A PHENOMENOLOGY OF TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS: WORKING TOWARD A SHARED VISION

by
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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Research conducted at schools that have outperformed their counterparts points to specific characteristics that make them successful. These characteristics brought about the development of the effective schools correlates by Ronald Edmonds (1979). Various people from across the United States and in various occupations perceive these correlates differently (Sorenson, Goldsmith, Mendez, & Maxwell, 2011). Effective school research focuses school improvement on the variables that are within the control of educators and have the greatest potential to impact student achievement (Vaughn, Gill, & Sherman, 2009). Research surrounding effective schools concentrates on the seven effective school correlates: (a) clear school mission, (b) high expectations for success, (c) instructional leadership, (d) frequent monitoring of student progress, (e) student time on task and an opportunity to learn, (f) safe and orderly environment, and (g) home-school relations (Berdsell & Sudlow, 1996). In this study, I questioned teachers and parents at elementary schools in rural Virginia using open-ended questions about the perceived effectiveness of schools. The study found that the perceptions of parents and teachers were both similar and different, depending upon their perspective. Five themes emerged from the research a) communication, good home-to-school relationship; (b) parental involvement; (c) high expectations; (d) instructional leadership; and (e) school safety. All five themes correspond with existing correlates of effective schools. This study was intended to help start a dialogue between parents and teachers about the importance of the correlates of effective schools.

Keywords: Effective schools, correlates, teachers, parents, rural

Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to my wife, Maureen, and to our three beautiful children, Emma, Mitchell, and Benjamin; without them I would be nothing. It is also dedicated to my grandfather, William E. Greene, who instilled in me the importance of education. To Dr. Jose Puga and Dr. Judy Shoemaker for their patience and guidance to help me through this process, and of course, Dr. Andrea Tottossy, who has been my colleague for years and someone I have admired for her wisdom, but I am a better person because I can call her my friend. To Dr. Lori Colwell who was a voice in this process. To my father, Ralph E. Sroufe, and brother, Ralph E. Sroufe, Jr., who I miss every day.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy 4:7.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Previous research conducted on the effective schools correlates, originally developed by Edmonds (1979), aimed to find better ways of improving student achievement in different schools and institutions. People in different occupations, such as teachers, parents, politicians, and religious leaders, perceive the effective school correlates differently which can lead to ineffective schools and unsuccessful students (Fleming & Raptis, 2008).

A study on parent involvement and student academic performance by demonstrated that increased parent involvement generated a significant correlation with students' academic performance. The study measured classroom academic performance using both a standardized achievement test and teacher ratings (Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Forming relationships that allow parents to trust teachers is a vital element in building and maintaining the family-school relationship. A parent and teacher questionnaire conducted in 2000 about the issues of trust in the family-school relationship indicated higher levels of both parent and teacher trust at the elementary level in comparison to the middle or high school levels (Adams & Christenson, 2000). The findings indicated that the primary way to enhance trust is in improving home-school communication (Adams & Christenson, 2000). The study also found that when there was a positive relationship between parents and the school, the school's performance increased (Adams & Christenson, 2000). The results of the study highlighted the importance of school personnel making a systematic effort to build trust between parents and teachers throughout a child's academic career (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

To begin a dialogue between teachers and parents about school effectiveness, both sides need to understand each other's perceptions of the school's operational processes. During a time of snowballing accountability, budget shortfalls, unfunded mandates, and ever growing high expectations, effective schools are becoming an essential part of the educational landscape (Kirk & Jones, 2004). Parents and teachers having positive impressions of the correlates of effective schools is needed more now than ever before (Kirk & Jones, 2004). Effective schools will create a generation that not only has proven their ability to attend class, but has also proven their proficiency in the knowledge and skills essential for success beyond the classroom (Kirk & Jones, 2004).

After a review of the effective schools literature, the current study was conducted in targeted rural elementary schools. The seven effective correlates of school effectiveness were identified in the research as being closely aligned to student achievement.

Background

Upon an examination of extensive research, effective school correlates were revealed to be similar factors or characteristics present in various highly effective schools (Guetzow, 1991; Lamendola, 2002; Lezotte, 2009). These characteristics are the primary driving force behind an institution's success and student performance (Lezotte, 2009).

Between 1960 and 1980, a group of teachers, the public, and policy workers combined efforts in finding what could be done to bring reform to public schools (Kaplan & Owings, 2011). This resulted in the formation of a movement led by Edmonds, who together with his group, convinced the educational sector that schools were capable of change (Edmonds, 1979; Kaplan & Owings, 2011).

According to the Berdsell and Sudlow of the Association of Effective Schools (1996), teachers in effective schools share an understanding of and commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability through a clearly articulated school mission. There is a certain climate in effective schools in which teachers have high expectations of each student and believe that students can obtain mastery (Berdsell & Sudlow, 1996).

The principal also plays a decisive role as the instructional leader of the building. The principal must persistently communicate the school's mission to teachers, parents, and students (Kirk & Jones, 2004). The principal must understand and manage the school's instructional program in order to be successful (Berdsell & Sudlow, 1996). In schools that are effective, teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential content and skills (Association for Effective Schools, 1996). The majority of the time, students are engaged in whole class or large group, teacher-directed, planned learning activities. To promote a culture of success, teachers must ensure that they use a variety of assessment procedures to help improve the instructional program individually and globally over time.

A safe and orderly environment is a must in order to achieve all of the other correlates (Lezotte, 1991). An effective school must be orderly, focused, and promote an atmosphere that is business-like in nature. Students must feel safe and free from harm while at school (Berdsell & Sudlow, 1996).

Of all of the correlates identified by Edmonds (1979), the most important is for school officials to do their best to help parents understand and support the school's basic mission. Educators must reach out to parents and give them an opportunity to play a

crucial role in helping the school achieve the clear mission stated in the first correlate (Berdsell & Sudlow, 1996). Christopher Jencks studied the Lames report, reassessed the data, and established that it was the parents' work that most correlated with the institution's effectiveness (Kaplan & Owings, 2011).

In the late 1970s, Ronald Edmonds carried out the same research and found similar results. This led to the development of the effective school correlates, which he strongly believed were the core factors for an institution's effectiveness (Kaplan & Owings, 2011). Edmonds carried on with effective school research until his premature death in 1983.

In the early 1990s, Larry Lezotte picked up where Edmonds left off and further developed the correlates of effective schools. Lezotte's (1991) work remains a prevailing indicator of successful schools where all children learn. Lezotte's research on the effective school correlates concluded that there is a direction correlation between the correlates and school improvement. Lezotte also indicated that schools should have a well-structured framework for identifying, grouping, and resolving or looking at challenges at all levels (Lezotte, 1991). The correlates offer hope and inspiration to school leaders who try hard to improve their schools' performance (Kaplan & Owings, 2011). Lezotte (1991) later developed two generations of correlates: the first and the second generations. In the *first generation*, parents are aware of their mission and fully support it by the opportunities given to them by the school. In the *second generation*, there is a more authentic relationship between the school and the home (Fleming & Raptis, 2008). The best hope for effectively confronting the problem is to build enough

trust and communication to realize that both teachers and parents have the same goal—an effective school.

Situation to Self

I am an elementary school principal in southwest Virginia, and believe that a rural school system can still provide a great education to children. However, parents and teachers do not always talk about what is effective in schools and how they can work together. This gap in communication leads to misconceptions about what we are doing to make schools successful, and yet we know that it takes all stakeholders to move our mission forward. In an effort to help bridge the gap of communication, I conducted this phenomenological study of the parents and teachers in the target rural school district so that a common understanding could be reached.

Problem Statement

School leaders face numerous challenges in their efforts to meet the expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), as well as those of their own state regulations concerning student achievement. One of those challenges, and the problem this study sought to address, is the disconnect between parents and teachers regarding what makes an effective school. When such a disconnect occurs, the needs of the whole child are not met; the child is negatively affected when the home-school connection is broken. Unity between the two must be strong to support and encourage the mental, physical, social, and academic needs of all students. To align parents' and teachers' perspectives toward a shared vision of what is most effective in improving student achievement, it is essential to know what each side values. However, there is limited research that describes parents' and teachers' perceptions regarding the

characteristics of effective schools that will improve student achievement (Edmonds, 1979).

Edmonds (1979) concluded from his study of effective schools that there are similar, identifiable correlates that make schools successful in educating all students. He identified these correlates as: (a) strong administrative leadership, (b) high expectations for student achievement, (c) a safe and orderly school atmosphere, (d) pupil acquisition of basic skills, and (e) frequent monitoring of student progress. Schools must reach out to uncover any deficiencies that Edmonds identified to maximize positive results in schools.

Additionally, effective schools research (Berdsell & Sudlow, 1996) supported Edmonds' (1979) findings and maintained that these school-level factors are evident in schools that successfully meet the needs of all of their students. However, the research is limited in describing teachers' and parents' perceptions of which correlates of effective schools can improve student learning (Edmonds, 1979).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers about the success of the selected elementary schools in their incorporation of the seven correlates of effective schools established by the literature. The results will initiate dialogue about school improvement to work toward a shared vision of student achievement.

According to the University of Illinois Extension (2011), children do better in school when communication between parents and teachers is ongoing. All parents want their children to succeed, and yet when it comes to engaging schools and becoming

involved, many parents do not know where to start, when to find the time, or how to go about making positive connections with the school.

This study addressed teacher and parental perceptions of the importance of effective school correlates in improving parent and school communication for planning and further student achievement in targeted rural schools. In particular, the research helped identify how teachers' and parents' perceptions of the effective school correlates can help school-home communication and student achievement.

Significance of the Study

In today's schools, with a climate of achievement and mandated excellence, leaders need help more than ever before in establishing appropriate school-to-home communication, which is a direct impact on students' success (Louis et al., 2010). Not surprisingly, research shows that the more parents and teachers share relevant information with each other about a student, the better equipped both will be to help that student achieve (American Federation of Teachers, 2010).

Teachers and parents have different perceptions of the ways schools can be effective and can be helpful in identifying ways school leaders can improve student achievement. Therefore, school leaders need to identify which correlates of effective schools are perceived by teachers and parents as being the most significant in raising student achievement. The current study identified those perceptions to help create a dialogue about school improvement and student achievement.

Research Questions

The main aim of this study was to gather the views and perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the correlates of effective schools and how they relate to student

achievement. Previous research indicated that the correlates of effective schools are basic determinants for improving student achievement (Lezotte, 2009). The study was guided by the following questions:

RQ1. How do parents and teachers view the effective correlates identified by Lezotte (1991) as they relate to student achievement?

The overall perception of parents and teachers of the effective school correlates needed to be determined. The impact of their perception is needed to begin a shared vision for student achievement.

RQ2. What do parents and teachers perceive to be the most important things schools can do to improve student achievement?

The clearer understanding of what parents and teachers perceive to be most important to improve student achievement was also needed. The exploration of this question provided an in-depth opportunity to provide relevant information through the perception of parents and teachers and how they related to the effective school correlates.

RQ3. What barriers do parents and teachers perceive to exist with regard to improving student achievement?

Understanding the barriers that parents and teachers perceive to be in place in improving student achievement needed to be determined as well. The investigation of this question provided the prospect of problems perceived by teachers and parents in improving student achievement.

RQ4. In what ways do the perceptions of parents and teachers differ from one another as they relate to student achievement?

The difference of the perceptions of parents and teachers of the effective school

correlates needed to be determined and was the main aim of this study in order to begin a dialogue of a shared vision.

Research Plan

This phenomenological research paralleled that of van Manen (1990), who sought to understand basic lived experiences in his research. The current study examined how the correlates of effective schools are perceived by teachers and parents. Obtaining an understanding of where parents and teachers agree or disagree in terms of the effective schools correlates can help schools move toward a shared vision of student achievement and school improvement. The data for the study were gathered through the use of questionnaires, an online focus group, and interviews. Separate teacher and parent questionnaires were developed for the purpose of this study.

An electronic link from Effective Schools Reality Check was provided via an email for the teacher and parent questionnaires with instructions for completion posted for participants. In addition, emails were sent to all teachers and parents asking them to complete the questionnaire, and a link was provided to the appropriate questionnaire (teacher or parent). By soliciting all teachers and parents via multiple methods, the researcher maximized the likelihood that the samples of teachers and parents or guardians would fully represent the populations of interest in elementary schools. Within the context of the questionnaire, there was an option to be contacted to participate in a focus group that was conducted as an online blog, and individual interviews. The study was conducted without bias of any nature that violated or denied equal privileges or treatment to a particular individual because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status

(Faust, 2009). The study covered only teachers and parents or guardians who had students within the county where the research was conducted.

Delimitations

The participants in this study were teachers and parents from a targeted rural school district. A list of parents and teachers was acquired from each building principal. This resulted in an unbiased list of teachers and parents of children in the targeted rural school district.

Summary

The current study examined the perceptions of parents and teachers about how well the selected elementary schools were implementing the correlates of effective schools as identified by Edmonds (1979) and expanded by Lezotte (1991) to work toward a shared vision of student achievement. This study can help begin a dialogue about school improvement and student achievement between parents and teachers. Chapter 1 identified the significance and purpose of the study. Chapter 2 presents findings from the review of relevant literature, and Chapter 3 explains the methodology for the study. Chapter 4 includes the results from the online questionnaires, focus group, and interviews, while Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the results, recommendations, and lessons learned.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review begins with an examination of the effective schools movement and explores the effective schools research—specifically, the works of Ronald Edmond (1979) and Larry Lezotte (1991). This portion of the review cites research findings that concluded schools' institutional characteristics can make a significant difference in meeting the needs of all students.

The literature shows that highly effective schools have the characteristics of the correlates of effective schools (Bennett, 1988). These characteristics are the main driving forces behind the academic performance of students in the school (Lezotte, 2009).

Between 1960 and 1980, a group of teachers, the public, and policy workers combined efforts in finding what could be done to bring reform to public schools (Kaplan & Owings, 2011). This research led to the formation of a movement that advised on the correlates of effective schools (Lezotte, 2009). In the late 1970s, Ronald Edmond's research led to the development of effective school correlates, which he strongly believed were the core factors for an institution's effectiveness (Kaplan & Owings, 2011).

Lezotte's (2009) research on the correlates of effective schools concluded that the correlates were of considerable importance to a school's ability to improve its performance. The correlates are the way to high and equitable student levels of learning. As expected, all children, regardless of sex, economic status, or race, will learn at least the essential knowledge, concepts, and skills needed so that they can be successful at the next level next year if their schools incorporate these correlates (Worley, 2007). Research has shown that when school improvement processes based upon the effective

schools research are implemented, the proportion of students who achieve academic excellence increases, or at the very least, remains the same (Berdsell & Sudlow, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is based on Edmonds' (1979) five-factor theory and the premise that when teachers and parents understand what each is thinking, everyone will work toward a shared vision of student achievement and school improvement. These factors can be summed up as: (a) strong administrative leadership, (b) clear school goals shared by faculty and administration, (c) a safe and orderly school climate, (d) frequent monitoring and assessment of student progress, and (e) high expectations for student performance. According to Edmonds, not all teachers or parents view the five factors in the same light. Newer research by Lezotte (1991) expanded and reworded the factors to include: (a) a clear school mission, (b) high expectations for success, (c) instructional leadership, (d) frequent monitoring of student progress, (e) opportunity to learn and student time on task, (f) a safe and orderly environment, and (g) home-school relations.

Lambert (2002) expressed that a shared vision on the core values between teachers and parents results in coherence that is weaved into the vision. Generating shared knowledge becomes the energy force of the school and allows parents and teachers to reflect on the data for the purposes of discussion, analysis, and planning. Lambert found that participation between parents and teachers was most powerful when combined with a thoughtful and integrated process.

If the fundamental vision is caring for children, then their academic success follows (Bencivenga, 2006). Student achievement and academic skill cannot exist alone,

and there must be a balance where everyone has a role. There must be a shared vision to promote a school culture that values the social and emotional well-being of all students. The vision may not be the most popular or simplest, but it must be meaningful and practical. The shared vision must be an essential approach that can become the basis for the academic success of students and a profound force in nurturing and unifying parents and teachers.

Research indicates that for teachers and parents to work together for the success of students, the scripted way of doing things must change (Graue, 1998). School leaders and parents alike must look inward and focus on the nucleus of the problem as a starting point for changing the school landscape. Through a collaborative endeavor, the community, parents, and educators can work to create a shared vision that represents both parent and teacher knowledge. This collaborative action plan will further articulate the hopes and dreams held for children and establish schooling as a collaborative endeavor (Pushor, 2007).

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature pointedly identifies the seven effective correlates as first analyzed by Ronald Edmond (1979) and further developed by Larry Lezotte (1991). The review of the literature identifies the common institutional correlates present in effective schools and provides a brief review of the research literature on each correlate.

Clear School Mission

Teachers and staff should share an understanding of and commitment to a clear school mission surrounding instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability (Lezotte, 1991). This clarity would focus on the teachers and their ability

to teach all children, both those with lower-level academic skills and higher-level cognitive abilities.

In 2003, Haberman put the responsibility of creating a clear mission on the principal by concluding that to create a common vision, effective teams should be built to implement that vision and provoke commitment to task. According to Cibulka and Nakayama (2000), schools often are organized as administrative hierarchies rather than as groups of professionals working toward shared goals. A principal should utilize teachers as partners and help create a vision for the school (Kirk & Jones, 2004).

Gabriel and Farmer's (2009) research suggested that all stakeholders should be involved in a school's progress toward its mission. The mission provides detailed expectations for administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and other stakeholders and includes specific plans that guide improvement efforts throughout the year. A school's mission provides an essential overview of where its leaders want to go and what they want to be. Few thriving schools attained success without developing clear missions (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009).

To realize a school's mission, merely drafting statements is not enough; a school must model beliefs, values, and collective commitments while demonstrating enthusiasm for what will come next (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). Perhaps most noteworthy is that the mission must establish clear expectations and standards for all stakeholders (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009).

High Expectations

In an effective school, there is a climate of high expectations where everyone believes that all students can obtain mastery of the school's essential curriculum (Lezotte,

1991). There is also a belief among the staff that they have the capability to help all students obtain that mastery (Lezotte, 2001). Schools that establish high expectations for all students and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations have high rates of academic success (Benard, 1995).

The School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC, 2009) concluded that establishing high expectations for all stakeholders results in higher student achievement. In a presentation entitled "Creating a Climate for High Expectations," the SIRC made the following suggestions for establishing high expectations in schools:

- Schools should establish a "no failure" attitude with staff, students, and parents (pg. 19).
- Policies and procedures implemented to protect instructional time help teachers be accountable for student learning (pg. 19).
- Slogans that communicate high academic and behavior expectations have an impact on the school environment (pg. 19).
- Schools should model and communicate to students that learning is a life-long process (pg. 19).

Instructional Leadership

By effectively communicating the mission of the school to all stakeholders, a principal in an effective school becomes an instructional leader (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). A clearly articulated message influences a school's effectiveness (Lezotte, 2001). The role of instructional leader emerged in the early 1980s and called for a shift of emphasis from principals being managers or administrators to being instructional or academic leaders (Phillips & Arul, 2002). This shift was influenced largely by research

that revealed effective schools usually had principals who stressed the importance of instructional leadership (Lezotte, 2001). Lezotte's (2001) work indicated that instructional leadership is critical in the success of effective schools.

The instructional leader makes instructional quality the top priority of the school and attempts to bring that vision to actualization (Phillips & Arul, 2002). Instructional leadership begins with a leadership team. It is a collaborative effort that builds a common focus, enhances school-wide problem solving, and embraces database decision-making and shared best practices. Lezotte's (1991) work on the premise of instructional leadership stipulated that principals are not the sole leader of a building, but a "leader of leaders" (p. 3). Principals should empower teachers and include them in decisions about the school's instructional goals.

Frequently Monitors Students

Lezotte (2001) proposed that students' progress over the essential objectives should be measured frequently, monitored frequently, and used to improve individual student behaviors and performances as well as to improve the curriculum in an effective school. Student progress monitoring is a method of keeping track of their academic development. Progress monitoring requires frequent data collection with technically-adequate measures, interpretation of the data at regular intervals, and changes to instruction based on the interpretation of student progress (Speece, 2010).

According to the National Center for Student Progress Monitoring (2011), the benefits are significant for everyone when student progress monitoring is implemented. The benefits of student monitoring include accelerated learning because students are receiving instruction that is more appropriate, documentation of student progress for

accountability purposes, and more efficient communication with families and other professionals about students' progress. Fuchs and Fuchs (1998) found that using student progress monitoring with larger groups required extra effort. Many teachers will find this strategy worth the effort because it provides a powerful tool that can help them adjust instruction to ensure that all students reach high standards (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998).

Opportunity to Learn and Keep on Task

Lezotte (1991) suggested creating an "interdisciplinary curriculum" to teach the necessary skills in the least amount of time, making decisions about what is most powerful and letting go of the rest—what he called "organized abandonment" (p. 4). Knowing what to teach and providing adequate time to teach are essential components of effective instruction. Teachers and administrators must balance the issue of increasing curricular demands with limited instructional time.

Worthwhile, genuine education is effective for all students, and may require different approaches and strategies to be successful (Reagle, 2006). Improving schools is a daily challenge that includes tiny steps and quantum leaps. It takes a devoted staff, the willingness to take risks, supportive parents, business-community partnerships, and leadership with a philosophy that all students can learn and want to learn when given appropriate and equitable opportunities. The genuine belief that all students can learn needs to be the cornerstone of all teaching and learning efforts to explore new educational paradigms and guide the changes necessary to develop productive school improvement plans (Reagle, 2006).

In the effective school, teachers put aside a substantial amount of classroom time for instruction of the core curriculum. Effective schools keep students actively engaged

for a high percentage of time in whole-class, large group, teacher-directed, or planned learning activities (Lezotte, 2001).

Safe and Orderly Environment

In effective schools, "there is an orderly, purposeful, business-like atmosphere, which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning" (Lezotte, 2001, p. 6). Lezotte (1991) also spoke of schools not only needing to eliminate "undesirable behavior," but of teaching students the necessary behaviors to make the school "safe and orderly" (p. 1). Lezotte defined these behaviors as cooperative team learning, respect for human diversity, and an appreciation of democratic values. Teachers must also model these desirable behaviors (Kirk & Jones, 2004).

Moorman's (2011) article, "A Safe and Orderly Environment," described a teacher in Michigan who battled with verbal violence between students. John Ash, a social studies teacher, explained that some people think that a safe school always refers to physical safety, but he stated that it also means a safe emotional environment (Moorman, 2011). Ash reported that he could not allow "students to beat one another up with their fists. . . and would not allow it with words either" (Moorman, 2011, p. 1). Ash explained that meeting students' physical and emotional safety needs was necessary for students to learn (Moorman, 2011).

Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer, Ouston, and Smith (1979) characterized an orderly climate in an effective school as one that has policies in place that clearly articulate rules and codes of behavior, along with associated rewards and punishments. In such a setting, students, faculty, and staff understand and consistently follow the policies. A U.S.

Department of Justice (1998) report entitled “School Disruptions: Tips for Educators and Police,” proposed that creating a safe school environment is a community-wide responsibility, and that school authorities should bear the immediate responsibility for identifying potential school problems. The report stipulated that a cooperative effort must have one clear purpose—to provide a safe and secure environment in which students may learn to the maximum of their abilities (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

Home-School Relationship

In effective schools, “parents understand and support the basic mission of the school and are given opportunities to play pivotal roles in helping the school to achieve its mission” (Lezotte, 2001, p. 8). However, because so many ineffective schools are located in low socio-economic areas, many parents of the children attending these schools may not be able to support their children fully in their academic activities (Kirk & Jones, 2004).

A review from the Harvard Family Research Project, Jeynes (2005) noted that parent involvement had a positive and significant effect on children’s overall academic performance. The effect was educationally meaningful and large enough to have practical implications for parents, family-involvement practitioners, and policy makers (Nye, Turner, & Schwartz, 2006).

According to the requirements of NCLB (2002), each school receiving Title I funds must demonstrate parent involvement by: (a) having a written parent involvement policy developed jointly with and approved by parents, (b) convening an annual meeting of parents, and (c) developing with individual parents a school-parent compact that outlines actions to be taken by the school and parents to improve their child’s

performance. NCLB incorporates into policy the long-standing evidence that parental involvement can make a difference in school outcomes for children (Sadker & Zittleman, 2007).

Lezotte (1991) emphasized that in effective schools, parents understand and support the mission and vision of the school. Likewise, parents are welcomed to play prominent roles to ensure that the school achieves its goals. However, Lezotte emphasized in his literature review that effective schools can adequately meet the needs of students without extraordinary efforts from parents. He admitted, however, that parent support facilitates the school's success. Finally, Lezotte explained that to create a successful relationship, both schools and parents must trust and communicate that they "have the same goal-an effective school and home for all children" (p. 4).

Jeynes (2005) indicated that parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes. Jeynes' findings emerged consistently whether the outcome measures were grades, standardized test scores, or a variety of other measures, including teacher ratings. Children whose parents were involved at school had substantially higher academic achievement than their counterparts whose parents were less involved.

While the research by Lezotte (1991), Jeynes (2005), and others (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Dorfman & Fisher, 2002; Graue, 1998; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kaplan & Owings, 2011) indicated the importance of communication, the importance must also lie in understanding how both teachers and parents see the overall picture of the school. Teachers and parents should understand each other's perceptions of how schools are effective in order for communication to be effective.

According to Lezotte (2009), the correlates of effective schools provide school leaders with a comprehensive framework for identifying, categorizing, and solving the problems that schools and school districts face. The correlates, based upon documented successes of effective schools, offer hope and inspiration to those struggling to improve.

Seven Effective Correlates and Student Achievement

Since the 1960s, researchers have continued to examine the relationships between classroom practices, school-leadership practices, and effective classrooms. Researchers have found evidence that leaders at schools with higher levels of student achievement have a clearer understanding of the correlates of effective schools than those at schools with lower levels of student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). As findings from numerous studies began to accumulate, the effective schools research base and its effect on student achievement emerged. While these findings began to point research in a specific direction, simply identifying the correlates of effective schools without a clear and consistent way of practicing them was insufficient. Further research is needed to identify the relationships between identified practices and student achievement. This body of knowledge and data from the effective schools research shows effective practices and relationships that ultimately affect student achievement (Scheerens, 2004).

Clear Mission

In schools across America that have higher levels of student achievement, school boards work with state and federal guidelines to align and support curricula for achievement and instruction, some of which are non-negotiable goals. This hierarchy allows school boards to undertake new initiatives when necessary, but always protect the goals of instruction and higher student achievement. Boards generally adopt long-term

plans or goals for achievement and instruction. These practices have a positive correlation with student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Researchers report that when school leaders monitor progress as set out by their initial mission and intervene when necessary, as opposed to the goals just being signs on a wall, student achievement remains high. The statement of the mission is not enough; it needs to be translated into current practices to enhance student achievement. In short, each school uses student achievement and instructional goals or missions as primary indicators of success. Any difference between what was expected of teachers and the goals or mission of a school would require corrective action on the part of the school administration (Waters & Marzano 2006).

In a self-study of a Catholic elementary school by the Western Catholic Educational Association (2010), the school's mission was revealed to be an essential element of systematic school improvement. A clear mission and philosophy explicitly defines the school, identifies the population the school serves, and describes what the school intends to accomplish. Building leadership should encourage faculty to develop a vision of what the school must do if it is to prepare for students in the 21st century. If leaders do their jobs and the necessary supports are in place, then the principal and teachers can begin to design and implement solutions tailored to the unique needs of their own students and communities (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010).

Of course, the commitment cannot stop with the building principal; there should be a partnership with the community, staff, and the school board to set a clear mission for student achievement and articulate those beliefs that ultimately serve as the foundation for the schools and the district's student achievement. In most districts, school boards,

acting as elected officials, work with schools to help raise student achievement by establishing a shared vision throughout the school district (Waters & Marzano 2006). With the vision in place, the principal can work with the staff to develop an improvement plan that takes ownership of problems and creates interventions to improve student achievement at the school level (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis 2010).

According to Lezotte (2001), when educators think about all the dynamics that make up a good education, the time limits, people needed to get the job done, and the clear mission and focus on the overall effort, they realize there must be a substantial discussion. He went on to explain that a clear, shared mission moves everyone in the same direction, assuring a clear focus for all stakeholders. If the school is focused and has an open and honest mission, the question of "What does this school care most about" can be easily answered.

High Expectations

Researchers in Texas (SIRC, 2009) found that students who were enrolled in college preparation classes during high school found the experience helpful when going to college. The students' responses also indicated that their preparation for college spanned all the key areas (academic content, cognitive strategies, academic behaviors and skills and college knowledge) identified as critical for success (Jobs for the Future, 2011 p. 9). The students indicated that it was not just one course or one instructor, but rather the level of difficulty of the course work. High schools that prepare students in each of these areas provide them with better chances for college completion (Conley, 2010). Students who achieve higher academic performance, even those students with lower

abilities, achieve the result by merely stating their high expectations (Schilling & Schilling, 1999).

According to Miller (2001), when teachers have high expectations of students and these students fail, the failure is deemed a fluke or bad luck, and despite failing the teachers continues to expect high academic performance. However, when students for whom teachers have low expectations fail, both the teachers and the students blame the failure on low ability. In turn, teachers' expectations are lowered for those students, and expectations for future performance are impacted.

When teachers have higher expectations of students, the "Pygmalion effect," a transformation in belief and behavior that can change a low-expectation student into a successful learner, is possible. Students will achieve what is expected of them (Miller, 2001). Teachers are most motivated when school leaders create high expectations for student learning. In short, when there is collaboration between the school and professional communities, the student efforts are exceeded in other classrooms (Louis et al., 2010). According to the research, when administrators, teachers, students, and families share expectations, students excel academically (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kirk & Jones, 2004; Schilling & Schilling, 1999; Williams, 2011).

According to Benard (1995), schools that establish high expectations for all students and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations have higher rates of academic success. Successful schools often have common characteristics, such as putting an emphasis on academics, clear expectations, high levels of student participation, and alternative resources such as library facilities, vocational work opportunities, art, music, and extracurricular activities. Benard pointed out that one of

the most significant findings is that the longer students attend successful schools, the more their problem behaviors decrease, whereas the opposite is true for students who attend schools that are not successful.

High expectations have been clearly defined in the literature (Benard, 1995; Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; Miller, 2001), and when districts put a strong emphasis on high expectations and have powerful mission statements, a culture of high expectations is developed in their communities. Communities that are not supportive of their districts tend to set low expectations by focusing most of their time and energy on strategies for helping students meet the minimum requirements, rather than teaching an accelerated curriculum. When expectations are set low, student achievement fails to improve and often declines (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010).

Instructional Leadership

In the last decades, principals have been looked at as not only the management of a school building, but also the instructional leaders. Principals are expected to create opportunities for collaboration and build a culture of trust. The underlying idea is that a principal should have a broad knowledge and understanding of instructional strategies, observe each classroom teacher, and help model effective teaching practices. According to a policy brief on the role of principals in strengthening instruction (Ross & Gray, 2006), this is an unrealistic expectation in most schools due to the complexity of the instructional program. In addition, the research shows that the most important impact of the principal on student learning and teacher practices is indirect.

When teachers are provided an effective, high-functioning professional community and greater working conditions, their performance typically improves

(Hallinger & Heck, 1998). School leaders who build a culture of trust and collaboration in schools do so by providing common planning time, opportunities for peer observation, and focused cross-grade meetings. Successful educational leadership is not a random occurrence, but rather is executed by careful and thoughtful planning of putting students' success first (Fullan, 2003). When relationships are based on trust, credibility plays a hand in overcoming resistance to change and helps build the shared vision in the school community. Successful principals have always had the role of the instructional leader, consistently communicating the school's vision and goals to staff, students, parents, and the community (Hensley & Burmeister, 2009).

Work that supports teachers in improving instructional practices occurs in classrooms, not in the principal's office (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). Daily classroom walkthroughs are protected times that provide a structure for dialogue between principal and teacher about instructional practices. Successful instructional leaders analyze multiple sources of data to identify and improve instructional practices. The principal remains focused, stands firm on issues related to students' academic success, and takes direct responsibility for the quality of the instructional program (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001).

In successful schools, educators recognize the increasing importance of academic standards and the need for all stakeholders to be held accountable, and have never lost sight of students who need additional time and attention to achieve mastery of core content. Teachers' expertise is recognized and utilized in leadership and grade-level teams (S. G. Shannon, 2004). All students have been provided a rigorous and relevant standards-based instructional program, which, as needed, has included more time on

academic content (i.e., zero periods, after school interventions, double blocking for math and language arts). A school's success is measured through the lens of students' academic achievement (Louis et al., 2010).

In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and articulates the mission of the school, which is crucial to the school's overall effectiveness (Lezotte, 2001). According to Edmonds (1979), some schools may have strong instructional leaders but not be effective; however, there is not an effective school that does not have a strong instructional leader.

Frequently Monitors Students

The behavior of effective teachers and how that behavior correlates to student achievement clearly identifies the importance of frequently monitoring homework and classwork. The most effective teachers, according to Cotton (1988), have "systematic procedures for supervising and encouraging students while they work" (p. 3). These teachers initiate more interactions with students during seatwork periods rather than waiting for students to ask for help. The teachers have more substantive interactions with students during seatwork monitoring, stay task-oriented, and work through problems with students. Extra time and attention are given to students they believe need extra help. The most effective teachers stress careful and consistent checking of assignments and require assignments to be turned in.

Homework can have a significant and positive relationship to achievement when the assignments are monitored carefully (Cotton, 1988). There are stipulations for when the assignments can be tied to achievement. The assignments should be closely tied to the subject matter currently being studied in the classroom and should be given

frequently to extend practice time with new material. The assignments should also be appropriate to the ability and maturity levels of students and be clearly understood by students and parents (Cotton, 1988).

Frequently monitoring a student's work not only falls to the classroom teacher; parents should also be part of the equation. Parents should make efforts to be aware of a school's homework policy; the daily work assigned to their children, and encourages homework completion. Simply monitoring students' progress and providing positive feedback can help improve student behavior and achievement (Cotton, 1988). The ultimate goal of frequently monitoring student progress is to ensure that all students are successful. Teachers are responsible for teaching on an ongoing basis so that they will know where their students are at any given time. This ongoing monitoring is also the way teachers determine whether their instructional strategies are working for all students and which students need instructional interventions (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012). When teachers use systematic monitoring and track their students' progress, they are better able to identify students who may need additional or differentiated instruction. This allows teachers to design stronger instructional programs, and their students achieve better as a result (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998).

Research into effective schools identified the practice of monitoring student learning as an essential component of high-quality education and a major factor differentiating effective schools and teachers from ineffective schools and teachers (Cotton, 1988). Cotton (1988) also identified monitoring student progress as a strong predictor of student achievement.

Opportunity to Learn and Keep on Task

Opportunities for students to learn are higher in an effectively managed classroom where students are orderly and remain on task for reasonable levels of time with a minimum amount of misbehavior. Effective classroom managers are more skilled at preventing disruptions from occurring. Research has identified specific approaches to keep students focused and to reduce classroom disruptions (Dunbar, 2004). Behavioral expectations and clearly established rules should be communicated with students. Along with the expectations, clearly established consequences of misbehavior should be explained thoroughly. Any deviation from the expectations should be dealt with promptly and consistently throughout the school year. Teachers should also take the time to teach self-monitoring skills so that students can maintain a brisk instructional pace and make smooth transitions between activities. Feedback and reinforcement should be given to create an atmosphere of success, particularly to those students who may have behavioral problems. Teachers should make use of humor and cooperative learning groups, and find ways to stimulate the interest of students and reduce tension (Dunbar, 2004).

Decades of time-on-task research shows a positive correlation between high rates of student achievement and students being frequently monitored (Cotton, 1988). Those students who are actively participating will perform at high levels of accomplishment. Educators who are familiar with the time-on-task research know their students well, use effective classroom management techniques, employ good teaching practices and interactive learning activities, and have the ability to motivate all students (J. Wright, 2000).

Simply put, the literature supports the idea that students learn more if they spend more time on a task (Dunbar, 2004; Lezotte, 2001; J. Wright, 2000). Lezotte (2001) pointed out that if teachers want students to achieve mastery, they need to make sure they dedicate time to them and have the students dedicate time to the items to achieve mastery.

Safe and Orderly Environment

Clear and consistent school rules and procedures must be in place regarding behaviors with consistent consequences for violation of the rules. The rules and procedures should be created with student participation and reviewed frequently for their effectiveness in developing self-discipline and responsibility (Mather & Goldstein, 2001). According to the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA introductory packet "Violence Prevention and Safe Schools (2007 revised), early detection of students who have high potential for extreme behaviors must be in place, and counselors and behavioral specialists should provide assistance in reengaging students in school. Public recognition for exemplary behavior and scholarship needs to occur. A safe, orderly campus paves the way for respectful behaviors. There needs to be continuity and predictability from one classroom to another. According to Marsden (2010), there must be a purpose for being in school and an understanding that we are in business of teaching and learning.

This premise has to be communicated to staff, students, and parents from day one and be reinforced in classroom procedures and instructional activities. One widely used educational framework for teaching respectful behaviors is the *six pillars of character*: (a) trustworthiness, (b) respect, (c) responsibility, (d) fairness, (e) caring, and (f)

citizenship (Glassman & Josephson, 2008). The six pillars of character need to be taught at each grade level in the context of fostering self-discipline and academic achievement.

In a report by the U.S. Department of Justice (2004), researchers explained that schools are expected to provide a safe environment and to play an active role in socializing children. Nearly all public schools in the United States use some sort of violence prevention program, though some are of poor quality. Although many programs have been judged effective, staff training, program monitoring, and other organizational support from school leaders have been found to be related to program quality.

The National School Climate Council (2007) showed a positive school climate promotes student achievement. In addition to promoting student achievement, the research indicated that students felt emotionally and physically safe in a school that promoted a safe environment. In Marsden's (2010) study, more than 250 teachers agreed with the body of effective schools research that schools cannot positively affect student learning without first working to maintain a safe and orderly environment. A school climate that is positive, caring, supportive, respectful of all learners, and has high expectations for all students to learn, affects students' motivation to learn.

Home-School Relationships

In a successful and high performing school there must be mutual trust, respect, two-way collaboration, support, and equality (Simmons, 2000). Lazar and Slostad (1999) recognized parent involvement as having a critical influence on student achievement. In a study of effective schools, Hoffman (1991) cited positive home-school relationships as one attribute of effective schools. Recent research indicated that positive parent involvement plays a major role in influencing outcomes such as higher grades, long-term

academic achievement, increases in student attention and retention, and enhanced motivation and self-esteem (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). The Goals 2000: Educate America (1993) Act (H.R. 1804) states that "every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (H.R. 1804 Goal 8, p. 18).

Communication between home and school is a key factor in improving parental involvement. Developing effective methods of communicating to parents about school programs and student progress is critical to successful parental involvement. When schools improve the level of communication, parents often respond reciprocally, resulting in a stronger working relationship (Simmons, 2002). According to Simmons (2002), when parents actively participate at school, whether through advocating, fund raising, or volunteering, student achievement improves. Effective school research shows that partnerships between the home and school can increase student achievement. The partnership should be based upon a school climate that makes families feel welcomed, respected, trusted, and needed.

Providing framing for relationships shows who is responsible for what actions between the school and parents in the home-school relationship, because it describes the relationship in terms of responsibilities (Graue, 1998). Successful principals must go beyond the norm to bridge the gap of communication in a healthy home-school relationship. Communication of varying sorts may be needed to get to the reluctant parent in order to build that relationship, which can lead to higher student achievement. If policy makers and educators are serious about improving student achievement, they need to devise ways to help parents become more involved. Emphasis should be put on

improving communication through various sources, including newsletters and involving parents on school committees (Smith, 1998).

Studies have shown a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and student achievement. This relationship holds true across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students of all ages. Although there is less research on the effects of community involvement, the research suggests benefits for schools, families, and students, including improved achievement and behavior (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

For many parents, family involvement does not necessarily mean active participation in school-based events, though many parents see the value of school-based activities. Parents want information on their children's progress and on how to support their children's education at home. Effective school-family-community partnerships lead to improved student success. These personal relationships between educators and families encourage shared understanding of children's educational needs (Dorfman & Fisher, 2002).

NCLB (2002) stipulates parent involvement in programs funded through the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education is to assist all levels of educational bodies with the implementation of the four principles (accountability for results, local control and flexibility, expanded parental choice, and effective and successful programs that reflect scientifically based research) that provide a framework through which families, educators, and communities can work together to improve teaching and learning (Desimone, 1999). These principles establish accountability and

give local control and flexibility. The programs are intended to expand parental choice and reflect scientifically based research (Jeynes, 2005).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) examined 31 studies that specifically addressed the connection between student achievement and various parent and community involvement factors that produced higher levels of student achievement. According to Henderson and Mapp, schools that succeed in engaging families in school events share key practices. The schools focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members, and recognize and respect families' needs and cultural differences. The schools also embrace a philosophy of partnership where responsibility is shared among educators and parents. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children do better in school and stay in school longer. Schools that have highly rated partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower rated programs. The evidence is consistent and convincing and proves that families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Summary

This literature review covered the beginning of the effective schools movement and correlates of effective schools that arose from the research. The literature review indicated that all stakeholders matter, particularly parents and teachers. Lezotte (2009) concluded that schools that align with the seven correlates and are consistent over time show greater student achievement.

The research indicates that for the seven correlates to work, all stakeholders must be available and share the same vision of the school. The school leaders will need to plan

extensively and collaborate with teachers, parents, and students. Effective parent involvement cannot be limited solely to the school day. Effective schools involve parents, students, and teachers to provide avenues for involvement during the school day and outside school (Williams, 2011).

According to Parent Involvement in Public School: Project Appleseed (2011), one way to start improving a school's parent-school partnerships is by assessing present practices. As such, the purpose of the current study was to solicit and assess the perceptions of parents and teachers about how well the selected elementary schools were doing in the seven effective school correlates, established in the literature, to work toward a shared vision of student achievement. The research will help begin a dialogue about school improvement and student achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers about the success of the selected elementary schools in their incorporation of the seven correlates of effective schools established by the literature. The study used an open-ended online questionnaire, online focus group, interviews, and a structured analysis to identify the perceptions of the participants. This chapter includes a discussion of the chosen research methodology and design, the selection process of participants, and the materials and instruments used in the research. Data collection procedures, limitations and assumptions, and ethical assurances are also presented. A summary of the research methodology concludes this chapter.

Design

This qualitative, phenomenological study used a questionnaire, focus group (i.e., online blog), and interviews to examine how parents and teachers perceived effective school correlates and whether the groups perceived these correlates differently.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) defined qualitative research as inquiry grounded in the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and that these constructions tend to be transitory and situational. Creswell (1994) described qualitative research as a study of individual cases that makes little use of numbers or statistics, preferring instead verbal and subjective analysis. A qualitative research method was chosen for the current study because the constructs of interest reflected the attitudes or perspectives of individuals. The objective of the study was to compare the perspectives of two different groups—parents and teachers—and to

understand their perceptions about the success of the selected elementary schools when incorporating the seven effective school correlates established by the literature.

A phenomenological study seeks to understand an experience from the participants' point of view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The study is based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasizes the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. Essentially, phenomenological research is powerful for understanding subjective experience and for gaining insight into people's motivations and actions (Lester, 1999). A phenomenological method was deemed best suited for the current study because I wanted richer information than could be obtained through closed-ended, quantifiable questions. I pursued information regarding the unique personal experiences and perceptions of those who have a stake in student achievement, including feelings, attitudes, and perceptions regarding what practices are likely to ensure academic success for students.

An online questionnaire, focus group (i.e., online blog), and interviews were chosen as the methodology for the study, as these are systematic methods of collecting data from a population of interest. The advantages of conducting a questionnaire are numerous, including compiling data from many stakeholders within a relatively short time, and using structured and standardized questions to minimize bias (Tuckman, 1999). The study utilized a questionnaire method because data were gathered quickly and efficiently, and the standardized nature of the questions allowed for easy comparisons between data sources.

According to Schaefer and Dillman (1998), the percentage of people with Internet and email capabilities is on the rise and provides a medium to conduct questionnaires. D.

M. Shannon and Bradshaw (2002) explained that using electronic questionnaires may require some technological skill, but the advantage is that they do not require postage. D. M. Shannon and Bradshaw concluded that electronic questionnaires are returned more rapidly than the traditional paper and pencil questionnaires, thus reducing time and labor to prepare the data for analysis.

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem, but is not limited to one particular type of data collection. When a researcher uses multiple methods of collecting data, it not only provides more in-depth data, it also allows the researcher to validate and increase the reliability of the findings (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009).

Research Questions

RQ1. How do parents and teachers view the effective correlates identified by Lezotte (1991) as they relate to student achievement?

RQ2. What do parents and teachers perceive to be the most important things schools can do to improve student achievement?

RQ3. What barriers do parents and teachers perceive to exist with regard to improving student achievement?

RQ4. In what ways do the perceptions of parents and teachers differ from one another as they relate to student achievement?

Participants

Teachers and parents of students who attended the targeted rural elementary schools in Virginia were invited to participate in this study. Individuals from all genders,

ethnicities, and social classes were solicited. The research was conducted without bias of any nature and without denying equal privileges or treatment to a particular individual because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status (Faust, 2009). To increase the credibility of this study, I chose purposive sampling because the participants had similar characteristics that would best enable them to answer the research questions (Patton, 1990).

Setting

This study utilized separate online questionnaires—one for parents, one for teachers—to collect data from the respondents. The study also utilized an online focus group and interviews. The participants were able to participate in the questionnaire and focus group in their homes or workplaces. The participants, all of whom lived in Virginia, received an email with a link to the questionnaire and were able to answer the questions at their leisure. The link, which was provided in the fall of 2012, was available for 2 weeks. Participants who agreed to be part of the focus group also received an email invitation for the online focus group. All participants and institutional name are pseudonyms.

Procedures

Dillman (2000) recommended making five contacts with participants to increase response rates for online questionnaires. His research found that increasing the number of contacts had a significant effect on return rates, thus increasing questionnaire validity. Dillman recommended that the first contact occur a few days prior to making the questionnaire available, that the participants receive an email 2 to 3 days later, and that

the participants receive a thank you for their participation 3 to 7 days later. The note thanks participants for completing and returning the questionnaire and asks that persons who have not already completed the questionnaire do so.

I met with the district's superintendent and school principals to explain the purpose of the study and to request permission to solicit teachers and parents from their schools for participation. As part of this meeting, the principals received a copy of the questionnaire and a participant letter indicating the purpose of the study, how I would use the data, and dates during which the respondents could view and complete the questionnaire. I assured the district's principals that all participants' responses would be kept confidential. After obtaining the district's permission, authorization was obtained through Liberty University's Institutional Review Board to conduct research that involved human subjects.

Once this approval was obtained, I made initial contact, via email to explain the research and the forthcoming questionnaire. This initial email contact encouraged all teachers and parents to participate in the study and to ask any questions they felt necessary. The email asked them to consider participating in the online focus group and an interview. I emailed a consent letter and a link to the questionnaire to the principals who then emailed the teachers and parents asking them to participate in the study. A hard-copy letter and consent form were also sent out to those participants without a valid email address, asking for their participation and explaining where the questionnaire could be found (Appendices A, B, and C).

After the second contact, an email with the questionnaire link was sent to all the participants asking them to complete the questionnaire and with an additional email

explaining the research. I sent another email thanking those who participated and asking those who had not participated to complete the questionnaire. Additionally, a hard copy was sent out to everyone once again, inviting them to participate in the research. After 14 days, a final email and hard copy were sent out thanking everyone for their participation in the study.

Upon completion of the questionnaire phase, I invited willing participants, as indicated from the online questionnaire, to an online focus group and interview to discuss their perceptions as teachers or parents about the correlates of effective schools and how they affect student achievement. The online focus group was available for 2 weeks to enable those who were willing to post their comments to do so. The focus group was semi-structured in that I offered open-ended questions developed from the questionnaire in order to understand the perceptions of the parents and a teacher regarding the effective school correlates. The interviews, conducted in-person and via telephone, were conversational and the questions were derived from participants' answers on the questionnaire and in the focus group.

Personal Biography

I was born in Newport News, VA. My parents divorced when I was 6-years-old. My father was a clinical psychologist for the Commonwealth of Virginia, and my mother was a homemaker. I spent some of my childhood in Austin, TX, Ellenboro, NC, and Virginia Beach, VA. I spent most of my childhood living with my mother and three siblings in Ellenboro, but at the age of 14 I went to live with my father in Virginia Beach.

In 1991, I joined the U.S. Air Force and was trained as journalist at Ft. Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis, IN. I participated in Operation Desert Storm and Operation

Provide Comfort at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. I was recognized as the U.S. Air Forces in Europe Public Affairs Airman of the Year in 1992 and USAFE Journalist of the Year in 1993. I also received the Air Force Commendation Medal in 1995.

After serving honorably in the U.S. Air Force, I went back to Virginia Beach where I attended Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA. I received a Bachelor of Science degree and Masters of Education in 1998.

In 1998, my wife and I moved to Christiansburg, VA, where I taught 8th grade World Geography and Physical Science. After teaching for 2 years, I went into the private sector and worked as a yearbook and photography representative for 2 years. I went back to teaching in 2001 in Roanoke City as a 9th through 12th grade information technology teacher in a charter school. After 2 years in Roanoke City Schools, I went to Montgomery County Schools and taught 8th grade Civics for 3 years. During that 3-year period, I attended Radford University where I earned an Administrative Endorsement in Educational Leadership.

At the beginning of my 4th year at Christiansburg Middle School, I took a principal position in Patrick County, VA, at Meadows of Dan Elementary, a Pre-K through grade 7 school. After 2 years as principal of Meadows of Dan Elementary, I was asked to take over Woolwine Elementary, a Pre-K through grade 7 school, on the other side of the county. I am beginning my 5th year at Woolwine. I have been a successful principal, earning the Governor's Excellence Award in 2011 and Title I Distinguished School for 4 years in a row.

As a public school principal, I believe that this study is imperative to the success of schools in both rural and urban areas of America. Parents and educators need to work

toward having conversations about student achievement. Student achievement is higher when all stakeholders are involved in helping schools move forward. As schools have evolved and the lives of parents have become busy, there has been a disconnect between educators and parents and the reality of what makes schools successful. This study can help begin a dialogue between all stakeholders and their perceptions of student achievement and the effective school correlates.

My interests are broad and varied. For example, I collect political autographs and those of famous Americans; among my prized autographs, I have a President Harry S. Truman and astronauts James Lovell and Eugene Cernan. I like to take my Chris Craft out on the lake, I am an avid hunter, and I am a New York Yankees fan. In 2011, I earned an Ed.S. from Liberty University and I am currently in the last stages of my Ed.D. at Liberty University.

I have been married for 21 years to Maureen, and have three children, Emma, 13, Mitchell, 9 and Benjamin, 6.

Data Collection

Before any data collection began, approval was granted by both Liberty University's Institutional Review Board as well as the local school district's superintendent (Appendix G). The letter from the school district superintendent was sent to all of the elementary principals in the district. Additionally, permission was granted to use both the Teacher and Parent Questionnaires (Appendix A & B). The answers for all four research questions were derived from the participants' responses to items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 on the questionnaires.

Utilization of the focus group (i.e., online blog) allowed for multiple data sources that were joined to generate powerful insights about the perceptions of parents and teachers.

Questionnaire

A 13-item online questionnaire (Appendix A and B) was used to determine the degree to which teachers and parents believed each effective school correlate was pertinent to student achievement. Open-ended questions offered flexibility and opportunities for respondents to bring to light the other factors that were not mentioned that could not be obtained in traditional surveys (Axinn & Pearce, 2006). Further, the anonymous format enabled both teachers and parents to provide frank and honest answers regarding their perceptions. The questions assessed the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the barriers to student achievement and the most important factors related to student achievement. Teachers and parents responded to questions while thinking about what role they believed they had in developing a clear school mission and in developing instructional leadership. Teachers and parents responded to questions while thinking about what role they saw themselves taking in providing students an opportunity to learn and to be kept on task while developing high expectations for student success. The questionnaire also sought their perceptions on each of their roles in providing a safe and orderly environment and in ensuring a healthy home-school relationship. The answers to these questions will help begin a dialogue among parents and teachers to move schools forward in greater student achievement.

Joppe (2000) defined reliability as the extent to which results are consistent over time and have an accurate representation of the total population. Validity has to do with

whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure (Golafshani, 2003). I developed the questionnaire for the purpose of this study and validated it prior to the commencement of data collection. The questions were derived from existing literature sources and compiled to focus on the specific purpose of the study (Clark, Watson, & Reynolds, 1995). The Effective Schools Reality Check survey website hosted the questionnaire.

Focus Groups

A focus group (i.e., online blog) (Appendix C) was conducted after the questionnaire part of the study. At the simplest level, a focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Tates et al. (2009) showed that the online focus group methodology is a feasible tool for collecting qualitative data and may offer new opportunities to collect data with other hard-to-include populations. The online group discussion gave participants an opportunity to articulate their experiences and views in a way they might not have done in a traditional group discussion. The online focus group questions were driven from the questionnaire and allowed participants to share their feelings anonymously.

Interviews

There are various forms of interview designs available to obtain data utilizing a qualitative perspective; an informal conversational interview approach was chosen for this study (Gall et al., 2010). This type of interview strategy was chosen due to the flexibility it offers in allowing participants to express their perceptions in their own words (Gall et al., 2010). This type of interview also allows flexibility to the interviewee

allowing for alterations, and for the interview to become more conversational while building rapport with the respondents, encouraging them to feel comfortable discussing the topic (Gall et al., 2010).

Participants for interviews were chosen using a computer-based random number generator. The program used is best described as a "pseudo-random number generator" because the numbers are generated by use of a complex algorithm that gives the appearance of randomness (Urbaniak, 2011).

An interview can be useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences and allows the interviewer to pursue in-depth information around the topic and to follow-up with certain respondents when the questionnaire is completed to investigate their responses (McNamara, 1999). All the interviews were done in person or via the telephone. (Appendix H)

Data Analysis

I utilized a modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological analysis on all three sources of data (i.e., interviews, online focus group, and questionnaires) as described by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas (1994) explained that the first step is for the researcher to describe his or her own experience with the phenomenon in an attempt to set aside personal experiences so that the focus can be related directly to the participants of the study.

Each question of this study was addressed by first listing any significant statements that captured the essence of the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) called this the *horizontalization* of the data. Each statement was treated as having equal worth, and I developed a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements. The significant statements

were then grouped into larger units of information. I wrote a description of what the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. Creswell called this the *textural description*, which includes verbatim experiences. A *structural description* was written to describe how the experience happened, reflecting on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced. Finally, a *composite description*, including the textural and structural description of the phenomenon, was written. The composite description became the essence of the experience and represented the culminating aspect of the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the credibility, dependability, and transferability of research. The collection of data from multiple sources and triangulating those data with the online focus group and interviews speaks to the credibility and dependability of this study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), triangulation occurs when data are cross-checked by use of different sources. The focus group (i.e., online blog) was conducted online so the data were an authentic look at the reactions from the participants. To assure credibility, two research consultants—one from the university and an outside source—were consulted as part of this study. In terms of transferability, the descriptions provided in the data collection and analysis procedures are well defined and specific enough that the study could be easily replicated.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2007), ethics in qualitative research is important. The current study posed no risks to the participants. The only time involved for participants was the time it took to complete the online questionnaire, which could have been done

from the comfort of their own homes. A separate consent form for teachers and parents, outlining participants' rights and expectations, including their right to refuse to participate, their right to withdraw participation or data at any time, and their right to obtain a copy of the results once complete, was provided before any data were collected. In addition to adhering to accepted standards of ethical research, Liberty University Institutional Review Board requirements were followed to ensure adequate protection of human participants.

Summary

This chapter described the research design and methodology of the current study designed to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers about the success of select elementary schools that incorporated the seven correlates of effective schools established by the literature. This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design using online survey and focus group methods. The questionnaire sampled parents and teachers of rural elementary school children using open-ended questions and focus group and interview follow-ups. Data were analyzed per Creswell's (2007) recommended procedures to identify the common themes and contrasting ideas between the two groups.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers about the success of the selected elementary schools in their incorporation of the seven correlates of effective schools established by the literature. A review of the research identified seven correlates of effective schools: (a) a clear school mission, (b) high expectations for success, (c) instructional leadership, (d) frequent monitoring of student progress, (e) opportunity to learn and student time on task, (f) a safe and orderly environment, and (g) home-school relations (Lezotte, 1991).

The study used two separate questionnaires that consisted of 13 items about the correlates, and each was specific to teachers or parents. The participants were asked open-ended questions about their perceptions of effective schools and the effective school correlates. In addition to the 13 questions related to the effective school correlates, participants were asked three demographic questions about their gender, race/ethnicity, and with which school they were associated. Participants were also given the option to participate in an online focus group and be interviewed. Participant responses are conveyed verbatim, including spelling and grammatical errors.

A total of 106 teachers and 1,478 parents were emailed the option to participate in the study. There were 38 parent responses and 36 teacher responses to the questionnaires. A total of 20 parents and 15 teachers agreed to participate in the online focus group, while five teachers and five parents were randomly chosen to be interviewed.

Organization of Data Analysis

The data are presented in relation to the four research questions. A modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological analysis was performed on all three sources of data. Quotes and summaries of findings from the questionnaires, interviews and online focus group are included in the description. Findings for each research question are described separately and summarized as the researcher's experience, horizontalization of the data, and the structural and composite descriptions of the data.

Researcher's Experience

The following sections provide a brief overview of my personal experience with each of the seven correlates. As an educator and a parent, I have always seen some division of how the perceptions of each group differ though they achieve the same result. As a parent of high achieving students, none of the correlates come as a surprise to me, but I do believe that some impact student achievement more than others, and I also believe that some are a given in today's society.

High Expectations

As a parent, high expectations for my children are the most important of the correlates. My wife and I have always been very clear about our expectations and the reality and responsibility that come with those expectations. Still, having high expectations for students cannot simply stand on its own, as a child must have support and guidance in order to meet those expectations. As an educator I often see parents with similar expectations, but who offer little support for their students. The expectation is that they want their children to be successful but they offer little support in terms of guidance, supplies, or a home-life that supports success. Other indicators of high

expectations, or at least the government's take on high expectations, are the established standards of learning and the end of year exams that define both the teacher's and child's academic school year. I do feel that schools should have standards, but I see little use in letting a 50-question test define a child's year. There are too many factors that can affect a child's school year, and I feel this is an unfair outlook of not only the student, but the teacher's instruction as well. As both a parent and educator I have stayed the course for having high expectations, as I believe that an education is the key to any great future.

Clear School Mission

A clear school mission has never been a priority for me as a parent, but as an educator it allows me to express to students and parents my expectations for student achievement. A clear mission allows for clear expectations for teachers, parents, and staff members. As an educator, I have to keep looking forward and develop a plan, implement the plan, and follow-through with the plan, and as a parent I am constantly making adjustments in raising my own children.

Instructional Leadership

I began my career in education about 15 years ago when the term *instructional leader* was evolving into the new role that a principal was expected to take on in his or her building. As an educator I believe that instructional leadership has allowed principals to step away from managing educators to leading them. I believe that instructional leadership has helped evolve special education, gifted education, technology education, and middle school philosophies. This involvement of leadership has created school systems that are more balanced and has provided standards that have been needed in

education for years. As a parent, I see instructional leadership from the teachers and school leadership as working hand-in-hand to make my children successful.

Frequently Monitoring Students

Ray Edmonds, who developed the correlates, and Larry Lezotte, who later expanded and synthesized the correlates, probably never imagined that frequently monitoring a student's progress could mean a parent logging onto the Internet to check a child's grades. As an educator, frequent monitoring of students is of the utmost importance in student achievement. I believe that teachers should build relationships with students so that students know the teachers are aware of what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they are doing it. Students must see that accountability is a large piece of learning. As a parent, I have found that I have built that foundation of accountability, but still have to constantly monitor my children.

Opportunities for Students to Learn and to Keep Them on Task

As an educator I am constantly looking for different ways to provide opportunities for students to learn and to keep them on task; this correlate relates to a movement in education called *differentiation*. In today's modern world, educators must compete with PS3s, Wiis, Xboxes, the Internet, and television, on top of having inclusive classrooms with special education students and gifted students. Educators must find ways to provide all students an opportunity to learn. As a parent of a gifted student with autistic tendencies, this correlate is very important. My son is well ahead of his peers in many respects, and the teacher and I are in constant communication about how to provide him opportunities and help keep him on task.

Home-to-School Relationship

In my experience as an educator and a parent, the relationship between the home and the school is a vital piece to a student's success. As an educator I find that it would be difficult to achieve any of the correlates without this important relationship. Communication between teachers and parents is vital to a student's success. As a busy parent, I can easily email my children's teachers for updates about their behavior, grades, or anything else that can be communicated with great discussion. Of course, parent-teacher conferences, PTO meetings, and after-school events are other ways to reinforce the relationship between the home and the school. As an educator, establishing a positive relationship with the home helps with student achievement because parents grow to understand that I have the same expectations they have for their children.

Safe and Orderly Environment

The last correlate took a completely different turn this week for me as an educator and a parent. Providing a safe and orderly environment has always a been priority for me as an educator. As the leader of a building, I establish safety protocols, provide guidance, and conduct drills to thwart any and all possible safety issues. The event in Sandy Hook, CT, has every community reflecting upon ways to provide a safe and orderly environment to protect our children at all costs.

Horizontalization

The horizontalization of the data occurred when each question of the study was addressed by first listing significant statements, treating each statement as having equal worth, and developing a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements. The significant statements were grouped into larger units of information called *themes* (Creswell, 2007).

There were similar responses from the participants from the interviews, questionnaires, and online focus group, and significant themes developed from the parent and teacher responses.

In the first question, parents and teachers were asked what barriers they perceived existed with regard to improving student achievement. The main concerns for parents emerged as communication, politics, morale, and money. There were also a few mentions of class size, but this can also be attributed to money, as hiring teachers would lower class size and thus cost more money. Teachers had very similar views as parents, and themes included parental involvement, money, and state and federal regulations. One particular issue mentioned by teachers and parents was the Virginia standards of learning, as well as difficulty in meeting the standards and the need for teaching to be repetitive in nature with students memorizing facts as opposed to "learning" information.

The second question addressed the roles of parents and teachers in developing a clear school mission. There were very similar responses from both sides on this particular question, and themes that developed included align, partner, support, collaborating, and sharing responsibility. The next question spoke to the roles of parents and teachers in developing high expectations for student success. In the parental responses, synonyms arose as parents described their efforts and leading by example, reinforce, implement, collaborate, check and model behavior. Teachers also had similar responses but their views were from an instructional vantage, and included themes like differentiation, individual learning, gently push, and exemplify high expectations.

The third question addressed the development of instructional leadership and the role of the parent and teacher. The parent themes that emerged included being aware,

support, assisting, encourage, and being involved. The teacher responses included being directly involved, modeling instruction, collaboration, advisor, mentor, and model.

Parents and teachers were also asked how each could frequently monitor students. The themes that evolved for parents included the use of technology to monitor grades, be aware of progress through students' daily planners, communication with teachers, and building a healthy relationship with those teachers. Themes that developed for teachers included monitoring students' work through formal and informal assessment, classroom discussion, and reading with students. Themes that emerged when asked about the parental and teacher roles in providing an opportunity to learn and be kept on task from parents included the parents' need to facilitate, structure, support, and to be involved. Teacher's responses included differentiation, good classroom management, engaging and ongoing lessons, and a good learning environment.

When parents and teachers were asked about their roles in providing a safe and orderly environment, themes that emerged from parents included: explaining social behavior, support for the school for disciplinary action, respect for rules and staff at schools, and enforcing rules and guidelines. Teachers described safety as being first on their list in some cases, and other themes included discipline being fair and consistent, dealing with unsafe behavior, and making it a top priority. The role of the parent and teacher to ensure a healthy home and school relationship was also explored in the research. Parental themes included: being contacted any time, positive, constant communication, collaboration, and being involved. Teachers answered with similar themes that included: diplomacy, timely and information communication, building relationships with parents, being open and honest, and crucial.

The last two questions asked the parents and teachers to identify their most important practices of the correlates in improving student achievement. Parental themes included setting high expectations and home-to-school relationships, and frequently monitoring students. Teacher themes included high expectations, good home-to-school relationships, and good instructional leadership. When parents were asked which themes they thought should be a priority for teachers, the responses included frequently monitoring students, high expectations, and good home-to-school relationships. When teachers were asked which themes they thought should be a priority for parents, the responses included good home-to-school relationships and high expectations.

The task of finding answers to the research questions was undertaken primarily by the horizontalization of the data and identifying and analyzing the themes related to the perceptions of parents and teachers of the effective school correlates. The analyses of these themes subsequently led me to develop a textural description, a description of what the participants experienced.

Textural Description

The themes related to the perceptions of parents and teachers about what makes schools effective were: (a) communication, good home-to-school relationship; (b) parental involvement; (c) high expectations; (d) instructional leadership; and (e) school safety. The major themes that developed from the horizontalization of the data are identified in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Responses Developed from the Data

Theme	Parent Responses	Teacher Responses
Communication (Home-to-School Relationship)	Lack of communication between parents and teachers. Unclear expectations. No feedback. Teachers not working in collaboration with each other to benefit the children. Parent input.	Need support from home. Parents who do not value education. Teacher's opinions and judgment should be trusted and respected. Teachers do not want to call parents who are rude and blame them for their child's issues.
Parental Involvement	Become more involved in the learning process of their child. Meeting with principal & teachers. Ownership in his/her part of the child's education. Volunteering. In Smalltown County parent input is unwelcome.	Lack of help, cooperation, and support from parents. Parent involvement in student achievement is critical to the success of students. Sharing responsibility. Ownership.
High Expectations	Parents set the pace. Positive attitude begins at home. No teacher can do it all.	Committed to all students. Essential for success. Realistic.
Instructional Leadership	Job of school officials. Providing support for the teacher. Serve on committees that assist the school.	Planning rigorous lessons, assignments, and homework that promote understanding and application. Principal is the instructional leader.
School Safety	Communicating with children on a daily basis. Monitor children's friends. Have access to their email/Facebook accounts. Provide stable, safe, and healthy home environments.	Teachers maintain safety and develop skills for each child. Remove unsafe students. By teaching our children the importance of abiding by the class/school rules.

Communication

From the accounts of the research participants (i.e., parents and teachers), communication was one of the key themes to emerge from the interviews, questionnaires, and online focus group. Although the responses were consistent, there were some differences. Though both sides recognized the importance of communication as the key to student achievement, each blamed the other for lack of communication and how that impacted the home-to-school relationship. The burden of communication or the lack of communication was apparent in the following parent comments:

> I do believe frequent monitoring my child's progress does help raise his achievement. This is why it is so frustrating when some of my child's teachers do not post grades regularly. I try to monitor them, at least weekly, so I can give consequences when he is not performing up to his potential. However, when I check grades weekly and many times 3-4 or more weeks pass and some subjects are still grade less, I feel helpless. (Mrs. Lidia)
>
> At my son's school the biggest barrier is probably communication, and partially that is because of him because he is a 12 year old boy and he doesn't always follow through with informing me with what is going on, but sometimes I feel like perhaps the communication could be a little better from the teachers but he is not good in delivering messages, delivering newsletters, or always showing me, but at the same time I don't always receive when I do talk with the teachers I am not receiving information that says I sent that home to you or you should have received that newsletter so I think the biggest barrier is the communication. I call that a barrier hesitantly because he is doing really well, but trying to think with

what we struggle the most, but it would have to be the communication back and forth. (Mr. William)

Parents also acknowledged the need to communicate because the lack of communication can be troublesome to their children's achievement. The overall experience in school and the relationship between the school and home was evidenced by the following parent comments:

> One is the communication between the teacher or the school and the home. That can be one barrier. In our current school situation that is improving with online ability of communicating and I think that is one barrier that we have. (Miss Margaret)
>
> I feel that I am an involved parent, but only get real answers when there is a true issue. Then once the issue has been resolved or is being worked on by the parent (let's say behavior) you have to then ask how things are going. I understand that teachers are teaching more than my child and can't send home a note or correspond with each child's parent each day. Many times you only hear the negative and then it's when it is at it's [*sic*] worse. Why not communicate the moment there is a problem. Then communicate again if it continues to exist or gets better. The parent has to do all the work if they truly want to know how their child is really doing. (Mr. Jason)
>
> Parent input should be sought by the school, in order to have a clear line of communication and a mission developed that makes all groups involved satisfied. With good communication between parents and teachers, almost any goals can be achieved. (Mrs. Lidia)

All the responses from the parents acknowledged that communication is key to making their children successful, though some shared frustration in what they perceived as being a lack of communication on the teacher's part. Similar to parents, teachers felt that communication between parents and teachers would improve student achievement as evidenced by the following comments:

> Student achievement can be improved if the home/school relationship is healthy. When the teacher is uncomfortable corresponding with the parents (or vice versa), necessary conversations may be avoided. If the teacher knows he will be accosted verbally, he is less likely to make home contacts. If this relationship is healthy, the teacher can share information about student achievements, successes, and weaknesses more readily. (Mr. George)

Teachers also viewed communication as the lack of support for a child's education and the emphasis of school at home as evidenced by the following comments:

> It seems to me that support at home and parent education would really improve the achievement of students. (Miss Jones)
>
> Parents and home life, teachers are able to provide what the students need at school, but if these behaviors aren't reinforced at home, the barriers are greater.

Despite the numerous ways to communicate (e.g., email, electronic messages, school messengers, online posts, social media, etc.), parents and teachers alike had various reasons for the lack of communication. Teachers felt that communication could be a barrier to student achievement as evidenced by the following comment:

> Teachers should communicate frequently with the home of each student through newsletters, notes, phone calls, and/or emails. The parents, however, are also responsible for making the communication a two-way endeavor. (Mr. Winslow)

Many participants deemed communication to be the key to student achievement. Still, communication must be both ways, and both parents and teachers must feel comfortable talking to each other about issues that may not be well received. Lezotte (2001) explained that to create a successful relationship, both schools and parents must trust and communicate that they "have the same goal-an effective school and home for all children" (p. 4).

From the responses described above, communication was important to both parents and teachers in helping improve student achievement. As one parent said, parents get "real answers when there is a true issue" and want more positive communication. Teachers sometimes attributed communication to involvement, and while they put the crux of the responsibility on themselves, one teacher explained that it was a "two-way" endeavor. Regardless of the group asked, communication seems to be key in moving students forward.

Parental Involvement

Teachers and parents in this study recognized that student achievement and parental involvement were parallel to success. The line between parental involvement and communication was sometimes blurred in their responses, but in the end both recognized parental involvement as a key to improving student achievement. In the case of this theme, teachers had more to say about parental involvement. Teachers recognized

that parents sometimes have barriers to their involvement, as evidenced by the following comments:

> I think that probably the biggest barrier is a lack of parental involvement and that is not always due to an unwillingness on the part of the parent to participate but may be things that are brought about by circumstances such as work schedules, and different things like that. (Miss Williams)
>
> Teachers must also set high expectations for parents to be involved and present in their child's educational journey - providing as many opportunities as possible to foster this involvement. This is another area in which extensive research shows consistently that involved parents make for higher achieving students. (Mrs. Pluska)
>
> Lack of parental involvement - not just an unwillingness to be here but no time due to jobs, other responsibilities. (Mrs. Zimmerman)
>
> Parent involvement in student achievement is critical to the success of students. This however, is not always easy to attain with so many students coming from single parent households or living with grandparents. We need to seek other avenues for remediation that will accommodate all students so they will have a better chance of success. After school programs only benefit those who have a means of transportation to get them there. (Mr. Clement)

As the above quotes emphasize, teachers believed parental involvement to be an important aspect of a child's education. Miss Williams recognized that parents may have other obligations and circumstances that prevent involvement in their children's education, while Mrs. Pluska explained the need for "high expectations" from the to

holding parents accountable to make their students successful. Teachers and parents had similar answers when it came to parental involvement, and while the responses from parents emphasized that it was lacking, ideas for how to improve involvement alluded both parties. Parents recognized that involvement in their children's education was crucial in order to find out what was going on in their children's lives in school as evidenced by the following parent comments:

> I said before parent involvement in everything helps that child along a lot more than a parent that don't really follow up on what the child is really doing. (Mr. Evelyn)
>
> Its [*sic*] important when parents are involved in child improvement and parent involvement for student academics. Staying on tasks with child's needs for school, and helping them remember due dates, monitoring, safety, leadership. All of the above to help student with their academics. (Mr. William)
>
> Checking homework daily, asking questions. Checking grades online and involvement with the teachers if needed. (Mr. Biggerstaff)
>
> Maintaining involvement in the education system. (Miss Smith)
>
> Parents not understanding what is expected of their children (at school, to graduate). Parents not knowing how to help their children with their homework. (Mr. Tom)

Parents seemed to recognize the need to be involved in their children's education, but often other obstacles got in the way, such as work, home life, and sometimes poor communication between the home and school. While teachers may have had the strongest feelings about parent involvement, parents did as well, as exemplified by Parent

20 who recognized the need to be involved. Parents recognized the importance of being involved, checking homework, setting boundaries, and understanding what was going on in their children's schools as evidenced by the parent comments.

High Expectations

Effective schools have a climate of high expectations (Lezotte, 1991). Schools that establish high expectations for all students and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations have high rates of academic success (Benard, 1995). In the current study, teachers and parents had similar opinions about high expectations and their impact on student achievement. Parents believed that supporting the teachers and demanding high expectations at home would set the pace for students at school as evidenced by the following parent quotes:

> Yes. We need high expectations. We do not want to limit ourselves or students by setting expectations to low. We should always expect the very best from our students. I think teachers should also know when to push and when to hold back. Good teachers know this for each of their students. (Mr. Kevin)
>
> We have very high expectations but we have healthy view of the school that we portray that to our son so that he has a respect for what is going on. (Mr. William)
>
> I have three kids and I learned that the hard way you expect the same out of all three of them and you really put that load on a child and I think that is kind of going to back them up too because they want to perform well for you because you've got the high expectations and if you put it too high on them that child might not have that capability and you put that high expectation on that child they

kind of back pedal in my opinion I've seen that with my own child. (Mrs. Mitchell)

Some teachers do not have high expectations of their students and I see that as the single greatest obstacle that there is to improving student achievement. (Mrs. Ryder)

Establishing high expectations depends on each child. A parent must know his/her child's abilities. If a child is capable of all A's, then they should be expected. If a child struggles to get C's, then those should be the expectations. Once the expectations are established, then consequences should be given at home when the expectations are not met - even if it means giving up other important things in the child's life. (Mrs. Lidia)

Similar to parents, teachers believed that the minimum just would not do, and high expectations must be set for all students as evidenced by the following teacher quotes:

Yes, because if they don't set the standards high the students are not going to necessarily be willing to reach beyond what they already are working at. (Miss Laura)

High expectations are essential for students. Although some students will go above and beyond without being asked, most students will meet the minimum requirements. It is the job of the adults involved in education to determine the students' goals & expect the students to reach them. (Mr. George)

> The teacher's role in developing high expectations should be to differentiate instruction, and be the coach in the classroom - spurring everyone to their best potential. (Mr. Mike)
>
> The classroom setting is the "root" of student expectations of which the teacher sets themselves. A teacher's enthusiasm for learning spills over to the students. Students that are excited about learning will learn. A teacher that has consistent high expectations for all students will produce a class full of successful students. (Miss Willams)
>
> The teacher should have high, but realistic, expectations for every student. The teacher must believe that every student is capable of learning and value every learner. (Mr. Cody)

Both teachers and parents expressed similar responses when asked about high expectations for students. One teacher did not blame either the parents or the teachers specifically, but rather said it was the job of all adults to have high expectations for students. While parents and teachers described high expectations in similar ways, their roles explained high expectations differently. The teachers' vision of high expectations was for their instruction to be garnered toward academic rigor, whereas parents saw high expectations as the final outcome for students in class. Parents were more interested in whether their students received an "A," whereas teachers were more interested in what the student learned from the instruction, which may not always equate to an "A."

> A great deal of research has been done to show that high expectations affect achievement in all areas, for all parties involved including the parent, teacher and student. Parents should have high expectations for their children AND their

children's teacher(s). People in general can only rise up as high as the challenge you put before them. If there is not a challenge present, no growth needs to take place. Parents do not need to expect their child to make 100's on every assignment that comes their way but they do need to expect them to work hard and try on every task. Parents should also expect teachers to provide an education to their child that is engaging and relevant. Teachers in turn must set high expectations for their students to try hard and be open to learning and high expectations for themselves to constantly tap into their own creativity to think outside of the box and deliver lessons that are fresh and appeal to students on all levels (sensory, auditory, visual and emotional). Teachers must also set high expectations for parents to be involved and present in their child's educational journey - providing as many opportunities as possible to foster this involvement. This is another area in which extensive research shows consistently that involved parents make for higher achieving students. High expectations must exist all the way up the chain of command from teachers to principals, to local school boards to state agencies. We must expect to get the best education available for our children as parents and be expected to provide the best education possible as educators in order to come even close to hitting the mark. (Mrs. Pluska)

There was very little delineation between parents and teachers when it came to having high expectations for students. Parents felt as if they should define high expectations by the grades their children should receive, whereas teachers defined high expectations as the rules of their classroom and the rigor of their lesson plans.

Instructional Leadership

Teachers are not solely responsible for student success. Rather, instructional leadership extends to parents, community, and other school leaders. Tradition has indicated that the society and parents also have a role to play in helping students achieve in education. The following quotes from the teacher interviews and the online focus group exemplify the teachers' beliefs surrounding instructional leadership:

> Instructional leadership involves the administrator, the teachers & support staff and the students. Teachers are knowledgeable in their subject areas and have a wide variety of instructional strategies that they use to fit the needs of their students. Teachers use knowledge of student achievement to guide their lessons & planning. Teachers share new understandings with their colleagues. Within a building teachers are aware of the strengths and specialties of their colleagues and seek out the help of those individuals as needed. Under the guidance of the teachers, support staff provide additional practice for students. The administrator oversees the process, providing a variety of needs, from materials, training to discipline. (Mr. George)
>
> Instructional leadership affects achievement because the leaders hire the teachers, decide how money is spent, make schedules, make disciplinary protocol, and provide a procedural framework for the school. If the instructional leader does not understand how learning takes place, then the leader cannot [*sic*] provide support to teacher. In Smalltown County where we have more inexperienced teachers, we need strong instructional leaders to support and guide them. As a

parent in Smalltown County have some concerns about the leadership in our schools but I don't feel like I have an avenue to voice my concerns. (Miss Laura)

The teacher becomes the planner when developing instructional leadership, deciding who, what, when and how, and who will help with all of this. (Mr. Mike)

The teacher is a collaborative partner for developing instructional leadership. Teachers learn well from fellow teachers with similar experiences. (Miss Williams)

Teachers indicated that instructional leadership was a collaborative effort and the parents had similar beliefs. The following quotes from parents demonstrated their belief that instructional leadership is a shared responsibility:

Instructional leadership is a shared responsibility of all stakeholders-parents, students, teachers, all school staff and you know bus drivers are the first person a kids sees when they get on the bus and most bus drivers greet them with a smile and get that day started off right and principals usually greet children and checking on things and usually asking about their day and teachers are saying have a good day or are you playing a ballgame last night and how was that and you know just making that child feel positive about the day from the beginning of the day from the time they step on the bus to the time they step off the bus in the afternoon all of that is leadership and letting the child know that you are cared about and you know that we are here to help you to get the best education you can. I think it is a shared responsibility not just the regular classroom teacher, parents and everybody share that responsibility in my opinion. (Miss Lorena)

Parents can assist in developing instructional leadership by serving on committees that assist the school. (Mr. Jason)

Frequent monitoring of student progress and good instructional leadership go hand in hand. (Mrs. Joan)

As evidenced by the above quotes, parents were split as to who was responsible for leadership, with one citing it as a shared responsibility while others stated that the responsibility mainly fell to the teacher, school, and administration. However, parents did identify that they, too, could be part of the leadership effort.

The data from participants helped generate similar ideas that instructional leadership should be a shared endeavor, but also that communication is key in making collaboration work. The participants' answers and conventional wisdom about instructional leadership emphasized the existence of an unmistakable correlation between the need for both parents and teachers to be part of the instructional leadership in schools. Both parties agreed that the quality of school leadership significantly impacted student achievement. The operative notion is largely dependent upon how each group defined its role, and how the communication issues between parents and teachers could be overcome.

School Safety

Violence, such as the high profile school shootings in Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, can cause concern within school communities, even if they are not directly affected by the event. School communities struggle to understand why these events happen and, more importantly, how they can be prevented. As such, school safety is a big concern for both parents and teachers.

The following quote from a parent blog entry explains the need for a safe environment. Mrs. Tanika wrote that "safety and order in the classroom are key to student development! Students can still have hands on and group activities in an orderly fashion." Mr. Kevin echoed a similar sentiment, pronouncing that "safety is the most important task that teachers must maintain. Order is key to success, chaos leads to confusion, boredom, and mischief. Safe space allows students to have fun and learn at the same time." Other parents agreed as evidenced by the following quotes:

> Making sure your child does not carry harmful products to school, following school book rules to safety to keep order in the environment. (Mrs. Tanika)
>
> No greater gift are we given than our children. Loving, nurturing, encouraging, safety, and security should be at the top of a parent's list for their children's well-being. (Mr. Antonio)
>
> Staying on tasks with child's needs for school, and helping them remember due dates, monitoring, safety, leadership. All of the above to help student with their academics. (Mr. William)

Teachers also believed that safety was of the utmost importance in their daily routines. Mr. Ladi wrote that "Teachers maintain safety and develop skills for each child, this changes per kid, while Mrs. Nicole indicated that teachers need to consider the child first (health, well-being, safety).

> The teacher needs to make sure that students are following school and classroom rules. The teacher also needs to be organized in regards to procedures, lesson plans, location of material, and daily routines. These things contribute to student

safety and a feeling of comfort that makes it easier to focus on learning for both student and teacher. (Mrs. Zimmerman)

It is solely the teacher's role to provide a safe, orderly learning environment within the classroom. A safe and orderly school environment is a collaborative effort of all administrators, teachers and staff. (Miss Williams)

School safety was one of the underlying themes that came from participants' responses. All participants believed the well-being of children was the top priority of both parents and teachers, though as in all of the responses, participants had their own ideals of how it should be carried out. Still, teachers and parents had different ideas about safety. Parents saw safety as the "physical safety" of their children (e.g., are the buildings secure, are their school resource officers in schools, etc.?), while teachers looked at safety from a point of view of everything being in order (e.g., are the rules and routines being followed?). In both cases, however, participants agreed that the children's well-being must be looked after.

Summary

From an analysis of the generated themes related to the experiences of my research participants, I was able to summarize my study findings through the development of the five textural descriptions of the perceptions of parents and teachers. First, communication is the key to any good relationship and it is no different in the relationship between parents and teachers. Effective communication skills are imperative for the success of any relationship and this research indicated that both parents and teachers understand that positive communication will certainly increase the opportunities to improve student achievement. Second, parental involvement is crucial to support

learning and children tend to do better in school when schools and families work together. Third, while the idea for high expectations has not always been a normal part of the educational landscape, it was an important theme identified by parents and teachers in the current study. The perceptions of parents and teachers were very evident based upon their given roles, and while both clearly identified the importance of high expectations, their definitions were clearly different. Fourth, instructional leadership is indistinguishably linked to student achievement and while the roles of the principal and superintendent are important, classroom instruction is second to none, with teachers being the instructional leaders with the biggest impact on student achievement. The difference between parent and teacher perceptions about instructional leadership was emphasized by the roles of the parent and teacher. Still, both agreed that instructional leadership is a shared responsibility and communication between parents and teachers is still lacking. Finally, significant academic improvements can be achieved with a renewed look at school safety and the issues of disruption, order in the classrooms, fear held by parents and students, and the time involved away from academics for school leadership. The recent tragic event at Sandy Hook Elementary has once again renewed the consideration of the school safety issue beyond the classroom and has forced districts across America to look at the challenges faced by schools. All participants in this research believed the well-being of children should be the top priority of schools, although participants had their own ideas of how it should be carried out.

Structural Description

By dissecting and evaluating the transcripts of the interviews, online focus group, and parent and teacher questionnaires, I was able to texturally describe the perceptions of

parents and teachers. From a description of the textures of the experience as previously presented, I explained what appeared in the experience. The next step was to identify and interpret the structural experience and to describe how the experience happened. The structural experience seeks to understand the question, "What does this mean?" (Moustakas, 1994).

My research participants were able to expand on their feelings related to their own children and students. They were able to explain their thoughts on their own position and what they thought of each other's position in improving student achievement. Every concept of education is different but all have a way of relating to each other. Additionally, persons possess conflicting perceptions toward education and its entirety. As some parents and teachers supported the correlates of effective schools, others thought otherwise.

Education is at minimum a two-way relationship involving teachers and parents. Each of the entities blames the other when the system fails to deliver as expected and each strives to receive recognition when success is achieved. Everyone is accountable in the end for the school's performance and thus all parties must work hard to ensure success. According to the questionnaire results from teachers and parents, it is fascinating that each of them acknowledged that the research shows that effective schools have strong instructional leadership, provide a clear and focused mission, cultivate a safe and orderly environment, have a climate of high expectations, frequently monitor student progress, promote a positive home-to-school relationship, and create student opportunity to learn and time on task in the classroom. Yet, each also pointed a finger at the other for the faults they found in the correlates. Both parents and teachers understood the

importance of the correlates of effective schools but sometimes ignored carrying them out. As some might put it, education transforms little kids into mature, well-mannered, and responsible people. For every successful society, education takes center stage in nurturing its members and molding them into top-notch people and in order to help create that successful society it takes parents and teachers working together.

The data signify how people in different roles see their place and that of others in the job of proving students successful. Parents and teachers possess different characteristics that they should merge to form a strong front in order to curb the barriers. Owing to the nature of this investigation, the results center on the assumption that what the parents identified through their perspectives and what the teachers identified through their perspectives is in fact taking place in the schools in which they had personal encounters. These characteristics are, in fact, known as the correlates of effective schools.

Composite Description

The above synthesis was an attempt to provide a summary of my textural and structural findings by way of a comprehensive description of the perceptions of teachers and parents of the effective school correlates. The essence of the experience as I have presented it revealed the shared experience of the research participants' perceptions.

The correlates of effective schools appear to be simple tasks that many schools can adopt. They are factors external to normal school programs but seemingly have an impact on the education of all children. From the discussions, parents and teachers get a hint of their weaknesses and strengths of the effective school correlates. While the problems come in different forms, the most important thing is that they have solutions.

As previously mentioned, all problems have solutions and it takes both parents and teachers to help resolve these problems. More colloquially, "It takes two to tango." In this case, solutions should be sought to the themes that came out of this research related to the perceptions of parents and teachers surrounding what makes schools effective: (a) communication, good home-to-school relationship; (b) parental involvement; (c) high expectations; (d) instructional leadership; and (e) school safety. In some cases, parents and teachers thought along the same lines, as in communication. However, who will take the first step? Additionally, more communication could solve the issue of parental involvement, as there were many definitions of what that entails as well. Setting high expectations for children fell on both parties, and instructional leadership was mostly left to the schools and school leadership. School safety is a topic that will be debated for the ages, but all seemed to agree of its importance without question.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the major findings from this study of the perceptions of parents and teachers about the success of the selected elementary schools in their incorporation of the seven correlates of effective schools established by the literature. Horizontalization of the data produced five major themes that were given a textural, structural, and composite description. This chapter presents a summary of the findings with recommendations for future research and lessons learned about the research process from the perspective of the researcher.

Summary of Findings

There have been skeptics of the public education system since its genesis. In Lezotte's (1991) research of effective schools, he noted similar, identifiable correlates that made these schools successful in educating all students. Those correlates were: (a) clear school mission, (b) high expectations for success, (c) instructional leadership, (d) frequent monitoring of student progress, (e) student time on task and an opportunity to learn, (f) safe and orderly environment, and (g) home-school relations. Lezotte (2009) concluded that schools that aligned with these seven correlates and were consistent over time had greater student achievement. The current study supports Lezotte's (1991) findings surrounding the correlates of effective schools. As such, this qualitative study was not intended to document what we know about the correlates of effective schools but rather to expand upon the perceptions of parents and teachers separately about the correlates. The themes generated from this research were: (a) communication, good home-to-school relationship; (b) parental involvement; (c) high expectations; (d)

instructional leadership; and (e) school safety. All five themes correspond with existing correlates of effective schools.

According to Williams (2011), all stakeholders must be available and share the same vision of the school. The school leaders will need to plan extensively and collaborate with teachers, parents, and students. Effective schools involve parents, students, and teachers to provide avenues for involvement during the school day and outside school. As such, the purpose of this study was to solicit and assess the perceptions of parents and teachers about how well the selected elementary schools were doing in the seven effective school correlates.

RQ1. How do parents and teachers view the effective correlates identified by Lezotte (1991) as they relate to student achievement?

Parents and teachers alike had a favorable view of the correlates of effective schools. This research showed genuine concern from participants about all seven of the correlates, though five themes of greatest concern emerged from the data. The themes that emerged occurred in all the data collected, providing evidence that the data can be trusted. Because of the findings, more trust can be put in the correlates as being typical perceptions of both parents and teachers.

In 2006, Bencivenga concluded that the fundamental vision is caring for children, and then their academic success follows. His research showed that there must be a meaningful and practical shared vision to promote a school culture that values the social and emotional well-being of students. The shared vision must be an essential approach that can become the basis for the academic success of students and a profound force in nurturing and unifying parents and teachers. The results from this study support

Bencivenga's findings as the collective vision of parents and teachers was the same. Specifically, all participants recognized the need to share a unified front in promoting student achievement.

The data from this research did support that the participants had a favorable view of the correlates; however, the role of the participants (i.e., parent or teacher) changed their perceptions of the correlates and the solutions to any issues. In 1995, Murray concluded that parents perceived all correlate items to exist in the school where the research was conducted. However, there were identifiable differences between what parents perceived was most important. Research indicates that for teachers and parents to work together for the success of students, the scripted way of doing things must change (Graue, 1998). Schools and parents alike must look inward and focus on the nucleus of the problem as a starting point for changing the school landscape. Through a collaborative endeavor, the community, parents, and educators work to create a shared vision that represents both parent and teacher knowledge. This collaborative action plan will further articulate the hopes and dreams held for children and establish schooling as a collaborative endeavor (Pushor, 2007).

In *Parental Involvement: Key to Student Achievement*, Burke and Hara (2004) explained that school personnel and parents struggle with the "how tos" of getting more parents involved. The issues that came from the current study were similar, in that teachers may say, "We ask parents to be more active, but it's always the same parents." Parents also may struggle with increasing their school involvement. Their issues often involve feelings of, "My work schedule doesn't allow me to attend meetings during the day. What can I do to help with my child's homework - I don't even understand it!?!"

These statements are indicative of how parents and teachers may react to trying to get involved in their children's education. This research revealed similar findings as each side acknowledged the need for involvement, but could not seem to get on the same page of how to improve communication or to get it started.

There was disagreement among the participants about which correlate was the biggest barrier, and there was contention about certain correlates and who should shoulder most of the responsibility for the correlate. In terms of the themes that were developed from the data, communication (i.e., home-to-school relationships) was the most mentioned among all participants, but the participants also pointed the finger of blame at the other party for beginning or maintaining good communication. Some parents believed that it was a major problem, while others talked about the communication being good and lifting up their children. Other participants took a different view on communication, speaking about the posting of grades and the communication piece that new technology brings to parents. The literature supports the findings and concludes that communication between home and school should be on a regular basis, is a two-way street, and should be meaningful (National PTA, 2012). Communication between home and school helps a teacher know a student better, which in turn helps teacher be more effective. Communication also helps strengthen the parents' integral role in assisting with student learning. The discussion of the parent's role in their child's education was also mentioned by both teachers and parents. Each side agreed that a parent's role is vital in a student's achievement. This line of thinking addressed high expectations for success, frequent monitoring of student progress, student time on task and an opportunity to learn, and home-school relations.

The findings indicated that parents' and teachers' perceptions of the correlates varied based on their own experiences and views of their own influence on a student's achievement. Further research should be explored to recognize the challenges associated with increasing the knowledge of parents and teachers surrounding the correlates of effective schools. Perhaps a committee of parents and teachers should meet to discuss their different perceptions of how each of the correlates of effective schools affects student achievement.

RQ2. What do parents and teachers perceive to be the most important things schools can do to improve student achievement?

There was little difference among the responses from the parents and teachers for each correlate. When comparing the themes that came out of the parent and teacher responses from the online focus group, questionnaires, and interviews, communication (i.e., home-to-school relation) was the prevailing theme, and thus deemed the most important piece for improving student achievement by both parents and teachers. According to Adams and Christenson (2000), the alliance between home and school has dramatically changed throughout the history of education, as have the roles and functions that parents and teachers are expected to fulfill. In this research, neither parents nor teachers offered a way to increase communication and only stated that it needed to be improved. Some parents defined communication as the need for grades to be posted to allow them to be closer to the needs of their students, while others heralded the communication of teachers. Teachers often defined communication as the need for parental involvement in their children's education, and even related the communication piece to keeping students on task in the classroom.

Similar comments were made by both parents and teachers about the differences between how parents and teachers saw the communication between the school and the home, but the consensus was that the more communication between the two about real issues, the better off the students would be in terms of achievement. This also supports parental involvement as being effective in improving student achievement (Sirvani, 2007).

Communication should take place on all occasions, both good and bad, when possible. Parents seem to understand that teachers cannot call them for every issue, but would like to hear more about their children before grades, behavior, or any other obstacle gets out of hand. In the teacher questionnaire, it was noted that teachers should have "timely and informative communication, letting parents know when their child is doing something good as well as when he or she is struggling." Additionally, teachers should invite parents to be a part of what is happening in the classroom as much as possible. These results were consistent with existing research literature. According to Desimone (1999), relationships cultivated between school and home can reduce many of the problems in education today, such as the lack of communication between teachers and parents as well as the lack of parental involvement. Epstein (1995) explained that parental involvement in a child's education is a crucial element in academic success and frequent communication attempts between schools and home have resulted in increased academic achievement. Further research about the impact of communication between the home and school will add to the understanding of the effectiveness of communication and parental involvement.

RQ3. What barriers do parents and teachers perceive to exist with regard to improving student achievement?

Communication was clearly the most important thing parents and teachers believed could improve student achievement, and it also seemed to be the biggest barrier though it was defined differently by parents and teachers. Some parents explained in the questionnaire that they did not understand what was expected of their children at school, while others expressed frustration with homework and the lack of explanation from teachers. Parents were not pigeon holing teachers into making phone calls to them; however, they expressed the need for communication to be positive. They were looking for feedback from teachers about their children and for teachers to work in collaboration with each other to benefit all students. Parents felt that communication would open the doors for opportunities for their children, and felt that if a teacher got to know their child, they could differentiate instruction to better meet that individual child's needs.

Of course, teachers had similar concerns about communication but from their perspective the responsibility fell to the parents, and they defined communication more in terms of involvement. Feuerstein (2000) found that due to the wide range of activities considered to be related to involvement, defining parent involvement has been hard for teachers and parents. In T. Wright's (2009) study about parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement, he found that parents particularly felt strongly about the desire to have a closer relationship with the teacher. The study also found that parents wanted more communication with teachers in order to stay updated on what was going on at school. The parents indicated a need for more formal and informal conferences and wanted to participate in school events. It is clear from this research, and supported by

that of T. Wright, that the perceptions of teachers and parents are different about each other's roles. The literature supports that parents want to participate, though participation is hard to define.

Clearly, communication (i.e., home-to-school relationship) is a key barrier in the school district in the current study. However, the perceptions of parents and teachers of where the blame lies clearly were skewed. It should be noted that some parents and teachers took the responsibility on themselves and believed that communication started with them, or at the very minimum that they were part of the problem. The literature supports the importance of the home-to-school relationship and suggests that positive communication will in turn have a positive impact on student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). In the current study, parents and teachers agreed that the home-to-school relationship was important in moving forward, but they must be able to recognize each other's perceptions of communication in order to do so.

Another barrier that was briefly mentioned and should not be overlooked, and one upon which both sides clearly agreed, was that standards of learning (SOLs) in the educational process are overwhelming and some believed counterproductive. Parents expressed frustration that they felt teachers were teaching to the SOL test and "that inhibits them to really teach." A teacher explained it as "kids are not retaining anything and they are not learning anything that will help them in life." One participant even explained the frustration by saying, "the state expects so much of children, many of whom enter school with little exposure and experience."

My personal perspective is important to note here. As a school principal who has been asked to take on the barriers to improve student achievement, having the knowledge

of the correlates of effective schools has proven to be instrumental in my school's success. I would concede that I was somewhat surprised, and disappointed, about some of the results of this research. In today's technological world, schools are constantly looking for new and improved ways to communicate to all stakeholders. Schools use email, webpages, online programs that allow parents to keep track of their children's grades, automated calls, school newsletters, county newsletters, radio, social media, and individual school signs to communicate. Yet, this study points to communication as the biggest deficit between parents and teachers. There is still a communication piece that is lacking between parents and teachers about where the blame might lie, student differentiation, and the goals of improving student achievement that cannot be overlooked.

Burke and Hara (1998) concluded in their book, *Parent Involvement: The Key to Improved Student Achievement*, that without a structured parent involvement program that addresses specific areas of parent and teacher concerns, parents will likely continue their rather minimal involvement in school-related activities. However, schools that make efforts to improve communication are likely to see improved student achievement. Further study of the relationship and importance assigned to parent involvement programs and the impact of those parents participating versus those declining to become involved should be conducted. Also, staff development is important as teachers engage parents in a positive productive manner that helps begin the dialogue needed in this community. A review should be conducted on school and district policies and procedures about recruiting parents to participate in school functions. Finally, I further recommend contacting other school districts and inquiring as to how they help bridge the gap in

communication between parents and teachers. It will also be helpful to obtain communication materials that can help teachers and parents develop their relationships.

RQ4. In what ways do the perceptions of parents and teachers differ from one another as they relate to student achievement?

There were many differences in the perceptions from parents and teachers taken from this research. Many teachers simply believed that some parents were apathetic to education and that priorities in the homes were not aligned with those at schools. Some parents thought expectations were too high from teachers, and that the influence of government regulations and testing made teachers robotic in their delivery. This type of teaching, some parents believed, simply made students memorize and repeat, and offered no real content knowledge.

There were comments from parents about the lack of availability of learning opportunities, while some teachers believed that students were not taking advantage of the opportunities given to them to learn. Teachers and parents also differed on the preparation of students. There were some data that suggested teachers believed that students were not coming prepared to school, and that parents were not taking the time to help with homework. According to Linton (2011), a core issue in the decline of the educational system is parental apathy. He explained that parents no longer hold themselves, let alone their children, accountable and that the United States has become a place where parents expect teachers to teach and discipline their children and feel they should not have to do anything at home. Parents commented that they could not help with some subjects, and that jobs and other commitments stood in the way of them helping their children. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* (Shellenbarger, 2012)

showed that a growing number of parents are struggling to help their children with the increasingly complicated homework, suggesting that the parents in this study are not alone.

The biggest difference between parents and teachers was clearly that of communication. The need for better communication (i.e., a good home-to-school relationship) has been thoroughly discussed as the pinnacle of the issues that resulted from this research. Parents and teachers shared their perceptions about the importance of communication and each defined their roles in the process. Time and again, the research supports that parents and teachers shares the goal of helping children learn and feel successful. The research has proven that when parents and teachers work together, everyone benefits—student achievement rises, attendance is higher, and students are better behaved and show more positive attitudes toward themselves and school. School programs that include strong parent involvement are more effective (Canter, 2013).

Looking at the data as a whole shows that the participants understood their part in the process was their responsibility, but mostly each side drew a line in the sand and pointed a finger at the other side. Parents and teachers felt involvement was an important part of the process, but parents became tied up in the perceived lack of effort on the part of the teachers while teachers got caught up in that they did not see parents when they needed to see them. There was little difference in the perceptions from parents and teachers in terms of high expectations of students. Both parents and teachers did make note of the constant struggle with the standards of learning and each group felt it was necessary to increase student achievement. Instructional leadership was considered more part of the teachers' (and schools') responsibility than part of the parents' responsibilities,

though some teachers made note that parents should take a role in their children's education by preparing them for school, helping with homework, and not being apathetic about school. School safety was addressed by both parents and teachers, and each agreed that school safety was of the utmost importance with each party having a role. I would have to think that this theme may have played a different role in the research had the study not ended just a few days before the events in Sandy Hook, CT. The study also showed some differences in both parents' and teachers' perceptions of the correlates of effective schools. Future studies need to examine specific correlates of effective schools and where the differences may be among parents and teachers and the impact that specific school correlates have on student achievement.

Recommendations

Based on the results from the current study, the following recommendations are suggested. To bridge the communication gap between parents and teachers and begin a healthy dialogue, I would first recommend a standard communication practice be set for schools in this district. Proper and accurate communication seems to be an issue that transcends both parents and teachers. I would recommend that teachers extend their invitation of communication to parents as much as possible, and explain to parents their clear expectations of their classrooms for the year. Teachers should also put clear directions online and in a syllabus to ensure blanket coverage of the rules and expectations of both the parents and teachers. Clear communication from teachers will ensure that parents understand the expectations for the school year.

In order to increase parental involvement, I would also suggest a comprehensive plan that would enable parents to understand what teachers do, and a volunteer plan to

allow parents in the schools. I recommend that parents attend training in the schools that corresponds with teacher training and that schools develop contracts with parents that show a commitment from families to their children's education. These contracts can be conformed to meet the needs of both parties, and will open the channel of communication about instructional leadership and the role of both teachers and parents to make it work successfully.

As school safety is on the minds of many parents, as part of the communication piece I would suggest a parent group to allow them to express their concerns to teachers as well as building and district leadership. I also recommend that parents from each school in the division become part of the district wide safety team and any instructional committees that would help further an interchange between parents and teachers about school safety.

The final recommendation is to educate all school stakeholders on the correlates of effective schools and offer training to all stakeholders so they can understand that when the correlates are in place, schools are effective and student achievement increases. The recommendations would help to establish clearer lines of communication between parents and teachers. Educating all stakeholders will expose both sides to each other's perspectives, and thus allow for an honest conversation about how each side feels slighted in terms of their roles in students' education.

The research is clear in indicating that schools that implement the correlates of effective schools have higher student achievement rates. This change will require a commitment from both parents and teachers regarding the implementation of the correlates. While some of the correlates are currently in place, the work will need to be

done on where the perceptions differ. Parents and teachers need to understand that these correlates are necessary to increase student achievement, and each group will need to embrace its role in supporting them the efforts to move each school forward.

Lessons Learned and Limitations

Several lessons were learned during the process of conducting this study. First, it is important to fully understand the process of qualitative design from the perspective of the researcher. Many research designs have been developed, and choosing the right one to fit the research is a time consuming and tedious process that should be looked at as carefully as the research itself. A second lesson from this study was the need to handle unexpected complications that arose during the course of the study. One complication during this research was whether to use a program like Weft QDA for analysis of the data such as the interview transcripts and questionnaire answers. Though some of my course work talked about these programs, none addressed the issues directly. While the challenge was unforeseen, I suspect that when the methodology was developed the researchers completed their work in the same manner as I did. Another lesson learned was my lack of experience in "running" an online focus group. As I developed the methodology for this research and worked through the process, I thought using an online focus group (i.e., blog) to triangulate the data would be a noninvasive way for people to answer some of the questions I provided as well as react to what other parents and teachers had to say. However, this did not work out as planned, as there were fewer participants on the online focus group than the questionnaires and interviews. I think in further research an online blog would still be effective, but a researcher could start the process with the online blog. I think participants thought the questionnaire may have

been sufficient and though they said they would participate in the focus group, they lost interest or motivation to participate further.

There were also several limitations to this study. This study included parents and teachers located in a rural school district. As such, the results are not intended to be generalized to parents and teachers in schools located in urban areas. Due to this being a non-random study, parents and teachers were able to opt out of participation, which could have resulted in selection bias. However, given the demographics of the county as shown by the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), parents and teachers who did participate in the study were fairly similar to the general population of parents and teachers in the county. It is likely that selection bias was at play but might not have been problematic.

Recruiting an ample number of participants for the study was another obstacle. I thought that I would get many more participants on the online focus group and questionnaires. Also, I thought because I had worked in the district for 7 years this would give me an advantage, but it did not prove as helpful as I first thought and there were fewer participants than I anticipated. I thought that the online focus group would spark up conversations that were not directly driven by me, but driven more by the parents and teachers. I only heard from two participants about the questionnaire and each had some questions for clarity about how the research would work, and in the end one of those participants even did an interview. Another limitation of the locality was the lack of Internet access, and while my first letter to potential participants stated they could receive a paper and pencil copy to participate, there were no requests for any.

Although participants were asked to express their perceptions about items on the questionnaire and how the items related to student achievement, some participants may

have misinterpreted what they were being asked because they may not have been familiar with the correlates of effective schools. Also, some questions were specific to the correlates of effective schools, and some participants may have drawn different conclusions and definitions that could have led to bias when answering the questions. If participants' interpretations of the questions were different than my intention, the validity of the questionnaire could have been undermined. Also, due to the low response rate, the results of this research may not present a complete picture of teacher and parent perceptions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers about the success of the selected elementary schools in their incorporation of the seven correlates of effective schools established by the literature. The study found that the perceptions of parents and teachers were both similar and different, depending upon their perspective.

As such, the findings from this research were consistent with identifying the importance of the correlates of effective schools to student achievement and suggesting that an honest dialogue between parents and teachers could be easily established to help the district move forward. Participants saw things from their own perspectives and at times had conflicting perceptions. Communication was identified as one of the most important themes by both parents and teachers. Teachers and parents alike saw that for student achievement to move forward, communication needed to be improved, whether by conferences, telephone calls, email, or electronic posting of grades. Notably,

communication perhaps is the easiest of the correlates to address from both sides (i.e., parent and teacher), as changes can be easily implemented.

While communication may have been the cornerstone to the results of this research, the other correlates that were explored cannot be ignored. Parental involvement was also part of the responses where both parents and teachers had similar comments to indicate its importance on student achievement. There were also differences between parents and teachers when it came to defining parental involvement, and that difference would need to be explored in future research.

Teachers and parents had similar opinions about high expectations and their impact on student achievement, as well as the need for the expectations to begin at home. The participants had similar views when it came to providing instructional leadership, and the need for a communal effort extending not only to teachers and parents, but also to other school leaders and the community at large. Finally, school safety was the last theme identified in the research. This theme may have been less obvious than the others as it was often discussed as order and routine by teachers and as the physical safety of students by parents. Still, both parents and teachers agreed that providing a safe environment could improve student achievement.

This study was intended to help start a dialogue between parents and teachers about the importance of the correlates of effective schools. While the overriding theme was clearly about communication, it is the quintessential starting point for the next step in each side understanding the other side's point of view. There were very few differences of opinion when it came to the correlates, but there did seems to be a misunderstanding of what each side knew or believed about the other.

Future research should continue to explore ways to improve communication. When that continued dialogue is established, a two-way street of communication can continue to address differences in the perceptions of all the correlates as well as continue to work to improve student achievement.

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APPENDIX A

Teacher Questionnaire

DESCRIPTION

This questionnaire has 13 questions for assessing teacher perspectives about the Correlates of Effective Schools related to your school setting.

1. I have read and understand the consent form for this study. Type your name in blank.

#	Item
2	Gender O Female (girl) O Male (boy)
3	Race/Ethnicity O White O African-American O Hispanic/Latino O Native American O Asian O Other Races

5. What barriers do you perceive to exist with regard to improving student achievement?

6. What is the role of a teacher in developing a clear school mission?

7. What is the role of a teacher in developing high expectations for student success?

8. What is the role of a teacher in developing instructional leadership?

9. How can a teacher frequently monitor students?

10. What is the role of a teacher in providing students an opportunity to learn and be kept on task?

11. What is the role of a teacher in providing a safe and orderly environment?

12. What is the role of a teacher in ensuring a healthy home-school relationship?

13. Which of these practices identifying a clear school mission, high expectations, opportunity to learn and student time on task, frequent monitoring of student progress, good instructional leadership, a safe and orderly environment, or good home-school relations do you feel is the most important in your role in improving student achievement?

14. Which of these practices a clear school mission, high expectations, opportunity to learn and student time on task, frequent monitoring of student progress, good instructional leadership, a safe and orderly environment, or good home-school relations do you feel is the most important in parents' role in improving student achievement?

15. Would you be willing to participate in an online focus group? If so, please provide your email and the link will be sent to you?

16. Would you be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview? (It can be done on the phone. If so, please provide the best way to contact you.

APPENDIX B

Parent Questionnaire

This questionnaire has 13 questions for assessing parental perspectives about the Correlates of Effective Schools related to your school setting.

1. I have read and understand the consent form for this study. Type your name in blank.

#	Item
2	Gender O Female (girl) O Male (boy)
3	Race/Ethnicity O White O African-American O Hispanic/Latino O Native American O Asian O Other Races

5. What barriers do you perceive to exist with regard to improving student achievement?

6. What is the role of a parent in developing a clear school mission?

7. What is the role of a parent in developing high expectations for student success?

8. What is the role of a parent in developing instructional leadership?

9. How can a parent frequently monitor students?

10. What is the role of a parent in providing students an opportunity to learn and be kept on task?

11. What is the role of a parent in providing a safe and orderly environment?

12. What is the role of a parent in ensuring a healthy home-school relationship?

13. Which of these practices identifying a clear school mission, high expectations, opportunity to learn and student time on task, frequent monitoring of student progress, good instructional leadership, a safe and orderly environment, or good home-school relations do you feel is the most important in your role in improving student achievement?

14. Which of these practices a clear school mission, high expectations, opportunity to learn and student time on task, frequent monitoring of student progress, good instructional leadership, a safe and orderly environment, or good home-school relations do you feel is the most important in parents' role in improving student achievement?

15. Would you be willing to participate in an online focus group? If so, please provide your email and the link will be sent to you?

16. Would you be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview? (It can be done on the phone) If so, please provide the best way to contact you.

Hosted by Effective Schools Reality Check[SM] ESPS, Inc.

APPENDIX C

Semi-structured focus group prompts.

1. Barriers and improving student achievement
2. The role of the school mission
3. How do high expectations effect student achievement?
4. How does instructional leadership effect student achievement?
5. Does frequently monitoring students help raise student achievement?
6. Does providing students with an opportunity to learn and be kept on task raise student achievement? How?
7. Can a safe and orderly environment raise student achievement?
8. Can a healthy home/school relationship improve student achievement?

APPENDIX D

Initial Teacher Participant's Letter

To: [Email]
From: wsroufe@liberty.edu
Subject: Parent/Teacher Perception Questionnaire
Dear Patrick County Educator,

My name is William Sroufe and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Liberty University. Recently, I met with your principal to discuss a study I am conducting to assess the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding school improvement and student achievement. I am asking you to take part in this study as the first step in our collaborative efforts to improve student achievement. Soon, you will receive an email with a link to short questionnaire. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

I know your time is very valuable and I would appreciate you completing this 13-question questionnaire. The information in the study records will be kept confidential in an electronic database that is password protected. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's database, accessible by only the researcher and the researcher's dissertation committee. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study. This anonymity also insures that no one will know if you choose to decline or to participate in this study, including your principal or other school administrators. Nothing you say on the questionnaire will affect you or your student.

By participating in this study, local school leaders and school improvement teams will begin to understand the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the seven effective school correlates. This data will help in improving communication between home and school in order to improve student achievement. For instance, do teacher and parent perceptions of effective school correlates differ? Are they the same? How do the differences impact communication? How do the differences impact student achievement? Answers to these questions can help school leaders and school improvement teams shape their learning plans to meet the needs of students in their buildings.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this study. If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, William Sroufe, at 415 Mulberry Drive, Christiansburg, VA (540) 449-9474 or (276) 692-7606. Once again: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, please follow the link and complete the questionnaire. Thank you and have a wonderful day.

Once again: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, please follow the link and complete the questionnaire.

APPENDIX E

Initial Parent Participant's Letter

To: [Email]
From: wsroufe@liberty.edu
Subject: Parent/Teacher Perception Questionnaire

Dear Patrick County Educator,

My name is William Sroufe and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Liberty University. Recently, I met with the principal to discuss a study I am conducting to assess the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding school improvement and student achievement. I am asking you to take part in this study as the first step in our collaborative efforts to improve student achievement. Soon, you will receive an email with a link to short questionnaire. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

I know your time is very valuable and I would appreciate you completing this 13-question questionnaire. The information in the study records will be kept confidential in an electronic database that is password protected. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's database, accessible by only the researcher and the researcher's dissertation committee. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study. This anonymity also insures that no one will know if you choose to decline or to participate in this study, including your principal or other school administrators. Nothing you say on the questionnaire will affect you or your student.

By participating in this study, local school leaders and school improvement teams will begin to understand the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the seven effective school correlates. This data will help in improving communication between home and school in order to improve student achievement. For instance, do teacher and parent perceptions of effective school correlates differ? Are they the same? How do the differences impact communication? How do the differences impact student achievement? Answers to these questions can help school leaders and school improvement teams shape their learning plans to meet the needs of students in their buildings. Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this study. If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, William Sroufe, at 415 Mulberry Drive, Christiansburg, VA (540) 449-9474 or (276) 692-7606. Once again: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, please follow the link and complete the questionnaire.

Once again: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, please go to the school's website or follow the link sent to you in an email.

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM

A PHENOMOLOGY OF TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS: WORKING TOWARD A SHARED VISION

William D. Sroufe

Liberty University

Education Department

You are invited to participate in a research study of the characteristics of effective schools. You have been selected as a possible participant because you are a parent or teacher in Patrick County, VA. I ask that you read this form carefully. You may ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by William D. Sroufe, Department of Education.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers about the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving student achievement in select elementary schools. The proposed research will help to initiate dialogue about school improvement and to work toward a shared vision of student achievement. In particular, the research will help to identify how teachers and parents' perceptions of improving student achievement in select elementary schools and can help improve school-to-home communication in order to enhance student achievement.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, after returning your signed consent form, you will be asked to participate in an online questionnaire about your opinions on the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving student achievement. An email will be sent to you with a link to a questionnaire. The questionnaire is expected to take 5 - 10 minutes. Upon completion of the questionnaire, you will be asked to supply an email address if you would like to participate in an online focus group (blog) or an interview. The online focus group questions will be derived from the questionnaire and will allow for a free discussion among participants. The interview, which can be done in person or via the telephone, will be conversational, and I will simply ask you questions derived from the questionnaire and the online focus group. The interview is expected to take 10-15

minutes. The focus group discussion will be online and electronically logged. All interviews will be recorded and then transcribed by a professional.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks for this study are minimal and no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation are that your opinions might help the school district to work toward an open dialogue between teachers and parents with the goal of improving student achievement.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. The results, and data from this research will not be used to present at a conference or any publications. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

All data will be stored on the Reality Check website in an encrypted file (password protected) and the principal investigator (PI; William Sroufe) is the only one with the login and password. Upon completion of the study, the information will be downloaded and secured in an encrypted folder on my personal computer. Each file will also be password protected. Three years months after the research has been published, all data will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or with Patrick County Public Schools.

How to Withdraw from Study

If you want to withdraw from the study, simply email me at williamsroufe@yahoo.com or email my committee chair at japuga@liberty.edu. All data associated with your email address will be deleted from the study upon your request.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is William D. Sroufe. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at wsroufe@liberty.edu or 276-692-7606. You may also contact the committee chair, Dr. Jose Puga, School of Education, 956-543-3224 or 956-698-1005 or via email at japuga@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

I agree to have my voice recorded during the interview and focus group components of the research.

IRB Code Numbers: 1415

IRB Expiration Date: 11/25/2013

APPENDIX G

PATRICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

P.O. Box 346 • 104 Rucker Street • Stuart, Virginia 24171
Phone (276) 694-3163 • Fax (276) 694-3170

William D. Sroufe
415 Mulberry Drive
Christiansburg, VA 24073

Mr. Sroufe

The Patrick County School district has agreed to participate in your research proposal, *Teacher and Parent Perceptions of the Characteristics of Effective Schools: Working Toward a Shared Vision.* A copy of this letter should be presented to the principals in order to assure them your research has been approved by the district. Approval is given, however, with the following stipulations.

1. Participation by the school, its teachers and parent is to be on a voluntary basis. That is, participation is not mandatory and you must advise your participants that they are not obligated to participate in your study.
2. Confidentiality must be assured for all participants. That is, all data must be aggregated such that the participants cannot be identified.

Please forward one copy of your completed study for our files.

Good luck with your endeavor. If you have any questions or need advice please do not hesitate to contact me.

Roger N. Morris, Ed.D.
Patrick County Public Schools
Division Superintendent.

CC:
Office of Institutional Review Board
Green Hall, Suite 1582.
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APPENDIX H

Interview questions. The interviews, conducted in-person and via telephone, were conversational and the questions were derived from participants' answers on the questionnaire and in the focus group.

1. In the school you are associated with what barriers do you perceive to exist with regard to improving student achievement?
2. Can the role of the teacher have an impact on the mission of the school? The parent?
3. Are developing high expectations for students necessary? Why? Why not?
4. How do you define instructional leadership?
5. Can frequently monitoring students help raise student achievement? How?
6. Can providing students with an opportunity to learn and be kept on task raise student achievement? How?
7. Does providing a safe and orderly environment raise student achievement? How?
8. How does a healthy home/school relationship improve student achievement?