. They all said that parent issues relating to lack of communication were rare were due to the use of the classroom newsletter.

School pride, a community of caring, high expectations, collaboration, and parent involvement were all factors that strongly shaped the culture of Cinco Elementary. Each was evident to a different degree, but they all blended to reinforce the commitment to student achievement and academic excellence that was the foundation of the school.

Research Question #3: What Programs or Other Factors Contribute to School Success?

Supplemental academic support. Teachers and staff believed a number of programs were integral to student achievement and the success of the school. One of the most frequently mentioned programs was after school tutoring provided by paraprofessionals. One teacher shared with me that a few years ago some school personnel noticed that there was a long period of time after the students were dismissed

when personnel were still on duty. Members of the leadership team collectively came up with an idea to use paraprofessionals to provide free tutoring services to students after school during four days each week; tutoring lasted for 45 minutes each day. Designed by the principal, assistant principal, and reading coach, and supervised by the reading coach, paraprofessionals used Carbo Reading in addition to teacher-developed materials to provide a framework for the instruction time. Student participation was voluntary and was only offered to students in third, fourth, and fifth grades, which are grades assessed by the FCAT. Every teacher that I interviewed mentioned this program as one that had a significant influence on student achievement and school success.

Accelerated reader and incentives. Every teacher interviewed also cited the Accelerated Reader program as having a significant and positive influence on student reading and achievement. Ms. Brown explained that at the beginning of the year, students were tested using the STAR Reading assessment, which provides a reading level for each student. They were then given individual goals for AR points for each nine week grading period. Students were encouraged to read and take tests in order to earn AR points. Teachers were also encouraged and recognized for their students' performance in AR.

School administration had established a number of ways to recognize student achievement in AR. The AR store was the most visible form of student recognition. Toys and prizes were available for students who have earned AR points from reading books. This was a great motivator for the students, and many teachers stated that the days that the AR store was open were some of the most anticipated of the school year.

Students were also recognized each nine weeks by the principal. Those with the top five totals in AR points at each grade level were treated to a lunch by the principal. Students were thrilled to have a chance to enjoy a meal with the principal as a reward for their achievement.

Teachers whose classes have top performers in AR were recognized at faculty meetings. The principal also recognized the teacher whose class made the greatest improvement in AR points compared with the previous grading period. The top classes had their picture taken and placed on the bulletin board in the cafeteria. This recognition was motivation for teachers to encourage and inspire their students to read more. The principal held a very strong belief in the importance of literacy, and she said that "the ability to read is critical to student success in any subject area, so reading is a very strong area of emphasis in every grade level at our school."

Websites and software. Teachers identified the use of the IXL Math website as another key to student success. The website was designed to address the Florida Sunshine State Standards and provided individualized learning activities for students based on their demonstrated skill level. Teachers viewed this as an invaluable tool for providing students additional practice opportunities to reinforce skills that were taught in class. Students enjoyed the program because it was computer based. It was also a valuable tool for working with lower performing students. It allowed teachers to identify areas of weakness and provided students with immediate feedback about their progress when learning a particular math skill. The program was also valuable because students could access the website from home, allowing teachers to assign practice work to students with home computers. The IXL Math website was an excellent tool for

identifying student needs and providing useful learning activities. When asked about programs that contributed to the school's success, IXL was mentioned by all but two interviewed teachers.

Small group instruction. Another essential to school success was small group instruction. Teachers spoke highly of its affect on student learning. In the small group instructional model, the class was divided into three to five learning groups, with one teacher-led group. Teachers often arranged their groups according to ability level or skill deficiencies. In the teacher-led group, the teacher worked with students on specific skills or areas of need. Another group was a computer group where students practiced skills on websites or instructional software. Others included groups of three to four students playing a game to reinforce previously learned skills, or a group led by a parent volunteer. Occasionally one of the other groups may have been an independent reading group, a listening station for reading, or an independent work group.

There were many reasons that teachers at Cinco cited for the effectiveness of small group instruction. One of the reasons was that it gave students an opportunity to learn in different ways. Unlike whole group instruction, the design of small group instruction allowed students to be actively engaged in a learning activity. During observations, I frequently saw students playing games that reinforced skills, concepts, and facts that had already been taught in reading, science, or math. Students enjoyed the games because they were unique, and a departure from sitting and listening to a teacher or completing questions from the text or a worksheet. I notice that many of the games were not store bought but were created by the teachers to ensure that the skills that the students practiced when playing the game addressed the necessary content.

The teachers also believed that small group instruction also provided students the opportunity to work with instructional technology on classroom computers. Each classroom had three student computer stations, making computer activities for the whole class difficult. However, I routinely observed that utilizing small groups allowed a group of three students to work on a website or game that required them to practice a skill or concept. Meanwhile, other students were permitted to work in a teacher led group, play a learning game, or complete independent activities to practice skills and concepts.

The primary reason teachers cited for small group instruction success was the ability to work one on one or in small groups with students. Teachers believed that this let them quickly identify problems and allowed them to work closely with their students to solve those issues. Without frequent small group interaction with their students, many teachers feared they may not have known what their students needed to work on until they were tested, which could cost valuable instruction time. Ms. Law explained:

> Small group instruction gives me the chance to work closely with my students that need attention the most. Without it, I might not know what help they need until a quiz or a test is given. Working with students in a small group also lets me see how they learn, how they figure things out. This helps when planning future lessons and developing learning activities and games for our centers.

Summary

A common theme among the programs that were identified as critical to the success of Cinco was individualized instruction for students. The programs identified as critical to the success of Cinco Elementary were supplemental academic support, AR reading program, IXL math website, and effective small group instruction. The tutoring

program supplemented instruction provided by the teacher and addressed students who needed extra attention. AR is a program with incentives designed to increase students' time spent reading, thus improving the level of literacy. IXL is a web-based program that complements math instruction as a means of individualizing math content for each student. Small group instruction was seen by teachers as the key to effective teaching. Each program contributed to the school's mission in a way that was essential to student success.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study began with the purpose of examining a highly successful elementary school with a high rate of poverty. I sought to describe the leadership, culture, and programs that contribute to the school's success.

Summary

The components of leadership displayed by the school principal were observed during school visits and revealed during discussions and interviews with teachers and staff members. Surveys completed by staff members regarding leadership and school culture also provided evidence of the effectiveness of the principal's leadership.

Interviews with staff members provided a wealth of information about the presence of effective leadership. They described countless actions taken by the principal that had a positive effect on teacher performance and student achievement. Likewise, leadership items on the School Culture Survey and the VAL-ED were rated highly by teachers and staff.

It is important to note that a qualitative study is emergent in nature. I undertook this study because I observed a high poverty, high achieving school that was exceeding expectations for a school with its population. I did not know what I would find when I began the study. A review of the literature about effective school leadership and leadership in high poverty schools provided a foundation and a guide to the research questions. The results in Chapter 4 were what I found. The results were based on the perspectives of the staff members who participated in interviews and completed surveys.

The results were also the conclusions that I drew as a researcher after participating in 80+ hours of observations and interviews and analyzing data from those observations, interviews, and surveys. What follows is a summary in the context of the research questions, and recommendations based on the findings.

What components of leadership and instructional leadership exist?

One of the primary components of the principal's leadership is her high expectations for students and staff members. The principal creates a high degree of accountability for all staff members and refuses to accept anything less than the best in any area of the school. This results in very high standards for teaching and learning and a staff that strives not just for continuous improvement but for excellence.

Another evident area of leadership is a strong knowledge of curriculum and emphasis on effective instruction. During interviews, teachers describe the principal's knowledge of effective instruction and how that knowledge is utilized to help teachers grow professionally and to improve their practice in the classroom. They describe her willingness to work with teachers in a hands-on manner to help them improve, thus leading to student achievement. In this manner, she demonstrated the role of More Knowledgeable Other, guiding teachers in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) to increase their learning and skill in terms of teaching expertise.

The principal also strongly emphasizes the use of small group instruction as a means of increasing student engagement and reviewing taught concepts. The importance of small group instruction and the need for differentiation is a message that the principal clearly communicates to the staff. She expects that those practices will be implemented with all students.

My observations in classrooms revealed small group work for the purpose of re-teaching and reinforcing skills that have already been taught. The importance of spiral review and utilizing different methods of instruction is understood as an effective practice and is utilized consistently. This model for instruction reflects Vygotsky's (1978) research about student learning and cognition. Students demonstrated greater degrees of learning when guided by their teachers in the Zone of Proximal Development, as well as through social interactions that are present in small group learning. Vygotsky found that when students could not master skills on their own, they could complete them when guided by a teacher, leading to increased learning. Also, Vygotsky (1978) found that interacting with peers in small groups was an effective way for students to learn, particularly when paired with a more competent student.

Another area of leadership that has tremendous influence is the emphasis on collaboration. Collaboration leads to sharing ideas and opening dialogue about best teaching concepts and how students learn. Teachers said that the principal's emphasis on collaboration was not received warmly in the beginning. However, most agreed that collaboration was the greatest contributor to the high performance of the teachers, the students, and the school.

The significance that teachers placed on collaboration is evidence of the effect of social interactions on teacher learning and growth. Teachers' described in great detail how much they improved their practice and increased their learning from collaboration with other team members. Vygotsky (1978) described the learning that occurs when one has social interactions with a skillful tutor or teacher who models behaviors. The teachers at Cinco were clear examples of this type of learning.

What is the culture?

Many of the positive components of school culture are a result of the leadership of the principal. Collaboration, continuous improvement, avoiding complacency, and high expectations shared by the teachers and staff are all the results of various components of the principal's leadership. A culture of caring and school pride, reinforced by the beliefs and actions of the principal, is also critical to the school's success.

What programs or other factors contribute to school success?

There were four programs identified as contributing factors to school success—additional academic support through use of personnel (tutoring), an academic program (AR), a web-based instructional program (IXL math), and an instructional method (small group and differentiation). The findings illustrate the emphasis placed on academic achievement. Although none of the programs are solutions by themselves, they are effective together because of how they are used. Most schools have similar tools and resources with which to work. However, to be effective, teachers must be willing to work hard and use the resources available to them in order to accomplish the goal of student learning. The following items are fundamental to student achievement:

1. the principal's motivation, expectations, and instructional leadership,
2. a culture of excellence
3. purposeful programs and student support

These three items were clearly evident from the observations, surveys, and interviews conducted at the school, and they are consistent with existing literature about high performing schools.

Recommendations

As a result of this research, four recommendations were developed for school leaders. The first recommendation is that school leaders emphasize collaboration and instructional best practices. Review of previous literature in the field reveals the value of collaboration in the development of effective teachers and improvement of student performance (Goldring, 2002; Habegger, 2008; Jacobson et al., 2007). This study supports those findings. The use of small group instruction is essential; well-planned small group instruction provides the teacher with opportunities for review and remediation, which are necessary for true learning. It also gives the teacher a clearer and more immediate picture of student progress.

A second recommendation for school leaders is utilizing a leadership style with high expectations for student achievement and staff performance. Again, a review of related literature supports this assertion (Edmonds, 1979; Kitchen et al., 2004; West, 1985). Without high expectations from a leader, it is impossible to ensure that the teachers will strive to achieve at a high level. With clear expectations, teachers are more likely to strive for improvement and ultimately, excellence.

A third recommendation for school leadership is to create a culture of caring and pride in the school. This is consistent with the literature about creating a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement (Goldring, 2002; Habegger, 2008) and the positive effects of school pride (Van der Westhuitzen et al., 2005). The caring is twofold, caring for students and caring about the success and performance of the school. Caring teachers will strive to meet the high expectations that are set. They are also more likely

to give extraordinary effort and commitment to teaching because of concern and care for the school and the students.

A final recommendation for effective school leadership is identifying a means of providing additional academic support to students. This was identified in the literature (Kitchen et al., 2004) as an important factor in the effectiveness of high poverty, high performing schools. Even with exceptional effort, school teachers and staff cannot provide everything that every student needs in a typical school day. Many students will need extra academic support outside of the time constraints of the school day. Supplemental academic support for students fills a critical gap in the learning of many students.

Limitations

A significant limitation of this study is that it was conducted in only one school setting. Due to the peculiarities of individual schools and organizations, drawing broad generalizations based on a single case study and attempting to apply them to other schools should be carefully considered. The ability to transfer findings to another school depends on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The fact that the school was an elementary school may limit the recommendations that can be made to secondary schools because of the significant differences between elementary and secondary schools.

Lack of diversity in the student population could be a potential limitation for the study as well. Although 64% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch, 88% of students were Caucasian. Lack of ethnic diversity could limit the ability to generalize findings to other schools. Likewise, a relatively small special education population

(11%, 79 total students) and ELL population (<1%) could hinder the ability to apply these findings to school settings with more diverse ethnic and special education populations.

Another potential limitation could result from the participants themselves. Most of the findings in this study are the result of interview and survey responses from staff members. The responses were collected and summarized to identify themes of effective leadership. It is possible that the participants placed emphasis on leadership factors that were not actually critical to student achievement and school success. It is also possible that participants may have overstated their accomplishments or reasons for success because of their status as a high achieving school or because the school was the object of a case study. It is assumed that the responses given by faculty and staff members to survey and interview questions were honest and accurate. It is also assumed that the responses of the sample were an accurate reflection of the opinions of the entire faculty.

A final limitation is my potential bias. My subjectivity in data collection through observation, surveys, and interviews could potentially influence the findings. I have never worked at the case school but I am presently employed as a principal in the same school district and have a collegial relationship with the principal of the school. I believe any bias would be negligible because the research findings were based on responses and opinions of school personnel, not my opinion or perspective.

Delimitations

I limited the scope of the interviews to eleven instructional staff members and administrators. Interviewing more subjects may have provided more insight. I purposefully chose the eleven to have a wide range of experiences at the subject school

and others schools so they would be able to compare the leadership at their current school to others where they had worked. The questions I chose for interviews could be a delimiter. Other questions could have prompted responses that lead to different themes and conclusions. I frequently asked follow up questions as well to elicit more detail in their responses to guard against this.

The time frame in which I conducted the study could also be a delimiter. I conducted research over the course of two months, which provides only a snapshot of the school. The findings are not longitudinal and could only provide information about other time periods to the degree that teachers could relate experiences at the school in prior years or at other schools or to compare Cinco to other schools.

Further Research

Further research is recommended in high performing, high poverty schools. Contrasting leadership that is present in high achieving, high poverty schools with leadership in low achieving, high poverty schools may prove beneficial and help to isolate leadership components essential to school success. Another interesting study would be contrasting the leadership in a school that had been a low achieving, high poverty school in the past but became a high achieving, high poverty school. Again, this would help to isolate the components of leadership that are truly essential to effective leadership. Conducting a quantitative study by expanding the study to include multiple schools could also be of interest to educational leaders.

A Late Night at Cinco

I arrived at the school at 6:30 p.m. on a Friday night to attend the Fall Festival, a parent involvement event. I parked my car and walked toward the festival area and could

see dozens of families already there. Children were laughing, running, and playing. I saw booths set up for games and tables ready for selling snow cones, pizza, and funnel cakes. I also saw a dunking booth and inflatables, and some kids were already taking their shoes off to take their first turn jumping in the castle. I saw a number of parents that had volunteered to help work the booths, and just as many or more teachers and staff members were there working as well. As I walked around, I noticed some lights on in one of the classrooms and went inside. Mrs. Topper was with another teacher, working and planning for the following week. When I asked her and her colleague if they realized it was nearly 7 p.m., they laughed and told me that there were "things that needed to be done" and that they would soon come out to join in the festivities.

The festival was a success. A few hundred people were in attendance, and all seemed to be having a wonderful time. Students and parents were interacting with staff, laughing, and enjoying the night. Teachers and administrators took their turns in the dunking booth, which was a huge attraction. I saw students walking around with toys, candy, cakes, and even live goldfish that they had won at one of the booths.

As the event came to a close and families began leaving, the clean up process began. Teachers and staff began breaking down booths and stacking tables and chairs while others were collecting trash. I looked around and counted more than 20 staff members pitching in to clean things up and prepare for next week. No one was told what to do, nor were they asked to do anything. Everyone simply took action to get done what needed to be done.

As the last tables and chairs were placed back in storage and the doors were locked, the eight or 10 remaining staff members made their way towards their cars to go

home. They exchanged laughs and playful verbal jabs at one another and wished each other well for the remainder of the weekend. As they all departed, I thought about what I had witnessed that night and what it represented. I had watched several dozen staff members spending their personal time on a Friday night at school. I had watched them work and sweat to put together a very successful community event. I watched them finish a 14-hour day, staying six hours past their contracted time to make the event happen. I watched them do so with no expectation of compensation. I believe this was a clear example of an attitude that permeates the faculty and staff at Cinco and is the common thread in the findings from this case study.

That attitude is a desire for excellence. It leads to a commitment to consistent collaboration and instructional best practices for continuous teacher improvement at Cinco. It reflects the high expectations for student achievement and teacher performance that begins with the principal and is shared by the staff. It explains the genuine care for students shown by the teachers and staff, and it explains their desire for the success of the school and its programs such as after school tutoring. It is indicative of the dedication that made those programs succeed. It reflects a teacher mentality where it is common, even expected to do whatever needs to be done to ensure success. After a long Friday at Cinco, the staff members headed home to have a weekend of rest before coming back on Monday to do it all again – and to do it better than they did it this week.

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Appendix A

Observation Protocol

Descriptor	Research Question	Data	Interpretation
Activity:			
Purpose of Activity			
Location			
Physical Environment.:			
Leader: Appearance: Role in activity: Behavior/interaction:			
Other Participants: Appearance: Roles in Activity: Behavior/Interaction:			
Additional data needs:			

Appendix B

Observation protocol

Question #		Yes	No
1	The campus is clean and well kept.		
2	School awards and student work are on display throughout the school		
3	There is a sense of safety and security on campus		
4	There is a positive interaction between staff and administration		
5	There is positive school spirit displayed by staff and students		
6	Staff members are familiar with the vision of the school		
7	There are reward/recognition programs for staff and students		
8	Leadership style of the administration: Y-Distributive, facilitative N- Top down		
9	There is a positive interaction between staff, students, parents, and community		
10	There is positive interaction between staff and administration		
11	Administration is visible in all areas of the school		
12	The office is welcoming and friendly upon entry		
13	There are rituals and events throughout the year that recognize learning and social opportunities for the community		
14	Teachers are engaged in school activities		
15	The administration has positive interaction with students.		
16	There is a friendly and positive atmosphere in staff meetings		
17	Students are on task in classrooms		
18	Substitutes are considered instructors and academic work occurs when they are present		
19	Content standards for lessons are visible		
20	Students are aware of learning objectives		
21	Student work is displayed in the classroom		
22	Guided practice is observed in the classroom		
23	A variety of learning activities (whole group, small group, technology, hands on, projects) are utilized in classrooms		
24	High level questioning is evident during classroom observations		
25	Assessments demonstrate multiple measures to evaluate student work		

Appendix C

Interview questions

Questions

1. Why is this school successful?
2. How is your school special, unique, different?
3. What type of support do you give?
4. What type of support do you receive?
5. How are decisions made?
6. What does communication look like among faculty and staff?
7. Among school and parents?
8. How are people in the school recognized for accomplishments?
9. How is a new teacher oriented to the school?
10. Are there any programs in place that contribute to student learning?
11. How are they implemented? Top down/bottom up?
12. How do you see accountability in the school?
13. Why are students achieving?
14. Who do you view as school leaders? Why?
15. Describe which experiences and activities have the greatest impact on your teaching practice
16. Describe which experiences and/or activities have the greatest impact on student achievement
17. Describe which types of interactions with administration impact your teaching practices, positively or negatively
18. Describe which types of interactions with colleagues and other staff members impact your teaching practices, positively or negatively
19. What do you feel are the most important factors that have contributed to student learning at this school?

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Research Question Addressed

	Leadership	Instruction	Programs	Culture
Question 1				
Question 2				
Question 3				
Question 4				
Question 5				
Question 6				
Question 7				
Question 8				
Question 9				
Question 10				
Question 11				
Question 12				
Question 13				
Question 14				
Question 15				
Question 16				
Question 17				
Question 18				
Question 19				