

Pockets of Educational Excellence: Findings from Effective Schools in Newark and Jersey City

**Report to the Goldman Sachs Foundation
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This report is based on the research project, “Pockets of Educational Excellence,” which addressed the need for improvement in New Jersey’s “special needs school districts,” also known as its “*Abbott* districts.” It is doing so, not by focusing not on their troubles or failures, but rather by focusing on their strengths and the successes currently taking place in some of their schools – their “pockets of educational excellence.” The project has focused on those high-performing schools in an effort to learn from their success.

Originally, we selected eight schools in three Abbott districts, including Jersey City, Newark and Paterson (all under state operation) as sites for the research. Using a multiple regression residual analysis, we identified 16 schools that perform above levels predicted by student, community and school characteristics (see Appendix A for a discussion of the methodology and our use of standardized tests, despite their limitations for identifying highly effective schools). Although our original proposal sought to examine eight schools, logistical problems at the district level in Paterson and the school level in Newark prevented us from including all eight schools. Jersey City was the most welcoming of the districts, providing access to their three schools upon completion of their IRB review process. In Paterson, despite dozens of attempts to follow up on an initial successful planning meeting, the Superintendent’s office would not facilitate our research. In Newark, after six months of negotiation with the

¹ We thank the following doctoral students for their research assistance on this project: Elizabeth Morrison Brown, Chelsea Dullea, Tara Davidson, and Beatrice Yabur. Louise Vaughan, Research Assistant at IELP provided essential editorial and technical assistance.

Superintendent for permission to do the study, we were given permission to study three schools, on the condition that their principals approved. Unfortunately, before the research was scheduled to begin, two of the principals changed their minds, leaving only one school in Newark for the study. One of the schools in Newark that was dropped was the only majority African American school in the study, which magnified a problem related to the demographic characteristics of the original sixteen schools. Based on our analysis of 4th and 8th grade test scores in all Abbott Districts, only one majority African-American school could be classified as highly effective, with the other fifteen majority- Hispanic or Portuguese. This selection process confirms research (http://www.just4kids.org/en/research_policy/higher_performing/), which has highlighted highly on effective schools in the state. Given the removal of the only majority African American school in our sample, we have added one majority African American charter school in Newark, North Star Academy Charter School, a 5-12 school, which met our criteria for highly effective schools using 8th grade achievement data.²

Thus, our research has examined four high-performing schools in two *Abbott* districts, including three Jersey City schools and one in Newark, as well as one charter school in Newark. The research has examined the characteristics of these schools, the districts and communities in which they are located, the students enrolled in the schools, and their families, in an effort to determine what may explain such high levels of proficiency. The goal has been to determine whether those strengths and successes can be replicated in other schools in *Abbott* districts and, indeed, elsewhere in the state and the nation. If it can, the research will be used to develop models to replicate the characteristics of these schools in other schools in Jersey City, Newark, and other districts.

The project has considered three interrelated issues: (1) what school characteristics, such as teaching staff qualifications or tenure, leadership style or instructional program (including whole school reform model), are correlated with success? (2) to what degree do any of these characteristics can be treated as elements of a successful school program, and replicated in other schools that have been less successful with comparable student populations,? and(3) what characteristics of the students, their families and their communities are correlated with the schools' success, and specifically whether demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, English

² Since our research, North Star has expanded to K-12 on three different campuses and is opening another K-4 campus.

proficiency, or the date of immigration are correlated with school success? One aspect of the project is an inquiry into whether any of the successes in the excellent schools can be attributed to any of the *Abbott* reforms. But the project is broader: its central question is whether excellent, high-performing schools in *Abbott* districts can point the way toward successful systemic reform.

The *Abbott* remedies, a series of education reforms including parity funding, whole school reform, high quality preschool, supplemental programs to meet disadvantaged students' special educational needs, and funding for improved school facilities, were first instituted in 1997-98. These reforms are beginning to show results, with academic proficiency levels in the elementary grades rising in the *Abbott* districts at a much higher rate than in the state as a whole. But the proficiency levels, and the rate of improvement in student performance, remain widely divergent among *Abbott* districts and among schools in each district.³

The project has drawn on the body of research on effective schools in urban districts developed by social scientists over the past two decades. Beginning with the work of Ronald Edmonds, this literature has focused on a number of characteristics of effective urban schools, including strong leadership, a focus on student learning, a climate of high expectations, a climate of order and safety, the effective use of student achievement data for improvement and effective professional development for teachers.⁴ However, little of this research has connected school level factors back to family and community factors or considered the effects of immigration status and ethnic diversity on school performance.

This project has built upon the existing research. Data collection and analysis were undertaken with the objective of understanding what makes successful schools successful—whether certain characteristics of students, schools or communities are correlated with success—and, if they are, to create a model of educational excellence based on those characteristics and a strategy for replicating that model in less successful schools. Jersey City and Newark, with large immigrant populations and their racially and ethnically diverse student population, have provided

³ For more information on improvement in *Abbott* districts' student performance, see http://www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/elcnews_041101_TestScoresRising.htm.

⁴ See R. Edmonds, Effective schools for the urban poor, *Educational Leadership*, 37(1), 5-24, 1979a, Some schools work and more can, *Social Policy*, March-April, 28-32, 1979; Programs of school improvement: An overview, *Educational Leadership*, 40, 4-11, 1982; P. Mortimore and G. Whitty, School improvement: A remedy for social exclusion, In A. Hayton (ed.) *Tackling Disaffection and Social Exclusion* (pp. 80-94), London: Kogan Page; A.R. Sadovnik, P.W. Cookson, Jr. and S.F. Semel, *Exploring Education: An Introduction to the Foundations of Education* (Third Edition, Chapter 10, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2006).

an important research site, especially as to the effects of immigration status and ethnic diversity on school performance.

The research began in spring 2005 and was completed in spring 2007. We have conducted a literature search regarding high-performing urban schools and replication methods; and conducted field research in the four schools for two weeks each during spring 2006. Our field research included participant observations in the school and classrooms by two team members in each school, in-depth interviews with teachers and administrators, an online survey of teachers and administrators, Based on our multiple regression analysis of schools that perform above levels predicted by student, community and school characteristics, we studied the Cornelia Bradford School, the Nicholas Copernicus, School Number 25 and the Christine McAuliffe School Number 28.in Jersey City and the Oliver Street School in Newark. The school achievement data for these schools compared to other Abbott districts, Jersey City and Newark districts and all districts in New Jersey are summarized in the following tables:

Fourth Grade Proficiency or Advanced Proficiency

School	Total 4th Grade Lang. Arts	Gen. Ed. 4th Grade Lang. Arts	Total 4th Grade Math	Gen. Ed. 4th Grade Math
New Jersey	78.91	85.73	81.49	86.75
Abbott Districts	60.55	69.74	65.65	73.06
Oliver	81.4	93.4	93.3	100
Copernicus	66.9	76.8	78.7	89
Bradford	94.6	96.9	97.3	96.9
MacAuliffe	81.7	87.3	78.9	81

Eighth Grade Proficiency or Advanced Proficiency

School	Total 8th Grade Lang. Arts	Gen. Ed. 8th Grade Lang. Arts	Total 8th Grade Math	Gen. Ed. 8th Grade Math
New Jersey	71.96	81.30	62.05	70.01
Abbott Districts	48.96	61.13	36.55	44.68
Oliver	52.6	70.1	51	56.3
Copernicus	67.5	85.1	61.7	73.4
Bradford	70.3	82.8	56.8	65.5
MacAuliffe	50.5	91.5	40	59.2

Student Demographics: Race

School	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian
New Jersey	57.27	18.12	17.36	7.08
Abbott Districts	12.39	44.39	40.74	2.26
Oliver	45	8.7	45.5	0.6
Copernicus	17.4	4.3	48.2	29.8
Bradford	12.8	34.2	28.7	23.6
MacAuliffe	13.6	4.4	75.9	5.8

Student Demographics: Poverty

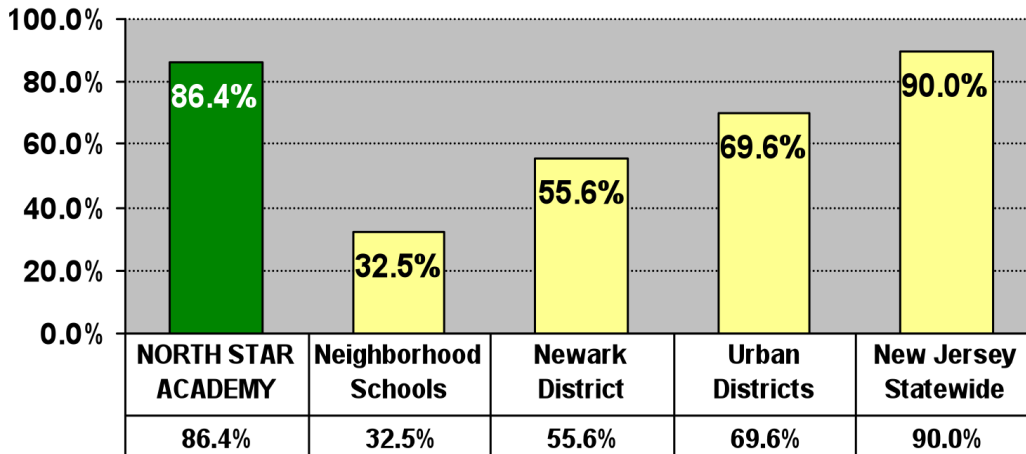
School	% Free Lunch	% Reduced Lunch
New Jersey	22.34	5.92
Abbott Districts	58.68	8.84
Oliver	13	0.7
Copernicus	56.9	17.2
Bradford	39.8	11.5
MacAuliffe	67.4	15.1

Student Demographics: Placement

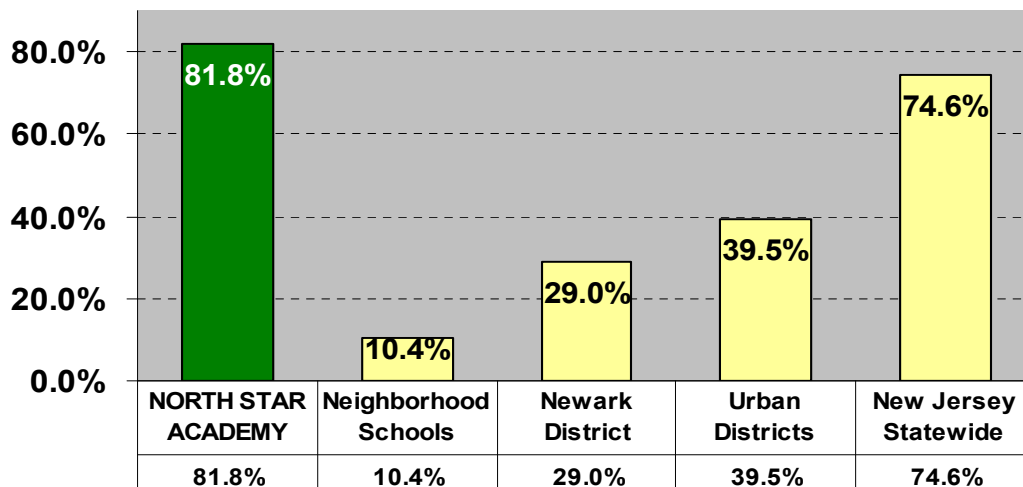
School	% Disab	% English	% LEP	% Special Education
New Jersey	14.34	81.14	3.80	5.29
Abbott Districts	13.99	63.72	10.25	7.6
Oliver	7.7	76.1	23.2	3.08
Copernicus	8.6	29.4	2.4	2.52
Bradford	5.4	53.8	0.5	0.25
MacAuliffe	12.6	32.4	3.2	5.97

In addition, our discussion of North Star is based on field visits and participant observations over the past five years by one team member (Sadovnik), as well as the insights of another team member who was a teacher and administrator there for a number of years (Gordon). Data on North Star are summarized in the following Tables:

LANGUAGE ARTS HSPA 2004 11th Grade Passing Rate General Education Students



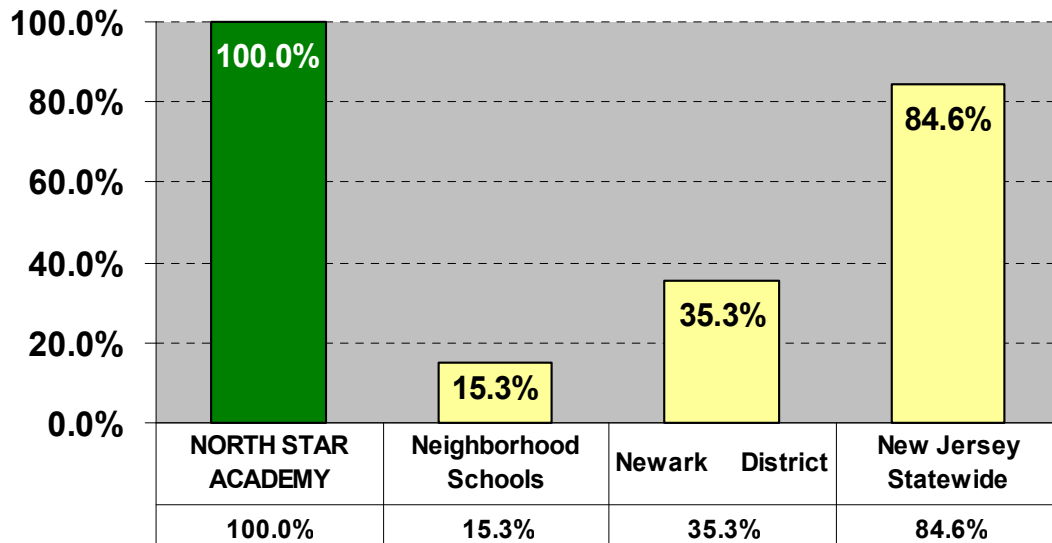
MATH HSPA 2004 11th Grade Passing Rate General Education Students



CLASS OF 2004 FINAL RESULTS

% Graduated by Passing HSPA

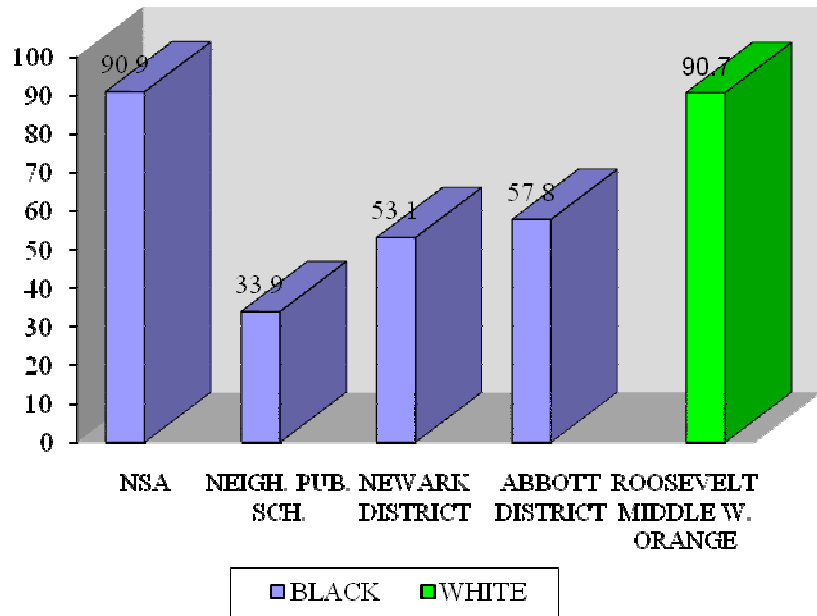
General Education Students



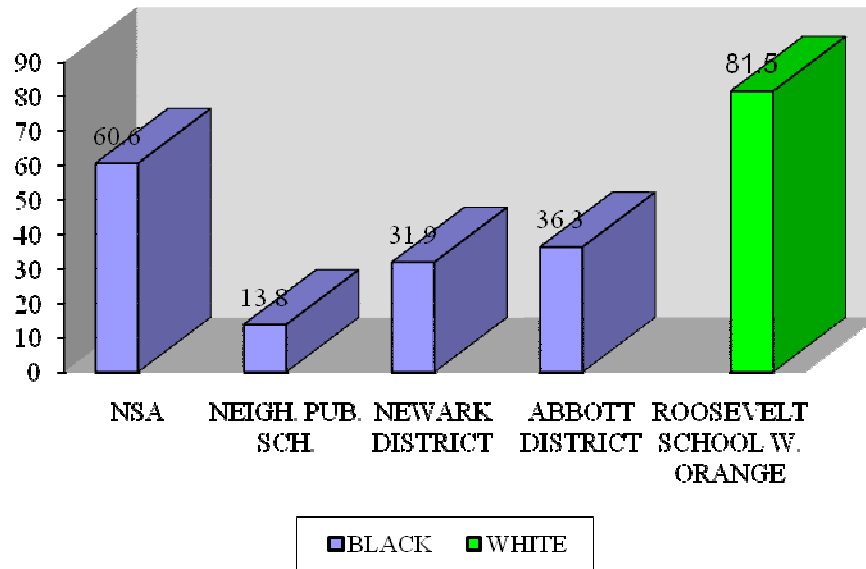
HSPA Results Disaggregated

<i>GROUP (# of students):</i>	Language Arts	Mathematics		
	<i>% tested:</i>	<i>% Proficient</i>	<i>% tested:</i>	<i>% Proficient:</i>
All students (25)	100.0%	80.0%	100.0%	76.0%
African-American (21)	100.0%	81.0%	100.0%	71.4%
Latino (4)	100.0%	75.0%*	100.0%	100.0%*
Disabilities (3)	100.0%	*	100.0%	*
Free/reduced lunch (22):	100.0%	77.3%	100.0%	72.7%

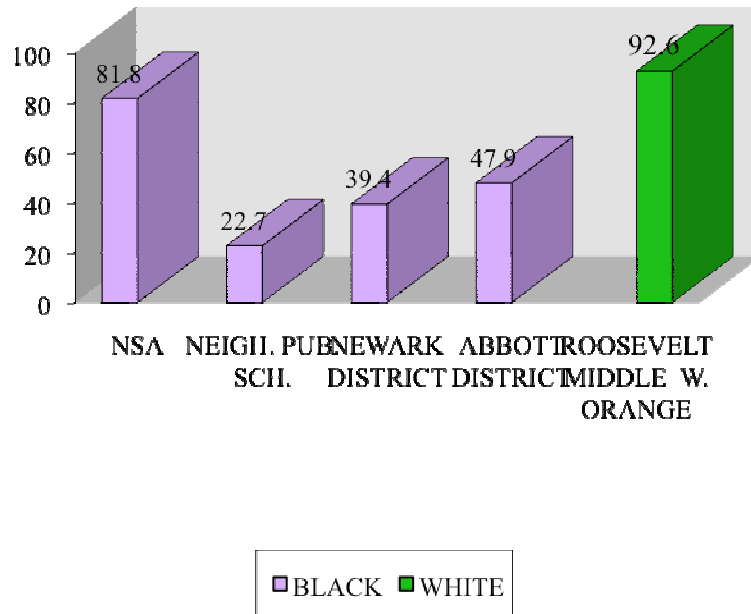
LANGUAGE ARTS GEPA 2004



MATH GEPA 2004



SCIENCE GEPA 2004



Statement of the Problem

Schools in high poverty districts are frequently viewed as *failures*. These schools frequently face the challenge of consistent low student performance, high dropout rates, poor attendance, unqualified teachers, dilapidated buildings, lack of resources, inadequate funding, and inefficient bureaucracies (Noguera, 2003, p. 3). Urban school failure, Noguera states is “pervasive; it is endemic in the nation’s largest cities- New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, and not uncommon in small towns such as East St. Louis, Poughkeepsie, Camden, and Compton.” Furthermore, he contends, “wherever poor people are concentrated and employment scarce,” public schools are frequently in dire straits (Noguera, 2003, p. 3).

Poverty is a major factor contributing to low student achievement. In fact, the poverty level in the United States is significant. In 2006, the official poverty rate was 12.3 percent, which means that 36.5 million people were living in poverty (<http://www.census.gov>, 2006). That percent, however, was higher for children under 18 years old. The percent of children under 18 living in poverty was 17.4 percent and 9.4 million children (<http://www.census.gov>, 2006). This data is significant because poverty influences the academic attainment of students.

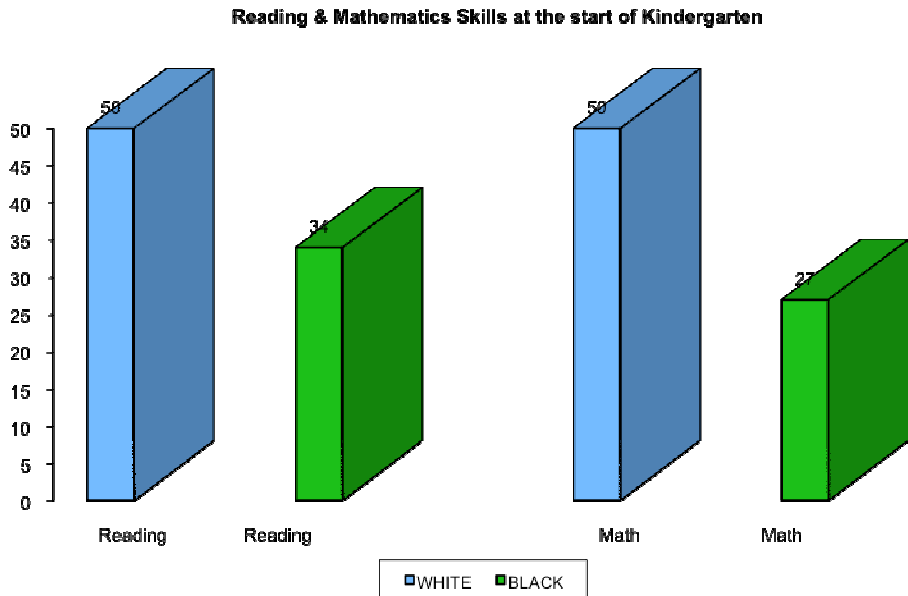
Sociologists Lee and Burkam (2002) in their study, for example, examined the cognitive abilities of African American and Caucasian children as they begin the educational process-

kindergarten. Their findings indicate that race and ethnicity are interconnected with socioeconomic status (SES). Moreover, children of minority groups- specifically Blacks and Hispanics – enter school both cognitively and socially disadvantaged (Lee & Burkam, 2002, p. 22). These inequities are evident before children enroll in kindergarten (Lee & Burkam, 2002, p. 22) and are magnified as impoverished students’ progress in schools. Lee and Burkam, further posit that “34% of black children and 29% of Hispanic children are in the lowest quintile of SES compared with only 9% of white children” (Lee & Burkam, 2002, p. 2). This implies that Blacks and Hispanic children are more likely to be impoverished. Additionally, for children under 18 years old, the census 2006 data indicate that the poverty rate increased between 2002 and 2006 from 12.1% to 17.4 % respectively (www.census.gov). This data is compelling because children living in poverty will achieve less academically due to the detrimental effects of poverty.

There is a clear correlation between the poverty level and the achievement attained in schools. The data suggest that Black and low-income children achieve at a disproportionately lower level than their white counterparts. Figure 1 demonstrates this disparity. The figure illustrates that African American children, even at the start of kindergarten, enter school less prepared than their white counterparts. The data reveal that the reading skills of African American 4 and 5 year olds were 27 percent below their white counterparts. Thus, on average in reading African Americans scored at the 34th percentile, while their white counterparts scored at the 50th percentile. Similarly, their mathematics achievement was substantially lower. African American 4 and 5 year olds, on average scored at the 27th percentile, while their white counterparts scored at the 50th percentile. The graph is displayed below.

Figure 1: Reading and Mathematics skills at the start of kindergarten

Source: (Rothstein, 2004; Lee & Burkam, 2002)



Note: The reading and mathematics performance of black students have been normalized to the reading and mathematics performance of white students (Rothstein, 2004; Lee & Burkam, 2002).

These data are significant because children living in poverty will academically achieve less due to the harmful effects of poverty. As Rothstein (2004) states, “socioeconomic differences [will] produce an achievement gap between students from different social classes” (Rothstein, 2004, p. 14). Unfortunately, he further states:

lower class children usually enter school less equipped academically and with fewer resources than their middle class counterparts. Thus, children from lower social classes and from many racial and ethnic minorities, even in the best schools, will achieve less, on average, than middle-class children. (Rothstein, 2004, p.14).

Nevertheless, there are some schools in high poverty districts- such as Oliver Street School in Newark that are high performing. This raises the question- what factors contribute to this

success? In the next section I will discuss the effective schools movement as it relates to academic achievement.

Literature Review

Effective School Movement

Research on effective urban schools has been conducted since the 1970s. Over the past thirty years, scholars have analyzed the characteristics of effective and high performing schools serving low-income students. Ronald Edmonds was one of the preeminent scholars of the effective schools movement and stressed equity and the “mastery of basic skills” as an important component in producing effective schools (Edmonds, 1979, p.15). The effective schools movement, however, evolved in response to the Coleman Report in 1966. In his report Coleman argued that schools had little to do with students achievement. Coleman maintained that family background was critical and more significant than schools in making a difference in the academic achievement of students.

Ronald Edmonds, one of the founders of the research on effective schools, rejected this conclusion and argued that equity and the “mastery of basic skills” was crucial to creating effective schools. Edmonds argued that “by *equity* I mean a simple sense of fairness in the distribution of the primary goods and services that characterize our social order” (Edmonds, 1979, p. 15). He further explained, “equitable public schooling begins by teaching poor children what their parents want them to know and ends by teaching poor children at least as well as it teaches middle class children” (Edmonds, 1979, p. 15).

As Andrews and Morefield (1991) note:

the early research findings of Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, and others (Edmonds, 1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1982; Edmonds & Fredericksen, 1978; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978) challenged the genetic/familial explanations of differences in outcomes [espoused by Coleman, 1966]. [Thus], by identifying schools that were effective with children, regardless of family income or ethnic status, the effective school research... attributed differences in children’s performance to schools themselves” (Andrew & Morefield, 1991, p. 271).

As the movement evolved over the next three decades (beginning in the late 1960s) the definition of “effective schools” also transitioned to focus on not only mastering the basic skills but to increasing problem solving and analytical skills. The initial characteristics were also expounded and became more inclusive of other factors. For example, the early effective schools movement suggests several factors that attribute to school success including strong principal leadership, quality instructional program, high expectations of students and a structured and safe school environment (Edmonds, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Purkey & Smith, 1983, Cohen, 1983, Good & Brophy, 1986; Bliss & Firestone, 1991, Peterson & Lezotte, 1991, Andrews & Morefield, Bell, 2001, Marzano, 2003).

In the later decades, however, there has been a shift in this paradigm. As Peterson & Lezotte (1991) explicates:

while the early conceptualizations of effective schools were most concerned with the achievement of basic skills of minority students, some schools and districts in this movement have already reached a high level of effectiveness in basic skills..... [thus,] working within this framework, some have redefined what they mean as basic to include higher-order thinking skills, problem solving, creativity... as part of their own local definitions of “effectiveness” (Peterson, 1991, p. 130).

Consequently, the effective schools movement developed specific criteria based on best practices of ways to effectively educate students in high poverty districts and characteristics of successful high poverty schools. The next section will discuss the significance of the research study.

Components of Effective Schools

Over the past three decades, researchers have analyzed the characteristics of effective and high performing schools serving predominantly low-income populations. Scholar Ronald Edmonds was one of the preeminent researchers examining the characteristics of effective urban schools and poor children. Edmonds focused on equity for disadvantaged students and believed that schools were a key component in providing quality education to at-risk children. As Edmonds

succinctly states, “the great problem in schooling is that we know how to teach in ways that can keep some children from learning almost anything, and we often choose to thus proceed when dealing with the children of the poor” (Edmonds, 1983, 22). Several studies have examined the characteristics of effective schools and the effective school movement (Edmonds, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Purkey & Smith, 1983, Cohen, 1983, Good & Brophy, 1986; Bliss & Firestone, 1991, Peterson & Lezotte, 1991, Andrews & Morefield, Bell, 2001, Marzano, 2003). Their findings suggest that there are common factors essential to the basic tenets of school effectiveness. These characteristics include strong principal leadership, quality instructional program, high expectations of students and a structured and safe school environment.

Edmonds, for example, argued that equity, instructional leadership, teacher expectations and school climate are key factors to student achievement (Edmonds, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983). Edmonds concluded that within school factors have a profound impact on student achievement. Equally important, he stated the following factors are crucial for school success:

(1) the principal’s leadership and focus on quality instruction; (2) a strong focus on instructional leadership; (3) a structured and safe climate conducive to teaching and learning; (4) teacher expectations and (5) student performance data employed to evaluate and adjust instruction and curriculum (Edmonds, 1982, p. 4).

Edmonds suggested that these factors must “work in collaboration with each other to promote effective schools” (Edmonds, 1982, p. 4).

Similarly, Cohen (1983) examines how school related factors contribute to student achievement as cited in Good and Brophy (1986). Cohen proposes three characteristics of effective schools, he explicates:

first, school effectiveness is clearly dependent upon effective classroom teaching; second, school effectiveness requires the careful coordination and management of the instructional program at the building level; and finally, effective schools generate a sense of shared values and culture among both students and staff (Good & Brophy, 1986, p. 581).

Likewise, Marzano (2003) investigates factors most significant to school effectiveness and student achievement. His research indicates that of the three factors (school-level, teacher-level, and student-level) school-level has the most influential impact on school effectiveness and student achievement (Marzano, 2003, p. 10). He further contends that on the school-level the important criteria are (1) guaranteed and viable curriculum (2) Challenging goals and effective feedback including high expectations (3) parent and community involvement (4) safe and orderly environment (5) collegiality and professionalism (Marzano, 2003, p. 10). While Marzano's findings are similar to Cohen's results, Marzano further analyzed his findings and reported that of the three factors influencing student performance- school-level factors had the most salient influence on student achievement.

Several of these scholars (Edmonds, 1979; Cohen, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1986; Marzano, 2003) posit similar foundational characteristics of effective schools. Although some scholars have added components to their definition of effective schools, the basic tenets espoused by Edmonds in the 1970s seems to still be relevant. For example, Marzano's definition of effective schools is inclusive of the basic principles of the effective school movement. However, he argues that parent and community involvement are also necessary in the building of the effective school. Marzano explains that:

three goals define effective parental and community involvement (a) communication, (b) participation (in day-to-day running of school such as working as teacher aides or guest lectures, volunteering); and (c) governance (requires establishment of specific structures that allow parents and community some voice in key school decisions (Marzano, 2003, p. 10).

While Marzano maintains the necessity of parental and community involvement on the school-level, he contends that home environment and family background have less of an effect on school effectiveness and student achievement. Marzano's findings mirror Good and Brophy's conclusion on effective schools. But, disputes the infamous Coleman's report of 1966, which maintained that family background, was critical and more significant than schools in making a difference in the academic achievement of students. Yet, this is a contentious issue. While the effective schools research posit that schools are significant in making a difference in the child's academic achievement and school effectiveness, much of the sociological research (Rothstein, 2004; Anyon, 1997; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Lareau, 2003) suggest similar to Coleman that the family has a

significant effect on student achievement. While acknowledging that factors such as poverty, socio-economic status, race and class affect student achievement, it would be foolhardy to not acknowledge the role schools play on student performances.

On a similar note, Bell (2001) investigates the characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools (HP2). In her article, Bell discusses the outcome of the High-Performing, High-Poverty Symposium in California which included about 200 of the state's education leaders collaborating with 12 California High Performing, High Poverty School Leaders. The results indicated 14 common factors inherent in HP2 schools, these included the following (as cited in Bell, 2001, p. 10):

- Implement rigorous standards for all students as the school's main goal
- Focus on delivery of high-quality teaching and learning for all students
- Emphasize hard work, high expectations and persistence
- Promote discipline and a safe orderly environment as key to learning
- Make district support evident and essential
- Have principals who are models of strong instructional leadership
- Have principals who are persistent and innovative in obtaining resources to serve students' needs
- Share leadership among administrators, faculty and parents
- Collaborate on school goals and professional development
- Regularly use assessment as a diagnostic tool to reinforce the school's academic goals
- Intervene early and often to promote the academic success of all students
- Promote a policy of inclusiveness and a sense of family
- Work actively with parents to extend the mission of the school into the home
- Help faculty and students see themselves as part of the system as a whole through articulation of the academic program across grade levels

These findings, as Bell notes "reflected similar findings in the current research on teaching and learning in high-performing, high-poverty schools" (Bell, 2001, p. 9). It is clear, however, that specific characteristics are common to high-performing, high-poverty schools in contributing to their effectiveness.

The center for public education in their investigation on high performing, high-poverty schools found seven key factors that contribute to school effectiveness. They identify the following criterion:

- schools and staff support the belief that all students can and will learn;
- Ongoing assessment in the school and classrooms allows teachers to individualize instruction for students, aligning curriculum with instruction and assessment provides teachers with a successful system, school leadership promotes a collaborative model with teachers involved in decision making;
- Teachers collaborate across grade levels and curriculum areas to ensure that teachers and students receive the support they need;
- Classrooms with highly qualified teachers enable students to succeed;
- Family involvement in a child's education positively affects student achievement (<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org>, p.1).

These characteristics are the foundational tenets in the effective schools movement. As Peterson (1991) suggests the “early work in school improvement based on the effective schools research and the writings of Edmonds assumed that an effective school was one defined by both quality educational programs and equity of achievement across different subsets of students” (Peterson, 1991, p. 129). Similarly, Firestone (1991) notes that the effective school research has remained closely aligned with the early principles of what constitutes effective schools (Firestone, 1991, p. 16). Firestone (1991), further asserts that:

ninety two percent of the effective schools programs reported that they emphasized instructional leadership and raising staff expectations, 88 to 89 percent monitored student achievement and stressed basic skills acquisition, and 76 percent worked on developing a safe and orderly school environment (Firestone, 1991, p. 16).

Consequently, many of the standards of the effective schools movement consist of factors related to improving student achievement. Thus, *inputs* such as quality instructional program, strong principal leadership, collaboration of faculty on school goals, high expectations that all children can achieve, structured and disciplined environment, all contribute to the *output* of improved student

performance and effective schools. In the next section, we will briefly discuss the organizational theory and its role in school effectiveness.

Organizational theory

Several scholars propose the idea of meshing organizational theory and the development of effective schools. As Richard (1991) explains “school effectiveness leaders like Ron Edmonds were arguing that schools did make a difference and they did so for reasons that could be traced directly back to alterable organizational characteristics of the school: a focus on basic education, directive leadership, high academic expectations, orderliness, and a positive school climate were argued to distinguish effective from ineffective schools” (Richards, 1991, p 29). Similarly, while Purkey and Smith (1983) suggest that other factors must be present as well, such as (a) collaborative planning and collegial relationships, (b) sense of community, (c) clear goals and high expectations, and (d) order and discipline (Good & Brophy, 1986, p. 581); they posit that the key factor to improving schools is to build consensus within the school as an organizational structure (Purkey & Smith, 1983, p. 442).

Organizational theory is “based on the premise that the effectiveness of an organization involves specific criterion such as a purpose, mission, data driven assessments and evaluations, emulating best practices, high quality hiring and recruiting process and varied movements in the organization to balance the productivity and efficiency” (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000, p.320). Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) suggest that the premise “is that these “failure free” organizations have developed distinctive organizational patterns because of the widespread agreement that any failure would be a calamity, and evidence the following characteristics” (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000, p. 320).

- A focus upon a small number of goals or ‘sense of primary mission’
- The use of a strong technology of education, involving standard operating procedures (SOPs) that prescribe organizational patterns
- ‘data richness’ involving use of indicator systems, performance assessment and serialization to understand and improve organizational functioning
- A concern to benchmark against organizational ‘best practice’
- Pro-active recruitment and high quality training

- A combination of hierarchical, vertical organization with an ability to ‘go lateral’ at moments of peak load, stress or crisis
- A concern with legislating for organizational detail and fine print, since the organizations are concerned with avoiding of ‘cascading errors’ that occur when minor malfunctioning leads to progressively more serious organizational failure (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000, p. 321).

While some of these principles are evident in the effective schools literature, others are not apparent. If this principle is applied to effective schools then we can conclude that “building consensus within the school as an organizational structure” (Purkey & Smith, 1983, p. 442) will improve its effectiveness.

Having a clear mission and vision is a key characteristic espoused in the effective schools research (Edmonds, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Purkey & Smith, 1983, Cohen, 1983, Good & Brophy, 1986; Bliss & Firestone, 1991, Peterson & Lezotte, 1991, Andrews & Morefield, Bell, 2001, Marzano, 2003). Peterson also maintains that it is “important for educators to understand and respond to contextual factors in schools” (Peterson, 1991, p. 133). For example, he states “it was possible for those at the National Center for Effective School Research Development (NCESRD) to work more effectively with schools and districts facing differing sets of problems, opportunities, resources, and cultures when the notion of contextual differences were applied” (Peterson, 1991, p. 133). Thus, within the organizational theory, effective schools are more successful when they understand the contextual factors. As Peterson (1991) notes “the research on school improvement and the parallel research on effective corporations show that there is a need for a clear direction and a focused mission communicated regularly throughout the organization” (Peterson, 1991, p. 132).

While Purkey and Smith (1983) explore the attributes of effective schools looking at school level factors, they also examine it in the context of the organizational theory. They define school systems as “nested layers in which each organizational level sets the context and defines the boundaries of the layer below” (Purkey & Smith, 1983, p. 428). Their findings suggest that the most important organization structure variables include the following characteristics: “ instructional leadership, school site management, staff stability, curriculum articulation and organization, school wide staff development, parental involvement and support, school wide recognition of academic

success, maximized learning time and district support” (Purkey & Smith, 1983, p. 444). These characteristics are similar to factors espoused in the effective school literature.

Another common theme that was evident in the literature was the role of leadership in improving schools. The next section will discuss the role of leadership in effective schools.

Role of Leadership

Another central component in the effective school research is the role of leadership. Numerous studies have examined the role of leadership on effective schools and students’ achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Witzier, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Their findings suggest that leaders play an integral role in the schools’ effectiveness. In this research study we will focus on two of the more commonly discussed forms of leadership—transformational and instructional leadership. We will further examine their effectiveness on improving high-poverty schools.

As mentioned, two prominent framework espoused in the scholarly literature are the instructional leadership model and the transformational leadership model. Thus, it is pertinent to understand the differences between the frameworks. *Figure 2* based on Hallinger (2003) leadership distinctions succinctly contrast the models. Additionally, we will explain how these components relate to our research questions posed.

Figure 2: Comparison of Instructional and transformational leadership models

Instructional Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Differences and Similarities
Articulate and communicate clear school goals	Clear vision Shared school goals	I.L. model emphasizes clarity and organizational nature of shared goals, set either by the principal or by and with staff and community. T.L. model emphasizes linkage between personal goals and shared organizational goals.
Coordinate curriculum Supervise and evaluate instruction Monitor student progress Protect instructional time	-----	No equivalent elements for these coordination and control functions in the T.L. model. T.L. model assumes others will carry these out as a function of their roles
High expectations	High expectations	
Provide incentives for learners Provide incentives for teachers	Rewards	Similar focus on ensuring that rewards are aligned with mission of the school
Providing professional development for teachers	Intellectual stimulation	I.L. model focuses on training and development aligned to school mission. T.L. model views personal and professional growth broadly. Need not be tightly linked to school goals
-----	Culture building	I.L. model also focuses on culture-building but subsumed within the school climate dimension

Source: (Hallinger, 2003, p. 344)

This model succinctly explains the differences between both forms of leadership- instructional and transformational. However, we will argue that it is essential that effective high poverty schools incorporate a mix of transformational and instructional leadership. Our study will

investigate this concept as explained in research question #1 (below). It will explore school level factors that contribute to effective schools.

Instructional leadership

The instructional leadership model predominated the field of education in the early and late 1980s as the framework that would reform low performing schools. This body of research, Hallinger states, “[identifies] *strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction from the principal* as a characteristic of elementary schools that [are] effective at teaching children in poor urban communities” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 329). The role of the principal emerges as a crucial and determinant factor in promoting and implementing change in low performing schools. Research consistently found that “the skillful leadership of school principals [is] a key contributing factor when it came to explaining successful change, school improvement, or school effectiveness” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 331). As Hallinger notes “the instructional leadership model shaped the thinking about effective principal leadership disseminated in the 1980s and early 1990s internationally” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 329).

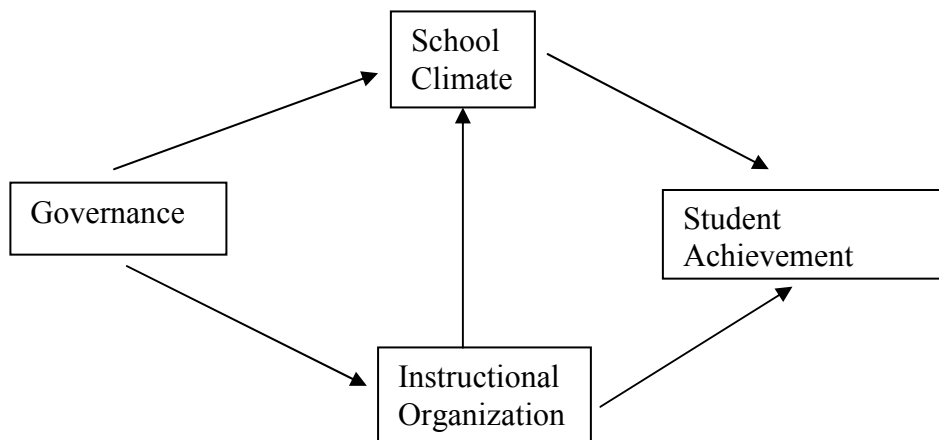
In their research Hallinger and Heck (1998) analyzed extensive empirical evidence of the principal’s contribution to school effectiveness during the decade, 1980-1995. Their findings indicate that school leadership influences the organizational structure in four dimensions:

- First, purposes and goals, which focus on the vision, mission, and setting the goals of the institution. Thus, the school leader’s influence on student achievement and school effectiveness is demonstrated through mediated effects, *such as the ability to motivate teachers*.
- Second, structure and social networks, this implies that there is a synergy between the organizational functions and the network relationships of the individuals.
- Third, the people- it is clear that a central role of the administrative function involves the interaction of people in the organization, including teachers, students, parents, and community members.
- Fourth, organizational culture which signifies the influence of the values and meanings of an organization as it motivates and encourages people to change their behavior to be more aligned with the culture and vision of the organization (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, p. 171).

Although, Hallinger and Heck concluded that principals demonstrate a significant, but indirect influence on school effectiveness, they maintain that the difference is “statistically significant and supports the general belief among educators that principals contribute to school effectiveness and improvement” (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, p. 157).

Yet, the definition and parameters of instructional leadership in the scholarly review suggests a divergent and ambiguous perspective. For example, the early research on principal instructional leadership has been concerned with “the relationship of isolated personal traits of administrators (e.g., gender, training, locus of control, leadership style) that correlate with successful schools” (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990, p. 96). However, these studies have posited “a single dimension (leadership style) or two-factor model (initiating structure and consideration), while generally ignoring the context of the school” (Heck, et. al, 1990, p. 96). Other studies have proposed a multidimensional approach to leadership. For example, Heck et al. (1990) propose a theoretical model to principal leadership that demonstrates other contingent factors that influence student achievement (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Principal Instructional Leadership Model: Variables Influencing Student Achievement



Source: (Heck, Larsen, Marcoulides, 1990)

The model illustrates the indirect effect of instructional leadership on student achievement. It further suggests that a multidimensional approach of instructional leadership, inclusive of the school culture, school mission and goals are mediated factors that also promote student achievement.

Hallinger, Bickman and Davis's (1996) results indicate that the school principal's instructional leadership demonstrated no direct effect on student achievement. The results, however, are consistent with prior findings that the principal can have an indirect effect on school effectiveness through actions that shape the school's learning climate (Hallinger et. al, 1996, p. 527). Hallinger and colleagues (1996) conclude that the principal's role in school effectiveness position the principal's leadership behavior in the context of the school organization and its environment (Hallinger, et. al, 1996, p. 527). It further assesses leadership effects on student achievement through mediating variables (Hallinger, et. al, 1996, p. 527). Consequently, the principal's leadership promotes school improvement through other variables such as the culture fostered, goal consensus, teacher empowerment and building the organizational capacity- all aspects of the transformational model.

While the extant literature on instructional leadership suggests an ambiguous and indirect role in improving student performance and school effectiveness it ascertains that instructional leadership plays a viable role and is essential in improving school effectiveness. The next section will discuss the scholarly work on transformational leadership and its role in influencing academic achievement and school effectiveness.

Transformational leadership

Several themes emerge from the scholarly review of transformational leadership. Comprised of the ideology of empowerment, shared leadership, consensus of goals, change agents, organizational learning and distributed leadership. Transformational leadership evolved in the early 1990s as a vehicle to reform schools. The emergence of the transformational model shifted the focus in the educational field from the dominant notion of the principal in the 1980s as the instructional leader. Moreover, it shifted the emphasis from the administrator as the sole power structure for improving student achievement and creating effective schools.

Transformational leaders play a pivotal role in precipitating change (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 375). Bass and Avolio (1994) espouses four attributes of the transformational leader: charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Lunenburg, 2003, p. 2). These attributes foster the production and innovation of change in the organization. According to Marks and Printy (2003) transformational leaders "motivate followers by raising their consciousness about the importance of organizational goals and

by inspiring them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 375).

Transformational leadership is thus viewed as an innovative mechanism that can transform an organization. For example, Leithwood (1994) examines transformational leadership and its effect on school restructuring. Leithwood’s research suggests that principals engaged in transformational leadership are effective through their influence on vision building, fostering group goals, providing individualized support and intellectual stimulation (Leithwood, 1994, p. 509). These components are consistent with Bass and Avolio’s (1994) criteria stipulated for effective transformational leadership-charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Lunenburg, 2003, p. 2). Additionally, Leithwood’s results indicate that “transformational leadership practices, [has] significant direct and indirect effects on school-restructuring initiatives and teacher-perceived students outcomes” (Leithwood, 1994, p. 506). He asserts:

Transformational leadership [has] strong direct and indirect effects on teachers’ personal goals. These goals, in turn, [has] strong effects on teachers’ context beliefs and weaker but still significant effects on teachers’ capacity beliefs. In school conditions typically [has] the strongest direct effects on most of the dependent variables in our studies (regression coefficients in the .30 to .50 range), and these conditions [are], in turn, strongly and directly influenced by transformational leadership practices (regression coefficients in the .60 to .70 range). Organizational learning [is] strongly influenced by transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1994, p. 506).

Another emerging theme from the transformational leadership framework is the role of principals as change agents. This role arises from the notion that principals should not only perform tasks related to coordination and evaluation of the educational system but also in relation to further developing the educational system via transformation of the school culture (Witziers et. al, 2003, p.403). The power of school culture in influencing change plays a significant role in the transformational leadership framework. As Purkey and Smith (1983) suggest, “an academically effective school is distinguished by its culture: a structure, process, and climate of values and norms that emphasize successful teaching and learning” (Purkey & Smith, 1983, p. 442).

Similarly, Lucas (2002) contends that principal transformational leadership will influence the school culture by increasing the teachers' level of perception and knowledge of the organizational structure, in addition to empowering the teachers (Lucas, 2002, p. 23). Thus, if teachers are empowered and support the vision, they are more likely to engage in activities that will benefit the school on a larger scale, which increases the organizational capacity (Lucas, 2002, p. 23). The transformational principal, Lucas claims "facilitates this focus upon culture by creating parallel learning systems that promote organizational reflection and change" (Lucas, 2002, p. 23). Consequently, "leaders who can embody and put into practice these transformational behaviors create school cultures that engender purpose, commitment, and creativity" (Lucas, 2002, p. 23).

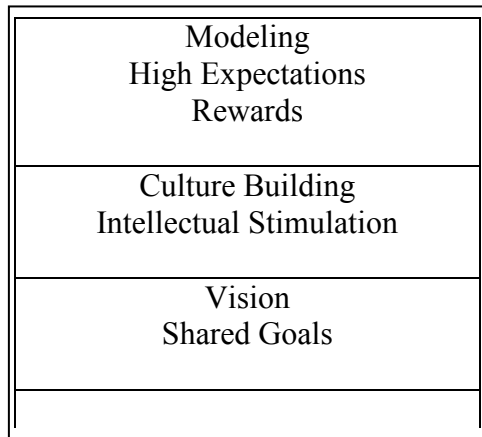


Figure 4: Transformational Leadership Model (Hallinger, 2003, p. 337)

The model of transformational leadership as Hallinger proposed alludes to the school culture playing an integral role in school effectiveness. This idea relates to our first research question posed: *Research question:* How are school and classroom level factors related to the effectiveness of this school?

- Micro level/school factors: Principal leadership (instructional and transformational), a clear vision and mission and school culture related to the effectiveness of this school?

Similarly, Hallinger (2003) contends that a transformational leadership employs collaborative effort to improve academic achievement and school effectiveness. In *figure 4* - Hallinger suggests that these characteristics are necessary in promoting the transformational leader's role in the organization. Thus, the principal is not the sole leader in creating an effective school but under the principal leadership other contingent factors are utilized to motivate the faculty to

partake in the vision. Behavioral components, Hallinger notes, “such as individualized support, intellectual stimulation, and personal vision suggest that the model is grounded in understanding the needs of individual staff rather than ‘coordinating and controlling them towards the organization’s desired ends” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 337).

Hallinger further notes that transformational leaders “foster a climate in which teachers collaborate and engage in continuous learning with their colleagues” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338). Teacher collaboration is an essential component to school effectiveness because it allows teachers to share best practices and empower them to take on leadership roles and to develop solutions to school challenges. Hence, as the transformational literature suggests the principal plays a key role in fostering the change needed to generate effective schools and improve student achievement.

On a similar note Lucas (2002) investigates the premise of transformational leadership, specifically, the relationships among principal, school leadership team and school culture. The primary method of analysis is quantitative, with survey data being used to determine (a) if any direct relationships exist between principal transformational leadership and school leadership team transformational leadership, (b) if any direct relationships exist between principal transformational leadership and school culture, (c) if any direct relationships exist between school leadership team transformational leadership and school culture, and (d) if school leadership team transformational leadership either moderates or mediates the relationships between principal transformational leadership behavior and school culture (Lucas, 2002, p. 4). Lucas findings, similar to prior studies, reveal that the principal is the key figure in articulating and executing the vision of the school. Moreover, the principal is integral in creating a school culture, which facilitates teacher collaboration and the goals of the group. The model of collaborative transformational leadership and school culture proposed below (figure 5) provides insight to Lucas results.

Figure 5: Model of Collaborative Transformational Leadership and School

Source: (Lucas, 2002)

CL = Collaborative Leadership

TC = Teacher Collaboration

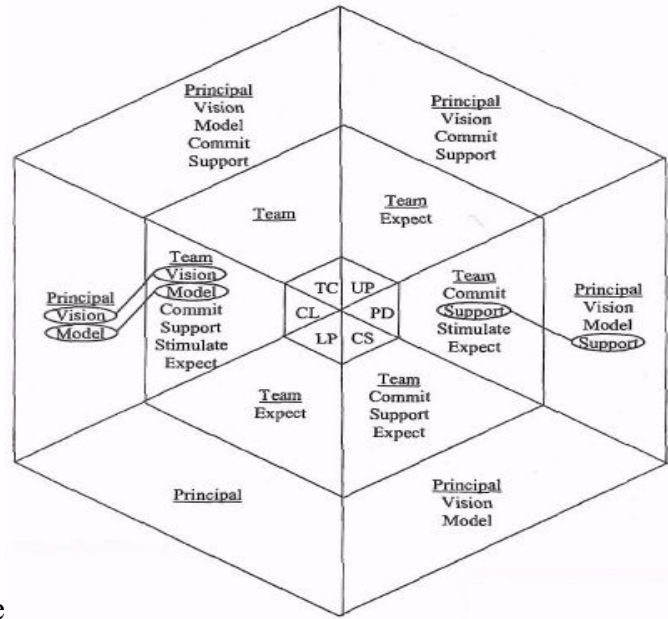
UP = Unity of Purpose

PD = Professional Development

CS = Collegial Support

LP = Learning Partnership

□—□= Indicates team factor
mediates relationship between
principal and culture factors



This model illustrates the collaborative effort and relationship that transpires between the principal leadership, leadership team, and school culture. From a transformational leadership perspective the model based on Lucas (2002) findings reveals:

- The principal seems to be the primary source of *identifying and articulating a vision* and *providing an appropriate model*, although in two instances- both within the culture factor of collaborative leadership- the leadership team mediates the principal's influence upon school culture;
- The leadership team seems to be the primary source of *providing intellectual stimulation* and *holding high expectations*; however, *providing intellectual stimulation* seems to be the weakest, or least predictive, factor of transformational leadership within the study;
- There is a mix of principal and leadership team influence as sources of *fostering commitment to group goals* and *providing individualized support* (Lucas, 2002, p. 20).

Similarly, examining the results from the perspective of school culture suggests:

- The leadership team, rather than the principal, seems to exert the greatest influence upon *collaborative leadership* and *learning partnership*; however, it should be noted

that the leadership team mediates the impact of two principal transformational leadership behaviors- identifying and articulating a vision and providing an appropriate model- upon collaborative leadership (Lucas, 2002, p. 21).

- The principal, rather than the leadership team, seems to exert the greatest influence upon *teacher collaboration* and *unity of purpose* (Lucas, 2002, p. 21).

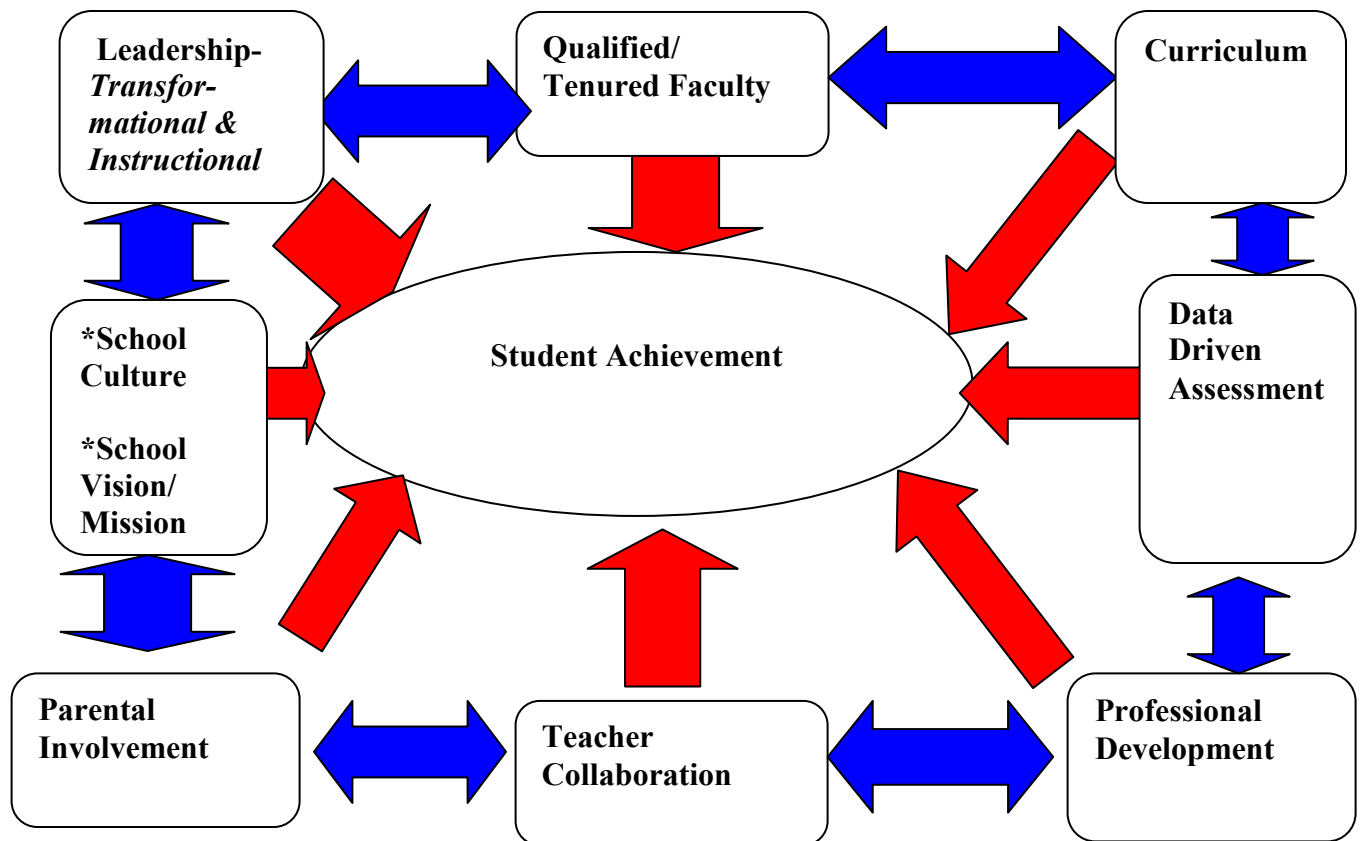
The implication of these findings substantiates the conclusion of numerous studies (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Witzier, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003), the principal is vital in executing the vision and facilitating the culture of the school. The results indicate that the principal plays an integral role in creating the culture of the school and empowering its constituents. These findings also support the theoretical literature regarding principal transformational leadership as a significant influence upon the development of teachers and teacher leaders (Lucas, 2002, p. 21). As Alexander and Keller (1994) notes “transformational principals need to proactively recognize the leadership abilities of others in the school, help bring about a shared vision for the school, and foster training for both leadership and change” (Lucas, 2002, p. 21).

Consequently, based on the empirical evidence, we would argue that the transformational model of leadership could influence high poverty urban schools. The ability of the visionary leader to motivate and empower its constituents is critical to vision building and implementation of the goals. Moreover, facilitating high performance expectations, providing individualized support and intellectual stimulus can be utilized as a vehicle for improving urban schools. However, we would argue that in order for leadership to effectively reform high poverty schools and in this case play an integral role in Oliver Street school as an effective urban school- it is essential to employ an integrated approach to transformational and instructional leadership.

Based on the effective school literature, we have developed a conceptual framework that suggests that effective high performing, high poverty schools engage in an inter- and intra-relationship between the variables of school and classroom factors to create effectiveness. The next section will discuss our conceptual framework which we have title “Integrative Model” of effective schools.

Conceptual Framework

Integrative Model



Findings

Our findings are based on five schools: Oliver Street and North Star in Newark and Bradford, Copernicus and McCaulife in Jersey City. Based on our field work, we have identified five themes that describe the factors related to high student achievement at each of the schools, all of which are part of the model above, and in some cases, add to them substantively:

1. Stability and Community Ties [Parental involvement]
2. Teacher Collaboration and School Community of Learners [Teacher collaboration; school culture; professional development]
3. Academic Standards, Expectations, and Accountability [Data driven assessment; curriculum; school culture and vision]
4. Leadership and Teacher Support [Leadership: transformational and instructional; teacher collaboration; qualified teachers]
5. Student Population and Parental Involvement [Parental involvement]

Oliver Street

Stability and Community Ties to School

Oliver Street School is located in the heart of the Ironbound, Newark and has historically served immigrants and their children, mostly from countries in Europe, such as Portugal and Spain. However, similar to many urban communities across the nation, the Ironbound has undergone demographic shifts in the last few decades. Although the Ironbound remains predominantly a Portuguese community, it is also a home to the more recent immigrants who are coming from countries in South and Central America, such as Brazil and Mexico, as well as Cuba.

Despite the changing demographics, many of the teachers, administrators, and staff at Oliver Street share a long history and strong ties to the Ironbound. Many teachers and administrators, including the principal have grown up, attended schools, and raised their own families in the Ironbound. Although some teachers have moved away to neighboring suburbs as adults, many of them stay closely connected to the Ironbound because of family and ethnic community ties. Repeatedly, teachers and principals reiterated their family connection to ethnic communities in the Ironbound as one of the most important reasons for their commitment to and deep understanding of the immigrant children and families they serve as educators.

The principal's experience underscores this long history of living and working in the Ironbound. When we asked her what brought her to Oliver, she explained her own family immigrant history and professional growth in the Ironbound. This is where she was born, raised, attended schools, and worked all of her life:

I've worked in the Ironbound section where I was born and raised. My parents are immigrants from Portugal and Brazil. And I've just stayed in the community. I am a product of the Newark public school system. I attended Lafayette Street School from Kindergarten through 8th grade, which is just about three blocks away. I went to the local high school, East Side High School for four years and I decided to become a teacher when I was in Kindergarten. From East Side I went to Newark State College which was then the teachers college and I graduate in '75, it was then Kane College of New Jersey. I majored in elementary education and library science. I continued there for my masters in

bilingual/bi-cultural education. I was hired right out of college in 1975 as a Portuguese bilingual teacher at Wilson Avenue School which is also in the Ironbound.

Spanning over 32 years, her career as a teacher and administrator has been based in the Ironbound. She built her career as an elementary school teacher and administrator in a total of four schools in the Ironbound - all walking distance from each other. Although she moved out of the Ironbound with her husband and children over ten years ago, she still stays in the area 4-5 nights a week with extended families and friends living in the Ironbound. She recalls the time when bilingual Portuguese was the only bilingual classes offered in the Ironbound. In her early career, it helped to be able speak both Portuguese and Spanish, so that she could offer the few bilingual Spanish classes in the Ironbound:

So, my entire career with the Newark Public School has been 32 years...We did move out about 10 years ago but I stay in the Ironbound at least 4 or 5 nights a week and basically go home on the weekends...It helps that my husband has rotating shifts and I have a grown daughter. But I taught mostly primary grades, K through 2, bilingual Portuguese classes and at that time we really didn't have Spanish classes in the Ironbound yet so anyone who spoke Spanish was also put into my class...I did that for 10 years and then I became Title 1 coordinator at another Ironbound school, Ann Street School. I was there for about 9 years and then was asked to go back to Wilson Avenue where I began my teaching career to become a Vice Principal. I did that for 4 or 5 years and then was asked to become Principal here at Oliver, for at least 9 years. So, it's been 4 schools right within walking distance.

She explained that her experience is typical of many of the teachers at Oliver Street. She noted that about 50% of the staff are born and raised in the Ironbound, while 25% of them are still living in the area, highlighting the strong ties between the school and its surrounding community, as well as underscoring the continued stability of the school.

Well, in this community, in this school particularly, because many of the staff members are a product of the community I think that helps to keep it more established or not

changing as much as other schools. I would say that probably 50% of the staff here was either born or raised in this area and about 25% of them still live here and that's instructional and non-instructional. So, I think that, you know, has kept the school more like it was used to be when I was younger.

In addition to having such a long rooted history and family ties to the Ironbound - all of which has been critical to maintaining the stability and consistency of its teaching staff and school community—the school is also able to offer an invaluable resource that many schools are not privy to: a committed bilingual staff who are equipped with linguistic, cultural, and historical understanding of the immigrant families and the children they serve. For the principal, this form of social capital has been an important resource that she attributes to helping immigrant parents and their children, as well as facilitating important communication between teachers and parents:

I think communication is key to running a good school especially when you have a bilingual population...But knowing that at least half of my staff speaks either Spanish or Portuguese helps and they [parents] feel a lot more at ease because they know that any time they can come in here they can either speak to me in Spanish or Portuguese or the parent liaison or most of the teachers.

Teacher Collaboration and School Community of Learners

Historical community ties extend beyond teachers and students: It is also evident in the relationships between teachers and administrators, many of whom have share family histories in the Ironbound. Some teachers have been life-long friends, while others share extended kinship ties. In such an environment, it is easier to foster collaboration and team teaching among teachers and administrators.

For instance, a teacher whose teaching experience spans over 23 years, mostly in the Ironbound, often collaborated across discipline with other teachers in the school who they previously knew in the community. Meeting as often as three times a week, she explained how well she works with other teachers at Oliver:

I know that we work very well together. If I need something I can go to them. If I have a question on something that I'm doing I can go to them. If the Math teacher is covering something in Math and she needs extra help in it or extra reinforcement and I tie it into my lesson I can usually do that. With the reading the same thing...We meet 3 times a week every period. We have usually last periods on Mondays, Tuesday, and Thursdays.

Other teachers mentioned that they used teachers double prep meetings to assess, analyze, and strategize how to develop best learning practices for their children. Such a collaborative effort was commonly mentioned by teachers across grades and disciplines:

We meet once a week on Tuesdays we have a double prep for that purpose. We get together to do our analysis, our assessment analysis, and discuss ways in which we can address the weaknesses that the majority of our 3rd graders are having. And we kind of talk and, you know, kind of bounce around ideas we have. We make some suggestions, strategies that would help to improve our teaching. Basically any projects, we had a Math and Science project, we had many meetings because we do it together as a grade level.

This collaboration is also possible because the administration develops and implements schedules for teachers that include block scheduling, vertical planning across grades, and interdisciplinary collaboration. That is, administrators organize teachers' schedules in such a way that it allows active collaboration across grades and discipline, as well as common preps for all grade levels. As the principal explains, scheduling can be a nightmare because implementing necessary parallel preps and double periods for teachers can be extremely difficult. However, she contends that it is well worth it, especially when teachers are able to collaborate as a way to examine their instruction, test scores, and curriculum development.

The first thing we do is try to schedule all of the teacher's preps where we would have vertical meetings. At least once a week we have Pre-K and K meet together, 1 and 2 meets together, 5/6, 7/8. With the block scheduling the 5th through 8th grades actually get a double period together. So, they are meeting all 10 minutes every week so they can plan because they're departmentalized and we do a lot interdisciplinary things and teachers

have to know what's going on in the writing classroom, the reading classroom, the Science, Social Studies, Math. So they get that 110 minutes of planning time every week, one a week and we've set it up so that they have a least three common prep's every a week. So, some teachers--they're mandated to meet just that one time but some of the grade levels meet twice, three times. So, everybody gets 5 preps and at least three or four are common preps. So, if they wanted to work on a special project with their colleagues, they could do that.

She contends that such scheduling allows her teachers to share ideas and feel more comfortable working with other teachers. She explains that although teachers initially resisted such collaboration, over the years, the teachers have learned that the benefits far outweigh the initial discomfort. For instance, when the teachers learned the limitations of 50 minute periods and how 110 minute double period preps actually allowed them to collaborate with others more efficiently, many teachers quickly overcame their initial resistance:

When we first instituted the double period they were upset about it. They thought it was too long; there were 110 minutes and the special activity teachers who have to cover their classrooms like the Art teacher, the Music teacher would have to provide a lesson for 110 minutes, so they weren't too happy about it either, you know, back to back preps. Teachers would rather have that single prep but we found that in 50 minutes by the time you dropped your kids off at the activity and then you come back to the room and you sit, you're lucky if you have 35 minutes left. And really when you want to look and focus on student work to see if you're meeting the standards or to share the ideas about best practices, there just wasn't enough time...And I think now after doing it for about a year and a half they're seeing the advantages because they are looking at that student work and they are getting more comfortable with sharing. Teachers tend to kind of close the door and this is my classroom and I'm doing my thing here, especially in the older grade. My primary teachers have no problem with sharing ideas. That's a phenomenon that we're trying understand and say, how can we get the middle grade teachers to be more like the primary's who do everything together.

More over, she explains that collaboration such as vertical planning gives teachers a chance to see children's progress and measure their growth longitudinally from one grade to another. It also ensures that teachers follow up on certain skills as well as introduce new topics that have not been covered the previous year, and really treat their students holistically. It also held teachers accountable to their curriculum material and assessment of the students in each grades:

We used to hear Kindergarten [teachers] say, "well, you know, they weren't taught this in pre-K." So now when they [Pre-k and Kindergarten teachers] meet they know exactly. Well, if you find that in Kindergarten your kids are lacking something when you meet with the pre-K teacher, one can say, "Well, this year let's make sure that this is covered"... So, you have to really look at each child. Then we pass portfolios along to next years' teachers with writing samples and a checklist so they know exactly where the kids are.

Interestingly enough, many teachers did not see such scheduling and expectations by administrators as anything but flexible and supportive. As one teacher put it, Oliver was a collaborative community with folks who worked well together sharing a common goal— "to make the child the best they can be":

Administration here is very flexible, they do come every so often, they do observe. If there is something that they see that needs to be fixed they will approach you and of course you have to adhere to whatever their suggestions are. But it's--we have--we really here at Oliver we really have a good staff, you know. It's a very open staff and we don't--it's a good interactive between administration, between teachers, between students, between parents. We have a good community here that works together to make the child the best that they can be"

Academic Standards, Expectations, and Accountability

At Oliver, teachers clearly understand and accept that they are held accountable for student learning. Although most teachers mentioned that test scores are important, teachers and administrators also spoke about student progress, longitudinal assessment, and measurement of

growth. Such discourse of teacher accountability and student learning upheld issues of improvement and growth that recognized limitations of test scores and national mandates such as NCLB.

When we asked the principal how she held teachers accountable, she explained that teachers were required to write a Professional Improvement Plan (PIP). This Plan, developed by each teacher, outlines teachers learning goals, how they plan to teach it, and how they plan to assess student learning. At the end of the year, teachers are assessed on their own PIP to see if students have indeed achieved the learning goals. When examining test scores, the teachers and administrators pay attention to longitudinal progress throughout the school grades, as well as the raw test scores. The principal explains:

Well, at the end of the year, like at this time of the year right now, they would all have to write a Professional Improvement Plan, a PIP. And that's basically what we start out with... So, in September we look at the PIP and we have our first pre-observation conference with the teachers. You know, this is what you said that you will accomplish this year, this is what you said you were going to do and your evaluation at the end of the year will be based on that... But based on the observations and their PIP's and attendance we also look at the test scores and we do a longitudinal study basically to see, you know, if there's been progress through the years and some of our teachers loop so we look at last years scores and this years scores to see how much growth there is. So, that's another way of holding them accountable, because they have to show some growth... You know, if they scored, let's say, a 10 in the fall I'm expecting to see maybe a 20, 25 in the spring. So, we look at those comparisons and see how much growth has happened in a year.

Teachers believed that their own assessment was integrally tied to student assessment. Meaning, students' learning was an important assessment of their own teaching. Moreover, the collaborative nature of the school fostered the process of getting feedback not only from administrators, but also from other teachers across grades and subjects. This process further enabled the teachers to make necessary changes in their curriculum and assessment accordingly. As one teacher noted:

I've probably written four narratives this year about things we've done in my classroom. Math Fair projects, teacher observations, we're constantly being assessed... we're being assessed as much as the students are being assessed, which is great. Give me feedback. It's the only reason, I think, I get better each year.

Such assessment plan was also integrally linked to the high expectations that teachers placed on themselves as well as their students. The teachers explained that the motto "all children will learn" is important. Although they acknowledged that such statement may not necessarily be a realistic or achievable, it is nevertheless an important expectation to have. As one teacher noted:

I think some parents think I have too high expectations with the amount of homework that I give or the amount of testing that I do. I think Newark's motto is "All Children Will Learn," that's my expectation. Is it--is it total reality? No. But my expectation is every kid walking through my door on the first day of school is, you will have the skills to pass a higher order thinking test by the end of the year. What you do with those skills, I can't go home with you and practice everything

As one teacher noted, students at Oliver may be working-class or poor immigrants with other disadvantages, but there is no difference in "brain power" from the wealthier and more privileged children in the suburbs:

There's no difference in the brain power just the money. It's just the parents with money think their children are brighter and that is not true. They are absolutely the same group.

Despite such high expectations, the reality of using test scores as a way to assess student, many of whom are poor, working-class, and second-language learners, is not lost to the teachers and administration, especially in a state-takeover Abbott District where schools are constantly under scrutiny. The principal admitted that district place too much emphasis on test scores and the bottom line without taking into consideration other important mitigating issues. For instance, although their elementary grade levels are doing very well, the middle school is undergoing second year of warning because it has not yet attained Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). She

believes that national and state mandates such as NCLB and other high stake exams do not take into consideration that a large number of students they serve are immigrant children who are mostly English language learners. However, she explained that the immigrant children who are bilingual especially those in early grades actually perform fairly well on these exams and often help the school obtain AYP:

Well, I mean, personally for myself, I think they place too much importance of standardized tests...Now, we're in 2nd year warning year because our Middle School has not attained Adequate Yearly Progress. We've been doing very well from Pre-K to 4, yeah, they're looking at the ASK 4 tests and we've been, you know, honored by the Chamber of Commerce just for the kids school based on our 4th grade scores. But, like I said, it's our 2nd year now that we haven't met AYP [for middle school], I've also had some turn over as far as teachers in the middle grades so, you know, there's a lot of different reasons for it. But to me I think there's just too much--too much stress on the teachers and the students to perform on the test. And especially now with NCLB when children are here in this country for a year and they are expected to take a test in English, I mean, it's just, knowing another language I know it's impossible. You can't become fluent in one year so I always say to people, how you would feel speaking only English having to go to Brazil or Portugal and test in Portuguese in only one year. It just doesn't make sense. But, I mean, we try our test and actually our bilingual kids do fairly well, you know, especially in the younger grades because they learn English so quickly. They do score--usually the bilingual test scores help us attain AYP.

Leadership and Teacher Support

Leadership style can come in many forms: while some principals may have the reputation of being “strong” and “no-nonsense,” others may be more appreciated for their “nurturing and caring” style. In either case, one of the more important themes of “good” and “effective” leadership centers on teacher support, and facilitating structural support so that teachers can receive appropriate resources. When we asked the principal to describe her leadership style, she explained her nurturing character as a teacher and the significance of doing whatever it takes to support the teachers:

I would say I'm a facilitative leader because I remember when I was in the classroom having administrators who were basically in their office or observing in the classroom but not really helping to make my job easier so--and I'm a care taker by nature which could be very bad...anything that I can do to make the teachers job easier. That's what I do and, I mean, if we are short a substitute I will do in there and sub or if a teacher isn't feeling well, we'll take over for a period until someone can come. Anything that the teachers need as far as resources as long as I have the budget they have it...I split up the money and give them the catalogs and the requisition forms and say, "Here, whatever you need for this year to make your student performance go up, anything that you need, order it."

When we asked her what she considers to be most important in good leadership, she noted the significance of good communication and being sensitive to teachers needs. She noted that her strength was in her ability to deal with many different types of personalities, as well as her understanding of teachers in classrooms and commitment to life long learning as a student herself:

Well, I think communication is very important, sensitivity too--you know, I'm dealing with 125 adult personalities and you have to be able to get along w/ everyone. Which they say is one of my strengths but then I also take a lot on myself too. But, like I said, that's just the type of person I am and if it's going to help the children or the teachers in anyway I'll do what it takes. Always being a teacher too and a life long learner which is something that--you know, I continue to go to school and when I go into observer a lesson I sit in the groups I work with the kids I participate with the teacher. Just really becoming one of them I think because people that, when I go out to workshops, no one ever guesses that I'm a Principal. When I sit there in the middle of teachers they just think that I'm one of the teachers because that's just how I am.

In addition to providing a supportive and caring environment, she also provides structural support for teachers in terms of professional development and workshops. She reiterated her commitment to allocating budget for teachers to attend workshop and conferences. For instance,

in her budget, the principal allocates at least one conference for every teacher because she believes the importance of learning and growing as a teacher, and that such professional development facilitates teachers to implement new teaching methods in their classrooms:

In my budget I always allocate one conference. They have registration fee money in there, they have travel money and also they have a professional improvement fund which is through the Newark Teachers Union. So, they go to go on two if they choose to, at least two a year besides our 8 staff development days. And most of the staff development days are either run by the District or they are school imbedded and of course the focus is on Language Arts, Math, Science, and English Language Learners and special needs population now and how to teach those two populations. But I think it is crucial that they do have them.

Many teachers overwhelmingly believed that the administration supported the teachers in every way possible. They felt that the administrators “trusted” and “backed” the teachers, while also being “flexible” and “visible” in the school. One teacher put it this way:

We’re very lucky, we have a great administration...And I do have to say no matter what she’s there for you 110% to back you up on whatever you need, whether it’s supplies or information on something or just advise or how to fill something out, how to do something. They do come to our grade level meetings, not all the time but if we request for them to be there they’re there. Anytime that you go to anyone of them [administrators] for a problem I do have to say that they are always there to help us.

And how does that affect your teaching and ultimately your students?

Well, for me it’s great to know you have Administration that’s there for you to back you up because you know that you’re not alone. And there are sometimes that you just can’t go to your colleagues that you need to go to someone higher up to confirm something. So it’s great to know that they are there for you and, you know, sometimes it helps your sanity to know that you’re not going crazy trying to figure out something on your own

and you know that you can count on them. And, of course, if I'm happy then my students are happy because it's rubbing off on them and I'm not going to come in here in a lousy mood and worrying about this form to fill out or this presentation to do.

Other teachers spoke of the flexibility and trust that they have from the administration. As one teacher argued, "Every teacher has flexibility. You close your door you're alone with your students." This flexibility and trust in teachers also translate to their curriculum decision-making and implementing teaching strategies. In the context of state takeover and district mandates, teachers at Oliver are required to strictly follow the curriculum standards; however, they are also free to teach it how they see fit in their own classes. The principal explains:

The State and the District also has a plan. So, we basically have to follow that. So, as long as they're teaching the skills or the standards, I'm very open to them doing it anyway they want to as far as you know a thematic unit or a special field trip. They can do it as long as they're covering the State and the Districts curriculum they have freedom to do a lot of different things within the building.

Teachers echoed the limitations of state mandates and standards; however, they also spoke of their different approaches and methods to implementing these standards according to the makeup of the classroom. That is, in the context of state mandates and restrictions of curriculum content, teachers also exercise child-centered approach and implement critical pedagogy that is flexible and specific for the given student population. As one teacher explained:

The skills stay constant, the curriculum stays constant. What's different is the way that the teachers approach how to teach that particular skill so the teacher has the flexibility to say, "Ok, I have to teach main idea...let's see, how is my class?" So, the makeup of the classroom come into play and knowing your children and who the children are in your classroom makes the teacher pick different strategies to teach that particular skill.

Student Population and Parental Involvement

At Oliver, most parents are first-generation immigrants with second-generation children who are either born or raised in the United States. Many of them are also working-class and poor parents who work menial jobs, often holding down more than one job in order to support their family. Consequently, administrators and teachers point to these reasons, as well as English language limitations as key reasons for limited parental involvement in school. For example, the PTO and formal group meetings that require constant and frequent meetings are very limited in attendance and have been declining for several years. Although this seems not uncommon for other schools that we have studied, it was nevertheless seen by many administrators as a concern, and seen as a dramatic change from the past when more parents were involved in PTO. The principal explains:

The parents because most of them are immigrants, you know, like I said before they came here to get a better life, make a better living and education for their children. Most of the parents are working 2 jobs. I have very few stay at home parents. I mean, our parent academy, which has a few volunteers, those are about the only mothers that don't work. There's maybe 3 or 4 that I know of and we have a population of 820 children, everyone is working. So, it's very hard to get them to actually coming for PTO meetings. If I have 30 parents at a PTO meeting, I mean, I'm excited.

However, there are few key events, such as the Open House and Parent Conference Day, where the school gets overwhelming participation from parents. Therefore, parental involvement may not always be generalizable as “good” or “bad”, but may very well differ depending on the events, teachers, and expectations. The principal continues:

Open House in October we get 600 people because that's the 1st time they get to visit the school and on Parent Conference Day that the District sets aside two 1 o'clock closings for that, so, we're open from 1 to 7 for parents to come in and that's when they get to talk one-on-on with the teachers. We get hundred's of parents on those three nights, the Open House and the two parent conferences. But other then that there's very little support--involvement. Support, they do support us but as far as helping with homework and things

like that since they don't know the language it's very hard to get support as far as that. But it's definitely the language barrier.

Many teachers noted that parental involvement varies from year to year. However, overall, teachers believed that parents are very supportive of them and their children. And on parent-teacher nights, many teachers have overwhelming attendance, despite some parents long work schedules and English language barriers. It helps of course to have teachers who are also bilingual who can help many immigrant monolingual parents navigate and negotiate the workings of a school. When we asked the teachers to describe parental involvement in their classes, one teacher noted that parental involvement may not always be consistent, but she relies on letters to communicate, as well as phone conversations with parents to facilitate their involvement:

Well, it depends on the year. I have sometimes parents who are willing to take time and come and help and participate in work, projects, they even go on trips with us. But this year was a little difficult because a lot of my parents work long hours and they can't take off of work. A lot of them are--don't have documentation so they are afraid that if they don't go to work, you know, they'll lose their job. So, we have a problem here with a lot of parental involvement. I do communicate with them through letters, you know, if they can't come I'm always writing them letters to give them an update to how the child is doing, if there's a problem I will call on the phone, that's how I communicate with most of my parents....Like, last year I had more parental involvement they would come and sometimes participate in Math games...But this year was a little bit more difficult to get that help.

When we asked a teacher if her parents come to parent teacher conference nights, she replied, "Yes. I have to say 99% of my parents came to 3 parent night and the 2 conference nights. I have to say I was very happy that they did come." When we continued to ask, "Are they mandated to come in the sense of picking up their report card or do they have to be here to pick it up?" the teacher replied:

Yes, the two conferences they have to come to pick up the report card, yes. But if they don't come we have to give the report card the next day. But they usually do come, the parents, if they can't come that night they'll call me or we'll set an appointment during my prep, I'll come and they'll come and we'll conference then. But I've been very successful this year.

Although parents may attend the report card nights where they are mandated to come and pick it up themselves, it is more difficult to get parents to help their children with homework on a daily basis. Many teachers attributed this to the parents' limited knowledge of English language:

Getting them to help the children with their homework or to at least check--because my students copy their homework everyday and I ask them the parents to sign it, that's a big problem. You know, there's no consistency at home, one day they will one day they won't. And so some kids come with homework sometimes and sometimes they--. Sometimes they don't because there's no--there's not really a consistent monitoring at home of homework. And reading to the children, a lot of these parents don't speak English and they don't have books in their native tongue so it becomes very difficult for them to read to their children...The majority of them [parents] can't speak English. I have only 2 parents who speak English in this class, they all speak Portuguese. So, yes, that is a *must*, knowing the language to able to communicate with them.

Despite the English language barrier of many immigrant parents, teachers were also quick to remind me how resourceful and determined the parents were in getting their children the best education possible. Teachers mentioned that since the school has a waiting list and is competitive to get in, many parents have to stand in line on the day of registration as early as 7 am. Such action indicates that most parents are concerned and involved. As one teacher noted:

For here you have to sign your kids up. Like, we have one day of registration, you have to come here at 7 o'clock in the morning if you want your child to get into these two classrooms. So, to me that's already a sign that they are at least interested if they are ready and willing to come here at 7 o'clock in the morning to sign them up.

In conclusion, parental involvement may vary from year to year, and from class to class. Nevertheless, the teachers and administrators were keenly aware of the overwhelming parental involvement on few key events, such as the registration night and annual parent conferences. No doubt, teachers are also aware of the economic and language limitations of the immigrant parents who are mostly working-class and poor with limited English language skills. That said, immigrant parents greatly benefit from having committed bilingual teachers who can and are willing to communicate with parents and actively reach out to them in and outside of schools about their children's education. One teacher summed it up well: "Generally, I have always found when I call a parent and ask a parent to come in they will come in. There are a few parents that just won't come in, you know, everybody's working I understand. That's when I told you the other day if I can't reach parents I always reach them on Sunday between 1 and 4."

The Decline of Achievement Scores in the Middle School

One of the most interesting phenomenon at Oliver is the significant decline of achievement test scores in the middle school grades, 6-8. Although our research did not investigate the reasons for this decline, it is an important subject for future investigation.⁵ Since there are a significant number of students who transfer from a neighboring K-5 feeder school in the 6th grade, it is important to understand the effects of these students on achievement in the 6th-8th grades. The neighboring school serves a lower income population, which is largely African American, as opposed to the majority of K-5 students at Oliver, who are largely Portuguese and Brazilian. Consistent with our model the questions need to be explored are:

1. Does the process of adolescence explain this decline?
2. Does the change in the composition of the student body due to transfer students explain this decline?
3. If the decline is due to new students:
 - a. What are the effects of academic preparation, race, ethnicity, SES, etc. on the differences between the two groups (K-5 and newcomers)
 - b. What are the effects of school processes on the differences (teacher expectations, tracking, etc.)

⁵ Paula Gordon's current doctoral dissertation research at Rutgers-Newark is investigating this issue in-depth.

- c. What are the effects of parental and community involvement and social and cultural capital on the differences.
4. Are there differences in the characteristics of effective schools and classrooms between the K-5 and 6-8 levels?
5. How do the administration and teachers deal with the problem of declining scores? What policies have been implemented or being considered?
6. Given the transfer option of NCLB whereby students from failing schools have the right to transfer into effective schools, what are the potential problems? Will effective schools become ineffective ones?
7. What are the differences in leadership, curriculum and instruction at the K-5 and 6-8 levels?
8. How are transfer students treated? Are they labeled, do teachers have lower expectations for them, and are they more likely to be placed in special education classes?
9. How does the school place transfer students? Are they integrated into heterogeneous classes or are they tracked based on ability on grade 5 tests? Are they overrepresented in special education and/or ELL?
10. What are the differences in cultural and social capital, family involvement, parent and student culture, peer group networks, after school programs and other outside school factors between the K-5 and transfer students and students from different backgrounds?
11. Does the achievement of transfer students increase from 6-8?
12. Which classroom level factors: qualified or tenured faculty, curriculum and instructional practices, data driven assessment, teacher collaboration, and professional development, are related to the achievement differences of this school?
13. Which microlevel/school factors: instructional and transformational leadership, clear vision/mission, school culture are related to the achievement differences in the school?
14. Which outside school factors: parental and community involvement, student and family culture, and peer networks related to achievement differences of this school?

Copernicus

Stability and Community Ties to School

Copernicus, located in Jersey City was found in a community that the principal describes as mostly “working people who built houses...but very little apartments.” Built in 1898, it was historically a family driven community with little or no transients. “If you bought a house you stayed here,” says the principal.

According to the principal, the community consisted mostly of working-class German and Polish immigrant families who worked in the American Can Company or Colgate factory. She said that the residents had a “deep sense of being part of the community, where schools and education were the answer for them.” She continues, “because of this, schools became really strong....the great American dream.”

This is an important statement, in light of the fact that a large number of the teachers at Copernicus are veteran teachers with over 20 years experience and have been at Copernicus for most of their careers. There is generational ties to the school, at least for the teaching and administrative staff.

In the last few decades, however, there has been a significant change in the demographics of students attending Copernicus. While the school was once predominantly attended by working-class white European immigrants, Copernicus and its neighboring communities today belong to mostly working-class minority students, with a significant number of children of immigrants from countries in Asia, Arab, as well as South and Central America.

Despite the change in student populations in the last few decades, teachers repeatedly spoke of the stable and consistent teaching staff and how this contributes to the success of Copernicus. One teacher who has been teaching for 35 years, where 25 years of that has been at Copernicus explained why she thought the school was successful:

I think...faculty was stable. There weren't people moving in and out....It was a very stable faculty and a stable neighborhood. In this neighborhood there are many more two

family houses then there are apartment. So, people had an investment in the neighborhood. [They] Stayed here, their children went to school here. They may have gone to school here. I've taught the children of children already in this building. If I start teaching the grandchildren I know I'm done for. But I've taught the children of children already, so there is stability in the neighborhood.

Although the demographics may have changed, she argued that the low turnover number of teachers help maintain a stable community. Even for the students, she noted that once they arrive at Copernicus, they end up staying as well. She notes that this is contrary to many of the other schools in the district that are struggling with rising number of student and teacher turnover:

Once they [the teachers] get here, it runs like a well-oiled machine in many ways and everybody knows what they should be doing it, and how it should be done...When we see children coming in from other schools many times they come in and what we're doing they don't seem to meld and mesh with. And then it takes a little while and then all of a sudden the light seems to dawn. They are doing things in the same manner that everyone else is doing and doing better...There's a consistency, you know, 1st grade, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, there's a similarity of ways that things are being done. And because at this school--children don't move in and out, it's a more consistent clientele...if you want to call the children clientele, and a very consistent faculty. In a lot of other schools, and I know this because of people and friends in other schools—they could have a 1/3rd turn over in their students within a year. You know, you can look at some children's folders and see that they've been in 6 or 7 schools by the 6th or 7th grade. But here you'll see maybe 1 or 2 schools. They find the place and they stay there...I think it really makes a difference.

Teacher Collaboration and School Community of Learners

The stability of the faculty members and their long history of teaching experiences also contributed to the level of teacher collaboration as well as their involvement in curriculum decision-making.

One elementary school teacher spoke of both formal and informal teacher collaboration that took place across and within grade levels. She explained that teachers informally spoke about curriculum and teaching methods during lunch or after school. More formal collaboration entailed morning meetings several times a week among teachers of similar grade levels:

All of the grade levels collaborate--formally and casually. There's discussion at lunch time between grade levels, like, we did this we did that--I tried this, I tried that. But there's formal also--several times a week we meet together as grade level, before school starts--before the children come in...And we collaborate at that time, come up with ideas. It says we need to do this, can we do it a different way? Who has the resources? Do you know where we can get that? Those kinds of things. So, it's like a common planning and--if anybody needs materials that someone else has--those kinds of things are shared at that time.

This level of collaboration didn't only exist across grade levels. It also existed between veteran and novice teachers. When we asked her to describe the relationships between veteran and novice teachers, she elaborated again the formal and informal collaboration. She gave an example of her relationship with a novice teacher who she mentored at Copernicus—a mentorship that began over 7 years ago and is still on-going. She notes that when there is a new teacher in the building, “somebody takes them under their wings.” She explains:

Well, there's an informal and formal once again. Like XXX who is in the room next to me here--I mentored her when she first came about 7 years ago. I was her mentor. That's a formal thing. And within the State of New Jersey she had to have 2 mentors, one from outside the building and one inside the building. So I was her in building mentor. And it's continued. I meet with her every morning, informally--we talk over--before we have to go to our regular meetings--our lives and also, you know, things about what's happening in the class...But it's passed on, informally and formally. If there's a new teacher in the building somebody takes them under their wing even if it's not a formal situation and reminds them this have to be done...but always trying to help that person along.

These meetings become important spaces for teachers to gain moral support, as well as gain invaluable guidance on curriculum development and teaching strategies. It also fosters teachers' decision making in curriculum planning—a process that becomes particularly important under the state takeover mandates. Despite the status of the state takeover, Copernicus faculty has maintained much teacher autonomy and flexibility in terms of implementing core curriculum content and standards, which are often accused of being “cookie cutter” and one-model fits all paradigm. When we asked the teachers and administrators about their involvement in curriculum decision making at Copernicus, most noted the distinction between the state standards themselves from the strategies actually used to implement those standards. Meaning, although the teacher may have to implement the mandated standards, *how* they get implemented and used in classes are up to the teachers. Such acts of agency and professionalism granted to teachers at Copernicus have been articulated by many of the administrators. One of the assistant principals was careful to point out how teachers should be the ones to decide on the strategies for implementing state standards; however, in order to do so, it is also important to structurally provide support for them, including scheduling their meetings to accommodate for developing such strategies. She noted the importance of professional developments and other ways to foster communication and collaboration between teachers:

Their [Teachers] role is to decide what strategies to use to apply the curriculum. The curriculum topics and things are driven from Central Office...the Professional Development are going from 8 o'clock to 8:30....Wednesdays, they get together talking about what's coming, progress reports--things like that--fieldtrips--things they all need to know. Then they break it down to every Tuesday and Thursday—the Math teachers meet just as Math teachers and they look at curriculum and they talk about planning and they talk about projects. Same thing with Language Arts and straight Science. So the constant meeting and talking it over with each other about what works what doesn't work.

One 5th grade teacher explained that even though the core content curriculum may be coming from the central office, how it is taught is largely “up to us to decide what you're going to teach

and how you wanna teach it.” That is, although teachers use the guideline provided by the district, the teachers use their own style, technique, and strategies.

The teachers also speak about the ways in which they negotiate, resist, and “circumvent” mandates that do not adhere to “best practices.” Throughout the process, however, they are careful to adhere to the Core Curriculum Content Standards as mandated by the state:

The District Office sends us certain mandates and provides certain materials, as you can see they’re all over. And has brought us to many meetings to give us their idea of how things should be done. And they want us to do things a certain way. We have found--we have felt that in the past few years that they have wanted us to do things in a ways that we don’t necessarily think are the best practices so we try to circumvent those, if we can, but still maintaining the Core Curriculum Content Standards and all that.

The principal explained that she expects the teachers to know the curriculum standards; however, she strongly believed that teachers should also have a say in how the curriculum is taught. She notes that although she faces pressure from the central office to implement the exact teaching method prescribed from the central office, she believes it is important to do it “our way.” She supports her teachers to find their own strategies that fit their children best and disagrees with the central office support for one-model fits all. It is important to acknowledge that all teachers have different teaching styles and that they have their “own way of doing it.” She believed that the central office would benefit both financially and educationally if they considered teacher creativity, and listened more to the needs of individual schools and situations. She states that there is “no creativity up there [district level]. It’s just do, do , do, and do it this way. So, we do it in our own way in the school.” Moreover, she continued to argue that as these “gospel” methods of teaching come down from central office, there isn’t enough time to actually understand, implement, and teach these models—since there is yet another “better” one coming down the pike.

Academic Standards Expectations and Accountability

All of the teachers held high expectations of their students. They elaborated that high expectations are critical to maintaining the quality of learning and teaching at Copernicus. One

of the assistant principals mentioned that the teachers at Copernicus had extremely high expectations of their students, and that this level of expectation far “exceeds the expectations that the State has for us.”

The teachers spoke of high expectations across the grade levels. One teacher stated that teachers at Copernicus “expect them [students] to do the best they can do in every single area to meet the standards on their grade level.” Similarly, another teacher noted that teachers “try to make sure that all students are working at or above grade level based on the curriculum.”

As the principal noted, the expectation is that no child at Copernicus should ever fail:

As I tell the kids every Copernicus and every assembly awards day-nobody in this school should fail, nobody. I don't care what the situation is, nobody should fail. Everybody should have gotten some award today because everyone of you are capable of. So, if you failed or if you get left back you chose to do it. So, I can't help you.

Repeatedly, teachers and administrators spoke of instilling high expectations for students. These high expectations are coupled with deep understanding of differentiated assessment of students as well. For instance, a teacher commented that she holds high expectations and standards for all of the students, however, this does not mean that all students are expected to learn the same way. “I expect every child to learn but not necessarily at the same pace, at the same level, or at the same degree of success, but every child will learn.”

Leadership and Teacher Support

When we asked teachers to describe the leadership style of the principals, many teachers explained that their principal sets a tone for high achievement. She also trusted teachers to be professionals who are capable of making important teaching and curriculum decisions for their children, as well as give necessary feedback to the administrators on the status of their classrooms. One teacher explained:

I would say that she [principal] sets the tone. But the tone of the building for high achievement is that she trusts her teachers to let her know how things should be. She trusts us as the professionals and she says that a lot. ‘You know the nitty gritty of the classroom, I trust you to set the tone and let me know what kind of things need to be

done.’ So she does trust the faculty to be very professional. So, that sets a very good tone. You don’t feel that someone is looking over your shoulder saying, ‘No, you’re doing that wrong. You’re doing this right. Do this do that.’ It’s not that. If you can make a valid reason for doing something she’d be happy to let you go right ahead and try it.

The professional treatment of teachers facilitated trust and support. Many felt that the principal would support and “back up” teachers should they be challenged by the district or the parents. For instance, a fifth grade teacher noted, “She is always there for the faculty. She’ll back you up.” Other teachers explained that the principal was firm but fair—someone who cares about students’ welfare.

The principal herself noted the high caliber of teachers, and attributed most of the success of the school to her teachers. But she also spoke of her own role models—good principals that she had the fortune of working with, as well as her own graduate school experience at Rutgers University. She highlights her own training as well as apprenticeship with “good” leaders as important reasons for her own growth as a principal. She explained that she has learned to be more collaborative with all of her teachers, as well as with her assistant principals. She explained that her relationship with other assistant principal here at Copernicus is very different from those relationships at high school level since “every vice principal [at the high school] wants your job and that’s an underlying current.” However, here at Copernicus, her relationship with the other assistant principals is very different. It is based on working together and collaborating for the best outcome for the school as a whole.

For instance, she gave an example of her working relationship with one of the assistant principals at Copernicus. In addition to the number of experience teaching at Copernicus, the assistant principal was “detailed oriented” and can focus on detailed logistics of governance of the school. On the other hand, the principal’s strength was in being able to see and implement the “big picture” for the school. Such collaboration among the administrators also played an important role in fostering the school community. The principal states:

One of my strong points is I can see the big picture. My weakness is--ah, Devil is the details. I just am terrible with details, I’m terrible with paperwork, I’m terrible with paperwork because I *hate* it. Unless I can see a reason for it I hate doing it. Someone

said to me, “You are really a people person.” And I am. I love being with the kids, I love being with the teachers. I suppose I should be the PR person. But she’s [assistant principal] very logical and very detailed and that’s why she’s so good with the paperwork. I can sit there and do some of the analysis and I can play around with it and then. But I’ll get to a certain point and I’m done. You know, I’ve come up with major components. You know, I’m not stupid. But she will even go further [into details].

Student Population and Parental Involvement

Copernicus consists of a diverse student body. Many of the students are immigrants or children of immigrants whose families have come from countries in Asia, Middle East, Caribbean, as well as Central and South America.

One of the assistant principal noted the diverse student body at the school. In the aggregate, however, Asian Indians represent one of the fastest growing racial and ethnic groups in the school. Despite the diversity in race and ethnic groups, most of the students are coming from working-class and poor income level households. Moreover, parents held high expectations of their children. The assistant principal explains:

Well, we’re pretty diverse here. We have a very huge Indian population. And that Indian population has very high expectations for their children even though many of them don’t speak English as their first language but they are very very concerned about the academic achievement of their children. I think the blacks are in the minority. I believe many of our parents send their children here because of what they’ve heard about us being high achievers here. So they really do work with us... they work with us academically, they work with us trying to help us eliminate some of the social concerns that we have, such as, making sure all of the students come to school with their uniforms on. That’s a big issue. They are very very cooperative. The children get along together, the parents get along together.

Despite the portrayal of all students and parents getting along, other teachers did not lose sight of the difficult conditions that some students faced at home and school. Some teachers mentioned that those limited English students have trouble in various subjects, including math. Others

discussed the difference from those children who have attended Copernicus since kindergarten whose literacy skill may be higher, compared to those students recently transferred from other districts. So the variability of students and their family backgrounds speak to the diverse schooling experiences of students at Copernicus.

Notwithstanding these barriers, teachers and administrators felt that overall, there was increasing parental involvement. One way of ensuring that parents get involved is for the school to mandate all parents to pick up their child's report card in person. This policy forced many parents to attend the teacher parent conferences. Initially, administrators faced much resistance and complaints especially from parents who had to work late hours. While sympathetic to these issues, the principal believed that the school accommodated their late working hours by staying late and reaching out to them to ensure that they can come in and meet the teachers whenever it is convenient for them:

They have to pick it up. Yeah, we went through that already. Parent only can pick it up. Not your brother, not your sister, not your grandmamma. I know you have a problem but you have to come in. Somebody's here at 7 o'clock in the morning, they can do it you can sign. Somebody's here until 6 o'clock at night. You know, you make arrangements; you want to come at lunch. People will always be there for you. I can't--I know it's hard. I'm sorry. But only parents. Because the old story was, "oh, I never saw it. Oh, well, who signed for this? I didn't I guess my sister or my mother who I'm fight with today or--." Nah, nah. I take a lot of hits for that but that's it, I'm really sorry. That's it, it's only parents. So, they know. And they kids--the kids know. Sometimes they don't but come on. And if they don't come in, we call them. You know, "You haven't picked up your report card.

As she continues, despite these strategies, there are those who fall through the crack. Some of the parents who do not come to open school nights and who do not work with teachers are those who are often facing problems in schools. "My biggest problem with parents is the group that's in trouble...They are really distrustful of the school...Not disciplining their kids. 'Oh, I can't do that, he's only a baby.' A baby? he's 7 years old, what are you talking about?"

Clearly, not all parents can be reached, but for the most part, the newly arriving immigrants and their children at Copernicus seem to be adjusting relatively well. Despite the increase of poor immigrants entering the school, the teachers and administrators believed that immigrant students helped improve the school. The principal mentions that not everyone in the neighborhood welcomes the increasing number of immigrants, but in the end, she feels that immigrant families have actually helped improve the school. “Most of the changes we have seen were positive, not that everybody in the Heights liked it, like all these foreigners coming. But, you know, that was a good thing for us, for education and for schools.”

Cornelius Bradford School

Cornelius Bradford School is located within walking distance of the Exchange Place PATH (Port Authority Trans-Hudson) station in Jersey City, which is on the waterfront. Because of its location—a five minute PATH ride to Manhattan—the waterfront section of the city has become the center of gentrification. If you ride the light rail from Exchange Place to West Side Avenue, where the Jersey City Board of Education is located—in one of the non-gentrified sections of the city—you can see a tale of two cities: one becoming more and more affluent and other still working class and poor.

Given the limited number of school-age children living in the waterfront neighborhoods, which are zoned for Bradford, and that many more affluent families choose to send their children to charter schools, independent or parochial schools, Bradford is an open-choice school. It admits all children within its zoning area and admits children from anywhere in Jersey City who apply. Since the school can reject the choice students there is some evidence that creaming may be taking place. Further research is needed to determine if this is the case.

As the school report card indicates (see Appendix 1), Bradford serves a multi-racial, multi-ethnic and economically integrated student body. Its success can be seen through the examination of our themes:

Stability and Community Ties to School

Bradford is a central part of its community with the school having stability from 2001-2008, especially under the leadership of its principal, who began right before September 11, 2001. Since it is an unzoned school, the principal and its parent and community liaison make a concerted effort to involve all parents, regardless of where they live. Although the families come from different races, ethnicities, and socio-economic positions, the school has an explicit mission to integrate them all within one community. During our observations, we did not witness tensions among the students or their families. Obviously, further research is needed to more fully examine whether or not these tensions are under the surface.

The group of mothers who talked with us on the schools “Muffins for Moms” breakfast on the Friday before Mother’s Day (there is also a “Doughnuts for Dads” breakfast on the Friday before Father’s Day) all indicated that Bradford is an important part of the community and that they feel integrated into its social fabric. Although the turnout of over 80 moms is indicative of such community spirit, we have no way of knowing without further research whether or not such a spirit is indicative of the parent body as a whole. Nonetheless, based on our research it is clear that every effort is being made by the school to create positive linkages between school and community.

Teacher Collaboration and School Community of Learners

When the current principal began in 2001, he made three important curricular and organizational decisions. The first was the implementation of looping, where children spend two years with the same teacher for two years (Pre-K and K; 1 and 2; 3 and 4; 5 and 6; 7 and 8). The second was the assignment of subject matter specialists at the 3-8 grade levels—one teacher in mathematics and science and one teacher in social studies and language arts—for each two-grade sequence. The third was the elimination of self-contained special education classes for students with disabilities and the implementation of inclusion classes at all levels for all students, with each class having both a regular and special education teacher to work with all students.

Our interviews with teachers showed majority support for all these decisions, but with some opposition by a handful of teachers. Nonetheless, our observations and interviews indicate that all of these processes have contributed to professional collaboration and teachers seeing themselves as a community of learners.

With respect to looping, the principal stated:

Part of the plan was to change—to get rid of desks and bring in tables for collaborative learning. Have the classes held as collaborative learning classes. I wanted group learning taking place. We looped. The first year we started the loop I had to introduce what looping was to the teachers

Many teachers told us that looping accomplished two interrelated goals. First, it allowed them to really get to know their students and how to help them learn. Second, in combination with the assignment of subject matter specialists to each loop, it required that they work collaboratively as part of a two-grade team. As one teacher told us:

My grade level partner? We work together a lot. We've been together since she started so we have a pretty good team. So we spend maybe about 3 hours a week depending on whether it's something new or something we've done in the past.....sometimes I'll refer back to the teacher who taught the 3rd grade last year. You know, the other Math teacher will say, "Did you try this because they don't get it. Do you know something else we could do?" So, we have that. But we pretty much stay with our floor, it's our grade level.

Although the principal remains strongly supportive of inclusion, arguing that special education classes label, stigmatize and lower student academic progress, some teachers indicate that it slows down the non-special education students. Interviews with both special education and regular education teachers indicate that on the whole inclusion has been positive for both sets of students and has required special and regular education teachers to collaborate in ways that usually does not happen.

Finally, many teachers and the principal stress the school's small size as an important component of community. As the principal told us:

I think that's the advantage of a small school. I think with bigger small school out there I think it's frustrating because I just don't think you can meet the needs of the students when you are there. When you are in a small environment you get to know these children

from Kindergarten to 8th grade, you see them developing, you know their families, and you know what when their walking around the building and they see a teachers had in Kindergarten maybe they're not going to be the smart as an 8th grader, the tough guy, they have a connection so that not only are you developing the kid as a person but you're also striving to show them that in order leave this environment, in order to better themselves they have to put forth their best because the competition out there, the children, the--there's a lot of competition so you have to strive to do your best.

With regard to professional development, one teacher stated:

...Yeah, we have--aside from the staff development days that are set aside on the calendar we have, you know, pretty much every morning from 8-8:30 there's something going on that we're required to attend. Whether it be our grade level meeting, a curriculum meeting, every person is required to be on a committee. So, just that in itself requires you to be somewhere between 8 and 8:30 whether the committee is parent involvement, peer relations or, you know, things like that. So, you know, that's within the school itself and then, you know, he also has somebody that forwards us all the different type of workshops that are being offered whether it's within the district or within the area that he thinks would be relevant to each individual.

Academic Standards, Expectations, and Accountability

Both the principal and teachers have extremely high expectations and academic standards for Bradford students. They are proud that the school's achievement scores are among the highest in the city and that it has been awarded numerous awards for excellence. When asked if there are differences in the achievement of neighborhood and non-neighborhood children (to see if performance is related to socioeconomic status), the principal indicated that there is little difference. The schools NCLB report card indicates that it has made AYP for all subgroups. [check] Out of zone parents told us that the reason they have their children travel long distances to the school is precisely because of its academic reputation.

The principal told us that in his first year he asked his daughter to transfer his grandson from a parochial school to Bradford in order to convey his message that Bradford was a school that I will send my child or grandchild to.

Teachers and administrators consistently stressed high expectations as a key to student success. One teacher told us, “For me—I expect a lot from my kids—I push and push and push and I make sure that my 8th graders are ready for high school.”.

These expectations are turned into results by strong accountability. One teacher stressed this point:

For teachers, we’re observed at least one time during the year....We’re held accountable, of course, like, our grade book, our plan book and just in general the kind of job we’re doing....students are held accountable. They have projects they have to do. Homework assignments, of course, and test grades. As far as their behavior as well, they have to live up to a certain standard. They have, like, the uniform policy which they have to live up to.

On this subject another teacher added:

I mean, they’re [expectations] pretty high, exactly where they should be if reaching the state standards if not above, you know. This year actually we have some very bright classes and we have some readers reading at the 3rd grade level, so, I think that’s one thing we really stress is that if they are at or above standards that we set even higher standards for them. We don’t just settle for, ok, they’re meeting the state standards and that’s it. . . in the beginning of the year they know what’s expected of behavior wise and academic wise and everything so it kind of makes it more of a responsible learner on their part.

However while the teachers have high expectations of the students, they also encouraged to have realistic, achievable ones. The level for their expectations are determined through the assessment of instruction. One teacher talked about how, at Bradford, the children are

continually reassessed, to ensure that each child is being taught at the correct level for them and achieving the most they can achieve. This teacher commented:

Right, well, the bench line checklist it's not really a formal assessment it's just kind of so they know what they should be working with their children on at home. But as far as from a teaching standpoint, how we assess them, in Kindergarten there is what's called the ELAS, I don't know if you've heard anything about that. But that's a pretty intense language arts assessment and it's something continuously that we do all throughout the year through anecdotes, through observations, through work samples, things like that. And that's something, like I said, that goes on all through out the year so we are continually reassessing their whereabouts. And then, you know, there's the monthly progress reports and they report cards and things like that.

When asked to comments on time teachers spend on actual instruction during the day, this teacher elaborated on the fact that it is the schools aim to make sure that the children were instructed and kept busy all day 'until the bell rings', stating

. . . But instructional time, other then having 15 minutes for snack and then their lunch time it's pretty much continual. If--we have learning centers at the end of the day which is more play oriented, learn through play, so as far as us giving them instruction it's not so much as a formal lesson or anything like that. It's them kind of playing and learning to socialize and things like that, exploring. But the centers are instructional, there's math center, writing center, listening center, so it is still in a sense is instructional but it's not as concrete but I would say pretty much the majority of the day is continual. And that's one of the main goal is to instruct until the bell rings.

Leadership and Teacher Support

There is no doubt that Bradford's principal is the center of the school. Although its teachers are a talented and experienced group, the principal is like an orchestra leader who makes sure everyone plays his/her part. A better metaphor would be a football coach. As the principal told us:

I describe it as a football coach because I was a football coach. I think that the football coach—as a football coach you have to have a game plan. You have to go into the season with a plan for the entire season. You prepare for everything possible but you also have to make adjustments during the game. Same thing for the school year; you are playing for the school year but there are adjustments made. Everyday is new adventure so everyday is like an adjustment that you have to make. You also have to have a strong coaching staff and that's my teachers. My job is to make sure I have a good strong coach staff or teaching staff to implement my program, implement my ideas. I also try to be as unobtrusive as possible with your teaching techniques.

The principal is ubiquitous. He is outside early in the morning greeting children and parents as they arrive to school. He knows all of his students and their parents by name. He jokes with them; but can also be a stern taskmaster, with both students and teachers. As one teacher told us:

Yah, that's one thing that he does he pops in, sees how things are going, what's on the walls and sees what we're working on and talks with the kids. He's really, he has a really good rapport with the children. That's one thing that, you know, he'll--he really enjoys being exposed to them and talking to them and everything too. So, yah, we see him. Probably not as much as, you know, the main building because it's a matter of location but he does make an effort to come by. . . .

As with all strong leaders, he is liked by some and disliked by others. One teacher told us:

[The principal] is a leader in many respects. He has a pulse on what is happening on a daily basis. In order for anything to work you have to have excellent communication skills, in my opinion, with the teachers, the staff, the parents, and the community at large. In my minds eye we have never had such an exemplary leader as Mr. Marsella these past four years. He makes daily rounds in every single classroom and prior to him coming there was never a venue in which every single person in the building was respected and valued the way he exhibits on a daily basis. And when you have that reciprocation from

the custodian to the luncheon aid all the way up and everyone feels as though they are a stake holder in the type of education we're providing for the children, always with the goal in mind, service to the children.

On this subject a kindergartern teacher added:

The one thing that I noticed about him that I really liked was that he, you know, he kind of has a team camaraderie with everyone. You know, he really makes you feel like you're working together and we're a unit of teachers as a whole and he stresses staff development and, you know, just to further your teaching abilities and the knowledge that you have, he stresses that a lot which is good. And, so, you know, he backs all of the teachers up and he is really confident in our skills which, you know, helps when, you know, if he's confident in your skills then, you know, you feel confident as well.

However, there is a conflict of opinions amongst the staff and not all of the teachers felt as positively about the principal. One stated:

The principal's character is very bizarre. He doesn't have all the answers. He doesn't do it from the heart. Character development will happen if the leader demonstrates it. He points fingers, has something to say. Doesn't consider the good things they do. He is a good guy but thinks he's right all the time. Diplomacy means a lot, especially when you're a leader. He has a lot of answers but doesn't listen. He thinks he is doing the right thing. I have had principals that cared and I believed in them. They always said "Thank You" to staff. Our principal is not like that. He is very rough.

And another teacher who did not want to be directly quoted told us that the principal is too strong handed and dictatorial.

Finally, numerous faculty and administrators talked reverentially about one of the principal's first days: September 11, 2001. After the attack on the World Trade Center, Bradford was a staging zone for the evacuation of children from New York City public schools in lower Manhattan. They described the principal as immediately taking charge by the seat of his pants,

making critical decisions, providing leadership and ensuring the safety of traumatized children. His decision to not permit any parent to pick up their child without proof of identity, although unpopular with some at the time, was seen as the right decision; one made to prevent someone with dangerous motives from exploiting an already tragic situation.

Our interviews revealed that teachers have mixed reactions to the principal's leadership style, with a majority overwhelmingly positive and a small number negative. Based on our observations, it is clear that the principal is an energetic and demanding leader, who sometimes does not take his teachers' feelings into account. He can be abrupt, but it is clear that he is zealous about ensuring student learning is at the center of all activities. Sometimes he can rub teachers the wrong way. As the old saying goes, "you cannot make an omelet without breaking some eggs." If the majority of teachers were as negative as the minority who are, we would see this as a problem. However, given the fact that the majority of teachers were positive, we view his leadership positively.

Since we completed the fieldwork, the principal of Bradford has retired. Anecdotal evidence based on a number of observations suggests that the climate and culture of the school may be changing.⁶ In addition, there is some evidence that middle class parents are leaving the school for charter, independent or parochial schools due to dissatisfaction with the new principal, who many believe is too closely aligned with the district superintendent.⁷ Further research is required to determine to what extent these are the case. Nonetheless, these putative problems illustrate the problem with replicating principal leadership once an effective school head leaves (Semel and Sadovnik, 2008).

Student Population and Parental Involvement

Bradford has one of the most diverse student populations in the state (See Appendix A). Teachers and administrators see this as one of its main strengths. As one teacher told us:

You'll see anything from students who live in really nice town houses closer to the water front where their parents are wealthy to students who live in shelters, you know local

⁶ Elizabeth Morrison Brown's (a Rutgers-Newark doctoral student) observations at Bradford in 2007-2008 indicate that the school may be becoming less effective. However, additional data analysis and observations are necessary to support this claim.

⁷ This has come out in Morrison Brown's interviews with parents and community members in her current dissertation research on a charter school in the same neighborhood.

shelters. It's a broad range a lot of different ethnicities, different family backgrounds, who lives with their mom, who lives with their grandma, step-brothers, step-sisters, it's very diverse.

The principal told us that parental choice is an important feature of this diverse population:

Their parents make--their parents make a choice to choose this school over their neighborhood schools and because of that I think that was always something that worked for us because if you are choosing to be here you have to make it work for you and we have to offer something that's going to attract you.

In addition parent involvement is an important, multifaceted component of the school. The parent coordinator told us:

Well, we have a committee, it's called Parental Involvement Committee. That's part of the Whole School Reform, I'm on that committee. And we do things, like, we're actually having a Mother's Day breakfast on a Friday, we do a Father's Day breakfast, we had a movie day one day after school just to try to get the parents to be involved in their kids, not even academics, just to be involved in their kid's life. You know, share a little time with your child together. We do that—that sort of thing through parental involvement. It seems like there's always parents in the building, so—.... the kids are so little when we dismiss them we see a lot of the parents then when they come to pick up their kids. We have report card night, we have to send home progress reports. For the most part though, you know, if parents are concerned or interested, I mean, they can always call us or...

She went on to stress the importance of open lines of communication between parents, teachers and Principal how the school tries to cultivate this:

Parental involvement and a Principal that has an open door policy. Parents are very involved in all of the planning for this school, we have monthly Parents Association meetings, we are really working hard trying to bridge the gap between communication of

the teachers and the parents and administrators. There is only one in this school of a little over 400 children. But I would definitely think it's definitely parental involvement. Definitely everybody just kind of working together as a team for the educational excellence of the children.

She then commented on the high degree to which parents are involved in the school. Pointing out that almost every parent is involved in workings of the school in some way. She stated:

Significantly, I would say at least 40%. Moderately, that goes up to about 70 or 80% and not at all, I don't think there are any parents that are not at all at one time or another involved in their children's education. . . . Whether it be spending an hour doing our Read Across America, they come to the school and read for the children, so in some way or another I would have to say, you know, you have 40% or the parents that are always here and then--that come to every meeting--every--every parent meeting (...) the month. Then you have those that are here doing things like that. So, I wouldn't say there are any real parents that are not in some way connected to their children.

Another teacher felt that the high level of parental involvement in Bradford could be linked not only to the school's efforts to involve parents but also the type of parents in the area. She commented:

Oh, it's [parental involvement] excellent here. It is, it's really excellent. I think a lot of that has to do with just for some reason the nature of the parents in the area. I don't know, they just--probably again it's a small community, everybody kind of knows what's going on and, you know, they drop their kids off and pick them up so there's always that continual communication between the teacher and the parent. But, also, the school as a community does a lot to foster those, you know, the parental involvement. We have all sorts of, you know, activities to get the parents involved, Friday night movies and things like that, lunches.

Another teacher expounded on the relationship between parents and teachers with respect to expectations for students and trust between teachers and parents:

Int: And the parents are made aware of the expectations?

T: Yeah, yup. We give them, we actually give them in the beginning of the year kind of like a bench mark check list of things that they are expected to know by the end of the school year and, you know, we kind of give an update every couple of months where they're at and how they're meeting those needs, so.

Int: Do the parents trust you?

T: Right, yah, I think we kind of look at each other as a team, you know. So, you know, if something is going on at home then we look to address that at school as well. Just so everybody is on the same page and the child has some consistency. So, and the parents are, you know, fairly good about that. Telling us if something's going on, letting us know because it's important, it changes the way the child behaves so, yah.

This commentary also draws attention to the fact that the teachers in this school are encouraged to be aware of what is going on in the children's lives outside of school.

Given the diverse nature of the parent body and the fact that English is not the first language of many, we have a concern that the involvement of parents is skewed to more affluent and/or English speaking parents. Although we did not see concrete evidence of this during our observations, further research is needed to examine this issue.

Christa McAuliffe School

Located in the Heights section of Jersey City, NJ, the Christa McAuliffe School (P.S. 28) is a K-8 school that serves approximately 1300 students from around the area. With a predominately Latino student body, P.S. 28 offers numerous specialized instructional programmatic resources

such as bilingual education and English as a second language (ESL), in addition to Special Education, Reading Recovery, a Fine and Performing Arts program, and computer-assisted instruction. As stated by the principal, “the Christa McAuliffe Elementary School believes in the importance of providing a challenging, diverse, and inclusive curriculum that engages and motivates students to become lifelong learners and productive responsible citizens.”

McAuliffe is located Hancock Street, a street set in the middle of a residential area, even though it is only few blocks over from a Jersey City main road. A Catholic church is directly across the street from the main entrance of McAuliffe, and has been quite useful to the school as it has housed the 4 grade classes for the past several years on the top floor of the church. The school has had to pay for use of the church space for their classes, but the relationship between public and religious institutions appears to be indicative of the ways in which McAuliffe attempts to “build relationships outside of the normal routes” as stated by the principal. Interestingly, the school is also less than ten city blocks from another large public school, Nicholas Copernicus, but despite being physically close to Copernicus, McAuliffe serves a very different student population and has a moderately different approach to student achievement.⁸

Stability and Community Ties

Through conversations with the principal, teachers, and staff, it is clear that the school is seeking to foster a relationship with the surrounding community and neighborhood organizations. According to the principal, the local community is highly encouraged to be involved in the school through collaborations with recreation programs, the Girl Scouts, and area businesses. In fact, several local stores reward students for their successes through free goods and services. The school also uses the local community resources in order to facilitate their speaker series, field trips in and around Jersey City, and other special programs. The school also hosts several cultural events during the school year, and often relies on the relationship with local merchants to help sponsor these events.

The student body reflects the surrounding community demographics in that they come from primarily immigrant families who are economically disadvantaged. Despite these social and economic odds, the leadership at McAuliffe strive to help the students actualize their dreams. The principal states:

⁸ See Jamie Lew’s report on Copernicus for greater detail in the differences between the two institutions.

Most students, a large number of students, come from economically disadvantaged homes. Many are immigrant parents. I don't even know their legal status for that matter. But they come with the American dream; they really come to get ahead. So, children come with the expectation that they're going to do well in school, because they have to. And parents need to work very hard.

We really work very hard, we just have children with limited resources that come to us with a lot of issues and we move them ahead. It's just that to start out they were so far behind. They continue to have problems in the community, there are gangs, there are outside influences that affect them but I would say, for Jersey City, we have a great curriculum. We really are ahead of what many suburban districts do but part of it is that we have social issues that the children bring with them. And no one wants to hear that and we should not let it affect us but it's a reality. We move them ahead but they still have those things, they do not disappear. We need to provide support that helps them overcome those.

The staff at McAuliffe often spends their time trying to compensate for some of the issues and troubles that the students face in their personal lives. Teachers spoke about building "family networks" with the students so they know what is needed to help the "whole student." This help sometimes came in the form of extra attention and mentoring outside of class, coaching extracurricular activities and sports programs, or sometimes just lending an ear with individual students. Several administrators and teachers spoke of seeing themselves as extensions of the students' parental units:

A lot of our students come with problems at home. We are like a family here. We know our families here and we know how we can help. But a lot of--sometimes, single parents, it's tough, it's really tough for some of the parents. And you can see it they want to do the best for their child. I think every parent wants the best for their child and they ask us to help we try to help them out. (*Assistant Principal*)

Leadership and Teacher Support

Upon entering McAuliffe, and watching interactions between staff, teachers, administrators, and teachers, it quickly became clear that the leadership at the school is a driving force. The principal at McAuliffe was appointed by the district and has only been at the school for a little over three years. Given that she replaced a long-time principal and was hired from outside of the school, it was surprising to see how much support she had with the faculty and staff. The teachers spoke fondly of the principal commenting, “I think she’s strong, consistent and fair and very approachable which is very important.”.

The principal was cognizant of how she could have been received by the teachers and staff given her “outsider-ism,” but believed that as long as she was steadfast to the mission of the school and maximized student achievement, then other things (and people) would fall into place. As the principal is a Latina herself, she remarked how she had a special interest in seeing students of color do well, so upon beginning her position, she instituted measures and mechanisms to facilitate her goals. By having a good relationship with the District, the principal was able to ask for resources that “other principals may not think to ask for.” The principal also has a part-time grants writer position to apply for various funding from outside of the district, and they have been quite successful in procuring these outside funds. The additional funds have provided resources for a more modern science lab, new computers, and new electronic equipment that are used in movie-making and video-editing among the older students.

Despite enacting what is sometimes deemed as (by the students) strict school policy around dress code and behavior, the principal is rather hands off with the teachers as long as students are progressing.

I feel like she basically lets us do what we want to do in our classroom and she supports us. (*5th grade teacher*)

When you have good support from the administrators you can’t help but succeed. (*1st grade inclusion teacher*)

This hand-off approach seems to only solidify the teachers’ support of not only the principal, but the two assistant principals as well. The school leadership is known to walk around the school

on a daily basis and “pop their heads in” to various classes, yet there is evidence of a level of comfort in that process. Teachers do not seem to feel that they are being constantly monitored, but believe that school administrators are taking ownership and responsibility for their school. The collaboration between administrators and teachers is a beneficial one in that there seems to be an inherent level of trust, particularly in the vision, and execution of that vision in the school.

I think every leader needs to have a vision for the school, where you want to take the school, a mission, you have to work collaboratively and I think a big important part of leadership is you have to have a sense of humor too. So, I think those are the leadership qualities. You have to know where you are now and where you are going to take it, where you are going to take your vision. (*Assistant Principal*)

The Assistant Principal expanded on the theme of administrative teamwork commenting on the importance for school management to make a concerted effort to be present within the school – both for the teachers and parents. She commented on the value of being accessible and cultivating good relationships with the parents and open lines of communication, allowing for the parents to feel comfortable contacting them to talk about anything. She noted:

We can give an idea to her and, you know, she’ll say go with it, you know, try it, see how it works and she’s always good like that. I think we lead by example. We--our style is and mine personally, and [the principal] and [the other AP], we’re outside, we’re highly visible. We’re out in the morning at 8 o’clock and we’re out at the end of the day, we speak with the parents. You know, my speaking with the parents we know in advance if there might be some kind of problem or issue that we can resolve . . . I think they feel that we’re very approachable and we will, you know, listen, investigate, and help them out even if it’s dealing with an agency. You know, we’re always available and we return our phone calls which is important because as a parent myself if I had a concern I would want the administrator to call back. I think we work very well together here and I think that’s very important. If the teachers come to us and they want to try something, go for it. See we’re here--I think--our school here is like, we’re here for the kids. If it’s going to help

the kids, we're willing and [the principal] is always willing to find the money and, you know, help the teachers out that way whether it materials, a concert.

When asked about her own ideas about quality leadership, she elaborated:

I think every leader needs to have a vision for the school, where you want to take the school, a mission, you have to work collaboratively and I think a big important part of leadership is you have to have a sense of humor too. So, I think those are the leadership qualities. You have to know where you are now and where you are going to take it, where you are going to take your vision.

The assistant principal went on to describe her way of working within the school. She commented on the importance of reflection, empathy and sensitivity in her approach, stating:

I think I bring sensitivity to what I do. I consider myself a teacher first. . . So, whenever we're at curriculum meetings or talking with my colleagues down stairs I'm always thinking like a teacher. . . .So, I always like to think that I approach teachers respecting that they're probably the expert in this particular situation because they have had the training and the development and they are in the classroom everyday and to respect where they're coming from and to encourage them, to praise them. If I do have--if there is something negative I will always come at it privately and personally and, you know, like, there was something on a bulletin board we were preparing and, you know, my approach will be, "This part is really great. I like how you did that but the way you have the heading we need to change that because it needs this, that and the other.

And finally, commenting on the principal's strong leadership qualities, she stated:

She is very good--she is a strong leader and a person that I would like to be a leader-- I would like to be like her in terms of her leadership style. . . .but she has that charisma with the respect of staff, staff respect her, she knows what she's doing but when --she can when she has to get tough she can get tough. . . .She's small in stature and all but she can,

you know, she can take on whatever needs to be taken on, the District, the parent, the teacher, the child, you know, she's strong like that. She also develops relationships. . . . they respect her, they know her and they know she's no nonsense, she all about business but she's always all about putting her hand on a child's shoulder and saying, "Come with me, let's talk about this. [whispering]

Academic Standards, Expectations and Accountability

All of the teachers held high expectations of their students. They saw it as their job to at least meet the educational standards as mandated by the state, and expected their students to surpass each of those basic standards. These expectations are held at every grade level, from the youngest student to the oldest, whether the student is cognitively challenged or not,

...high achievement and high expectations for all students and keeping them focused on learning to really improve. *(Principal)*

I feel that we have very high expectations, which is why our results are so well. Having these high expectations really makes them work hard and achieve a lot more than they ever thought they would. *(6th grade teacher)*

I think that they are very high but fair and I think the kids are working to the best of their ability and meeting the standards. *(1st grade teacher)*

The principal, she tours the building, she looks around, she looks in, she speaks to the children and that's another way she keeps task. *(1st grade inclusion teacher)*

Another teacher expanded on the high level of expectations at the school and the effects of having such high standards:

I feel we have very high expectations which is why our results are so well. I just think we just want the best. . . I feel that we have these high expectations for them and they see that. From going to—I started in 1st to 5th to 6th it's just the way that they've grown. Even

just seeing from 5th to 6th I'm like WOW, I'm like, this student was 3 reading levels below and now she's a reading level above. Having these high expectations really makes them work hard and achieve a lot more than they ever thought they would.

When asked about teacher accountability, this teacher talked about the school policies in place to ensure this. The staff are: evaluated each year, required to mentor new staff, and attend monthly staff meetings. Another mentioned the requirements of NCLB and how the work ethic of the teachers results in them driving each other.

The first teacher commented:

Well, we get an evaluation every year by the principal. And then we kind of almost can tell because you look in the hallways, you know, you look around in the classroom.

What's visible? What's up? And the teachers are pretty close knit. It's like support one, you know, reach one teach one. We support one another if there's any struggles, like there's anything. Even with new teachers. . . And that's how it usually works, it's like a buddy system. Usually when we get a new teacher there's always--we have something called a mentor and that new teacher gets a mentor. . . that person kind of walks them through, they meet with them, if they have anything--just keep them in line, keep them on track, let them know how things run, what is expected. And we have staff meetings every month so that way the principal can kind of talk to us as teachers making sure that everything is in order for each month. And then our principal, she tours the building, she looks around, she looks in, she speaks to the children and that's another way she keeps task.

Another of the teachers added:

We're help accountable for the test scores. I mean there's no repercussions but under NCLB that's our job here to see that every child succeeds. . . The teachers just really work hard here, the administrators too. . . Everything is aligned with the district curriculum and the core curriculum standards. So, accountability wise, like I said there

are no repercussion but if you do not meet the AYP you have to come up with a plan and-. There was one year, one year with math which we did but we've really come a long way with math improving out scores, in the 8th grade in particular. He has a algebra program and they put the pre-algebra in 7 and the algebra in grade 8 and that has done a lot to improve the scores too. So, we try to select the right program and the right materials and we try to put our strongest teachers, when we're testing 4 and 8, we try to put our strongest teacher there. Our math teacher is math certified, in some schools in the city they are not but everybody is trying to move towards that. He was one of our students, we try to higher within. [Chuckle] A lot of the teachers here--it's an interesting point. A lot of them either subbed for us, were student teachers--he was one our students. So we try to, you know, choose people with empathy, with sympathy for the kids, who understand the community. Like, I'm a Jersey City person; I live in the city too, so.

Finally the Principal commented on accountability:

Here at PS 28 we ask for the non-tenured plan books one a week, the tenured staff every other week. And we do monitor them and they know that the administrators will speak to them, write them a note if there's something that we pick up on that's not being coordinated with the standards or with the district curriculum. We ask them to hand in reading logs and their DRA assessment. And we monitor the record keeping. I don't know but at this building we do it. We stay on top of that and we do call them in if we find something that's not, you know, jiving with the curriculum or whatever we do. . . .so we do monitor their lesson plans, their school based projects, their themes, you know their units that they work on, we check their role books. So, when they hand in report cards they need to hand in a role book. When we do an evaluation we write those items in the evaluations. There is a pre-conference form, we say we're going to look for the plan book, the record book, the logs, any assessment. It has to be readily available upon the day of observation. So they know that, they know within 10 days we're going to come in. . . . we check, they have portfolios, the students have portfolios, . . .we do check those items and everybody is on target with that. And that came about under the connect model.

..

Finally, commenting on the level of expectations for teachers, the Assistant Principal's opinion resonated with that of a number of the other schools investigated. The Assistant Principal added:

Very high, very high. The previous principal who I never worked with apparently was a very strong leader that the staff thought very highly of. I knew her by name and to see her but I didn't know her personally . . . So, I think that she set the tone in many cases for the teachers, for the building. This is what we do, this is what our standards are. And of course teachers being self-motivated they just carry that along with them but the teacher, you know, they want to do the best, they want to be the best in the city for test scores-- which I have a whole 'nother opinion about. But [laughing]--but they strive for that, they strive to do it, they strive to get those students on point, you know, to get that parent in because he's not doing the best he possible can. The disadvantage of that, I would say, is that, but all of our students are not alike. So, you know, yes, we do have high standards but we may have to reach this student another way, you know, of course differentiated instruction. We may have to go through the backdoor with this particular person and--. And understand this may be as good as it gets for he or she . . . it's not a cookie cutter world although sometimes that's how we treat it in education. So, I think the standards are high. Mrs.-- . . .

Unlike other schools in the area, the majority of the teachers at McAuliffe were relatively new. The majority were tenured, but tenured in the past 5 years. Several teachers believed that the combination of a new principal and young staff facilitated an ability to be innovative with teaching and learning. It was expressed that these "new" approaches to teaching facilitated the mission of high standards set by the school leadership. However, the need to adhere to the aligned curriculum was sometimes seen as "limiting," so supplemental methods and tactics were more often added to the lesson plans,

They give us the standards and we have to abide by them and we have to stick very closely to the curriculum. (*Kindergarten teacher*)

We are all here to benefit the kids so we have to take care of the curriculum and supplement it with additional information to enhance learning. *(7th grade science teacher)*

As a result of wanting to improve upon the aligned curriculum, several teachers voluntarily participated in the district-wide committees that were re-vamping the curriculum,

...I know when they changed the social studies from the textbook to this new think block which is units I actually worked on the think block curriculum. *(6th grade teacher)*

The curriculum comes from the district so a lot of our teachers participate in committees that decide on curriculum. *(5th grade teacher)*

This method of “working from the inside” to alter the curriculum helped teachers believe that the district was moving in a positive direction and might actually be taking the needs of students (and teachers) into account when constructing learning goals, outcomes, and guidelines.

A number of teachers talked about the alignment of curriculum. One stated:

Well, obviously all the curriculum is aligned with the state. They just implemented new programs. Last year was for 3rd, 4th, and 5th and now it went up to 6th, 7th, and 8th with the language arts and the social studies think block. It's more hands on projects but it's still aligned with the state curriculum but it just gives them more ways to connect all the things. Instead of using a text book there's really no text book. I know in our classroom we have only 10 social studies text books which are used as just reference. 100 book challenge is really big and as you get to the older grade it's theme based so you're pulling--I know for 6th grade it's medieval civilizations and then the renaissance and everything is aligned within that, language arts, reading, we have core novels which we read with the class, that's aligned with the social studies. So, everything kind of all fits in together.

Another added:

Everything is aligned. And we do have an after school program, an extended day program. The district stated that we couldn't have anything--yeah, we do have sports, that they allowed. But they strictly wanted us to use our extended time, you know, to improve test scores, close the achievement gap which we have and that's where we work on getting the proper materials. What we think would be the best testing material to prepare our children. It's mandatory that 8th grade attend, you know, extended day, for test preparation. 4th grade it's not mandatory but we usually get, like I say, 99.9 percent to attend for 4th grade because those were the major testing grades. Although, now we're testing all the children for NCLB which isn't a bad idea--it's not a bad idea, you know, I don't see anything wrong with that it's just very time consuming to schedule all the testing.

Student Population and Parent Involvement

Given that the majority of the student body are immigrants or children of immigrants, it is not a surprise that for many of the students, English is often not the primary language spoken at home. Several teachers spoke of language being a barrier to concerted parental involvement. Students who received notes to take home for disciplinary reasons either would not show the note to their parent, or not translate effectively, thereby impacting the parents' ability to know the true status of their child in the school. Language barriers also often made it difficult for parents to help their children with homework and other school activities. However, knowing and understanding these circumstances, lack of parental involvement placed undue burdens on the teachers, some who believed that this had an impact on student achievement,

But for the most part I think parents could be a little bit more involved in certain situations and giving their kids a little bit more help at home which would allow for them to see a little bit more success in school. (*1st grade teacher*)

Despite the difficulty in dealing with poor, disadvantaged students and their families, the administrators and teachers believed that the school fostered students to perform to the best of their ability (and sometimes beyond even that). The principal stressed that regardless of the

challenges that the students' faced, there was no obstacle that they could not overcome, and that was clearly instilled in the students at Christa McAuliffe on a daily basis.

Commenting on parental involvement, one teacher indicated that not only does the school work hard with the children but with the parents too, stating:

Parents are involved very--greatly because, of course we have a parent counsel. And teachers and parents have a very special relationship because not all the time when you have conflict . . . unless it's something major the principal advises us to contact the parent. . . .We have open house during the year where the parents come in, get their children's report cards but they also get to interact with the teacher so they get to get that relationship. . . . I have a very good relationship with my parents, I explain to them that I am their teacher but you are their parent, we are a team, we work together. Ok, and communicate with me no matter what it is. . . .We're not against each other, we're working together to bring your child to the level of excellence so we have to be a team and we have to be here for that child, because I have them all day and I'm teaching them. . . .at any time if a parent has a conflict or anything, just want to speak to the teacher our principal keeps it open that we can schedule appointments during our preps during the day where we can talk to the parents, . . .

We also have guidance program. If there is a case where children are going through situations or anything we make it open to the parents that we have this guidance and then they send letters home and the guidance also speaks to the parents for anything that may be--. So we keep a very close family like situation with our parents. Also, every year we have Christmas time, Thanksgiving, things of this nature, if we have parents who are in need the nurse, the principal, also--we have bags and gifts--the staff gets involved with giving funds towards families in the schools and then-- . . .just a little extra help during the special time of the year, during the holidays. . . . But we keep a very close relationship with our parents. We make sure that our parents are comfortable as well as their children to, you know, (....)

Another teacher mentioned the parent group(s) the school is running:

Well, in the 6 years that I've been here--it starts with a small group and we try and get the parent involved. We have, you know, some money set aside for parent involvement where we try and bring in speakers, you know, we survey the parent in the 1st meeting in September, what things--issues you might have or things you want us to--you know, to get the parents more involved. And it seems what the parents want, you know, is how to help their children with their homework, computers, so we brought in groups--the educational arts team in. They work with the parents with the early literacy, who want to work with their children at home with the program. . . anything whether it's a quality of life issue or a curriculum issue we try to bring someone in to work with the parents and it's gone really well.

North Star Academy Charter School⁹

North Star Academy Charter School in Newark, New Jersey is one of the most successful public schools serving low-income and minority students in New Jersey, at least as measured by student test results (Sadovnik and Gordon, 2005; Gordon, 2005). Founded as a 5-8 charter school in 1997, by a former Newark teacher Jamie Verrilli and NYC non-profit organizer, Norman Atkins, the school expanded to grades 9-12 in 2002 and recently had its charter expanded to the K-4 grades beginning in 2006. Its co-founder, Atkins left in 2004 to start an all boys charter school in Brooklyn and to found Uncommon Schools a collaborative non-profit that is planning to open a number of new charter schools in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey in the coming years, based on the North Star model and its success. North Star is a traditional school, with students wearing uniforms, with rigid disciplinary structures and with directive pedagogical practices. However, it is also a school with a partially Afro-centric curriculum, with exhibitions and alternative assessments at the middle school and high school levels, and a variety of rituals

⁹ As noted above, North Star was not part of our original research plan. Unlike the other schools, where we spent a considerable amount of time, this was not the case with North Star. This section is based on numerous site visits over the past eight years, as well as discussions with co-founders Norman Atkins and Jamie Verilli, administrator Paul Bambrick and Paula Gordon, formerly a teacher and administrator at the school. It did not include formal interviews and therefore there are no direct quotes used in this section.

including a “morning circle” that provide a sense of belonging and community for administrators, teachers, students and parents.

NSA serves a predominantly minority and low-income population, with 90% of its students receiving free lunch. 85% of its students are African-American and 15% of its students are Hispanic.

North Star was initiated by the collaboration of its founders and a parents’ council in 1997, immediately after the passage of New Jersey’s Charter School law in 1996. As a charter school, it is independent of the Newark Public Schools and receives state and local public school funding of less than \$10,000 per student. As a charter school, it does not receive any Abbott funding (additional funding to the 31 low-income urban Abbott districts in NJ from the state’s landmark Abbott v. Burke Supreme Court decision). Thus, like all charter schools in Newark, NSA receives significantly less funding than the almost \$16,000 per pupil received by the NPS.

NSA’s goal is to eliminate achievement gap by high school and to prepare all of its students for college. Its mission is to serve Newark children by building an uncommon school where students partake in a rigorous, 11-month, extended day, academic program that gives them the means to beat the odds in school and life.

Taken through a lottery at the end of the 4th grade, NSA students arrive below the Newark Public School average on the fourth grade NJ ASK 4 examinations in mathematics and reading/language arts, and by the 8th grade, NSA students are significantly above NPS and NJ students as a whole on the eighth grade GEPA and 11th grade HSPA examinations in mathematics, language arts and literacy and science. There is currently a waiting list of over 500 students.

The data indicate that North Star has effectively closed the achievement gap between urban students and the rest of the state on statewide assessments, but NSA students are significantly below the statewide average on the SAT examinations. In almost every category, North Star’s 8th graders practically doubled the Newark average and performed higher than the statewide average (New Jersey Department of Education, 2006).

What makes NSA successful, with respect to student achievement? According to its administrators, it is because it has an 11-month program (200 days vs. 180 days), and extended school day, gives two hours of homework assigned each night, has special Saturday classes (8th, 10th, 11th) for GEPA, HSPA, and SAT preparation, before-School Reading Groups (targeted 5th

& 6th graders), after school honors group for 7th graders (Read To Kill a Mockingbird), tutoring, performance tasks aimed at developing critical thinking and research skills, middle and high school portfolios and exhibitions before teachers, students and external jurors (similar to CPESS), and community morning circle where students and teachers share goals and inspirational stories as a community.

Similarly, at North Star Academy, longer days, longer school year, committed and talented faculty, rigorous academic, parent involvement all contribute to its high achievement. Most important, effective leadership has created a culture in the school community that reflects commitment and dedication to all children. It is understood that all teachers, administration and parents will utilize numerous strategies and interventions for a child to succeed. Academic curriculum is rigorous and class sizes are small, which facilitates achievement. Additionally, learning is maximized and discipline alleviated through the creation of a well-structured environment. Finally, there are positive teacher-student relationships created through advisory groups, mentoring, sports, clubs and the classroom. Although North Star is structured and disciplined, it nonetheless incorporates many progressive practices, including advisory groups, portfolios and exhibitions. It, however, spends far more time on test taking strategies and preparation.

Another accomplishment of North Star Academy is that 100% of its three high school graduating classes is attending college. All seniors were accepted to college—an average of six acceptances each—and every general education student is attending four-year universities, such as Boston College, Mount Holyoke, Spelman, Syracuse, and Rutgers. Such results offer hope when compared to the Newark District, where only 26% of the graduating seniors report planning on attending 4-year colleges (Annual Report 2003-2004, p. 4).

North Star Academy, with its more traditional, standards based and often more authoritarian pedagogic practices reflects the type of curriculum and pedagogy that Delpit and the Thernstroms see as more successful for this population; one that provides the necessary order and structure that low-income students may require. Its student success on statewide tests indicates that such a curriculum and pedagogy can be highly effective. However, it is important to note that NSA's discipline is not the type of rigid authority often found in urban schools. Rather, it is part of an overall philosophy that attempts to get students to internalize authority and responsibility and by the high school, NSA students are engaged in the type of independent more characteristic of schools

with more affluent populations. NSA, although more structured and disciplinarian, also provides a caring community for its students.

What seems clear is that NSA provides students with a caring and respectful community where achievement is stressed. It has created a secular religious environment in which its pedagogic codes, through ritual, curriculum rigor and explicit pedagogic rules result in student internalization of an identity that includes academic success and college attendance as virtues. Whereas critics may see this as an imposition of white middle class culture on African American students, North Star administrators view this as the assimilation of what Delpit has termed the “codes of power,” which is necessary for school and economic success. Although North Star believes that their students should retain their “local” cultural identities by becoming bicultural, they do not apologize for equipping their students with what they see as the tools for success.

Stability and Community Ties to School

North Star maintains strong ties to its parental community by making parental involvement a requirement of attendance. In addition, it has community leaders on its Board of Trustees. Until his election as Mayor of Newark in 2006, Cory Booker served as a Board member from the school’s founding. Parents are consistently involved in the school and must meet with teachers and administrators on a regular basis.

Teacher Collaboration and School Community of Learners

North Star sees the school as a community of learners and students and faculty are encouraged to collaborate in a number of ways. Teachers meet together, before, during and after school to discuss student learning and curriculum issues. Students work closely with each other and faculty on individual and group presentations. From the 8th grade on, students present portfolios and year end exhibitions to a panel of faculty and community experts creating a sense of community around academic requirements.

Academic Standards, Expectations and Accountability

The academic standards and expectations for North Star students are exceptionally high, with students expected to meet and exceed New Jersey achievement requirements at the 8th and 11th grade levels. Students are also evaluated using standardized tests from the 5th grade onward in

order to assess student progress in relation to national norms. The North Star year end reports provide detailed analysis of student achievement and how the faculty ensure student success. From the moment a student enters in the 5th grade, the North Star community makes it clear that success means high achievement and ultimately college attendance. This is symbolized by the college banners of all teachers' alma maters that are displayed at the entrance to each classroom and the bulletin board exhibiting the college acceptances and destinations of each graduating class.

Leadership and Teacher Support

Strong leadership by a team of administrators has been central to North Star's success. Its original founders, Norman Atkins and Jamie Verilli split the administrative responsibilities, with Atkins responsible for fiscal, accountability and external duties and Verilli for curriculum, instruction and teaching duties. When Atkins left to found Uncommon Schools, he trained his successor, Paul Bambrick during a one-year internship.

Teachers work incredibly hard at North Star, given its extended day and year. There has been a high turn over rate, with many teachers unable to sustain the level of commitment required. This is a problem that the school is currently examining. Although teachers receive support, there is an intensity at North Star that often requires teachers to give more than teachers at district public schools and whether this can be sustained over time is a crucial question.

Student Population and Parental Involvement

The student population from Newark is 100% low-income and minority, with the majority African American. Parents are required to attend meetings and to meet with teachers and administrators on a regular basis, so parental involvement is probably more than in Newark district schools. North Star, as indicated above, has a philosophy and teaching methods that are similar to KIPP Academy, which uses strict discipline in the lower grades to instill what it sees as a culture of achievement (Tough, 2007). Although many critics argue that schools such as North Star require that their students act white, North Star's curriculum and rituals include significant aspects of African and African American culture. North Star's philosophy is that only through the socialization of its students to the "codes of power" required for academic success can its students actually succeed (Sadovnik, 2008).

Discussion

The schools examined in this report all serve largely low-income student populations, albeit with significant demographic differences in the race and ethnic compositions of their student populations (Oliver with large Portuguese and Hispanic populations; North Star with a large African-American population; Copernicus with large Hispanic and Asian populations; Bradford with significant numbers of African-American, South Asian and Hispanic students). All of the schools performed above the average achievement scores of schools in their own districts and in the Abbott Districts as a whole, and near or above the New Jersey average for all districts.

Our research indicates that despite differences in their student populations there are a number of themes that cut across the schools, all of which support the tenets of the effective school literature:

1. Effective leadership by a principal or school head (s).
2. Stability in either in the teachers or in the programs offered to children, including a majority of highly qualified teachers.
3. Strong ties to the community.
4. Teacher collaboration and the creation of a community of learners.
5. High academic standards, high student expectations, and strong accountability systems.
6. Strong administrative support for teachers.
7. Parental involvement from very different parental communities.

Our analysis of classroom observational data on instructional practices indicates that there is not one instructional or programmatic system or approach that characterizes the instruction in the schools. There appears to be wide variation of practices both within and between schools, with some schools more “progressive” and others more traditional in their approaches. Our findings suggest that different instructional strategies can be successful if the other characteristics, including teacher quality, strong administrative leadership and support, parental involvement, strong high expectations for students, high academic standards, accountability systems are in place. All of these combined create a climate or school culture of success.

Our research also supports the view that effective leadership is a central component of effective schools. However, just as it has proven difficult to replicate the components of effective schools on a larger scale, the effects of changes in leadership are an important problem for the continuation of school effectiveness in schools like the ones we have studied. Semel (1992), Semel and Sadovnik (1999), and Sadovnik and Semel (2002) examine the problem of continuity of leadership in a number of public and independent schools. Semel and Sadovnik (2008) analyze the decline and eventual reorganization of the once successful Central Park Secondary School in East Harlem, once its visionary and charismatic head, Deborah Meier (1995), left to found another school in Boston. We can not stress sufficiently that effective transitions in leadership are vital to the continuation of effective schools.

Our research began with three central questions. Although our research does not provide conclusive evidence to answer these questions, it does provide preliminary data for further research.

- (1) What school characteristics, such as teaching staff qualifications or tenure, leadership style or instructional program are correlated with success?

Our research on these five schools indicates that there is no one instructional program, leadership style or type of teacher qualifications that explain school effectiveness. For example, the school leaders were very different in style and personality; what they have in common is the ability to coordinate the instructional program of the school, to connect effectively with teachers and students and to ensure that learning is at the center of the entire school enterprise. The instructional programs also differed, with significant variations within and between the four district schools. North Star with its strong disciplinary structure and use of student exhibitions is significantly different from the others. Likewise, whereas the district schools all had a majority of experience and tenured teachers who had been with the school for many years, North Star has far more new teachers, many of whom are recruited from Teach for America. Again, there is no one formula for success.

- (2) To what degree can any of these characteristics can be treated as elements of a successful school program, and replicated in other schools that have been less successful with comparable student populations.

The ability to replicate effective schools or to bring their practices to scale at the district or network level is the most difficult part of school reform. If there were one path to excellence then a formulaic approach might be possible. However, given our findings that there are multiple paths to effectiveness, one replication model does not appear warranted. Rather, it is the general principles outlined in our model above that need to be replicated, albeit differently and in the context of different school conditions. Networks such as KIPP and Uncommon Schools, however, are trying to replicate their models on a large scale, through a common set of principles and processes, including the creation of their own teacher education programs in affiliation with local universities.¹⁰ More research is required to examine the success of these replication efforts. Previous research, however, indicates that whatever the philosophy or methods chosen by a school, it must have the capacity to build and sustain its model¹¹

(3) What characteristics of the students, their families and their communities are correlated with the schools' success, and specifically whether demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, English proficiency, or the date of immigration are correlated with school success?

Our research indicates that close ties between the school and community is an important aspect of school effectiveness. Given the racial and ethnic diversity of the five schools, our research suggests that schools can be highly effective independent of student demographics. However, the available data on New Jersey school achievement indicates that student achievement is strongly related to family background, including social class, race, and ethnicity. For low-income schools in the Abbott districts, the evidence indicates that there are a number, albeit too small, of highly effective schools, at least in terms of student achievement, whose students perform well above

¹⁰ KIPP has established a teacher education program for its teachers at Hunter College in New York City. This program is separate from Hunter's traditional program and prepares teachers to implement the KIPP philosophy and methods. Uncommon Schools is beginning to develop similar teacher education programs.

¹¹ See C. Giles and A. Hargreaves, "The Sustainability of Innovative Schools as Learning Organizations and Professional Learning Communities during Standardized Reform," special issue, *Education Administration Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2006): 124–156; A. Hargreaves and I. Goodson, "Educational Change over Time? The Sustainability and Nonsustainability of Three Decades of Secondary School Change and Continuity," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2006): 3–41.

the average of the Abbott districts and, at times, at or above the state averages. Given our finding that few, if any of these are majority African-American and most are majority Hispanic or Portuguese, clearly race and ethnicity matter. More research is needed to understand how and why race and ethnicity affect student achievement. However, the existence of highly effective schools such as North Star and others that are part of the Uncommon Schools network and KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) schools¹², most of which are majority African-American demonstrates that race is not a barrier to high student achievement. However, as Sadovnik(2008) has pointed out, more research is needed to determine if the highly structured pedagogy of North Star and KIPP are necessary for the successful achievement of low-income African-American students.

The effect of different race and/or ethnic groups, especially immigrant students and their families, is an important concern of our project. Our evidence suggests that in Bradford, Oliver and Copernicus, all with large immigrant populations, immigrant students bring both important social and cultural dimensions, as well as challenges, especially with respect to language problems. Although our multiple regression analysis indicates that majority African American district schools in the Abbott districts have significant problems related to underachievement, our research at North Star indicates that majority African American schools can succeed at extremely high levels. North Star has a great deal in common with our other schools, but also significant differences with respect to its curriculum and pedagogic practices, which are more Afro-centric

¹² Uncommon Schools is an network of charter schools in the Northeast, founded by Norman Atkins, the co-founder of North Star. It includes North Star and other similar schools. See <http://www.uncommonschools.org/usi/home/index.html>. KIPP schools are part of a national network of 66 schools. According to their website (<http://www.kipp.org/01/>) “KIPP began in 1994 when two teachers, Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, launched a fifth-grade public school program in inner-city Houston, TX, after completing their commitment to Teach For America. In 1995, Feinberg remained in Houston to lead KIPP Academy Middle School, and Levin returned home to New York City to establish KIPP Academy in the South Bronx. These two original KIPP Academies became the starting place for a growing network of schools that are transforming the lives of students in under-resourced communities, and redefining the notion of what is possible in public education.”

Since their founding, the two original KIPP Academies have sustained track records of high student achievement. While fewer than one in five low-income students attend college nationally, KIPP’s college matriculation rate stands at more than 80 percent for students who complete the eighth grade at KIPP. In 2007, nearly 95 percent of KIPP alumni went on to college-preparatory high schools; collectively, they have earned millions of dollars in scholarships and financial aid since 2000.

and disciplinarian. Despite these differences, North Star, like the other schools has created a culture of learning and success that is transmitted to parents, students and teachers.

Despite the successes of these schools, our research suggests that achieving such success is not easy. It requires dedication, hard work and constant vigilance. Our interviews with teachers and principals also indicates how tenuous such success can be, with the effects of poverty and life in cities such as Newark and Jersey City always capable of negatively impacting students and their families. When asked about how realistic No Child Left Behind is to expect that low-income children achieve at the same levels as children in New Jersey's I and J districts (the state's wealthiest suburbs) one teacher became very emotional:

INT: NCLB's primary goal is to reduce, actually to eliminate the achievement gap between black and white, rich and poor, all groups by 2014. What do you think about this?

T: It's the stupidest thing I've (...)

INT: Why?

T: So, (...) unrealistic, you can quote me on that, it's the most stupid plan ever. I mean it's a great plan, it's beautiful to think that everyone is going to meet a certain standard by a certain year. That's beautiful. I would love to see that. But as a mother, and forget my role as an educator, I have two children that are being raised in the same mother father household in the same community that no matter how much I do they're going to be different and if I, as a mother, have two children that I can't raise to be identical in everything else that's coming around them is identical, how the [expletive] am I going to think that a child who doesn't go home to a family at night, who potentially is on the street at night, who doesn't get sleep at night, who doesn't have a role model to love and to admire and have someone take care of them, how is that child going to potentially be loved, adored, you know, respected, nurtured, how are those two children going to have the same kind of educational experience? It's impossible. It's truly impossible. And I, know, it's impossible because, you know what? When my--when I get very little sleep I could be sitting in the same class as you and if you had a good night sleep you're going to get more of that class than I am because I'm too tired, I'm not paying attention, I'm not focused. So, even though--

INT: President Bush would call that the negative effects of what he calls ‘low expectations’. And others would say, all of those things, while they are real, are not excuses.

T: Live the life of a child in this building. Spend one day, going home with them.

INT: Now I can see how passionate you are about this.

T: [Crying] Oh my God. This really pissed me off. I would like one meeting him and say, “What the [expletive]? You think that our expectations for these children are there?”

[Crying] It’s ridiculous, I’m sorry.

INT: No, don’t apologize.

T: [Crying] It’s so, asinine to think that the teachers that work in urban districts don’t have high expectations. Don’t go home wishing and hoping that there’s something that they can say or do and are going to make a significant change in this child’s life. [Crying *really* hard] I’m so embarrassed.

INT: No, don’t be.

T: I think it’s—it’s so asinine that the reality of it is no matter what I do in the classroom, no matter how hard and how much love and respect I give this child, no matter if I’m the best teacher going— I can’t change what goes on when their home. And the reality of it is, when you are not there mentally, when you aren’t in the classroom because there are so many other issues going on you can have the best teachers in the world doing the best that they can do and it’s not going to hit home. It’s only going to hit home for the kid that’s actively attentive. And the truth of the matter of it is, you might have some of the best teachers working in this building and, you know, I can live in Bergen County and I can have so called wonderful school systems but I’ve seen some of the better teachers in the urban districts and those test scores in the urban districts aren’t as good as the suburbs. So, it has to—there has to be a correlation. I’ve taught— I’ve seen what goes on in better school districts, so called better districts-only because their test scores are better, and I’ve seen the teaching and the things that go in the urban school districts where the low scores are coming about and you can’t tell me that the expectations aren’t greater. I think people potentially work harder here...

This statement reflects the belief of most teachers and administrators interviewed that although low-income children should be expected to achieve at the same levels as all children and that the school must do all in its power to ensure this, that there are significant economic, social and familial problems that adversely affect poor children and that the schools best efforts are not always sufficient to overcome the pernicious effects of poverty. Nonetheless, the schools in our study have demonstrated that it is indeed possible to overcome the odds. However, their successes should not be used to argue as do Abigail and Stephen Thernstrom that there are “no excuses” for failure (Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2003). Rather, our research suggests that although it is possible for schools under challenging circumstances to be highly effective, it is not easy to do, nor sustain. The more difficult task for policy makers is to develop models to replicate these successes in less effective schools. After almost thirty years of effective school research that points to the same school level variables as responsible for successful schools with low-income children and punitive accountability systems such as NCLB that have not magically closed the achievement gaps, it seems obvious that both within school and outside school factors must be addressed to raise achievement significantly. Despite this important caveat, it is also clear from our research that studying excellent schools like these gives us some hope that school level factors do affect student achievement. How to replicate these models and bring them to scale is the difficult, but important policy question.

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