Schools of Excellence AND Equity: Closing Achievement Gaps
Through Faculty Trust

D. Thad Urban

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Approved By:

________________________________________
Advisor: Dr. Kathleen M. Brown

________________________________________
Reader: Dr. Stanley A. Schainker

________________________________________
Reader: Dr. James Veitch
ABSTRACT

Although studies have examined schools that make a difference in the lives of marginalized children (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000; Riester, Pursch & Skrla, 2002), there is an absence of literature regarding principals as the unit of analysis and the process of principals serving as leaders for social justice. Related to this is an absence of documented strategies that principals who are leading for equity and excellence use to advance their work in the face of countervailing pressures of public schools.

Currently, the debate in public schools centers on the achievement gap and is politically bathed in the language of equity and excellence. Despite decades of efforts to provide an equitable education to all of our nation’s students, significant gaps in achievement remain between White students, students of color, and students living in poverty (Kozol, 1991; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Williams, 2003).

While research continues to suggest that our schools are plagued with inequities that perpetuate this gap and maintain the status quo (Darling-Hammond; 1994; Jenks & Phillips, 1998; Kozol, 1991; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004), there are some schools that play a key role in raising student achievement for all students and in closing the achievement gap across socio-economic and racial lines (Comer, 1994, Ladson-Billings, 1994, Reyes et al., 1999, Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

This study explored how K-5 elementary school principals of state recognized Honor Schools of Excellence are (or are not) pursuing, supporting, and achieving excellence and equity and sought to offer school leaders specific strategies for attaining this goal. For the purpose of this study, the researchers rank ordered and then separated the identified schools into two categories. Categorizing the schools by the size of their achievement gap allowed the researchers the opportunity to compare and contrast
leadership styles with the hope of identifying specific practices that support both excellence AND equity.

For the purposes of this study, data were analyzed from the final component of academic optimism: faculty trust. Faculty trust is defined as, “a willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that that party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2006, p.429).

Using faculty trust as a framework, the data is organized into themes under the five components of faculty trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness.

Schools and the means in which they are assessed and measured have developed into extremely complex systems. It is very tempting to focus exclusively on numbers and the titles that go along with them. This study’s findings conclude that the most excellent and equitable schools focus on relationships and building trust throughout all levels of the learning community. Possessing faculty trust and its five components (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness) allows and encourages strong working partnerships to be created and sustained between home and school and amongst colleagues. Often schools look at parents as the problem for a child’s academic troubles; school leaders must shift this paradigm and begin seeing parents as the solution.
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Thank you to my parents, who have taught me to be strong enough to ask the difficult questions and have provided me with the support needed to locate the answers. You have taught me more than you will ever know.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Although studies have examined schools that make a difference in the lives of marginalized children (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000; Riester, Pursch & Skrла, 2002), there is an absence of literature regarding principals as the unit of analysis and the process of principals serving as leaders for social justice. Related to this is an absence of documented strategies that principals who are leading for equity and excellence use to advance their work in the face of countervailing pressures of public schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this two-phase empirical inquiry of “good” schools was to explore “how” K-5 elementary principals of state recognized “Honor Schools of Excellence” are (or are not) pursuing, supporting, and achieving both academic excellence AND systemic equity in their schools. Furthermore, the researchers shed light on a flawed accountability system that touts excellence while ignoring glaring inequities among student subgroups. Although the state’s accountability system, unlike the Federal system, accounts for student growth, many children are still left behind. A school is deemed a “School of Excellence” regardless of whether subgroups meet or exceed the targeted proficiency level. While some subgroups consistently outperform others with regard to proficiency, many schools boast the title of “Excellence” despite hidden inequities that reinforce the achievement gap. By definition in the selected county, “Honor Schools of Excellence”
have at least 90 percent of their students perform at or above grade level (i.e. achieved a level 3 or 4 on state exams) and the school meets expected growth and federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) proficiency requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This accountability system conflates excellence and equity, therefore offering a narrow definition of student achievement and perpetuating the current achievement gap that separates many minorities from their white counterparts.

In Phase One, quantitative data were collected through equity audits to scan for equities and inequities across multiple domains of student learning and activities. The purpose was to document and distinguish between “good schools” (i.e. those that are both excellent and equitable) and those that are not and to uncover practices in the “good schools” that lead to both excellence AND systemic equity. In Phase Two, through the use of semi-structured interviews with principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parent leaders, qualitative data were collected to document the specific strategies that principals of “good schools” used to confront and change past practices anchored in open and residual racism and class discrimination. “Good leaders” committed to excellence AND equity find a way “for all students to achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any student’s race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents, or home language” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p.1).

For the purpose of this study, the researchers rank ordered and then separated the identified schools into two categories. The 12 more equitable schools that recorded achievement gaps of 15% or less between their White students and their minority students were labeled SGS for “small gap schools.” The 12 less equitable schools that recorded achievement gaps of more than 15% between their White students and their
minority students were labeled LGS for “large gap schools” (see Chapter 3 for methodology). Categorizing the schools by the size of their achievement gap allowed the researchers the opportunity to compare and contrast leadership styles with the hope of identifying specific practices that support both excellence AND equity.

Research Questions

The following question focused the research study: How are principals of K-5 public “Honor Schools of Excellence” pursuing, supporting and advancing social justice, excellence, and systemic equity in a suburban southeastern county? The sub-questions include the following: a) What are principals of K-5 “Honor Schools of Excellence” doing to ensure the success of all of their students? (b) What similarities do school leaders, who are successful in creating equity and excellence, have in common? (c) What findings can connect to and build upon the literature related to leadership for social justice and systemic equity? (d) What can be learned from “Honor Schools of Excellence” that could benefit other schools with similar demographics?

Background

The historical marginalization of underprivileged students often results in a school culture that perpetuates the status quo and ignores the social injustices that permeate our schools. As a result, the fate of many of our students is a pre-determined mold designed for school failure and social inequity. A school culture that does not embrace the responsibility of responding to the needs of these students and their families simply perpetuates hegemony and leaves these students behind—without hope, without vision, and without equal access to the excellent education to which all children are entitled.
School-based administrators can attempt to resist hegemony by making social justice the primary focus of their administrative agendas.

Social justice, due to its historical roots, carries various, contextual meanings and is therefore an elusive term to define. “In Latin, justice comes from the word *equitas*, which means fairness, and social derives from the word *socius*, meaning companion. Combining these Latin roots produces a literal definition of social justice as being fair to one’s companion” (Shoho, Merchant & Lugg, 2005, p.47). Social justice has roots in fields such as sociology, history, law, social work, and theology. While there appears to be no single definition for social justice, there has been wide consensus with regard to the guiding principles of equality, fairness, acceptance of others, and inclusiveness (Shoho et al., 2005).

Recently, many prominent scholars in the field of education have offered definitions of social justice (Bogotch, 2002; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002; Shields, 2004). Scheurich and Skrla (2003) equate social justice in schools with equity and excellence in schools whereby “literally all students achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any student’s race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents or home language” (p.1). Moreover, Theoharis (2004), in a paper entitled “Toward a Theory of Social Justice Educational Leadership,” goes a step further by attributing social justice [in schools] to school leadership by stating:

I define social justice leadership to mean that [these] principals advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States. (p.3)

In tandem, the definitions from Scheurich and Skrla and Theoharis served as a guide to explore strategies employed by school-based administrators who are committed to
supporting and advancing social justice—leading schools in which all students achieve high levels of academic success.

**Historical Roots**

Spring (2005), in his book, *The American School: 1642 – 2005*, suggests that hegemony is a central theme in educational history. Spring lays the foundation beginning with the English invasion of North America in the 16th century, eventually leading the U.S. government to aim for a national culture to preserve, honor and maintain Protestant Anglo-American values. He reveals that one reason for the 19th century development of public schools was to “ensure the dominance of Anglo-American values that were being challenged by Irish immigration, Native Americans and African Americans” (p.3). Spring explains that public schools, as a result, became “defenders of Anglo-American value with each new wave of immigrants” (p.3) and, in the following century, served to assimilate minorities and therefore perpetuated hegemonic practices. Although educators have preached equality of opportunity, schools have been repeatedly plagued with acts of religious intolerance, racial segregation, cultural genocide, and discrimination against immigrants and non-whites. Spring argues that hegemony (this quest for cultural and racial domination) persists today in the debate over multiculturalism and is evident as schools perpetuate and reproduce the dominant cultures and values in society.

Although many lawsuits have addressed the issue of equality of opportunity, none has had a greater or more lasting impact on public schools than the landmark *Brown vs. The Board of Education* decision (1954). Among one of the most significant rulings in the history of the U.S. Supreme Court, state imposed racially segregated schooling was declared unconstitutional and was described as depriving “minority children of equal
education opportunities in violation of their rights under the “equal protection clause” of
the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution” (Brown & Harris, 2004, p.239).

Although Brown sparked four major educational developments (Elementary and
Secondary Education Act Title I and Title VII, funding equity and adequacy, affirmative
action, and multicultural education), “improvement has been mixed, slow in coming,
insufficient in impact, and with a few backward steps” (Valverde, 2004, p.377).

Present Issues in Education

Currently, the debate in public schools centers on the achievement gap and is
politically bathed in the language of equity and excellence. Despite decades of efforts to
provide an equitable education to all of our nation’s students, significant gaps in
achievement remain between White students, students of color, and students living in
poverty. A gap also exists for middle class students of color in suburban schools. This
achievement gap has been reported and discussed extensively in the research on student

Recent data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
indicate that this achievement gap persists. Using data from the 2005 National
Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) fourth grade math tests, researchers found
that the average scale score for White students was 246 while the average score for
African American students was 220, and the average score for Hispanic students was
226. The size of the gap for all subgroups of students was similar on the reading test.
White students had an average scale score of 229, while African-American and Hispanic
or Latino students scored 200 and 203, respectively. Similar gaps were found when the
data were disaggregated by socioeconomic levels. Students who received subsidized
lunches scored 23 scale score points lower on the math section of the NAEP than students who were not eligible for subsidized lunches. The gap between the same subgroups was 29 scale score points on the reading section of the NAEP.

McKenzie and Scheurich’s (2004) research of the current educational achievement gap reveals the following:

There is an abundance of data and research that show that students of color not only are performing at lower achievement levels than their White counterparts but, also, are overrepresented in special education and lower level classes, dropping out of school at higher numbers, frequently educated by teachers who do not believe they can learn or who are actively negative in their attitude toward these students, underrepresented in gifted and talented and higher level classes, often times educated in schools with less resources and with the least experienced teachers, and more likely to be suspended or expelled. (p.602)

These data reflect an inequality with regard to student achievement, program accessibility, teacher expectations of students, instructional delivery, curriculum implementation, and resource allocation. There is no question that minority and socio-economically disadvantaged children are being left behind and, as a result, this growing disparity has gained national attention.

Many researchers have attempted to explain why this gap exists. Some (Jensen, 1969; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) believe that the gap exists due to the genetic inferiority of African-Americans in comparison to Whites. Although the validity of their studies has come into serious question, many still subscribe to this genetic deficiency line of thinking. Other scholars, such as Slavin (1986), have pointed to class differences, families, and the access to learning opportunities at home as a major cause of the achievement gap. Slavin, and others who believe as he does, postulates that, if students of color or students of poverty were raised in White middle-class homes, they would
achieve greater levels of academic success, and the gap would be reduced or eliminated. These same authors, however, do not address the many examples of students who are successful but were not raised in White middle-class homes.

Valencia (1997) called the views of individuals such as Slavin, Jensen and others *deficit thinking*. Those who believe in these views blame poor school achievement on the deficits of the students and their families. When blame is placed on the student, it simultaneously exonerates the school. As King, Houston, and Middleton (2001) state, “Individual characteristics emerge as most responsible for poor school performance. Such discussions render invisible schooling practices that contribute to school failure” (p.434). However, many schools exist that have been successful educating students of color and students of poverty (Comer, 1994; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Considering the evidence from these schools, it is impossible to ignore the role that the school system plays in providing an excellent and equitable education for all students.

The problem then becomes that overwhelming evidence suggests the school system is responsible for providing an excellent and equitable education for all students, yet has failed to do so. Specifically, schools have missed opportunities to provide all students with an equitable opportunity to learn. This is evidenced by the unequal representation of subgroups of students in academically gifted education and special programs. Another factor that deprives students of an equitable and excellent education is the inequitable access that students have to the schools most talented teachers. These lack of opportunities, coupled with the prevailing deficit view that schools often take towards students, contribute heavily to the inequities in schools. It is the deficits of the school
system, not the individual students and their families, that are responsible for the gap in achievement that exists in our nation’s public schools. Granted, this is not an easy problem to solve, but as Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, and Koschoreck (2001) conclude, “…the fact that, broadly speaking, our children experience differential levels of success in school that is distributed along race and social class lines continues to be the overriding central problem of education” (p.239).

The standards based movement, along with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, proposes criteria for how to eliminate the achievement gap between minority students and their peers. “The broad goal of NCLB is to raise the achievement levels of all students, especially underperforming groups, and to close the achievement gap that parallels race and class distinctions” (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p.3). Across the country, school systems are required to publish “report cards” that report disaggregated data regarding students’ results on standardized tests. This information is then used to advertise the quality of teaching within a school, the performance of individual groups of students and, in many cases, leads to the dismissal of school leaders and/or the involvement of a team of people (often without educational experience) who “take over” the school to ensure equity and excellence.

As English (2002) points out, discriminatory practices, although banned by law, “continue in other guises” (p.298), and result in the resegregation of our schools. Among the most insidious of practices, prevalent in schools throughout our nation, is the use of standardized tests to “discriminate and separate students for purposes of instruction” (p.298). Furthermore, Darling-Hammond (2004) explains that NCLB fails to address the blatant and disturbing systemic inequality regarding the provision of education offered in
the United States. Students in our wealthier schools and districts, for instance, receive up to ten times greater funding than that of students in our poorer districts. Kozol’s (1991) research, documented in his book, *Savage Inequalities*, elaborates upon these funding inequities and paints a sad, disheartening picture of the impact they have upon the education of poor and minority children across our nation. Regardless, there is still hope that the United States will move forward with a socially just agenda of providing all children with equal access to quality, desegregated public education (Brown & Harris, 2004).

Despite funding inequities that favor the wealthy and ignore the disadvantaged, despite federal mandates that conflate measuring schools with fixing them, and despite societal norms and values that often serve as impediments to equality and excellence, our schools can serve as vehicles for social justice. We must first turn our attention to what is happening within our schools; we must uncover and expose hegemonic practices, identify socially and morally just strategies for how to respond, and must insist and ensure that all children receive the equitable and excellent education to which each is entitled. The success of our schools relies upon leadership that upholds and advocates equality of opportunity for all of our children.

Conceptual Framework

This research study was analyzed through the lens of academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfok Hoy, 2006), a construct developed by the authors to explain student achievement while controlling for socioeconomic status, previous achievement, and urbanicity. The notion of optimism as a factor related to success was suggested by Seligman (1998). He argued that optimism influences achievement as much as talent and
motivation and that optimism can be learned and developed (Hoy et al., 2006). The structural model of academic optimism supports and builds upon Seligman’s model of learned optimism. Hoy and his colleagues outline three underlying components: (1) academic emphasis; (2) collective efficacy; and (3) faculty trust, and suggest that collectively, these components enhance learning, improve student achievement, and shape school norms and behavioral expectations.

Limitations

One of the central limitations of this study is that “excellence” in the selected county is defined solely by students’ attainment of a target score (AYP) on a standardized test. The “target” score, as defined and measured by NCLB, conflates excellence and equity, therefore offering a narrow definition of student achievement and perpetuating the current achievement gap that separates many minorities from their white counterparts.

Another limitation is its focus on a single school district. Furthermore, this district is unique in its focus to keep most schools balanced by subgroups of students identified under NCLB. As a result, most of the schools in this study have a population of African-American and Hispanic students that ranges from 20% to 40% of the total school population. This is not representative of many districts or many schools in these districts that essentially remain segregated. Despite the limitation, it is an opportunity to add a unique district to the research on equity in schools. Also, the site selection process did not include other variables, such as budgets and Title I status that might have impacted findings.

An additional limitation lies in the definition of “good” schools and “bad” schools in this study. Some of the schools where African-American, Hispanic, and Economically
Disadvantaged students are achieving at the highest levels still have achievement gaps between 10 and 20%. Admittedly, these schools are not perfectly equitable. However, it further illustrates the need for this research and the importance of not only learning from, but also building on, the success of the more equitable schools in the district.

A final limitation is a result of the large quantity of interviews (80 in all) that were conducted by multiple researchers. As a result, a broad semi-structured interview protocol was used, which did not allow for specific probing. In addition, data was self-reported in interviews but not verified through observations. To counter this limitation, data was collected and triangulated through multiple sources.

Definition of Terms

- Academic Optimism: A conceptual framework adopted by this study that consists of three sub-components. The sub-components include:
  - Academic emphasis: The extent to which a school is characterized by a press for academic achievement (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006).
  - Collective efficacy: Includes self-efficacy beliefs of students, self-efficacy beliefs of teachers, and teachers’ collective efficacy beliefs about the school (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006).
  - Faculty trust: A willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006).

- Deficit Thinking: Students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster—such as familial deficits (Valencia, 1997).
- Hegemony: Racial and cultural domination (Spring, 2005).

- Leadership for Excellence and Equity:
  - Schools in which all students achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any student’s race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents, or home language (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p.1).
  - Schools in which principals advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States. (Theoharis, 2004, p.3).

- Systemic Equity: The transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner—in whatever learning environment that learner is found—has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life (Scott, 2001).
  - Achievement Equity: Having comparably high performance for all groups of learners when academic achievement data are disaggregated and analyzed.
  - Opportunity to Learn Equity: Equal access to a rigorous curriculum for all students.
  - Resource Distribution Equity: Equal distribution of funds and human resources to all schools and students who populate those schools.
Treatment Equity: The belief and expectation that literally all students can learn and achieve academic success at the highest levels

Significance

Many people, including educators, still believe that factors such as genetic deficiency, class differences, families and access to learning opportunities at home are the most reliable predictors of school achievement. With this view, schools excuse themselves from any accountability for inequities among student subgroups. However, with this study of schools that teach similar populations of students from the same geographical region, it is impossible to ignore the reality that the school plays an important role in the achievement of all students. This study gives leaders data to support the notion that the school plays a significant role in the achievement of students. More importantly, educational leaders who read this study will learn strategies that will facilitate excellence and equity from the principals who lead the most equitable schools in this district.

Although studies have examined schools that make a difference in the lives of marginalized children (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000; Riester, Pursch & Skrla, 2002), there is an absence of literature regarding principals as the unit of analysis and the process of actually leading for excellence and equity. The rationale of this two-phase empirical inquiry of leadership for excellence and systemic equity was to document how schools, and leaders in particular, can and are pursuing, supporting, and achieving both goals. They decide they can create both equitable and excellent schools and then use their time and energy to figure out how to do so. This research and review of the literature
uncovered strategies that principals can use to achieve both excellence and equity in their schools.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Efforts to provide an equal education for racially and economically diverse students can be traced back to 1849 when an African-American father sued the city of Boston for mandating that his child walk beyond a White school to attend a school established for Blacks only. In Roberts v. City of Boston (1849), the court concluded that the school committee was within its power to separate the White and Black students, especially if the education was equal (Gooden, 2004). Gooden points out that the struggle to achieve equality in education gained national prominence in 1954 with the landmark court case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.

Since Brown, authors such as Edmonds (1979) have documented schools that do provide an equal education to students regardless of their race or family’s socioeconomic status. Edmonds noted that student performance did not derive from family background, but rather it derived from the school’s response to family background. While this discussion of providing an equitable education for all students has continued for well over a century, our current educational system remains inequitable.

Our current discussions of equity in education are centered around the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that was signed by President Bush on January 8, 2002. The stated purpose of this law is to close “the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority
students, and between [economically] disadvantaged children and their more
[economically] advantaged peers” (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005, p.1). NCLB defines non-minority students as White students and divides minority students into the following subgroups: African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students. To remain consistent with the terms defined by NCLB, the literature refers to subgroups of students such as African-American, Hispanic, White, economically disadvantaged, and non-economically disadvantaged. It is important to recognize that an achievement gap exists between these subgroups of students; this does not mean, for example, that all African American or Hispanic students are low-achieving compared to their White counterparts. Although the manner in which the discussion of equity is framed has changed over time, our schools have not. They remain systemically inequitable.

The following review of the literature describes the current research on the three components of Systemic Equity; (a) Achievement Equity; (b) Programmatic Equity; and (c) Teacher Quality Equity. After broadly discussing these three components, the review moves into the literature on the role leadership plays in creating schools that are systemically equitable. Specifically, the authors review the literature on characteristics of leaders for social justice, equity, and excellence. The conceptual framework of Academic Optimism is then described in detail.

Systemic Equity

This persistent inequity has prompted Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, and Koschoreck (2001) to conclude, “… the fact that, broadly speaking, our children experience differential levels of success in school that is distributed along race and social class lines
continues to be the overridingly central problem of education” (p.239). Since equity remains the central issue of education, the review of the literature will focus on the research that centers around systemic equity (Scott, 2001). Scott defines systemic equity as:

The transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner—in whatever learning environment that learner is found—has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life. (p.2)

The literature review is based on Scott’s four components of systemic equity: (a) achievement equity; (b) opportunity to learn equity; (c) resource distribution equity; and (d) treatment equity. The researchers have combined Scott’s four components into three sections titled: (a) Achievement Equity; (b) Programmatic Equity; and (c) Teacher Quality Equity. The review begins with achievement equity and evidence that it is possible to create schools that are excellent and equitable. Next, the literature on programmatic equity is presented and specifically addresses students in special and academically gifted programs, inequities in the disciplining of students as well as offering a rigorous curriculum for all students. The following section addresses teacher quality equity and includes sections on teacher certification, years of experience, National Board Certification, and teacher quality formulas.

*Achievement Equity*

*Introduction*

According to Scott (2001), achievement equity means having comparably high performance for all groups of learners when academic achievement data are
disaggregated and analyzed. This section provides examples of schools that have attained achievement equity.

In answer to his own question, how many schools one would have to see in order to be persuaded of the educability of poor children, Edmonds (1979) answered, “If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that basic pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background” (p.23). Unfortunately, many educators still believe, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that the school system cannot impact student achievement as much as family background. However, researchers have found schools that are both excellent and equitable (Comer, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

**Exemplars of Achievement Equity**

In a study of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools, Johnson and Asera (1999) found nine schools that were excellent schools. One school in their study was 100% African American, with 87% of the students receiving subsidized lunches, experienced a rapid growth in test scores over a short period of time. For example, fourth grade students passed the state’s reading test at a rate of only 22.4% in the spring of 1994. However, in the spring of 1998, fourth grade students passed the test at a rate of 65%. This was better than the state average of 58.6%. Although the success of the nine schools in the study was similar, Johnson and Asera reported that the methods by which each school achieved success were varied.

Noblit, Malloy, and Malloy (2001) also found several examples of high-performing schools when they studied schools with a population of predominantly
African-American students. They report improved student achievement on indicators such as a greater representation of minority students on the honor roll and in accelerated classes. The schools compare favorably with schools that serve mostly students from middle class surroundings. Perhaps the most significant finding is that “the distribution of achievement is becoming more equitable” (p.74). Although these schools were part of the Comer Process and the School Development Program where they were reformed using particular strategies and resources, that does not discount them as exemplars of the fact that all students, regardless of their background, can (and should) achieve academically.

In a study of school districts, Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, and Koschoreck (2001) found evidence of entire districts that were successful with all students. One district in their study, with an African American population of 36% and a Latina/o population of 47%, raised test scores for both subgroups of students from 45% to 76% passing and 56% to 81% passing respectively. With evidence of highly successful schools that serve large groups of economically disadvantaged and minority students, it seems impossible to ignore the role that schools play in student achievement.

In their study of five high performing, high poverty schools, Ragland, Clubine, Constable, and Smith (2002), studied five elementary schools that had at least 60% of their students receiving subsidized lunches. Two of the five schools had 92% of their students receiving subsidized lunches. All five of these schools received Exemplary or Recognized status, which means 80% of all subgroups of students passed the reading, writing, and math sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.
Scheurich (1998), in his article, “Highly Successful and Loving, Public Elementary Schools Populated Mainly by Low-SES Children of Color,” provides a research-based description of the “type of school that is needed to provide both a loving environment and strong academic success for low-SES students of color” (p.452). This grassroots model, developed and implemented by school-level administrators, is known as HiPass (High Performance All Student Success Schools). Scheurich documents the importance of five core beliefs and seven cultural characteristics that are common to each of the identified (HiPass) schools and attributes each to the vision, commitment and practice of the school leader. The five core beliefs include: (1) All Children Can Succeed; (2) Children or Learner Centered Schools; (3) All Children Must Be Treated With Love, Care Appreciation and Respect; (4) The Racial Culture, Including the First Language of the Child is Always Valued; and (5) The School Exists for and Serves the Community, and the seven cultural characteristics are: (1) A Strong, Shared Vision; (2) Loving, Caring Environments for Children and Adults; (3) Strongly Collaborative – We Are a Family; (4) Innovative, Experimental, Openness to New Ideas; (5) Hardworking but Not Burning Out; (6) Appropriate Conduct is Built Into the Organizational Culture and (7) School Staff as a Whole Hold Themselves Accountable for the Success of All Children. The principals included in the study each stated that these core beliefs and cultural characteristics serve as a prerequisite for high achievement. According to Scheurich, these principals, while retaining 80% to 90% of teachers, transformed these schools within about a 3- to 5- year period into schools that were academically competitive with some of the higher performing schools in the state. One high school principal, for
example, was able to take a “predominantly low-SES African American school with less than 20% of the African American students passing the state math test and, within five years, have more than 60% of these same students passing the math test” (p.458). It is clear that the HiPass metaphor extends beyond academic success as it is traditionally measured solely by student scores on standardized tests; HiPass is an embodiment of the espoused and enacted beliefs and values of the schools’ leaders. Under the leadership of these principals, the HiPass schools are “highly collaborative and democratic, with all participants, including parents, empowered; they do not treat the student as a passive consumer of knowledge; and they deeply value the racial culture and language of the child” (p.455).

Effective Schools Research

The quest for more effective forms of schooling has traditionally been synonymous with the quest for greater educational equity across racial and socioeconomic levels. Beginning with the Coleman Report of the mid-1960s (Coleman, 1966), the past 40 years have witnessed a growing number of research studies aimed at reducing the gap in quality between the school experiences of economically disadvantaged and more affluent youth. Concluding that the strongest predictors of achievement across all racial groups were social characteristics of the student's home environment (e.g., parents' education, income), Coleman proposed that children from economically disadvantaged families and homes, lacking the prime conditions or values to support education, could not learn, regardless of what the school did—in essence, absolving schools of the responsibility for student achievement. Through the “effective schools research,” Edmunds, Brookover, Lezzotte, and others (see Rosenholtz, 1985) set
out to find schools where children from low income families were highly successful and thereby prove that schools can and do make a difference and that children from poverty backgrounds can learn at high levels. Many of these process-product studies identified samples of high-performing schools, documenting certain school, classroom and leadership practices that are critical to enhanced student achievement and school productivity, regardless of family background. These unique characteristics and processes within the purview of schools are correlated with high and equitable levels of student learning.

Summarizing these findings, Odden and Odden (1995) noted that effective teachers maximize instruction time; are well prepared; maintain a smooth and steady instructional pace (especially during the first few weeks of school); focus on academic learning; and emphasize student mastery of material. With regard to organizational characteristics, effective schools evidence strong instructional leadership, usually provided by the principal; consensus on academically focused school goals; realistic but high expectations for student learning; regularized monitoring of progress toward academic goals; ongoing staff development; and an orderly and secure environment (Odden & Odden, 1995).

School Climate and Community

Other studies found similar characteristics of a school’s climate associated with improved student learning. For example, in 1988, Bryk and Driscoll expanded the notion of school commonality, arguing that "communally organized" schools evidence: (1) a consensus over beliefs and values; (2) a "common agenda" of course work, activities, ceremonies, and traditions; and (3) an ethic of caring that pervades the relationships of
student and adult school members. On the basis of analyses of a national sample of schools and students, Bryk and Driscoll found that schools with higher levels of commonality (as measured by an array of survey items representing each of the three core components) also evidenced higher attendance rates, better morale (among both students and teachers), and higher levels of student achievement. Shouse’s (1996) follow-up study separately examined the achievement effects of commonality (measured along lines similar to those of Bryk and Driscoll’s study) and "academic press" (measured in terms of an assortment of survey items reflecting school academic climate, disciplinary climate, and teachers' instructional behavior and emphasis). The findings revealed that academic effectiveness among low-SES schools was significantly tied to academic press and to an integrated culture of academic press and commonality. Achievement in low-SES schools having high levels of both academic press and commonality rivaled that of schools serving more affluent students. Conversely, the least academically effective low-SES schools were those that combined strong commonality and weak academic press. Although these findings reveal the tensions between meeting students' social and academic needs, they also reveal the tremendous potential of school social networks that are supportive, cohesive, and academically oriented to greatly enhance the quality of educational experiences for disadvantaged students (Shouse, 1996).

School Restructuring

Similar to the effective schools movement, the school restructuring movement also denotes a fairly specific array of prescriptions for improving organizational effectiveness and student achievement. The tenets offered by this movement center around three basic areas: (1) shifting the thrust of school governance to a more "bottom
up" direction through decentralization, site-based management, staff professional
development, teacher empowerment, and greater parent involvement; (2) refocusing
curriculum and instruction toward cooperatively organized, mixed-ability classrooms
with a greater emphasis on higher-order learning and the use of performance-based
student assessment; and (3) reducing school size, typically through the creation of
"schools within schools." Research evidence links the collective adoption of these areas
with significant gains in high school achievement. A study by Lee and Smith (1994), for
example, contrasted achievement gains in three types of school: (a) those with no reform
or restructuring; (b) those that had sought to improve on their traditional, more
bureaucratic practices; and (c) those that had engaged in some level of organizational
restructuring. Although students in traditionally oriented schools that were seeking
improvement outgained those in nonreform schools, students in restructured schools
(those having adopted at least three out of 12 restructuring practices) significantly
outgained those in both other types of schools. More important, the achievement gap
between more economically advantaged students and less economically advantaged
students was narrowest within restructured schools.

Also significant, the collective involvement of teachers appears to be a key to
effective school restructuring. Researchers found that school effectiveness and student
learning were enhanced when schools took on the qualities of "professional
communities" (Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Such communities
had the following three basic features: "Teachers pursue a clear shared purpose for all
students' learning. Teachers engage in collaborative activity to achieve the purpose.
Teachers take collective responsibility for student learning" (Newmann & Wehlage,
In effective schools, which typically operate as strong professional learning communities, Fullan (2000) found that teachers systematically study student assessment data, relate the data to their instruction, and work with others to refine their teaching practices. Louis and Kruse (1995) concur, claiming that reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, and collaborative efforts all enhance shared understandings and strengthen relationships within a school. Barth (1990) added that a “good school … is a place where everyone is teaching and everyone is learning—simultaneously, under the same roof” (p.163). He writes that the adults enter into a collaborative relationship and create an “ecology of reflection, growth, and refinement of practice” (p.162). Such communities of teachers, administrators, and parents promote purposeful and collaborative classrooms to improve instruction, create a climate of care, and use accountability to continuously scan for inequities across multiple domains of student learning and activities.

In recent years, a revival of effective schools research has surfaced, most likely due to widespread national concerns about student achievement. Such research has shifted in emphasis over the years, from economic to structural and on to social models of urban school effectiveness, from highlighting school funding and physical resources to teachers’ instructional behaviors and on toward a school’s sense of community and academic culture. For example, a recent study of highly effective schools in New York City (Teske & Schneider, 1999) suggests that within these schools, there is a culture defined and sustained by a combination of strong, consistent leadership and strong community support. Another study by Taylor, Pressley, and Pearson (2002) summarized findings from five large-scale research studies on effective, high-poverty elementary
schools (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Designs for Change, 1998; Lein, Johnson, & Ragland, 1997; Puma, Karweit, Price, Ricciuti, Thompson, & Vaden-Kiernan, 1997; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). The six recurring themes that emerged from these five studies support and extend the earlier research on effective schools: (1) putting the students first to improve students learning; (2) strong building leadership; (3) strong teacher collaboration; (4) focus on professional development and innovation; (5) consistent use of student performance data to improve learning; and (6) strong links to parents. Such research stresses the importance of educators (teachers and principals) learning and changing together over an extended period of time, as they reflect on their practice and implement new teaching strategies (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

While the effective schools movement has been influential among researchers, educators, and policymakers, questions persist regarding its various recommendations, particularly the direction of causal effect. In other words, although certain characteristics might produce higher-achieving students, the reverse might also be the case. That is, schools may maintain these characteristics because they are fortunate enough to have greater numbers of high-achieving students. That some schools identified as effective at one point in time were found not to be so a few years later might, for example, suggest the latter possibility. Thus, although "effective schools" clearly share important practices, it has never been consistently established that ineffective schools could become more effective by adopting these features. Still unattained and perplexing is the crucial research goal of establishing a reliable set of techniques for transforming ineffective schools into effective ones. As such, the next section emphasizes the critical role of programmatic equity as a vehicle for attaining systemic equity.
It is not only important to know that these excellent and equitable schools exist, but also to know what these schools did in order to become excellent and equitable. A common thread throughout all of these schools was the belief that all students could be successful. The staff at these schools accepted shared responsibility for making this belief a reality and spent the majority of their time focusing on strategies to help all students be successful. Perhaps the most prevailing theme that arose from all of these studies was that of a collaborative environment. Educators at these schools worked together to ensure the success of all students. If schools that serve high populations of minority students and poor students are highly successful, one cannot argue that a student’s background is the sole predictor of school-achievement. It becomes the duty of educators then to create schools that are equitable and serve literally each child well (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). The next section reviews the literature on equity as it relates equal access to educational programs. It is divided into three sections: (a) Students in special and academically gifted programs; (b) Inequities in discipline; and (c) Access to a rigorous curriculum.

**Programmatic Equity**

**Students in Special and Academically Gifted Programs**

The two largest programs that schools offer to students include special education and academically gifted education. Both programs tend to label and exclude students in different ways. Special education has historically excluded students in a negative way by grouping struggling students together, excluding them from their non-disabled peers, and giving them limited access to the regular and advanced curriculum. In contrast, students who are selected for academically gifted education have had a more positive experience being grouped with other students of high ability and given access to the most advanced
curriculum. In terms of programmatic equity, it is essential that all students be equally represented in both of these programs.

However, it has been documented that African American and Hispanic students are over-represented in special education classes and under-represented in academically gifted classes (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Ford, 1998; Ford & Harris, 1999; Obiakor, 2007; Patton, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). For example, according to a 2001 U.S. Department of Education report, White students make up 67% of the general population but only 43% of the special education population. While White students are under-represented, African American and Hispanic students are over-represented. African American students make up 16% of the general education population but that percentage climbs to 20% of the special education population. The numbers for Hispanic students are more inequitable with Hispanics making up only 4% of the general education population but 14% of the special education population.

Donovan and Cross (2002) further illustrate these inequities in their analysis of data taken from a 1998 Civil Rights Compliance report. Donovan and Cross found that African American students were more than twice as likely to be identified as mentally retarded than their White and Hispanic peers. Inequities in the identification of students as emotionally disabled also existed. The percentages were approximately 1/2, 1, and 1.5 for Hispanic, White, and African American students respectively. If the system were equitable, enrollment numbers for general education and special education would be equal.

Donovan and Cross (2002) also found inequities in the percentage of students in academically gifted programs. While 6.2% of the overall student population is identified
as academically gifted, White students are over-represented at 7.47%, and African American (3.04%) and Hispanic students (3.57%) are under-represented in the academically gifted population. This disproportionate representation has led to inequitable access to curriculum. Students in academically gifted classes are held to high standards, while students in special education classes are held to much lower standards. Logically, this contributes to inequity in schools. However, it is not necessarily the intelligence of the students that places them in academically gifted education or special education.

Davis and Rimm (1997) report that 90% of schools continue to use intelligence or achievement tests as the sole measure of “giftedness.” Since these tests can be culturally biased, fewer African American students are selected for gifted programs. Another reason for the disproportionately low numbers of African American students in academically gifted programs is the teacher referral practice. Ford (1996) found that even African American students who had high test scores were not referred for screening. Since the teacher is often the only referral point, this severely limits the number of African American students being referred for academically gifted programs.

In order to increase the number of students in academically gifted programs, Harris, Brown, Ford, and Richardson (2004) recommend two critical changes. First, the authors recommend using a more culturally sensitive instrument by which to identify students. Tests such as the Naglieri Non-Verbal Abilities Test and Raven’s Matrix Analogies Tests, are considered to be less culturally biased than traditional tests like the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R). The authors also recommend greater multi-cultural preparation for all school personnel. As teachers learn
to implement multicultural strategies, all minority students will have a greater opportunity to be successful, which will make them less likely to be identified for special education classes and more likely to be selected for academically gifted classes.

Although curricular opportunities are limited in the special education classroom and abundant in academically gifted classrooms, the opportunities within regular education classrooms are also inequitable. The next session will focus on the literature surrounding inequities in discipline.

Discipline

In response to recent acts of violence in schools, many schools and systems have become focused on creating a safe and orderly school culture. One example is the implementation of zero-tolerance policies. Verdugo (2002) contends that such policies, however, have a profound implication in our schools, especially with regard to race and social class relations. It is also noted that zero-tolerance policies are more prevalent in minority and poor communities. In fact, little research exists to support the implementation of these policies. Although these policies are implemented with the intention of creating a safer learning community, Verdugo concludes that zero-tolerance policies result in an overwhelmingly disproportionate number of minority suspensions and seemingly appear to be “inequitably directed at ethnic/racial minority students” (p.59). In addition to the disproportionate number of minority suspensions, this study also revealed that minority students are suspended for ambiguous reasons such as threatening appearance or disrespect, whereas White students are suspended for clear violations such as guns, weapons, or drugs. Verdugo concludes his study by calling for more equitable, culturally responsive, and child-centered ways of achieving safety in our schools.
Scheurich, Skrla, Garcia, and Nolly (2005), conducted a study in 2001-2002 to analyze discipline referrals in a small-town high school of 1,300 students. It was concluded that African-American males were disciplined at a rate nearly three times their proportional representation in the student population and that for Latino males the rate was nearly four times disproportionate. As the authors point out, this school, like many others nation-wide, is characterized by a glaring inequity with regard to student discipline.

Watts and Erevelles (2004) argue that school violence stems from socially unjust social conditions that perpetuate individual blame rather than address the inequitable social context of our schools that are rooted in oppressive beliefs and practices. The authors contend that the social context of our schools “normalize structural violence in the daily lives of oppressed peoples” (p.294). We must, according to the authors, address the system, rather than place blame on individuals who are merely victims of an oppressive social context. Watts and Erevelles call for schools to “define alternative modes of practice that will enable both students and their communities to advocate for social transformation and social justice” (p.294).

Scheurich and Skrla (2003) promote the use of equity audits to ensure systemic equity within schools. This process involves gathering and analyzing data to identify inequities that serve as barriers to academic achievement. Equity audits can be implemented to address issues of discipline and identification for services such as special and gifted education. With regard to discipline, Skrla and Scheurich (2001) conducted a number of studies highlighting a disproportionate number of referrals for minority students and argue that rather than blame the students for their behavior, we must seek to
understand our minority students’ cultures and must acknowledge that
disproportionalities in discipline are directly related to inequities in student achievement.
Students who spend less time learning in the classroom are not afforded an equitable
opportunity to learn.

Another important aspect of programmatic equity is the availability and access to
a rigorous curriculum. In other words, it is essential that all students, regardless of their
NCLB sub-group, have equal opportunities to learn.

Rigorous Curriculum

Our country has a history of tracking students by perceived ability. These
practices have resulted in the racial and socioeconomic segregation of students (Oakes, 1985). In other words, the majority of students identified in the NCLB subgroups of African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged have been
disproportionately represented in the lower track classes where they cannot access higher-level courses. This has helped create inequity in schools. This inequity is reflected in racially separate programs that provide minority children with restricted educational opportunities and outcomes (Oakes, 1995). Recent research indicates that as schools enroll more students in rigorous courses, the percentage of students passing state exams and entering college will increase (Gamoran & Hannigan, 2000; Luce & Thompson, 2005). Although definitions of academic rigor vary, for the purpose of this study, academic rigor will be defined as the most challenging courses a school has to offer. Specifically, this usually means honors and advanced placement courses.

According to a 1997 report published by the North Carolina Manpower Development Center (MDC), a group that has launched several projects to assist middle
and high schools increase educational and career options for low-income minority youth, a more rigorous curriculum will lead to higher achievement on test scores. MDC developed a project entitled Alliance for Achievement. The Alliance project is an effort to improve the academic preparation of all students. The report describes a Louisville middle school where only 2% of its students were achieving “proficient” or “distinguished” on state math tests in 1992. At the same time, only 25% of eighth graders studied algebra. By 1995, all of the eighth grade students studied algebra. As a result of providing access to a rigorous curriculum for all students, the percentage of students scoring “proficient” or “distinguished” increased from 2% to 18%.

Stone High School, located in Stone County Mississippi, experienced similar results when a team decided to allow most of its students to enroll in Algebra in eighth grade. In the same previously mentioned report, the MDC (1997) found that the number of students scoring in the top two quartiles of state math tests increased from 52% in 1992 to 77% in 1995 for White students and from 22% to 62% for African-American students. These increases in test scores corresponded with the increase in access to rigorous courses. This finding is particularly significant in that gains achieved by African-American students doubled that of their White peers. If schools are looking to reduce the achievement gap and provide a more equitable education, providing all students with access to rigorous curriculum appears to be a useful strategy.

In a different report, Bottoms and Carpenter (2003) found the same correlation between the access to higher levels of mathematics and higher standardized test scores. According to the authors, “Access to rigorous mathematics coursework in the middle grades is measured by whether or not students take algebra—the gateway to higher
mathematics” (p.4). In their study, Bottoms and Carpenter found that students who took at least one semester of algebra in the middle grades scored a 160—the midpoint of the Basic range. However, students who did not take algebra scored a mean of 141—two points below the Basic level.

Although much of the research on the effects of rigorous courses is measured by math achievement, Carbonaro and Gamoran (2002) found improvements in English achievement data as well. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS), the authors looked at over 8,000 students in various academic tracks named general, academic and honors. They found that, “students who have more intellectually challenging content in their English classes tend to have higher levels of achievement” (p.819).

Recent reform literature (Anfara & Waks, 2000) focuses on the need for increasing academic rigor in the middle schools. A 1998 article in Education Week characterized middle schools as “the wasteland of our primary and secondary landscape” (Bradley, 1998 as cited in Anfara & Waks, p.47). In order to improve that wasteland, reformers recommend following the suggestions in Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Although less of the research focuses on the updated version, Turning Points 2000, school leaders should consider the recommendations in this revised edition. These recommendations include using instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards, staffing middle grades schools with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents, organizing relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development, governing
democratically, providing a safe and healthy school environment, and including parents and communities in supporting student learning.

*Turning Points 2000* emphasizes the untracking of students. The book cites numerous studies that point to repeated overrepresentation of minority and economically disadvantaged students in lower tracks. As Oakes (1995) has found, this overrepresentation is flawed. Even when students of varying ethnic backgrounds score the same on placement tests, minority students are less likely to be placed in higher-track classes. Specifically, Oakes found that while only 56 percent of Latinos scoring between 90 and 99 on placement exams were placed in accelerated classes, 93 percent of White students gained admission to these classes. Jackson and Davis (2000) also cite research that instruction in the low track classes is far from excellent and causes gaps in achievement between the two groups to widen. However, schools that implement *Turning Points* seem to diminish these achievement gaps. Felner and Jackson (1997) studied 93 schools and over 15,000 students who attended schools that implemented the *Turning Points* recommendations. When analyzing achievement test scores for schools with “full implementation,” the authors found scores of 298, 315, and 275 on mathematics, language, and reading tests. These scores compared favorably with students from non-implemented schools, who earned scores of 248, 254, and 247 on the same tests.

Although programmatic equity and achievement equity are strong beginnings to improving equity in our schools, they alone are not sufficient. In addition to establishing systems that give all students an equitable opportunity to learn, all students must be
afforded that opportunity to learn from high quality teachers. The next section concludes systemic equity by reviewing the literature related to Teacher Quality Equity.

Teacher Quality Equity

Research has shown that teacher quality is a strong predictor of student achievement. This data should be encouraging in terms of improving systemic equity in our nation’s public schools. If stronger teachers taught students who have been historically marginalized by our public schools (e.g., minority students and students living in poverty) then the achievement of those students should increase. The research tends to view stronger teachers as those who are traditionally and fully certified, experienced, and score higher on teacher quality formulas. Alarmingly, however, recent research has indicated that less competent teachers are more likely to teach minority students and students living in poverty (Borman & Kimball, 2005; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Shen, Mansberger, & Yang, 2004). The following section reviews the extent to which different indicators of teacher quality impact student achievement, as well as the distribution of quality teachers to students of varying characteristics. The indicators include certification, years of experience, National Board Certification, teacher quality formulas, and other related studies.

Certification

The literature suggests that teacher certification is a significant predictor of student achievement (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Felter, 2001; Lazco-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; Wayne and Youngs, 2003; Fuller & Alexander, 2004; and Croninger, Rice, Rathbun, & Nishio, 2007). Although research shows this strong link between teacher certification and student achievement, our country’s most impoverished schools are
populated by an alarming percentage of under-certified teachers. States such as Arizona, California and New York report under-certified teacher rates of 20-50%. The percentages of under-certified teachers are typically higher in impoverished and urban schools (Go, 2002; Lankford, Loeb and Wycoff, 2002). As a result, the students who have historically underachieved have the least access to certified teachers.

Goldhaber and Brewer (2000), using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, found that the certification status of teachers impacted achievement in 12th grade math scores. The mean score for students who were taught by a traditionally certified teacher was 51.52 compared to only 41.93 for students of probationally-certified teachers and 43.74 for students with emergency-certified teachers.

Felter (2001) also found that students who were taught by teachers with emergency certification scored lower on standardized tests. Felter analyzed student data (approximately 300,000 students in grades 9-11) from California’s Stanford 9 Math Achievement Test. The data showed a statistically significant negative correlation between teachers with emergency certifications and lower student test scores. Felter’s findings are consistent with the other studies regarding teacher certification and emphasize the findings that students who are taught by fully-certified teachers outperform students who are not. An underlying reason behind the success of traditionally-certified teachers is the emphasis of content specific course work. In California, as in many other states, one can earn an emergency certification as few as nine content-specific graduate hours. A traditionally-certified teacher will earn many more credits in addition to receiving specific pedagogical training.
Lazco-Kerr and Beliner (2002) also studied the achievement differences between students of certified teachers and students of under-certified teachers. The authors defined under-certification as an emergency or temporary certification given by the state of Arizona (with requirements similar to that of California). The study included 293 certified and under-certified teachers from five low-income districts in Arizona. After comparing students’ scores on the SAT 9, Lazco-Kerr and Berliner found that students of certified teachers significantly outperformed students of under-certified teachers. As an example, the mean score of the reading section of the SAT 9 for students of certified teachers was 36.52, in comparison to 30.67 for students of under-certified teachers. While the mean difference in math scores was not statistically significant, it followed a similar trend with students of certified teachers outperforming students of under-certified teachers (38.8 v. 35.82). It is important to note that the study was replicated the following year. In addition to finding similar results, the researchers also found the scores on the math section to be statistically significant. As Fuller and Alexander (2004) concluded, the data are similar for non-certified teachers.

Fuller and Alexander (2004) performed multiple regressions on data from four Texas districts (including 578,123 students). The researchers found that students with certified teachers performed better than students who were taught by non-certified teachers on the 1999 TAAS (Texas’ standardized math test).

Analyzing 1998 data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Croninger et. al. (2007) found a statistically significant positive correlation (.078) between a teacher’s type of degree and students’ cognitive reading achievement score. Specifically, the researchers found that the students of teachers who held an elementary degree
outperformed other students. Although this finding does not specifically address certification, one could make the connection that teachers with an elementary education degree typically earn a traditional certification. However, students in poverty tend to be exposed to more uncertified teachers than the rest of the student population. Using data from the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study 1993-1997, Shen, Mansberger and Yang (2004) found that in schools where 20-49% of the students were living in poverty, only 8.5% of the teachers were non-certified. However, the number nearly doubles to 16.9% when over 50% of the students attending the school live in poverty.

Knoeppel (2007) also found inequities in teacher resource distribution. Even after the state of Kentucky reformed their finance system to focus on vertical equity, “the least experienced teachers with the least training are found in schools with greater student need” (p.437).

*Years of Experience*

Research indicates that novice teachers are less effective than experienced teachers (Felter, 2001; Hanushek, Kain, O’brien, & Rivkin, 2005; Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor, 2006; Croninger et. al., 2007). In a previously mentioned article, Felter (2001) studied the impact of teachers’ years of experience in addition to certification. Felter analyzed the impact that years of experience has on mathematics achievement as well as student dropout rates. Using data from the Stanford Nine, Felter found a positive correlation (.36-.39 depending on the grade level) between test scores and years of experience. That is, more experienced teachers had higher passing rates on standardized tests than less experienced teachers.
Using statistics from the California Basic Education Data System, Felter (2001) also concluded that, “The average number of years of teacher education and experience are negatively correlated with the dropout rate” (p.162). Of particular note is the finding that years of teaching experience had a stronger correlation (.20) than the poverty level of the student (.13), a reminder that the school system’s response to family background is more powerful than the background alone.

For example, Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2006) found that highly experienced teachers increase student achievement in math by close to a tenth of a standard deviation when compared to novice teachers. With half of the achievement effect being attributable to teachers in their first few years, the authors conclude, “Regardless of how effective (first year teachers) may eventually become, during their first year of teaching they are clearly less effective than more experienced teachers” (p.18).

Results achieved in a study by Hanushek, Kain, O’Brien, and Rivkin (2005) were similar to Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2006). Using teacher data from the Texas Schools Microdata Panel data from 1989-2002 and student data from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, Hanushek et. al. found that a new teacher lowers student achievement growth by .12-.16 standard deviations. The authors’ findings are significant when coupled with the fact that African American students are more likely than their White peers to encounter first-year teachers. Using 2001 data from 7th grade teachers across North Carolina, Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor (2005) found that African-American students were 54% more likely to have a novice math teacher than their white peers. The authors also found that African-American 7th grade students across North Carolina were 38% more likely to have a novice English teacher.
National Board Certified Teachers

The research on National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) impacting student achievement is sparse. In a recent review of the literature, Goldhaber and Anthony (2005) find only four studies (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000; Cavalluzzo, 2004; Stone, 2002; & Vandevenoor, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004) that investigate the effectiveness of NBCTs in comparison to non-NBCTs.

Stone (2002) studied the 16 of Tennessee’s 40 NBCTs who had value-added teacher reports. A value-added teacher report is a summary of annual achievement gains exhibited by each teacher’s students. Student achievement is estimated on the basis of how much students gain in comparison to their achievement increases in previous years. Stone defined exceptional teaching as that which brings about an improvement in student achievement equal to 115% of one year’s academic growth in the local school system (Stone). When taken collectively, the 16 teachers received 123 teacher-effect scores as a result of multiple subjects taught over multiple years. Only 18 of these scores, or 15%, reach the exemplary level and 13 of the scores would be designated as “deficient.” In summary, Stone’s study did not find that NBCTs had a positive impact on student achievement.

In contrast to Stone (2002), Bond, Smith, Baker, and Hattie (2000) did find that NBCTs taught students who “differ in profound and important ways from those taught by less proficient teachers” (p.x). The study included a 65-teacher comparison of 31 teachers who earned National Board Certification and 34 teachers who attempted but did not earn National Board Certification. The teachers were analyzed on 15 dimensions of teaching. Most of the 15 dimensions were literature-based attributes of excellent teachers. The
evidence of these dimensions was gathered through reviewing lesson plans, student work, observational visits and scripted interviews. Although this study appears encouraging, it is important to note that the authors did not take measures to ensure that students in the study all entered at the same ability level. The absence of the data calls into question the validity of the study, especially since other studies have already indicated that higher performing students tend to be assigned to NBCTs more than lower performing students.

Cavalluzzo (2004) also found that students with NBCTs outperformed students who did not have NBCTs. Using data that included 108,000 individual student records from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Cavalluzzo’s results indicated that students with NBCTs “gained 12 percent of a standard deviation more than others on the end-of-grade exam in mathematics, all else equal” (p.25). However, to the author’s own acknowledgement, all else is not equal. The students in Cavalluzzo’s study are not distributed equitably among teachers. She found that NBCTs were less likely to teach students who receive subsidized lunches, were minority, had attendance problems, and were suspended throughout the year. These are all characteristics of students who have historically underperformed in schools. This is a significant limitation, since it is unclear whether the gains these students are making are a result of the certification status of their teachers or other factors. It is also important to note that Cavalluzzo’s study was funded by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, and Berliner (2004) studied 35 NBCTs from 14 Arizona school districts. They analyzed four years of results from the Stanford Achievement Tests in reading, mathematics, and language arts in grades 3-6. In the 48 comparisons based on this data, the researchers found that students in the classes of
NBCTs surpassed students in the classrooms of non NBCTs (to a statistically significant level) in almost one-third of the comparisons. Although Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley and Berliner use their findings in support of NBCTs, it is important to note that, in almost 67% of the comparisons, no statistically significant difference between NBCTs and non-NBCTs was found. Another limitation includes the small sample size of the study. The authors only included 35 of the 80 available NBCTs in the 14 Arizona school districts.

To date, Goldhaber and Anthony (2005) present the most comprehensive study of the effectiveness of NBCTs. Using teacher records from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction from the years 1996-1999, the sample included 390,449 students and over 300 NBCTs. The authors found that while the NBCT process is successful in identifying effective teachers, the process itself does not increase teacher effectiveness. Related to systemic equity, Goldhaber and Anthony found, “that schools with NBCTs receive substantially more educational benefits from having their NBCTs teach low-income students in earlier grades” (p.26). Cavalluzzo (2004) reported a similar finding in her study in Miami-Dade. However, within North Carolina schools, Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2006) found the more privileged students (defined by the authors as not receiving subsidized lunches and whose parents are college graduates) have more access to Nationally Board Certified teachers than less-privileged students.

*Teacher Quality Formulas*

Characteristics of good teachers, such as certification, years of experience, National Board Certification and type of degree earned, are all important factors when attempting to quantify good teaching. Additional research has been done that attempts to combine these qualities into one teacher quality variable.
For example, Provasnik and Young (2003) created a teacher quality variable that consisted of a teacher’s college degree, area of certification, and years of experience. Using 8\textsuperscript{th} grade mathematics data from the 2000 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the authors found that students from schools that had high concentrations of special programs students, American Indian students, and high poverty students were less likely to be taught by high quality teachers.

In another study, Borman and Kimball (2005) attempted to determine the extent to which teachers with higher standards-based evaluation ratings close student achievement gaps. After rating teachers based on classroom observations conducted by school administrators, Borman and Kimball found mixed results. For example, fourth-grade teachers with higher ratings made progress in closing the achievement gap, but in other grade levels the progress was not statistically significant.

Milanowski (2004) used a Cincinnati district’s teacher performance score to analyze the relationship between teacher performance and student achievement. The district’s teacher performance score is comprised of scores on four domains: planning and preparation, classroom management, teaching for learning, and professionalism. Milanowski combined those scores to create a composite evaluation score. Student achievement was measured by district and state tests in reading, mathematics and science. Results indicated a substantial test score variance at the teacher level. The variance ranged from 6\% to 28\%, with an average variance of 16.3\%. In addition, the teachers with higher composite evaluation scores correlated with higher student achievement. In other words, Milanowski findings suggest that good teachers make a positive difference in student achievement.
Other Studies

Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (2004) studied the impact of teachers on student achievement through a unique perspective. Instead of attempting to identify the qualities of a good teacher or study what specific teacher characteristic impacts student achievement, the authors investigated the degree to which a teacher in general impacted student achievement gains, using data from the Student-Teacher Achievement Ration (Project STAR). Project STAR involved students in 79 elementary schools in 42 different districts in Tennessee. Participating districts allowed the researchers to randomly assign students to different kindergarten classes and randomly assign teachers to those classes. The cohorts of kindergarten classes moved together through the third grade, where they received a randomly assigned teacher at each grade. Since the classes were initially equivalent, the authors argue that differences in achievement must be due to teacher effectiveness.

Variance component estimates indicated no statistically significant differences for achievement within classrooms. However, for both between classrooms and between schools, achievement differences in each grade level for both mathematics and reading showed a statistically significant difference in achievement. In summary, Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (2004), found that teachers make a difference in student achievement. Even more profound is the finding that the, “between-classroom-within-schools-and treatment-type variance component (the teacher effect) is always larger in the low-SES schools” (p.250). Taking into account previously mentioned research that less qualified teachers tend to populate low-SES schools, systemic equity could be improved if more qualified teachers taught in low-SES schools.
In concluding the review of systemic equity literature, it is important to emphasize that schools that are equitable for all students exist. The achievement equity section of this review documents this. These equitable schools exist as a result of equity in the programs they offer for students and the teachers who educate these students. However, systemic equity cannot be achieved in the absence of strong leadership. Effective leadership becomes paramount to schools as they answer the call for systemic equity. As such, the next section emphasizes the critical role of principal leadership in creating schools that are excellent, achieving both social justice and systemic equity.

Leadership for Excellence and Equity

The Principal's Role in Promoting Student Achievement

According to ERS (1998), the United States is experiencing a dearth of interested, willing and qualified school leader candidates because the principal today is confronted with a job filled with conflict, ambiguity, and work overload. Given this, it is understandable that fewer and fewer qualified people aspire to the principalship, that good people are becoming increasingly harder to find, and that “bright, young administrators aren’t appearing on the horizon” (McCormick, 1987, p.4). What are the realities of the job? Charged with the mission of improving education for all children (i.e. universal proficiency embodied most recently by the No Child Left Behind Act), the principalship has become progressively more and more demanding and fraught with fragmentation, variety, and brevity (Petersen, 1982). The role of school leadership has broadened from performing customary administrative and managerial duties—such as budget oversight, operations and discipline—to include emphasis on other responsibilities such as curriculum development, data analysis, and instructional leadership. According to
Murphy and Beck (1994), principals fill a role replete with contradictory demands. They are expected to “work actively to transform, restructure and redefine schools while they hold organizational positions historically and traditionally committed to resisting change and maintaining stability” (p.3).

Although current school reform efforts use different approaches to improve teaching and learning, all depend for their success on the motivation and capacities of local leadership. According to Fullan (2003), “Leadership is to the current decade what standards were to the 1990s for those interested in large scale reform. Standards, even when well implemented, can take us only part way to successful large-scale reform. It is only leadership that can take us all the way” (p.16). A review of the literature on school reform and restructuring confirms the notion that the school principal is indeed the key player in all successful school reform efforts and that good teaching is not the only predictor of student success—leadership becomes an important lever for improving student achievement.

The belief in the principal’s influence on student achievement goes back to the research of the 1970s and early 1980s. Two decades ago, A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983) specifically recommended strong leadership as a means for school improvement. Effective schools research also recognized the importance of quality leadership by consistently identifying strong instructional leadership as instrumental in creating a positive school climate and as a correlate of high-achieving schools (Edmonds, 1979). In schools where students performed better than expected based on poverty and other demographic characteristics, a “dynamic” principal was at the helm. These studies suggested that specific actions by
principals could directly influence student achievement. Even though this is an assumption, there is little evidence to support the idea that student achievement has increased as the result of principals’ direct actions in instructional supervision. Current theory and research evidence points toward principals affecting student achievement indirectly, through teachers and staff members. As with any manager or leader, principals influence performance through others, and the influence includes a broad spectrum of behaviors.

*Characteristics of Effective School Leaders*

Although it is difficult to demonstrate a direct link between school leadership and student achievement (the most tangible and publicly accepted measure of school success), a model of what makes a good leader is emerging. A recent forum of the National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policymaking, and Management (1999) developed a comprehensive description of an effective school leader. Consistent with the observation that the job of a school leader is multidimensional, the forum identified areas in which school leaders must have skills: instructional leadership; management; communication, collaboration, and community building; vision development, risk taking, and change management.

In other studies that document the importance of strong building leadership (Designs for Change, 1998; Lein, et al., 1997; Puma, et al., 1997), principals worked to redirect people’s time and energy, to develop a collective sense of responsibility for school improvement, to secure resources and training, to provide opportunities for collaboration, to create additional time for instruction, and to help the school staff persist in spite of difficulties. While their style and roles may be different, effective leaders
create a culture for school improvement. They understand that “although leadership can be a powerful force toward school reform, the notion that an individual can effect change by sheer will and personality is simply not supported by research” (Marzano, 2003, p.174). As a result, they promote the involvement of teachers and parents in the decision-making process and are not threatened by, but rather welcome, this empowerment.

Research conducted by Andrews and Soder (1987), Bender Sebring and Bryk (2000), and Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) found that high-performing schools that demonstrate better student achievement possess a climate that focuses on student learning. Principals in these schools provide clarity to the school’s mission, which influences everyone’s expectations. Such leaders (a) have a vision that they allow staff and parents to shape; (b) hold teachers and themselves to high standards; (c) recognize student achievement; (d) communicate academic achievements to the community; and (e) encourage teachers to take risks in trying new methods and programs. They also found that schools with effective principals exhibit a sense of teamwork and inclusiveness in planning, enabling, and assessing instruction. Principals in these schools (a) involve teachers in instructional decisions; (b) provide opportunities for staff members and parents to assume leadership roles in charting instructional improvement; (c) protect staff members from the community and central office; (d) act as facilitators for the instructional staff, helping staff members succeed; (e) serve as an instructional resource for staff members; and (f) create a feeling of trust through cooperative working relationships among the staff in the school. And, according to these research studies, staff members must receive the necessary materials, equipment, and opportunities to learn in order to be successful. Principals in these schools get things done by providing the
resources and staff development needed to support the staff’s efforts to improve. These leaders are visible in classrooms, departmental or grade-level meetings, and in the building. They readily provide the social support needed by students so that class time is devoted to learning (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Bender Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996).

Since 1998, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) researchers have been engaged in what they refer to as “third generation” effective schools research, distinguishing it from the efforts during the 1980s to implement the research findings of the 1970s (see Waters & Grubb, 2004). Recently, they reviewed over 5,000 studies through a series of meta-analyses of research on the student characteristics, school practices, and teacher practices associated with student achievement. The third meta-analysis focused on the effects of principal leadership on student achievement and involved 70 empirically-sound research studies, 2,894 schools, over one million students, and 14,000 teachers, representing the largest sample of principals, teachers, and student achievement scores ever used to analyze the effects of educational leadership. The results show a significant, positive impact of instructional leadership on student achievement (i.e. the study found the average effect size, expressed as a correlation, between leadership and student achievement is .25). The analysis also identified 66 leadership practices embedded in 21 leadership responsibilities, each with statistically significant relationship to student achievement (see Table 2.1 for the top ten principal responsibilities).

Therefore, leadership not only matters, but according to the Wallace Foundation’s
Table 2.1: Top Ten Principal Leadership Responsibilities: Average $r$ and Associated Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Avg $r$</th>
<th>Associated Practices</th>
<th>N schools</th>
<th>N studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Situational awareness | … is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems. | .33     | ▪ Is aware of informal groups and relationships among teachers and staff  
▪ Is aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord  
▪ Can predict what could go wrong from day to day | 91        | 5          |
| Intellectual stimulation | … ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture. | .32     | ▪ Stays informed about current research and theory regarding effective schooling  
▪ Continually exposes teachers and staff to cutting edge ideas about how to be effective  
▪ Systematically engages teachers and staff in discussions about current research and theory  
▪ Continually involves teachers and staff in reading articles and books about effective practices | 321       | 5          |
| Change agent         | … is willing to and actively challenges the status quo.                    | .30     | ▪ Consciously challenges the status quo  
▪ Is comfortable leading change initiatives with uncertain outcomes  
▪ Systematically considers new and better ways of doing things | 479       | 7          |
| Input                | … involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies | .30     | ▪ Provides opportunities for input from teachers and staff on all important decisions  
▪ Provides opportunities for teachers and staff to be involved in policy development  
▪ Involves the school leadership team in decision making | 504       | 13         |
| Culture              | … fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation           | .29     | ▪ Promotes cooperation among teachers and staff  
▪ Promotes a sense of well-being  
▪ Promotes cohesion among teachers and staff  
▪ Develops an understanding of purpose  
▪ Develops a shared vision of what | 709       | 13         |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>SEQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitors/evaluates</td>
<td>... monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>1071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>... is an advocate or spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders.</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>... establishes a set of standard operating principles and procedures.</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>... provides teachers with the material and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/beliefs</td>
<td>... communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the curriculum
- Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of instruction
- Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of assessment
- Advocates on behalf of the school in the community
- Interacts with parents in ways that enhance their support for the school
- Ensures that the central office is aware of the school’s accomplishments
- Provides and enforces clear structures, rules, and procedures for teachers, staff, and students
- Establishes routines regarding the running of the school that teachers and staff understand and follow
- Ensures that the school is in compliance with district and state mandates
- Ensures that teachers and staff have necessary materials and equipment
- Ensures that teachers have necessary professional development opportunities that directly enhance their teaching
- Holds strong professional ideals and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and learning
- Shares ideals and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and learning with teachers, staff, and parents
- Demonstrates behaviors that are consistent with ideals and beliefs

Note. From “Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us About the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement,” by T. Waters, R.J. Marzano, and B. McNulty.

Copyright 2003 by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
“Learning from Leadership Project” (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2005), school leadership is second only to teacher quality among school-related factors that effect student learning. In a five-year study involving 180 schools, in 45 districts and nine states, this study attempts to clearly understand the links between student outcomes and the work of principals and other educational leaders. As a precursor to the project, a publication entitled “How Leadership Influences Student Learning” has been produced. The authors provide an overview of existing research and present the basics of successful leadership. They suggest that, across many different settings, three sets of practices make up the basic core of successful leadership: (1) setting direction; (2) developing people; and (3) redesigning the organization. These authors conclude that “The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of the total school effects” (Leithwood et al., 2005, p.3). They also found that leadership’s demonstrated impact tends to be considerably greater in schools where the learning needs are most acute. In essence, the greater the challenge, the greater the impact of a leader’s actions on learning.

Reminded by Crawford (1998) that “almost all educational reform efforts have come to the conclusion that the nation cannot attain excellence in education without effective school leadership” (p.8), principals automatically become essential figures in terms of schoolwide change, priorities, and vision (Blackmore, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Riester et al., 2002; Shields, Larocque, & Oberg, 2002). Strong, outstanding leadership is necessary for any significant transformation of any organization, schools included (Glickman, 2002). As such, exemplary leadership helps point to the necessity for change and helps make the realities of change happen (Bell, Jones, & Johnson 2002; Bogotch,
2002; Grogan, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Solomon, 2002). Leaders for excellence and equity leverage changes in daily practice, making small changes in the structure that begin to transform the system.

Leadership for Social Justice, Equity and Excellence

Leaders committed to excellence find a way “for all students to achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any student’s race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents, or home language” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p.3). In their schools, there is no discernable difference in academic success and treatment among different groups of students. Leaders committed to excellence insist upon both social justice and systemic equity. Bogotch (2005) suggests that the beliefs and values of our school leaders serve as an impetus to support and advance social justice. We cannot, as Bogotch (2002) boldly reminds us, “separate educational theories and practice from social justice… the leadership task is to make these connections transparent and tangible to all” (p.141). Bogotch (2002) contends that, “[Here] social justice emerges from the heroic (capital H or small h) efforts of an individual – someone with a vision and a willingness to take risks to see that vision enacted. It is the responsibility of educational leadership to translate visions into socially and educationally just actions” (p.142). In this context, it is clear that the school leader’s role must be socially constructed and must extend beyond the traditional, managerial tasks associated with school leadership that simply perpetuate the status quo. Research also emphasizes that leaders for social justice have deeply embedded belief and value systems that serve to inform the leader’s actions. Riester, Pursch and Skrla (2002), for instance, state that the leadership of the school principal is “paramount in creating the conditions for success in schools that serve
children predominantly from low-income homes” (p.283), and attribute the success in these schools to the principal’s belief and value system. In both contexts, these principals are aware of current social, political and economic factors that contribute to hegemony, understand the danger of perpetuating that injustice in our schools, and are therefore committed to school leadership that advocates social change. The next section of the literature review highlights qualities of leaders for both social justice and systemic equity.

Challenging the Status Quo

Rather than accept the status quo and allow schools to mirror social injustices, leaders for social justice advance change, often times in situations that are politically and professionally charged, resulting in personal and/or professional ramifications. Research suggests that leaders who are successfully advocating social justice can be characterized by an insistent disposition (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Riester, Pursch & Skrła, 2002; Scheurich, 1998; Solomon, 2002; Theoharis, 2004; Valencia, 1997). Riester, Pursch and Skrła (2002) refer to this mentality as a “stubborn persistence” (p.292), while Rapp (2002), acknowledging that these leaders are often recognized as “mavericks,” credits these leaders for their “oppositional, rebellious imaginations” (p.226). “These leaders,” according to Rapp, “resist, dissent, rebel, subvert, possess oppositional imaginations, and are committed to transforming oppressive and exploitative social relations in and out of schools (p.226).

Scheurich (1998) applies this insistent disposition in the context of the all too familiar rhetoric, “all kids can learn” and argues that leaders for social justice “are fiercely committed, not just to holding out high expectations for all children but for achieving high levels of success with all children” (p.461). According to Scheurich
(1998), these leaders, for example, “disposed of the bell or normal curve as a guiding principle for academic success and replaced it with what statistics calls an extremely negatively skewed distribution, meaning many scores are near the high end” (p.461). These leaders achieved this, however, not by lowering standards or watering down the curriculum, but by “reconceptualizing what is possible for all children and by refusing any other result” (p.461). These leaders know that in addition to believing that all children can learn, they must also insist upon it and obtain the necessary resources to ensure that rhetoric becomes a reality.

**Understanding Policy**

School leaders for social justice must have an understanding of how policy impacts education and, furthermore, must exercise their voices in the political arena. As stated earlier, Skrla et al. (2004) promote the use of equity audits in schools and suggest that these audits are “vital in linking accountability policy intent to equity outcomes in local contexts…” (p.134). In a 2001 study conducted in Texas, Scheurich, Skrla and Johnson (2001) reported that the Texas Assessment of Skills (TAAS) accountability system was successful in “driving significant improvements in academic achievement for children of color and low income children, and thus these systems are increasing equity” (p.296). As Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan, and Foley (2001) point out, however, although the Aldine, TX district (one of the four in the Scheurich et al. study) TAAS pass rates increased for all students from 1994-1999, data from the U.S. Department of Education reveals that, in 1997-1998, Aldine had one of the lowest graduation rates in the state and in the nation (p.320). The research by Valencia et al. (2001) refutes Scheurich et al.’s (2000) previous claim that accountability in the name of high stakes tests results in equity
and, more importantly, is another reminder that school leaders should be wary of using test score data as a sole determinant of systemic equity. Instead, school leaders must utilize an accountability model that accounts for “input (the adequacy of resources), process (the quality of instruction) and output (what students have learned as measured by tests or other indicators)” (Valencia et al., p.321).

School leaders that are knowledgeable about policy are more effectively able to collaborate with various stakeholders in the school community and are less likely to be blinded by political mandates that undermine the pursuit of social justice. All too often, policy such as NCLB is offered (mainly by politicians with little or no educational experience) as a method for reducing inequities and therefore “leveling the playing field.” In the meantime, such policy in effect ignores the systemic equities that have perpetuated the historical marginalization of students who live in the shadows cast by those who are privileged. School leaders cannot simply succumb to policy that reinforces the status quo and ignores the social injustices that permeate our society, leaving many of our children behind. In fact, Marshall and Oliva (2006) state that leaders for social justice must be able to “argue and demand that inadequate policies and programs be reframed… and must be able to present arguments that educational excellence means moving beyond test scores and working with parents and communities to build inclusive, safe and trusting spaces” (p.196). It is unfair to assume and misleading to suggest that a school’s scores on standardized tests reflect systemic equity.

**Resisting Deficit Thinking**

Another challenge that leaders for social justice are faced with is what Valencia (1997) refers to as *deficit thinking*, the “dominant paradigm that shapes U.S. educators
explanations for widespread and persistent school failure among children from low-income homes and children of color” (p.235). This paradigm falsely suggests that students who fail in school are victims of internal cognitive or emotional deficiencies or social or economic shortcomings. “The popular ‘at risk’ construct, now entrenched in educational circles, views poor and working class children and their families (typically of color) as predominantly responsible for school failure (p.235). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) share this belief about deficit thinking and expanded upon it by coining the term “equity trap,” which they describe as “the conscious and unconscious thinking patterns and behaviors that trap teachers, administrators and others, preventing them from creating schools that are equitable, particularly for students of color. According to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), a common result of deficit thinking (and equity traps) in schools is that an inordinate number of minority students are overidentified for special education, are subjected to segregation because of language barriers, receive stricter disciplinary actions, drop out of school, and are “immersed in negative and ‘subtractive’ school climates” (p.236).

A number of studies have been conducted to further explore deficit thinking as well as to determine the principal’s role in confronting and replacing this mindset. Skrla and Scheurich (2001) conducted a study of four high-achieving districts in Texas to analyze the displacement of deficit thinking. Their findings uncovered five ways that accountability displaces deficit thinking, therefore suggesting that decreased deficit thinking can be linked to state and national accountability systems and implying that school leaders can use disaggregated data to expose and address areas of inequity.
McKenzie and Scheurich’s (2004) equity trap study proposed a number of strategies for removing equity traps, including: helping teachers reframe their thinking by engaging in neighborhood walks or by collecting oral histories; engaging in dialogue to address the notion that racism would cease to exist if everyone would just forget about race and see one another as human beings; expose situations in which teachers conceal deficit thinking and/or try to norm other teachers who disagree with child-negative views; and have teachers visit classrooms and schools where teachers are successful with a similar demographic of students. Finally, Garcia and Guerra (2004) present a conceptual framework for the deconstruction of deficit thinking through staff development and illustrate how deficit thinking can be challenged and reframed. The authors suggest that staff development aimed to unravel deficit thinking forces participants to grapple with and often reject their previously held deficit views and to acknowledge their personal role in student achievement, therefore leading to more culturally responsive and respectful instructional practices (p.164).

Research clearly suggests that a substantial amount of inequity in our schools is linked to the assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of teachers and administrators. The research also suggests, however, that deficit thinking and/or equity traps can be deconstructed by systematically exploring, exposing and addressing commonly held assumptions. According to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), “The best route to influence current teachers is through the principal, who, research repeatedly shows, is the key to school change” (p.628). For a principal to change not only her or his own beliefs and assumptions, but also those of the staff, it is imperative that the principal be able to understand, expose and address issues and beliefs that serve as barriers to equity.
Moral Leadership

Leaders who promote and support social justice and systemic equity are keenly aware of their beliefs and values and thoughtfully explore and expose these ideologies as they advocate change and challenge the status quo. Research suggests that these principals espouse beliefs and values that are tied to moral leadership. Dantley (2005) states, “The whole notion of moral leadership moves educational administration from the realm of minimum competencies and high stakes testing, which are grounded in a modernist frame, to a position of influence where the broader society is concerned” (p.40). This postmodern view of education reinforces the need for leaders to stop looking for one-shot answers, and instead, to begin asking questions that will uncover the hegemonic practices that leave our schools morally bankrupt, socially unjust, and politically corrupt. Dantley, in his essay entitled “Moral Leadership,” supports this postmodern framework of school leadership by stating that, “It is actively immoral for school leaders to attempt to embrace any genre of administration without first grappling with the social, political, and cultural contexts in which their schools exist” (p.40). It is unacceptable for school leaders to turn a blind eye to internal or external practices, policies or mandates that perpetuate hegemony. School leadership for social justice requires leaders who are deeply committed to repairing the social injustice that permeates our society. Educational leaders must consistently uncover, question, and challenge the status quo in pursuit of equality and excellence for all of our children; to not do so would be immoral.
Critical Reflection

In writing about developing an alternative pedagogy aimed at developing transformative leaders for social justice, Brown (2004) explains that learners must engage in critical self-reflection in order to change their learning schemes. The aim of this type of reflection is to “externalize and investigate power relationships and to uncover hegemonic assumptions” (p.84). Kose (2005), in his study of the principal’s role in advocating social justice through professional development, supports Brown’s (2004) argument for on-going learning, grounded in critical reflection, and further emphasizes that the principal’s commitment to learning is paramount. Kose calls for principals to continuously “deconstruct and reconstruct” their educational philosophy as it relates to student learning” (p.33). It is important to note here that the principal’s learning must be an ongoing, discursive process that begins with higher education institutions and continues contingent upon the school leader’s willingness to grapple with tough questions regarding one’s own cultural identity and to influence and inspire teaching practices and beliefs that lead to equitable learning outcomes for all students. Dantley (2005) expands on this notion of critical reflection, stating that leaders must “grapple with meanings of what is just and right” (p.42). This development of an idiographic morality stems from how leaders “personally see or evaluate themselves in actualizing those definitions” (p.42). Leaders that undergo the process of “critical reflection” and develop an “idiographic morality” are better equipped to clearly and consistently articulate and enact a vision for learning that responds justly and accordingly when confronted with situations that perpetuate hegemony, preserve the status quo and threaten democracy.
Leadership for Transformation through Community

“There is significant research that indicates there is a positive relationship between leadership and student achievement” (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p.603), and many scholars have conducted empirical and theoretical research about the principal’s role in supporting and advancing social justice. Shields (2004), in her research on leadership for social justice, links moral leadership with transformative leadership.

“Transformative educational leaders, as described by Astin and Astin, believe that the value ends of leadership should be to enhance equity, social justice and the quality of life” (p.123). Shields draws from Bogotch’s definition of educational leadership as “a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power” and insists that these deliberate interventions of educational leaders must “develop meaning that is socially just, build a deeper understanding of dialogue, and help educators to critically examine their practices” (p.110). Shields elaborates by stating that, “Rather than trying to balance numerous competing programs and demands, one of the central interventions of school leaders must be the facilitation of moral dialogue… transformative leadership based on dialogue and strong relationships, can provide opportunities for all children to learn in school communities that are socially just and deeply democratic” (p.110). Inspired by the school leader, it is this co-construction of knowledge that unites the entire school community in pursuing the common goal of ensuring that all children receive equal access to an excellent education.

Community and social activism are essential components of transformative leadership for social justice. Furman and Gruenewald (2004), believe that “… the entire community must be seen as central to the school’s curriculum” (p.70) and propose a
pedagogy of place in which educators work with the community members to conduct a needs-assessment, to gather support, and to, for instance, “identify individuals who could serve as curricular resources, providing oral histories of the community…” (p.70). Scheurich (1998), in his study of the HiPass model, states that the fifth core belief essential for socially just schooling is the belief that the school exists for and serves the community. The HiPass schools, according to Scheurich, erased the traditional separation between school and its community and replaced it with “a community of commitment” (p.466). These schools have creatively woven the school and the community; they “experience themselves as being in union with the community -- the community’s needs and dreams are their needs and dreams and vice versa” (p.466). Scheurich cites examples of school practices that promote community and social activism: parents working with teachers in the classrooms, school meetings that take place at community sites, teachers riding buses to meet and greet families at the beginning of the school year, and schools that serve as community centers to incorporate non-school related activities that support the community. “Consequently, these schools have developed the six qualities that Raywid contends are key features of building community: respect, caring, inclusiveness, trust, empowerment, and commitment” (p.467).

Another key component with regard to community and social activism is inherent within school practices that promote and support a collaborative school climate, reflected by the staff members’ willingness to learn with and from one another. Meier (2002), reflecting on her service as a principal, emphasized the importance of shared decision making. As a result, Meier established a supportive structure at Mission Hill that provided built in time for peer planning and observation and, most importantly, centered
on “particular students, student work, and curriculum” (p.68). Furthermore, “regular
House meetings, involving the four or five adults who shared responsibility for the
approximately eighty kids belonging to the House, became an instrument for pushing the
issues of feedback and accountability” (p.67). Scheurich and Skrla (2003) also argue the
importance of community and collegiality and suggest forging networks with other
schools and systems that are accomplishing success in achieving both excellence and
equity.

**Instructional Leadership**

Many studies on leadership for social justice and systemic equity emphasize that
the principal must serve as an instructional leader who promotes an empowering school
culture, uses disaggregated data to drive decision-making and advocates best practice
instruction and policies for *all* students. The research reveals, for instance, a need for a
postmodern perspective and approach regarding school size and scheduling. Meier
(1995), founder and former principal (*lead teacher*) of several alternative public schools
in New York and Boston, for instance, advocates for smaller, self-governing
(autonomous) schools. According to Meier, “It doesn’t depend on new buildings, just
using the ones we have differently” (p.107). Meier gives six reasons that small schools
are essential for “ensuring that all children can and shall learn to use their minds in ways
once reserved for a small elite” (p.107). These reasons include: an opportunity for deep,
ongoing discussion; accessibility to one another’s work (accountability); knowing one’s
students – especially those who are the hardest to know; physical safety; increased
accountability for student learning; and a school culture that is compassionate. “In short,
smallness makes democracy feasible in schools, and without democracy we won’t be able
to create the kind of profound rethinking the times demand” (p.110). Scheurich and Skrla (2003) also advocate for an alternative approach when grappling with how to meet the needs of every student. If, for instance, data reveal that “33% of students do not meet expectations for success, it may even require after-school or Saturday work, or it may require changing the structure of the day to serve this final 33% of students” (p.70).

Research also highlights the importance of opposing the traditional structure as it relates to the process of teaching and learning. With regard to an alternative structure for staff development, Kose (2005), in his dissertation entitled “Differentiating Professional Development for Social Justice,” proposes that, in order to surmount oppressive practices in schools, the leader must: differentiate professional learning opportunities; explore his/her own identity and be able to relate to other’s struggles with this concept; and must consider non-traditional school resources and structures. Finally, with regard to a postmodern view of curriculum, Shields (2004) argues that,

We need to open our curriculum (formal, informal and hidden) and create spaces in which all children’s lived experiences may be both reflected and critiqued in the context of learning. Over-coming the silence about class differences is a way of ensuring that our schools and classrooms are more inclusive, enabling fuller and more democratic participation by people. It helps to legitimize and validate the realities of more students and hence to provide a basis for the development of more meaningful relationships and deeper sense making. When we engage in conversations in our schools and classrooms, they must not be based solely on middle-class experiences and continue to exclude or pathologize the lived experiences of the rest of society. (p.123)

Riester, Pursch and Skrla (2002), in a study that examined the role of principals in highly successful elementary schools serving primarily students from low-income homes, identified two factors considered essential for a socially just school: (1) development of an early literacy program, and (2) avoidance of over-identification and inappropriate placement in special education classes. These researchers concluded that the development
of literacy skills prepares students to be successful in a democratic society, serves as a tool for emancipating the oppressed by building critical awareness and leads to cultural empowerment and economic survival. Another conclusion drawn from this study was that school leaders must “create school cultures that serve to empower teachers to enact specific practices that lead to learning for all” (p.283); this means that the school leader must hire teachers who are competent, reflective and culturally responsive practitioners. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) suggest that principals devote a significant amount of time to recruiting and hiring teachers and recommend forming a hiring committee to develop and implement a hiring protocol for interviewing teacher candidates. Furthermore, Meier (1995), with regard to hiring, states five qualities to look for in prospective teachers:

1. a self-conscious reflectiveness about how they themselves learn and (maybe even more) about how and when they don’t learn; 2) a sympathy toward others, an appreciation of differences, an ability to imagine one’s own “otherness”; 3) a willingness, better yet a taste, for working collaboratively; 4) a passion for having others share some of one’s own interests; and 5) a lot of perseverance, energy, and devotion to getting things right. (p.142)

“There is growing consensus among researchers and practitioners that teacher quality is the prime determinant of students’ opportunities for academic success” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p.95), and the principal therefore plays an essential role in ensuring that our students are taught by culturally responsive, competent, caring teachers.

In closing, the principal’s role in leading for social justice, equity, and excellence is multi-faceted and includes key characteristics such as: challenging the status quo, understanding policy, resisting deficit thinking, reflecting critically and providing moral, transformative, and instructional leadership. Perhaps these qualifications explain why our educational system as a whole remains an inequitable institution. However, the
research continues to point to the reality that equity exists in many schools, and the common denominator in all of these schools is a strong leader.

**Conceptual Framework: Academic Optimism**

The researchers will utilize the latent concept of academic optimism as a theoretical framework by which to analyze the data. Academic optimism is comprised of three interrelated components: (a) academic emphasis; (b) collective efficacy; and (c) faculty trust (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). Although the three components are interrelated, each of these three areas is specifically defined and grounded in theory and research. Each researcher chose a different one of these three interrelated components through which to analyze the data.

Academic emphasis, the first of the three sub-components of Hoy’s academic optimism construct, has been examined extensively as a factor that contributes to student achievement (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Hoy et al., 2006, Lee and Byrck, 1989; Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982; Shouse, 1996). Other terms in the literature for academic emphasis include: academic rigor, academic push, academic excellence, and environmental press. For this research study, academic emphasis is defined as “the extent to which a school is characterized by a press for academic achievement (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006).

Collective efficacy is grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997) and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief about his or her capacity to execute the actions required to produce a given level of attainment (Bandura, 1997). Building on self-efficacy, collective efficacy is, “the judgment of teachers that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the actions required to have positive effects on
students” (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). Collective efficacy contains four components: (1) mastery experience, (2) vicarious experience, (3) social persuasion, and (4) affective state. Research has shown that collective efficacy is the key variable in explaining student achievement—even more so than socioeconomic status (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002).

The last component of academic optimism is the faculty’s trust in parents and students. Just as academic emphasis and collective efficacy have been found to be positively related to student achievement, faculty trust has also been found to be related to student achievement (Hoy, 2002). Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) define faculty trust as “a willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that that party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (p.429).

The importance of academic optimism as a theoretical framework is its inclusion of cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. According to Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006), “Collective efficacy is a group belief or expectation, it is cognitive. Faculty trust in parents and students is an affective response. Academic emphasis is the push for particular behaviors in the school” (p.431). These three domains will serve as a useful tool in exploring the academic achievement in the schools in this study.

**Academic Emphasis**

As mentioned earlier, academic emphasis has been researched and studied extensively as a major factor contributing to increased student achievement (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). In schools with high academic emphasis “teachers set high but achievable goals, they believe in the capability of the students to achieve, the school environment is orderly and serious, and, students, as well as teachers and principals,
pursue and respect academic success” (Goddard et al., 2000, p.684). Academic emphasis therefore becomes a way of characterizing the instructional climate and culture of the school. While climate characterizes the school’s impact on students, culture refers more to the manner in which the teachers and other staff members work together (McBrien & Brandt, 1997). Schools characterized by academic emphasis focus on and insist upon student achievement.

Research demonstrates that academic emphasis is positively related to student achievement even after controlling for the socioeconomic status of students (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottcamp, 1991; Lee & Bryk, 1989). Shouse (1996) concludes that “all schools, particularly low-SES schools – can increase student achievement by placing their academic mission at center stage and allowing their social mission to play a supporting role” (p.18). Shouse further argues that educational equity can be attained in low-SES schools by utilizing both “human and social capital in more academically focused ways” (p.19). A school culture and climate that espouses these beliefs sends a consistent message to the school community conveying that the academic success of all students is both possible and critical. Instead, for instance, of offering minority students a watered down version of the curriculum, all students would be afforded equal access to a rigorous, challenging, and authentic course of study. Schools with high academic emphasis have equally high demands for all of their students and offer strong, individualized support in ensuring that every student achieves at a high level.

Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, and Mittman (1982) researched policies and practices that influence academic press. The authors distinguish between school-level policies and classroom level practices and behaviors, and suggest that, “academic press can be
maximized when school level policies and enforcement practices form the framework for classroom-level activity” (p.26). According to the authors, school policies that maximize academic press include policies that communicate high expectations, offer clear and measurable goals, promote the belief that all students can achieve grade-level standards, protect instructional time, foster an orderly and safe environment, emphasize mastery of grade-level skills, and closely monitor student performance. The authors also identified five categories of teacher practices that contribute to academic press:

(1) establishing an academically demanding climate; (2) conducting an orderly, well managed classroom; (3) ensuring student academic success; (4) implementing instructional practices that promote student achievement; and (5) providing opportunities for student responsibility and leadership (p.25).

It is important to note here that the authors emphasize the importance of relationships with regard to the above policies and practices. The authors emphasize that academic press is futile if teachers do not show a genuine interest in the students’ lives and if teachers, themselves, do not model behaviors that support and reflect academic emphasis.

Hoy, Tarter and Kottkamp (1991) developed a tool known as the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) and used this tool as a method for measuring a school’s level of academic emphasis. The elementary school OHI consists of eight scale items (see Table 2.2) and, for the purpose of Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy’s study (2000), was analyzed using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In the analysis of their data, Goddard and colleagues concluded that academic emphasis was a significant predictor of student achievement in reading and in math for poor and minority
Table 2.2: Academic Emphasis Scale Items

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<tr>
<td>Students respect others who get good grades</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students try hard to improve on previous work</td>
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<tr>
<td>The learning environment is orderly and serious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school believe that their students have the ability to achieve academically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student neglect to complete homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students make provisions to acquire extra help from teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seek extra work so they can get good grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically oriented students are not ridiculed by their peers</td>
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students. It was noted, for instance, that “an increase in academic emphasis of 1 standard deviation is associated with a gain of nearly 40% of a standard deviation in student achievement in math and more than one third of a standard deviation in reading achievement” (p.698). The researchers were able to conclude from their study that schools with a higher academic emphasis had higher levels of student achievement. To support this statement, it is worthy to note, for instance, that, “Although students receiving a free or reduced-price lunch scored on average 2.41 points below their schools’ mean reading scores, the school means averaged 11.39 points higher where there was a strong academic emphasis” (p.698). The analysis of this research clearly emphasizes that a school climate and culture characterized by high levels of academic emphasis results in high, more equitable levels of student achievement regardless of the
students’ race, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. It is therefore important to emphasize that academic emphasis must be synonymous with the school’s climate and culture. The norms (practices, policies, structures, etc.) of a school with high levels of academic emphasis should support, reflect, and foster a collective effort to focus on student achievement.

Shouse (1996), in a study of 398 schools, offers a framework for academic emphasis that highlights the separate and collective effects of academic emphasis and school community. He introduces three separate components, each contributing to the academic emphasis of the school: (1) academic climate; (2) disciplinary climate; and (3) teachers’ instructional practices and emphasis. The first component, Academic Climate, refers to the school’s emphasis on offering students access to a rigorous curriculum as well as an emphasis on recognizing and honoring outstanding performance. The second component, Disciplinary Climate, refers to the school’s emphasis on establishing appropriate and effective attendance and discipline policies. In explaining the third component, Teachers’ Instructional Practices and Emphasis, Shouse expresses the need for teachers to “establish objective and challenging standards for student performance” (p.4), that they assign work that is authentic and relevant, and that they provide frequent, purposeful, ongoing feedback for students and parents. Shouse’s study suggests that the most successful schools are those in which “a sense of community emerges as a positive result of a strong sense of academic purpose…” (p.19).

As this research seeks to explore the achievement gap from the perspective of what school leaders can do to achieve equity and excellence, a focus on academic emphasis could be a promising strategy. As Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) note,
“The greater the academic emphasis of a school, the more capable is the school of facilitating student learning” (p.687). The review of the literature regarding academic emphasis reveals a common thread of the importance that policies, practices, and beliefs have upon student achievement. Using the principal as the unit of analysis, academic emphasis will be utilized as a theoretical framework (see Figure 2.1) to explore leadership strategies that promote and support social justice and systemic equity.

Figure 2.1: Academic Emphasis Framework

ACADEMIC EMPHASIS
THAT RESULTS IN LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SYSTEMIC EQUITY

Leadership for social justice and systemic equity:
- High standards for all students
- All students achieve at high levels
- Equitable performance across sub-groups

Collective Efficacy

Roots

As previously noted, the collective efficacy component of academic emphasis is grounded in Bandura’s (1993) notion of self-efficacy. He postulates that self-efficacy is a mechanism of personal agency by which people make causal contributions to their own functioning. According to Bandura, “Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more
central or pervasive than people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives” (p.118). Self-efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, and act through four different processes: (a) cognitive; (b) motivational; (c) affective; and (d) selection processes.

According to Bandura (1993), human behavior, which is purposeful, is regulated by cognitive processes. As he stated, “The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer is their commitment to them” (p.118). This commitment tends to beget positive results. Collins (1982) confirms this theory in her study of students of varying mathematical abilities and different perceived self-efficacy. She found that within similar ability levels, students with stronger perceived mathematical self-efficacy outperformed students with weaker perceived mathematical self-efficacy. Also of note, Collins found that positive attitudes toward mathematics were better predictors of mathematics achievement than actual ability. Bandura (1993) would explain this by theorizing that, “those who have a firm belief in their efficacy, through ingenuity and perseverance, figure out ways of exercising some control, even in environments containing limited opportunities and many constraints” (p.125).

The second process of self-efficacy is motivational. According to Bandura (1993), motivation is governed by expectations that behaviors will lead to outcomes of performance. In other words, people are more motivated to complete a certain task if their self-efficacy beliefs are higher. Although motivation and self-efficacy are personal beliefs, leadership can impact teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs and motivation. In their study of 218 schools in two large districts in Canada, Ross and Gray (2006) found that
transformational leadership (fostering growth and enhancing organizational commitment in teachers) has a positive statistically significant impact on teacher’s sense of efficacy. Recent empirical evidence also links motivation to student achievement on tests (Brookhart, Walsh, & Zientarski, 2006). In their study of 8th grade students, the researchers found that motivational variables positively correlated with student performance on classroom assessments.

Bandura’s (1993) third process is affective. Naturally, beliefs in self-efficacy impact how much stress is experienced in threatening or difficult situations. People with stronger perceived self-efficacy beliefs exercise more control over the stress, giving them a better opportunity to be successful. Conversely, people with weaker perceived self-efficacy beliefs feel they cannot exercise control over the stress associated with difficult tasks. Stipek, Salmon, Vinnin, Kazemi, Saxe, & Macgyvers (1998) linked affect with math achievement and found that a positive affective classroom climate is a powerful predictor of student motivation and self-efficacy. The study conducted by Stipek, et. al has implications for practice as the researchers found that teachers can impact students’ affect by expressing positive emotions and enjoyment of their subject matter, showing sensitivity and kindness towards students, and utilizing humor.

These three previous processes lead to the most influential process of self-efficacy—selection processes. While cognitive, motivational, and affective processes create the conditions for a beneficial environment, selection process is the component through which people make the decision to undertake a challenging activity. According to Bandura (1993), “People avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping capabilities. But they readily undertake challenging activities and select situations
they judge themselves capable of handling” (p.135). Simply put, an individual will undertake and persevere through a task they perceive they are capable of handling. Most of the research in this area focuses on student selection processes. For example, Dalgety and Coll (2006) studied 126 first-year chemistry students and found a statistically significant difference in chemistry self-efficacy between students intending to enroll in a second-year chemistry course. In other words, students with higher self-efficacy beliefs chose to continue their chemistry education. This finding should be applicable to K-12 education. As students advance through secondary school, they begin to have more choices to make about their education. If their self-efficacy beliefs are stronger, they may tend to choose a more academically rigorous class.

**Theoretical Background**

The remainder of this literature review will focus on the research surrounding collective efficacy. Although distinct from self-efficacy, collective efficacy is related as it also has underpinnings in social cognitive theory. Goddard and Goddard (2001) also linked self and collective efficacy empirically as they found that collective efficacy was a significant predictor of differences in teacher efficacy. The authors found that teacher efficacy was higher in schools where collective efficacy was higher. Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk Hoy (2004) define collective efficacy in schools as, “the judgment of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students” (p.4). It is important to highlight collective efficacy as it relates to a positive effect on students. Continued discussions of collective efficacy will be framed in terms of positively effecting student achievement. Members of a school can be self-efficacious about other things; however, this study
focused on a staff’s collective efficacy regarding their ability to positively impact student achievement.

It is also important to discuss the relationship between self-efficacy and collective efficacy. In other words, at what point does a building of individual teachers with self-efficacy become a group of teachers with collective efficacy? The literature does not address a specific percentage or number of teachers it takes to attain collective efficacy. Collective efficacy has as much to do with degree as it does with quantity. If the majority of the teachers (and specifically teacher-leaders) are efficacious about their ability to positively impact student achievement, then collective efficacy will counteract the beliefs of others who do not think their actions can positively impact student achievement. Schools also display collective efficacy by continuing to improve upon it. When administrators and teacher-leaders actively build upon existing collective efficacy by talking about it and trying to persuade others that their actions impact student achievement, schools can be collectively efficacious. Bandura (1986, 1997) conceptualized four sources of collective efficacy: (a) mastery experience; (b) vicarious experience; (c) social persuasion; and (d) affective state.

For mastery experience, when the group perceives that a performance has been successful, efficacy beliefs tend to raise (Goddard, Hoy, Woolfolk Hoy, 2004). Goddard and Goddard (2001) found that past school achievement was a stronger predictor of perceived collective efficacy than race and socioeconomic status. Britner and Pajares (2006) also found that mastery experience was a strong predictor of student self-efficacy. In their study of science students in grades 5-8, Britner and Pajares found a statistically significant correlation (.49) between mastery experiences and self-efficacy. This finding
has important pedagogical implications for teachers. Teachers can impact student self-efficacy by providing mastery experiences such as authentic inquiry-oriented science investigations based on students’ developing abilities. Additionally, it is important to provide novice teachers with opportunities for mastery experiences. Mulholland and Wallace (2001) noted that achieving mastery experiences while teaching is an important source of self-efficacy. The researchers found, “the experience of teaching science a powerful influence on (a teacher’s) confidence and perception of confidence. When mastery experiences occurred in the form of successful lessons they seemed an important source of science teaching efficacy belief” (p.258).

Vicarious experience refers to skill modeling by another person. According to Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2004), “When a model with whom the observer identifies performs well, the efficacy beliefs of the observer are most likely advanced” (p.5). According to Brand and Wilkins (2007), vicarious experiences exist when, “individuals are inspired by the success of individuals with whom they personally identify” (p.304). Although there is limited research documenting the impact that vicarious experiences have on self-efficacy and teacher effectiveness, Brand and Wilkins suggest that vicarious experiences (as well as social persuasion and affective status) impact mastery experiences, which does significantly impact self-efficacy.

In explaining social persuasion, Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2004) cite examples such as encouragement or specific performance feedback, discussions in a teachers’ lounge, or community discussions. Although social persuasion is important for all staff members, the authors note that social persuasion is essential when assimilating new teachers. Even if a school has a strong sense of collective efficacy, a culture focused
on student achievement and a positive climate, new teachers are likely to encounter teachers who will socially persuade them in a negative way. It is important for school leaders to talk with new teachers and socially persuade them that the administration and teachers are focused on achievement for all students, regardless of their background. With positive social persuasion, new teachers learn that extra effort and a focus on high achievement for all students is the norm. Social persuasion is also important in terms of encouragement and specific feedback. Hoy and Spero (2005) found that efficacy rises during teacher preparation and student teaching, but tends to fall during a teacher’s first year of actual experience. The authors link this finding to a lack of perceived support compared to the university and student teacher experience.

The final source of collective efficacy—affective state—refers to the level of excitement or anxiety that adds to the organization’s sense of collective efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004). An example of this stress might include the pressure from high stakes accountability testing. Schools with high collective efficacy are able to channel this anxiety and focus on the academic achievement of students. Brand and Wilkins (2007), in a study of pre-service teachers, found approximately one-third of the participants indicated that sources of stress reduction impacted their ability to effectively teach math and science.

*The Significance of Collective Efficacy*

As Gibson and Dembo (1984) found, teachers who have a high sense of instructional efficacy devote more classroom time to academic learning, help students who are struggling, and praise them for their accomplishments. Of particular importance
for our study, Bandura (1993) linked schools where all kids are successful with schools that have a high sense of perceived collective efficacy. Specifically, Bandura found:

… with staffs who firmly believe that, by their determined efforts, students are motivatable and teachable whatever their background, schools heavily populated with minority students of low socioeconomic status achieve at the highest percentile ranks based on national norms of language and mathematical competencies (p.143).

As this study began to explore the achievement gap from the perspective of what leaders can do, a focus on collective efficacy was seen as a promising strategy.

In a study of 97 diverse high schools in Ohio, Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) found a positive correlation between the collective efficacy of the school and school achievement in mathematics. Not only was there a positive correlation, but the authors also found that collective efficacy was more important than socioeconomic factors in explaining school achievement.

It is important to note that collective efficacy is not a variable dependent solely on school-context and teacher-demographic variables. In a recent study of diverse K-8 schools (student demographics averaging 88% minority and 76% economically disadvantaged), school-context and teacher-demographic variables only explained 46% of the variance in collective efficacy (Goddard & SkrIa, 2006). This finding led the authors to suggest that, “There is more to perceived collective efficacy than the social demographics and contextual conditions that characterize organizations” (p.229). In other words, although it would be unlikely to change the student and teacher demographics of a
school, it is possible to improve upon collective efficacy since demographics comprise less than half of a school’s collective efficacy.

In closing, there has been a call (Goddard, Logerfo, & Hoy, 2004) for more research regarding collective efficacy and the extent to which teachers believe their work can achieve goals for social justice. The authors go so far as to say that efforts to expand the base of knowledge of collective efficacy “might be quite useful to understanding how schools meet challenging goals for educational equity” (p.420). By using collective efficacy as a theoretical framework for this current study, the researchers will be able to explore the discrepancies in systemic equity and add to the body of research on collective efficacy. The following section of this literature review focuses on Faculty Trust, the third component of Hoy’s Academic Optimism framework.

*Faculty Trust*

As stated previously, the final component to academic optimism is faculty trust, which is defined by Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) as “a willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that that party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (p.429). Faculty trust is an essential ingredient to create the culture necessary to initiate, implement, and institutionalize long-lasting change designed to promote excellence and equity throughout the walls of a school. For it is within trusting relationships that collaboration and problem solving can yield creative solutions. If the achievement gap is the largest problem facing the American educational system, then creative solutions will come through meaningful collaboration, and collaboration requires trust. When the faculty trusts parents, teachers can insist on higher academic standards with confidence that they will not be undermined by parents; and high
academic standards, in turn, reinforce faculty trust (Hoy et al., 2006). Faculty trust can turn the most toxic of school cultures into that of academic optimism, radiating a belief that all students can learn, and teachers and parents can make a difference.

As previously stated, faculty trust (the extent that a faculty as a group is willing to risk vulnerability) is a collective property. The definition that Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) provides readers (and the definition that the researcher will also use) to assist in clarifying this complex term is multi faceted.

1. Benevolence—the confidence that the one’s wellbeing will be protected by the trusted party.
2. Reliability—the extent to which one can count on another person or group.
3. Competency—the extent to which the trusted party has knowledge and skill.
4. Honesty—the character, integrity, and authenticity of the trusted party.
5. Openness—the extent to which there is no withholding of information from others.

This type of trust is thought to be cultivated through meaningful relationships and a common commitment. The principal has the power to create the conditions necessary to support the five facets of faculty trust.

Many studies have concluded that it is in the student's best interest to establish a strong link between home and school. Numerous child development, social work, psychology, and education studies have provided empirical evidence that supports the notion that parent-school partnerships are a determining factor in a student's cognitive and psychosocial development. Epstein (1994) states, “student learning, development, and success, broadly defined, not just achievement test scores, are the main reasons for school and family partnerships” (p.42). Brofenbrenner has urged educators and policy
makers since 1979 to create these links and metaphorical bridges throughout all levels of a student's perceived world to have the greatest impact on his or her human development.

Perhaps the largest and best-known current study of trust in schools is Bryk's and Schneider's (2002) analysis of the relationships between trust and student achievement. Based on a 10-year case study of more than 400 Chicago elementary schools, Bryk and Schneider's data provide the first evidence directly linking the development of relational trust in a school community and long-term improvements in academic learning. The researchers concluded “trust fosters a set of organizational conditions, some structural and others social-psychological, that make it more conducive for individuals to initiate and sustain the kinds of activities necessary to affect productivity improvements” (p.116). Trust and cooperation among students, teachers, and parents influence regular student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices.

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran developed a Trust Scale to measure the level of trust in schools and examined the interrelationships of faculty trust in students, teachers, principals, and parents (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Following development, their Trust Scales were used and tested in three large-scale studies in elementary, middle, and high schools in Ohio and Virginia. Findings suggested that a greater perceived level of trust in a school also indicated a greater sense of teacher efficacy (i.e., teachers' belief in their ability to affect actions leading to success). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's studies also suggest that faculty trust in parents predicts a strong degree of parent-teacher collaboration. Distrust, on the other hand, causes people to feel uncomfortable and ill at ease, provoking them to expend energy on assessing the actions and potential actions of others (Fuller, 1996).
When social exchanges and experiences between and within role groups are supportive and mutually beneficial, individuals and groups are willing to risk vulnerability and to work together to achieve desired outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Effective collaboration between parent, teacher, and student cannot exist without trust and respect. Friend and Cook (1990) write, “collaboration is a style of interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal” (p.72). Perhaps this type of collaboration was best explained by Henry's (1996) empirical study in which one teacher referred to this relationship as a metaphorical dance, where the individual must be conscious to the most subtle of communications that lets the other know what his or her needs are and how he or she can also help. Research also reveals that it is essential for the teacher to work towards developing this type of relationship because “teachers are really the glue that hold the home/school partnerships together” (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 1999, p.36).

Collaboration within a social system is not feasible without two unifying processes of decision-making: involvement and influence (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). “Mutually responsive relationships seem more likely to flourish if such efforts focus more on the interconnectedness of parents and teachers through their mutual commitment to children and on exploring ways to enhance and celebrate this connectedness” (Sumsion, 1999, p.11). Figure 2.2 displays the simple yet powerful blueprint for constructing trusting relationships between teacher and parent. Regularly engaging in a dialog, which focuses on their shared wants for the child/student allow for both parties to recognize the dedication and obligation associated with both roles. One must also recognize and respect differences in either party's culture and values (including their
backgrounds, race, ethnic group, socioeconomic class and educational level and communication style) when attempting to build such a relationship (Keyes, 2002).

Trust among parent, student, and teachers has also been linked to increasing the achievement of “at-risk” students. The term “at risk” is as complex as searching for the solution to assist these students. There are several definitions, perspectives, and identified risk factors. Davis (2004) states that contemporary research is now focused on the student in context, “conditions both in the child, and in the nature of the environments in which the child lives” (p.6). Environmental factors are linked to substantial risk to drop out of high school, i.e., the school context, family conditions, SES, and educational attainment of parents (Davis, 2004; NCES, 2004). Thus, in order to increase achievement in at-risk students one must take a systemic approach and involve the home environment in the remedy.

Educational research has also documented that `teachers' collaborative relations with parents and work in a family context do not come about naturally or easily (Powell, 1998, p.66). Many teachers find themselves struggling in working with families. Some have ethical concerns; others just lack knowledge, skills and strategies (Powell, 1998; Keyes, 2002). Professional stakeholders have repeatedly challenged the field to provide
both teacher and administrator training in working with parents (Epstein, 1989; Powell, 1998). This professional request to learn how to construct relationships with parents, supports the notion that trust is essential in raising student achievement and success. Faculty trust helps instill a universal belief that all students can learn and teachers and parents can make a difference.

Systems can devote much of their budget to improving achievement for minority students and helping bridge the gap between majority and non-majority students. Systems can create new curriculum manuals, provide staff development opportunities that address minority achievement, and bureaucratic improvement goals. However, this will have little to no effect on minority achievement unless teachers recognize that there is a problem in their individual classrooms and understand that they have the power to fix the inequities that are plaguing our schools. However, they cannot do this on their own. School leaders must involve both the parent and student, and he or she must openly provide them with the data to fully understand the complex and ugly truths about inequities in our schools. “When people of good faith see disparities in outcomes for learners, they immediately desire and do undertake to correct the deficiencies in systems and in individuals who operate those systems, as well as the practices those systems and individuals produce” (Scott, 2001, p.6).

Conclusion

There are principals who are striving for social justice and systemic equity every day. Despite countervailing pressures, they resist, survive, and transform schools (Riester, et al, 2002; Scheurich, 1998). They enact resistance against the historic marginalization of particular students and resist the pressures pushing schools toward a
deceptive caring versus academic culture, or possibly a defeatist apathetic culture. These leaders, according to Rapp (2002), are willing and able to “leave the comforts and confines of professional codes and state mandates for the riskier waters of higher moral callings” (p.233). They understand that “Leadership is the enactment of values” (Miron, 1996), that leadership depends upon relationships and shared values between leaders and followers (Burns, 1978). They also understand that not reflecting on, discussing, and/or addressing issues of race, poverty and disability only further perpetuates the safeguarding of power and the status quo (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Larson & Ovando, 2001).

Given the strong connection between quality principals and high-performing schools, Scheurich and Skrla (2003) claim that “good leadership, the bodies and spirits of our leadership, is crucial to the justice of our cause for equity and excellence in schooling” (p.99). Effective instructional and administrative leadership helps point to the necessity for change and is required to implement the change processes (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Rapp, 2002). Effective leaders are reflective, proactive and seek the help that is needed. They nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. They model the values and beliefs important to the institution, hire compatible staff, and face conflict rather than avoid it (Deal & Petersen, 1994). They make the shift from personal awareness to social action (Freire, 1973), realizing that respect for diversity entails advocacy, solidarity, an awareness of societal structures of oppression, and critical social consciousness.

Leaders committed to this agenda decide they can create both excellent and equitable schools and then use their time and energy to figure out how to do so. They find a way “for all students to achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any
student’s race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents, or home language” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p.3). In their schools, there is no discernible difference in academic success and treatment among different groups of students. They believe that excellence and equity are the same.

Although studies have examined schools that make a difference in the lives of marginalized children (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000; Riester, Pursch & Skrla, 2002), there is an absence of literature regarding principals as the unit of analysis and the process of actually leading for social justice. Related to this is an absence of documented strategies that principals who are leading for excellence and equity use to advance their work in the face of countervailing pressures in public schools. The purpose of this study was to examine how K-5 principals, who are dedicated to and passionate about social justice and equity, actually carry out their work in the face of resistance. This research studied principals who lead schools that are both excellent and equitable; principals who create schools in which the dream of equity comes alive on an every day basis through the work of ordinary, everyday people; principals who have narrowed and will eventually eliminate the achievement gaps; principals who create schools, educational methods, programs, and expectations that have significantly advanced the educational achievements of all students; principals who study and challenge the very beliefs, attitudes, and practices that keep all children from learning; principals who no longer tolerate inequities of achievement in their schools.

Scheurich and Skrla (2003) promote the use of data to uncover and erase systemic inequities. Rather than focus on external causes of the achievement gap, Scheurich and Skrla suggest that school leaders focus on internal or systemic inequities “because they
are built into the processes and procedures of the system that is the school” (p.80). Scott, (2001), as cited in Scheurich and Skrla (2003) defines systemic equity by stating,

Systemic equity is defined as the transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner – in whatever learning environment that learner is found -- has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life. (p.6)

Scheurich and Skrla (2001) recommend conducting equity audits “to identify patterns of inequity for the purpose of addressing those patterns and creating new patterns of equity” (p.80). Equity audits are a tool that can be used to address inequities surrounding teacher quality, program accessibility (which includes teacher attitudes, assumptions and practices) and, finally, student achievement. The notion of systemic equity is important because it reinforces the need for a more holistic approach to identifying and addressing internal inequities and the equity audit can be used to determine “whether all student groups are represented in reasonably proportionate percentages (p.146).

For the purposes of this study, data were analyzed from the final component of academic optimism: faculty trust. Faculty trust is defined as, “a willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that that party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2006, p.429).

Using faculty trust as a framework, the data is organized into themes under the five components of faculty trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Chapter 3 describes the research design for this study, including equity audits, site visits, and semi-structured interviews.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and methods used throughout this study. It begins with a summary of the research purpose and theoretical lens. It then identifies the rationale for a mixed methods design, role of the researchers, the protocol used for site selection, and procedures used for data collection.

Research Purpose

Today’s schools are currently subjected to an onslaught of high-stake tests at the federal, state and local levels. One may hear parents, students, and teachers complain about these new testing procedures and requirements, which are designed to hold teachers and school leaders accountable for student learning. However, no one can dispute that these tests are not initiating reform and change in the American educational system. No Child Left Behind and the accountability tests designed by the states have alerted the public to the unfortunate truth that our schools are failing to meet the needs of our non-majority population. High-stake testing illuminated the massive gaps between middle-to-upper income White students and students of color and poverty. In America, we boast “all men are created equal,” but things change quickly when these Americans become students in our schools.

The massive gaps between majority and non-majority students are great cause for alarm because they reveal that our schools appear to be racist institutions. It is hard to dispute this observation when sixty percent of Black males in the United States fail to
graduate from high school (Sturgeon, 2005). In order for schools to receive positive recognition, under the No Child Left Behind and North Carolina’s ABC Program, school leaders must address the lack of success experienced by non-majority students. Systems/schools that fail to change to accommodate the diversity within their classrooms will soon be branded as failing along with their teachers and students. This pressure is fueling reform. Without this pressure, many of these school systems would effortlessly continue to manage the status quo and continue to fail to meet the needs of students of color and students from a lower socio-economic status.

Some schools have experienced considerably more success than others in reducing the achievement gaps between majority and non-majority students. The purpose of this study was to ascertain/explore how K-5 elementary principals of state recognized “Schools of Excellence” are (or are not) promoting and supporting both excellence and systemic equity in their schools. Principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parent leaders were interviewed and the specific strategies that principals use to advance their work in the face of countervailing pressures of public schools were documented. Under North Carolina’s system of accountability (i.e., ABCs), “Honor Schools of Excellence” have 90-100 percent of students score at or above Achievement Level III (score needed to be considered proficient), make expected or high growth, and satisfy all Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) indicators required by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The research group selected these state recognized elementary schools with a traditional calendar from the largest and fastest growing school system in North Carolina.

An achievement gap existed between majority and non-majority students in all but two of this county’s thirty-three elementary schools that were recognized by the state
as an “Honor School of Excellence” during the 2004-2005 academic year. However, less than twelve percent of the students in these two schools were of color, thus lacking critical minority mass. Some of the other award-winning schools actually had achievement gaps as large as thirty percentage points. If the “best schools” are evidencing obvious achievement differences between majority and non-majority students, one can only imagine the enormous inconsistencies in student performance in the schools that did not achieve this top honor by the state. This study also supported the researchers’ assumption that the state’s formula to identify the “best schools” is institutionally flawed. Sixteen of these distinguished schools may boast 90% of their student population is considered proficient, but their students of color performed considerable lower than their White counterparts.

Rationale for Mixed Methods Research Design

A dominant-less dominant mixed method research design is the most appropriate approach for attempting to reveal how leaders can successfully promote equity and excellence in today’s schools. This research design refers to research in which "one paradigm and its methods predominate, with a smaller component of the overall study being drawn from an alternative design" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p.44). The dominant-less dominant is the most popular mixed method designed utilized by researchers in fields where purist approaches to positivist and/or naturalistic forms of research predominate and where criticisms about the absence of paradigmatic and theoretical grounding persist (Morse, 1991). This study predominately utilized qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews (the dominant design) and the researchers, armed with the quantitative data collected through equity audits (the less-
dominant design), scrutinized these results.

Studies that utilize the dominant-less dominant design allow for qualitative and quantitative data to be collected, analyzed (qualitatively and quantitatively), and reported. These procedures are often used sequentially to: (a) triangulate or seek convergent findings; (b) provide insights that will inform subsequent data collection and analyses; and (c) enable expansion of the breadth and scope of the research (Greene et al., 1989). Mixed methods offers researchers alternative study designs that can leverage the strengths of the various methods and apply the findings appropriately within their respective fields (Mactavish & Scleien, 2000). “Qualitative researchers believe that rich descriptions of the social world are valuable, whereas quantitative researchers, with their etic, nomothetic commitments, are less concerned with such detail” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.10). Quantitative assessment will, by nature of its goal for increased precision, continue to overlook potentially meaningful explanatory constructs. By combining both quantitative and qualitative designs for both the independent and dependent variables, and integrating those findings during some specific, deliberate stage, researchers will increase both precision and discovery in the field (Mactavish & Scleien, 2000). Mixed methods designs can and often do expand content-based theories addressing both generalizability (best achieved through quantitative assessments and analyses) and discovery (best achieved through qualitative strategies). “Mixed methods designs provide logical options for creative approaches in all areas of management research by combining the best that each has to offer in terms of depth and breadth, and in terms of precision and discovery” (Mactavish & Scleien, 2000 p.158).
As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) point out, “researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p.8). Qualitative researchers also look for “answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.8). Looking for answers regarding social experiences is accomplished by gathering thick, rich description from the participants, which is not a goal of the quantitative researcher. By utilizing a mixed methods research design, the researchers can provide this rich descriptive detail and subtle nuances and examine this information with the quantitative results gathered through equity audits. This mixed methods design makes this goal plausible because it enables the researchers to triangulate or validate the findings, which will ultimately allow one to expand the breadth and scope of the research (Greene et al., 1989).

Role of the Researchers

The purpose of this study was to ascertain/explore how K-5 elementary principals of state recognized “Honor Schools of Excellence” are (or are not) promoting and supporting both excellence and systemic equity in their schools. The research team consisted of three University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill doctoral candidates in the Educational Leadership Department, along with their advisor. Two of the four members of the research team are current administrators in North Carolina’s public schools. Another member is a former administrator in North Carolina’s public schools, and the final member is a former principal and current chair of the Educational Leadership department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The researchers have not worked in any of the schools selected for this study. However, two of the members are
current employees of the school district selected and these professional relationships enabled the researchers to gain access to the schools and members of the learning community. This access allowed the team to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parent leaders, in an attempt to locate/examine specific strategies that principals use to advance their work in the face of countervailing pressures of public schools. These professional relationships and familiarity with the district have the potential to make the researchers appear biased to present the data in a more than favorable manner. One may also argue that the two researchers working within the district were likely to yield guarded responses from their interviewees. The researchers were committed to remain unbiased in nature and reported their findings in the most accurate manner possible. Informal, collective cross-analysis of the data helped insure an unbiased analysis. Fortunately, the district leaders supported this research project fully and were eager to be provided with an impartial and objective look into their “Honor Schools of Excellence” and their corresponding leaders to see if they are truly excellent in nature.

Data Collection Procedures

Numerous studies reveal that the principal/leader is one of the most important factors in introducing, implementing, and institutionalizing positive school reform. “Almost all educational reform efforts have come to the conclusion that the nation cannot attain excellence in education without effective school leadership” (Crawford, 1998, p.8). Given this strong connection between quality principals and high-performing schools, it is critically important to research, study, and document “good” leadership at the site level. “We all know that good leadership, the bodies and spirits of our leadership, is crucial to
the justice of our cause for equity and excellence in schooling” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p.99). In fact, many would say that strong, outstanding leadership is necessary to any significant transformation of any organization, schools included (Glickman, 2002). After all, we have evidence of programs that, either in part or in their entirety, are working for diverse learners. The greater challenge, however, is to reproduce these successes in a nation full of millions of learners, on hundreds of thousands of school campuses, in thousands of school districts (Scott, 1998).

Although studies have examined schools that make a difference in the lives of marginalized children (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000; Riester, Pursch & Skrla, 2002), there is an absence of literature regarding principals as the unit of analysis and the process of actually leading for excellence and equity. The rationale of this two-phase empirical inquiry of leadership for excellence and systemic equity was to document how schools, and leaders in particular, can and are pursuing, supporting, and achieving both goals. They decide they can create both equitable and excellent schools and then use their time and energy to figure out how to do so.

Federal, state, and local mandates are now charging schools and their leaders to ensure the academic success of all students. This paradigm shift in the way schools and leaders are measured has resulted in the realization and the empirical evidence that there are alarming gaps in achievement throughout the student body. Leaders committed to excellence and equity find a way “for all students to achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any student’s race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents, or home language” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p.1). The purpose of this two-
phase empirical inquiry of “good” schools was to research and document leadership practices that are contributing to schools of excellence and equity.

Research Questions

The following question focused the research study: How are principals of K-5 public “Honor Schools of Excellence” pursuing, supporting and advancing social justice, excellence, and systemic equity in a suburban southeastern county? The sub-questions include the following: a) What are principals of K-5 “Honor Schools of Excellence” doing to ensure the success of all of their students? (b) What similarities do school leaders, which are successful in creating equity and excellence, have in common? (c) What findings can connect to and build upon the literature related to leadership for social justice and systemic equity? and (d) What can be learned from “Honor Schools of Excellence” that could benefit other schools with similar demographics?

Two-Phase Research Design

The purpose of Phase One was to look, not just at test scores, but to delve more deeply into the data associated with state recognized “Schools of Excellence.” How is “excellence” defined and operationalized in these schools? Are these schools “excellent” for ALL students? Can a school be “excellent” and still have significant “gaps” and disparities? Through the use of equity audits, these and similar such questions were explored. School data was used to identify systemic patterns of equity or inequity internal to the school (e.g., patterns that promote, prevent, or form barriers to schools being equally successful with all student groups).

The purpose of Phase Two was to explore “how” principals are (or aren’t) promoting and supporting both excellence and systemic equity in their schools. What are
leaders who are committed to excellence and equity actually “doing” to ensure the success of ALL their students? How do these findings connect to and build upon the literature related to leadership for social justice and equity? Through the use of semi-structured interviews with principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parent leaders, the specific strategies that principals use to advance their work in the face of countervailing pressures of public schools were documented.

This mixed method (dominant-less dominant) study was conducted using qualitative research methods with a grounded theory approach along with quantitative equity audits from each school. Procedures for a grounded theory approach outlined by Creswell (2002) include collecting interview data, developing and relating themes of information and constructing a visual model that portrays a general explanation. Using this approach, the explanation was “grounded” in the data from the participants. Since the purpose of this study was to examine the process of how principals facilitate excellence and equity, it closely matches the methodology offered by Creswell, which is used to explain, “an educational process of events, activities, actions, and interactions that occur over time” (p.396). This study looked at the actions of the principals, as well as the interactions between several groups of people, such as principals, teachers, students, and their families. Several other studies have been successful in utilizing qualitative methods to study equity in schools (Johnson & Asera, 1999; Ragland, Clubine, Constable, & Smith, 2002; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Johnson and Asera (1999) were able to interview school administrators, teachers, parents and other personnel at nine different schools. From there, the researchers looked at how these schools were able to transform themselves into excellent and equitable schools. By using similar methods, the
researchers added to the literature on equity in schools successfully. The goal of this study was to focus on how principals are facilitating excellence and equity in their schools.

Site Selection

“The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 1990, p.169). For the 2004-2005 school year, the state of North Carolina awarded over 50 schools in one large school district with the title “Honor School of Excellence.” Through purposeful sampling, twenty-four (24) elementary schools were eventually selected from this list using the following predetermined criteria:

1. K-5 “Honor School of Excellence” during the 2004-05 school year (no middle schools or high schools included);
2. Regular, traditional calendar school (no magnet, charter, or year-round schools included);
3. Principal has been in place for at least three years (no school with a new principal included); and
4. A student population in which at least 18% of the total school population is comprised of “minority” students.

For this study, minority is defined as those students who fall under the NCLB subgroups of African-American students, Hispanic American students, Native American students, and multiracial students. The researcher’s rationale for selecting schools with at least 18% minority population was to ensure that the data gathered were from a large enough sample size to ensure statistical validity to reveal a true pattern of achievement. The majority of social scientists, educators, and policy makers recognize 22% as an
accepted benchmark for achieving “critical mass” for the effective integration of schools (Hawley, Crain, Rossell, Smylie, Fernandez, Schofield, Tompkins, Trent, & Zlotnik; Schofield, 2001). In order to have a large enough sample size for this research study, the researchers agreed to lower the benchmark to 18%.

All 24 traditional K-5 “Honor Schools of Excellence” identified during the 2004-05 academic year recorded proficiency rates of achievement (i.e., scoring at or above a level three on the state’s end-of-grade test) of 95% or above for all of their White and Asian American students. The proficiency rates for minority students in these same schools ranged from 64.6% to 87.1%. Based solely on minority achievement, the schools were rank ordered and then separated into two types of schools. The twelve more equitable schools that recorded achievement gaps of 15% or less between their White students and their minority students were labeled SGS for “smaller gap schools.” The twelve less equitable schools that recorded achievement gaps of 15% or more between their White students and their minority students were labeled LGS for “larger gap schools” (see Table 3.1 for demographic data for SGS and LGS). While any gap, especially a gap of 15%, still indicates inequity, it also illustrates the need for this research and the importance of learning from and building on the success of the more equitable schools in the district.

The district involved is unique in its focus to keep most schools balanced by subgroups of students identified under NCLB. Around twenty years ago, the school board modified its racial-desegregation plan by replacing racial considerations with a new

Table 3.1: Demographic Data for Smaller Gap Schools (SGS) and Larger Gap Schools (LGS) – Complete data set for 2004-05
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th># of students</th>
<th># tests taken</th>
<th>% of minority students</th>
<th>% of F&amp;R students</th>
<th>% of L.E.P. students</th>
<th>% of students w/disability</th>
<th># of AYP Goals (100% met)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SG1</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG2</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG3</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG4</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG5</td>
<td>1061</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG6</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG7</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG8</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG9</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG10</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG11</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG12</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>549-1061</td>
<td>242-528</td>
<td>18-60</td>
<td>13-49</td>
<td>4-13</td>
<td>10-23</td>
<td>17-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG13</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG14</td>
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<td>259</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG15</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG16</td>
<td>561</td>
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<td>35%</td>
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<td>5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG17</td>
<td>921</td>
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<td>29%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>LG18</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG19</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>LG20</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG21</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG22</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG23</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG24</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

student assignment plan based on a combination of socioeconomic status and academic performance. Accordingly, no school may have more than 40 percent of its children
eligible for subsidized lunches or more than 25 percent of its students scoring below
grade level on standardized tests. This approach actively resists the demographic trends
toward high-poverty and low-performing schools by making decisions based on students’
need rather than their race.

As a result, the schools in this study had a population of minority students that
ranged from 18% to 60% of the total school population. While this demographic trend is
not representative of many districts or many schools in districts that essentially remain
segregated, it did provide a unique opportunity to study and compare what is actually
happening (or not happening) in schools that are similar demographically. This study’s
findings could be deemed as essential data to either support or dispute the need for school
leaders to take into consideration balancing socio-economic status when drawing
attendance lines for schools within a district.

Many people, including educators, still believe that factors such as genetic
deficiency, class differences, families and access to learning opportunities at home are the
most reliable predictors of school achievement. With this view, schools excuse
themselves from any accountability for inequities among student subgroups. However,
with this study of schools that teach similar populations of students from the same
geographical region, it is impossible to ignore the importance and impact of schools. This
study provides leaders with data to support the notion that the school plays a significant
role in the achievement of all students. More importantly, educational leaders who read
this study will learn strategies that facilitate excellence and equity from the “good
leaders” who lead the truly “good schools” in this district (i.e., the most excellent AND
equitable schools).
For Phase Two (i.e., qualitative data collection), the researchers gained access into two-thirds (i.e., 16 of 24) of these “Honor Schools of Excellence.” Four of the twenty four schools were eliminated because the socio-economic status of the students did not meet the equity audit criteria, and four schools were eliminated when a fifth researcher withdrew from the study. Multisite qualitative research studies address the same research questions in a number of settings using similar data collection and analysis procedures in each setting. The intent was to optimize description utilizing cross-site comparisons and increase the potential for generalizing findings beyond a particular case.

**Data Collection**

**Phase One: Equity Audits**

Through the use of equity audits, quantitative data was collected to scan for and then document systemic patterns of equity and inequity across multiple domains of student learning and activities within the selected twenty-four “Honor Schools of Excellence” (i.e., patterns embedded within the many assumptions, beliefs, practices, procedures, and policies of schools themselves that promote, prevent, or form barriers to schools being equally successful with all student groups). All of the data collected for these audits is public knowledge provided by the state department of instruction and posted on the district’s website.

The data provided by the North Carolina Department of Instruction allowed the researchers to analyze information in regards to testing performance according to race, gender, economic status, disability, language proficiency, and parents’ educational status. Teachers, administrators, school board members, community members, and policy makers may be aware of inequities in various aspects of their schools, but they rarely
have systematically examined these areas and then devised ways to eliminate the inequities. To achieve social justice and systemic equity and have a more productive orientation, one that is not deficit based or focused on issues external to schools, educators need practical tools in recognizing that there are substantial and persistent patterns of inequity internal to schools (i.e., embedded within the many assumptions, beliefs, practices, procedures, and policies of schools themselves). In response to these daunting challenges, practical tools that make intuitive sense to educators and are easy to apply, while getting beyond old biases, can be highly useful.

The research questions and interview protocols for this study of twenty-four state recognized “Honor Schools of Excellence” were modified from goal four of Scott’s (2001) Equity Audit, which deals with equitable opportunity to learn. Equity audits are a research tool that can (and will) be used to guide schools in working toward equity and excellence. Equity auditing is a concept with a respected history in civil rights, in curriculum auditing (English & Steffy, 2001), and in some state accountability systems (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Equity audits utilize district, school, and classroom data to identify (uncover) and address (understand) systemic patterns of equity or inequity internal to the school (e.g., patterns that promote, prevent, or form barriers to schools being equally successful with all student groups). The goal is to create “challenging learning opportunities such that every child, regardless of characteristics and educational needs, is given the requisite pedagogical, social, emotional, psychological and material supports to achieve the high academic standards of excellence that are established.” The qualitative data collected during Phase Two of the study (i.e., over sixty-four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with multiple sources including principals, assistant
principals, teachers, and parent leaders) served to “supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10) the quantitative data gathered via equity audits from the same “Honor Schools of Excellence” during Phase One of the study.

In this study, the researchers began with a manageable set of demographic, teacher quality, programmatic, and student achievement indicators that together form a straightforward, delimited audit of equity. Demographic equity for each of the SGS and LGS was explored by means of the following descriptive statistics:

(a) number of students;

(b) number of 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders who took the reading and math tests;

percentage of minority students (defined for this study as African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and multiracial students);

(c) percentage of economically disadvantaged students (defined for this study as students eligible for free or reduced lunch);

(d) percentage of limited English proficiency (L.E.P.) students;

(e) percentage of students with disabilities (tested and labeled);

(f) number of AYP goals (subgroups identified under the federal NCLB Act), and

(g) actual geographic location.

Because high quality teachers are key determinants of students’ opportunities to be academically successful, evidence of teacher quality equity in each of the SGS and LGS involved four variables:

(a) teacher education (percentage of teachers holding an advanced degree at the master’s or doctoral level);
(b) teacher credentials (percentage of fully licensed teachers, percentage of
classes taught by highly qualified teachers, and percentage of teachers with
national board certification);
(c) teacher experience (number of years as a teacher; 0 to 3 years, 4 to 9 years, or
10+ years of experience); and
(d) teacher mobility (percentage of teachers leaving or not leaving a campus on an
annual basis).

Equally as important as teacher quality is the quality of the programs in which
students are placed (or from which they are excluded) and in which teachers work.
Because there are large variations of quality among different placements and working
conditions within schools and school districts, indicators of programmatic equity for this
study involved data gathered on the following resources:

(a) student space (percentage of school crowding and number of mobile units);
(b) student discipline (number of acts of violence and number of student
suspensions per 100 students per school year);
(c) student access to books and technology (number of library books per student,
number of students per computer, and number of students per Internet
connection);
(d) teachers’ time;
(e) facilities and resources;
(f) teachers’ empowerment;
(g) school leadership; and
(h) opportunities for professional development
Indicators of achievement equity in each of the SGS and LGS expanded the traditional attention on nationally normed achievement test results and included such evidence of student attainment as growth rates, academic levels, parent education, and AYP goals met. Adequate Yearly Progress standards are used to determine success under the federal No Child Left Behind legislation involving incremental growth from certain starting points in reading and mathematics. With a goal of closing achievement gaps, there are nine categories of students that are potentially identified as subgroups. They are: (1) White; (2) Black; (3) Hispanic; (4) Native American; (5) Asian/Pacific Islander; (6) Multiracial; (7) Economically Disadvantaged; (8) Limited English Proficient; and (9) Students with Disabilities. A school must achieve 100 percent of its targets (subgroups) in order to be deemed to have made Annual Yearly Progress. In each of the twenty schools, 95% or more of the White and Asian/Pacific Islander students were proficient on the End-of-Grade reading and mathematics tests. The achievement audit for this study disaggregated the following available data based on the NCLB subgroups:

(a) state achievement test results (from a state accountability program, focused primarily on average growth, designed to improve student achievement, reward excellence, and provide assistance to schools that need extra help);

(b) growth rates;

(c) academic levels;

(d) parent education (proficiency rate of students whose parents do not have a college education);

(e) number of AYP goals met

Phase Two: Semi-Structured Interviews
Qualitative data was collected by the researchers through a variety of methods (including in-depth semi-structured interviews, site visits, informal observations, document analyses, and field notes) and from multiple sources (school principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parents). The intent was to optimize description utilizing cross-site comparisons and increase the potential for generalizing findings beyond a particular case. According to Glesne (1999), the special strength of interviewing is that it allows the researcher to “learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see” (p.69). Since it would have been impractical to log enough observation days to “see” what goes on in a school throughout the course of a year or more, interviewing provided rich data from a span of several years. It also provided alternative explanations of the persistence of inequitable schools.

Within each of the 16 schools, five semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour each were conducted—one with the principal, an assistant principal, two teachers and one parent (see Appendices A,B,C, and D for a copy of the Interview Questions). Each of the four researchers conducted all five interviews at two small gap schools and all five interviews at two large gap schools. The principal was selected as a participant because he or she served as the unit of analysis, while the other members of the school and community offered valuable information regarding the impact of the principal’s leadership on excellence and equity in the school. Two teachers from each school were interviewed (teacher 1 was an Initially Licensed Teacher in year 2, 3 or 4 of service and teacher 2 was a teacher leader, as determined by the principal, with preferably more than seven years of experience and above standard evaluations). The researchers also interviewed a parent leader that was actively involved in the Site Based
Management Team, school improvement team, or a parent organization (see Table 3.2 for the participants’ demographic information). The research questions, which served as the foundation on which the protocols were formulated, also served as the cornerstone for the data analysis. It should be mentioned that the principal selected the four other individuals that the researchers had access to interview, thus allowing the principal to select individuals that are more like to speak in a favorable manner (the researchers acknowledge that this was a limitation). However, for the results from the two groups to remain equal.

The researchers divided the schools to allow each researcher to enter 4 schools total (2 LGS and 2 SGS) and conduct all 5 interviews. Equally dividing the LGS and the SGS was a conscious effort to assist in keeping the collected data impartial in nature. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for purposes of analysis. The researchers shared all transcripts to allow each researcher the opportunity to analyze each and every interview through his or her specific lens of academic optimism. Each of the four researchers then generated a separate and individual chapter that detailed his or her findings after applying his or her specific lens of the framework (academic emphasis, collective efficiency, and faculty trust) to the collected data generated from this collaborative effort.

Methods of Verification

The study utilized a concurrent triangulation approach, which uses two complementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years at School</th>
<th>Years of Educational Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 3.2: Principals’ Demographic Information
research methods to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within one study (Creswell, 2002; Greene et al., 1989). According to Greene et al. (1989), “[W]hen two or more methods that have offsetting biases are used to assess a given phenomenon, and the results of these methods converge or corroborate one another, then the validity of inquiry findings is enhanced” (p.256). During the data analysis and interpretations stages, data from the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and results were then compared using
informal, collective cross-analysis as a strategy to further reliability and validity of findings (see Figure 3.1). Because of the interpretive and descriptive nature of the study, coupled with the intent to identify school-wide relationships, a mixed-methods (dominant-less dominant) approach was preferable to a single methodology. The use of interview data from all principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parent leaders coupled with the data obtained through equity audits supported the identification of generalizeable trends across the organization (i.e., broad relationships that are true at aggregate organizational and sub-group levels), while interview data allowed for the identification of individual experiences within the larger organizational context.

This mixed method approach provided the researchers with the opportunity to confidently and accurately address the research questions at both the macro (i.e., organizational) and micro (i.e., individual) levels, drawing a conclusion that was both valid in its interpretations and rich in its descriptions (Graham, 2006). To ensure trustworthiness for this study, triangulation was used to incorporate multiple methods.
sources, investigators and theories to interpret the data and peer debriefing was implemented to guard against bias and to review and discuss the interpretation of the data (Glesne, 1999).

Limitations of the Study

In addition to the previously mentioned possible limitations (2 of the 4 researchers actively working within the district and the principals selecting the other participants), there are two other limitations to this study. Focusing exclusively on elementary schools prohibits the researchers’ findings to offer conclusive evidence that could be used to assist the reform efforts in middle and high schools, which are sadly the areas that many researchers report in need of the most reform and plagued with the most inequities. The decision to focus on elementary schools was a conscious attempt to retrieve results on student performance and achievement, as it relates to school leadership, as pure in nature as possible. These students have limited experiences and their successes cannot typically be attributed to different schools and leadership. Many researchers conclude that reform efforts are most successful at the elementary level for the same reason (Murphy & Datnow, 2003).

This study is missing the insight from some great principals leading for excellence and equity as a result from the researcher’s limited and highly structured selection process. The researchers acknowledge that much could and should be learned from these leaders.

Finally, while conducting a group analysis allowed the researchers to compare and contrast strategies across 16 schools, an individual school level analysis may have
allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the implemented practices at a single school through artifact collection and on-going observations.

Outcome of the Study

Many people, including educators, still believe that factors such as genetic deficiency, class differences, families and access to learning opportunities at home are the most reliable predictors of school achievement. With this view, schools excuse themselves from any accountability for inequities among student subgroups. However, with this study of schools that teach similar populations of students from the same geographical region, it is impossible to ignore the importance and impact of schools. This study provides leaders with data to support the notion that the school plays a significant role in the achievement of all students. More importantly, educational leaders who read this study will learn strategies that facilitate excellence and equity from the “good leaders” who lead the truly “good schools” in this district (i.e., the most excellent AND equitable schools).
CHAPTER 4
QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Audit Findings

Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly (2004) proposed the simple formula of teacher quality equity plus programmatic equity equals achievement equity. In part, this study began to test that assumption. According to Scott (2001), a school cannot have systemic equity if even one part of the system is inequitable. For example, offering a high quality and challenging curriculum is not effective if the staff does not have high expectations that all students will be successful with that curriculum. The following findings seem to raise more questions than answers.

Audit of Demographics in Small Gap Schools (SGS) and Large Gap Schools (LGS)

Demographically speaking, the schools involved in this research study are very similar. All twenty-four are regular K-5, traditional calendar “Honor Schools of Excellence” in the same large school district of over 128,000 students. All twenty-four schools are located within a twelve mile radius of each other, house an average of 722 students, and boast an average daily attendance figure of 95 to 97%. Approximately one-third of the student population in both the SGS and LGS is comprised of minority students (defined as Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Mixed-Race students for this study). The SGS and LGS also both serve approximately the same number of economically disadvantaged students (@ 29.5% for SGS and LGS), same number of limited English proficiency students (@ 7% for SGS and LGS), and same percentage of
students with disabilities (@ 16.5% for SGS and LGS). As a result, both sets of schools also have the exact same number of AYP goals to meet (i.e., 20). See Table 4.1 for a snapshot of the demographic data for SGS and LGS.

Table 4.1: Demographic Data for Small Gap Schools (SGS) and Large Gap Schools (LGS) – Average data set for 2004-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of students</th>
<th># of tests taken by 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students</th>
<th>% of minority students</th>
<th>% of F&amp;R students</th>
<th>% of L.E.P. students</th>
<th>% of students w/disability</th>
<th># of AYP Goals (100% met)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SGS Range</td>
<td>728 (549-1061)</td>
<td>336 (242-528)</td>
<td>37% (18-60)</td>
<td>30% (13-49)</td>
<td>8% (4-13)</td>
<td>16% (10-23)</td>
<td>20 (17-25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGS Range</td>
<td>716 (561-921)</td>
<td>313 (191-416)</td>
<td>33% (18-52)</td>
<td>29% (14-42)</td>
<td>6% (5-9)</td>
<td>17% (14-24)</td>
<td>20 (15-25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Note. National experts report that about 10% to 12% of a school’s student population probably requires special education designations. Both types of schools in this study report higher than average classifications resulting in over-assignment (Artiles, 1998).]

Audit of Teacher Quality in Small Gap Schools (SGS) and Large Gap Schools (LGS)

Although defining teacher quality and then measuring it is a complicated task (Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002), pursuing it is vitally important in raising student achievement. Research indicates that having a critical mass of licensed, experienced teachers with advanced degrees is directly correlated with students’ academic success (Darling-Hammond, 1999). An audit of teacher quality revealed that teachers’ credentials, education, experience, and mobility are also very similar in both the SGS and the LGS. For this study, fully licensed teachers means the percentage of classroom teachers with clear initial or clear continuing licenses in all license areas (@ 90% for SGS...
and LGS). Classes taught by “highly qualified” teachers involves the percentage of classes taught by "highly qualified" teachers as defined by federal law (@ 89.5% for SGS and LGS). Teachers with advanced degrees includes the percentage of teachers who have completed an advanced college degree, including a master's or doctoral degree (@ 25% for SGS and LGS). National Board Certified teachers is the average number of school staff, including teachers, administrators and guidance counselors, who have received National Board Certification (@ 8.5% for SGS and LGS). Years of teaching experience delineates the percentage of teachers who have taught for 0 to 3 years, 4 to 10 years, or over 10 years. Although small, an interesting difference was noted in that half (51%) of the teachers in the SGS had 10+ years of experience compared to 43% of the teachers in the LGS. The LGS schools seem to employ more teachers in the 4 to 9 year range of experience (34%) compared to the SGS (29%). Overall, both types of schools seem to employ an appropriate balance of new teachers, mid-career teachers, and very experienced veteran teachers. Lastly, teacher turnover rate is defined as the percentage of classroom teachers who left their school staff from the start of the prior year to the start of the current year (@ 19% for SGS and LGS). See Table 4.2 for a snapshot of the teacher quality data for SGS and LGS.

Audit of Programmatic Issues in Small Gap Schools (SGS) and Large Gap Schools (LGS)

Programmatic issues involve a number of concerns including resources, physical space, student discipline, and access to books and technology. Once again, an audit of the SGS and LGS revealed some striking similarities. For example, while the SGS are 5% over capacity and the LGS are 10% over capacity with regard to school crowding and both sets of schools have approximately 7 mobile units on their properties, the average
Table 4.2: Teacher Quality Data for Small Gap Schools (SGS) and Large Gap Schools (LGS) – Average data set for 2004-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of teachers</th>
<th>% of teachers fully licensed</th>
<th>% of classes taught by highly qual</th>
<th>% of teachers with advance degree</th>
<th>% of teachers with national board certif</th>
<th>% of teachers with 0 to 3 years exper</th>
<th>% of teachers with 4 to 9 years exper</th>
<th>% of teachers with 10+ years exper</th>
<th>% of teachers who turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SGS</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>42-66</td>
<td>85-98</td>
<td>72-97</td>
<td>17-38</td>
<td>2-21</td>
<td>6-32</td>
<td>21-41</td>
<td>33-71</td>
<td>6-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGS</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>38-66</td>
<td>87-94</td>
<td>77-100</td>
<td>7-38</td>
<td>3-28</td>
<td>9-37</td>
<td>26-45</td>
<td>24-56</td>
<td>7-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

class size for all twenty-four schools involved is still 21 students. School safety issues involve the number of acts of crime or violence per 100 students, which includes all acts occurring in school, at a bus stop, on a school bus, on school grounds, or during off-campus, school-sponsored activities. While the LGS reported one more act per 100 students than the SGS, the SGS reported one more short-term (10 days or less) or long-term (more than 10 days) out-of-school suspension or expulsion per 100 students than the LGS. Students in both the SGS and LGS have access to approximately the same number of library and media center books (@ 17 books for SGS and LGS) and the same number of Internet-connected computers (@ 4 to 1 student/computer ratio for SGS and LGS).

Another way to assess programmatic equity is to examine the results of the governor’s Teacher Working Conditions survey. The goals of the survey are to (1) hear from teachers and administrators about what they identify as areas in need of improvement; (2) understand what school characteristics appear to affect those perceptions; and (3) provide data on working conditions to local school leaders and state
policymakers. Research and focus groups with teachers were conducted to develop 30 statistically sound working conditions standards for schools in five broad categories — time, empowerment, professional development, leadership, and facilities and resources. The online survey sent to every licensed public educator in the state solicits responses on 72 statements regarding working conditions in these five domains. Educators are asked to respond to each of the statements with a value of “1” through “6” with “1” representing “Strongly Disagree” and “6” representing “Strongly Agree.” All statements are written to indicate a positive description of the school environment (e.g., “The principal is a strong, supportive leader” and “Adequate and appropriate time is provided for professional development”). Therefore, higher scores always indicate a more positive opinion of the school environment. In 2004-05, surveys were completed and returned voluntarily by 42,209 educators from 1,471 schools in 115 of the state’s 117 school districts. Seventy-six percent (76%) of the schools had a response rate of 50% or higher.

The domain of time ensures that teachers can work collaboratively and focus on teaching all students. Empowerment is meant to ensure that those who are closest to students are involved in making decisions that affect them. Facilities and resources ensure teachers have the resources to help all children learn. Leadership ensures schools have strong leaders who support teaching and learning. And, opportunities for professional development ensure teachers can continually enhance their knowledge and skills. The Southeast Center for Teacher Quality (see Jacobson, 2005) found all five variables to be significant and meaningful predictors of student achievement.

Interesting findings emerged regarding the return rate, range of returns, and actual ratings on the surveys. First, 20% more of the teachers in the SGS actually completed the
survey (total of 88%) compared to teachers in the LGS (total of 68%). Second, the range of returns for the SGS was considerably smaller at 29 (between 71% and 100%) versus the LGS at 65 (between 35% and 100%). And third, the teachers in the LGS actually rated each of their working conditions slightly higher than the teachers in the SGS (the SGS responses were more aligned with the district average). See Table 4.3 for a snapshot of the programmatic data and Table 4.4 for a snapshot of teacher working condition data for SGS and LGS. These differences certainly speak to different cultures within each of the schools and may be explained in a variety of ways (positive and/or negative). Unfortunately, without more data (qualitative and/or quantitative), it is difficult to identify precise reasons for these results (e.g., culture on non-participation in some schools, pressure from the leadership to close gaps in other schools, only contented teachers completed the survey, etc.). Likewise, information needed to disaggregate the exceptional children’s classifications, including cognitive and behavioral disabilities and gifted and talented, by race and income was not readily available. The researchers intend to continue to mine for this data and the possibility of unequal representation in certain programs.

Audit of Achievement in Small Gap Schools (SGS) and Large Gap Schools (LGS)

According to Scott (2001), achievement equity means having comparably high performance for all groups of learners when academic achievement data are disaggregated and analyzed. Although demographic, teacher quality, and programmatic audits all indicated a fair amount of equity between SGS and LGS, the achievement audit between both types of schools indicated great disparities. Across the board, at-risk students in the SGS outperformed their LGS counterparts (and the district for that
Table 4.3: Programmatic Data for Small Gap Schools (SGS) and Large Gap Schools (LGS) – Average data set for 2004-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of crowding</th>
<th># of mobile units</th>
<th># of acts of violence (per 100 students)</th>
<th># of student suspensions (per 100 students)</th>
<th># of books per student</th>
<th># of students per computer</th>
<th># of students per Internet connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SGS</strong></td>
<td>105%</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>16.78</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>92-132</td>
<td>0-21</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>0-17</td>
<td>8.94-27.77</td>
<td>2.09-6.89</td>
<td>2.33-6.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LGS</strong></td>
<td>110%</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>17.65</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>90-132</td>
<td>0-16</td>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>0-12</td>
<td>11.28-23.28</td>
<td>2.31-6.54</td>
<td>2.31-8.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District</strong></td>
<td>105%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>14.47</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Working Condition Data for Smaller Gap Schools (SGS) and Larger Gap Schools (LGS) – Average data set for 2004-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of surveys completed</th>
<th>% of surveys completed</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Facilities and Resources</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SGS</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>30-74</td>
<td>71-100</td>
<td>2.5-3.18</td>
<td>3.18-4.27</td>
<td>2.68-4.09</td>
<td>2.66-4.33</td>
<td>2.79-4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LGS</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District</strong></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

matter). The 11.2% difference between minority student proficiency was used to separate the schools initially. Interestingly, the trend continued for disadvantaged students (9.4% difference), limited English proficiency students (7.2% difference), students with disabilities (4.9%), and students of parents with no college education (13.3%). Even though 95% of all students were tested in all twenty-four schools and each school noted some growth, a six-year analysis of growth indicated a greater difference of 6.3 percentage points for students in the SGS versus the LGS. 9% of the students in the LGS
scored below proficiency at a level one or two, while only 6% of the students in the SGS scored at a level one or two. See Table 4.5 for a snapshot of the achievement data for SGS and LGS.

Table 4.5: Achievement Equity Data for Small Gap Schools (SGS) and Large Gap Schools (LGS) – Average data set for 2004-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of minority students profic</th>
<th>% of F&amp;R students profic</th>
<th>% of L.E.P. students profic</th>
<th>% of students w/disab profic</th>
<th>% of students w/parent w/no college profic</th>
<th>% of all students profic in 2000</th>
<th>% of all students profic in 2005</th>
<th>Growth from 2000 to 2005 (6 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SGS Range</td>
<td>83.2% (80.5-87.1)</td>
<td>80.1% (65.0-85.7)</td>
<td>72.1% (42.9-91.7)</td>
<td>72.8% (54.3-91.8)</td>
<td>75.1% (57.1-90.0)</td>
<td>82.3% (70.5-89.4)</td>
<td>94.1% (91.3-96.8)</td>
<td>+ 11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGS Range</td>
<td>72.0% (64.6-78.4)</td>
<td>70.7% (59.2-82.2)</td>
<td>64.9% (28.6-93.2)</td>
<td>67.9% (59.0-79.1)</td>
<td>61.8% (42.9-93.3)</td>
<td>86.6% (80.5-91.5)</td>
<td>92.1% (90.3-94.1)</td>
<td>+ 5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAPS</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>+ 6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Note. 95% of all students in all twenty-four schools were tested.]

Concluding Discussion

By controlling for and/or eliminating some of the external variables (e.g., demographics) and internal factors (e.g., teacher quality and programmatic issues) often cited for the achievement gaps between White middle-class children and children of color or children from low-income families, the findings from this study raise more questions than answers. Do the principals and teachers who work in Larger Gap Schools (LGS) truly believe that all students can be successful? If so, why do equity audits in these schools reveal significant achievement gaps across multiple subgroups of students? If not, what are the reasons behind and/or the causes of these beliefs? Conversely, do the principals and teachers who work in Smaller Gap Schools (SGS) truly believe that all
students can be successful? If so, what are the reasons behind and/or the causes of these beliefs?

Although improving teacher quality continues to be a leading national priority, “the fact that, broadly speaking, our children experience differential levels of success in school that is distributed along race and social class lines continues to be the overriding central problem of education” (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2001, p.239). Changing demographics of the student population in the nation’s schools, the stable demographics of the teaching force (i.e., White, middle class, females), and the growing contrast between the two sets of demographics support the need for all educators to increase their knowledge and social responsibility toward diversity and equity related issues. In serving increasingly diverse student populations from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, many of whom experience poverty, neglect, or other negative situations that can seriously affect their physical, cognitive, and emotional development, Villegas (1992) argued that educators in a multicultural society need the following: (1) an attitude of respect for cultural differences; (2) knowledge of the cultural resources their students possess, and skills in tapping these resources in the teaching-learning process; (3) a belief that all students are capable of learning, evidenced in an enriched curriculum for all pupils; and (4) a strong sense of professional efficacy when evaluating students. Unfortunately, beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets do no not lend themselves easily to empirical investigation (Pajares, 1992).

As the results from Phase One of this research indicate, equity audits are a practical, easy to apply tool that educators can use to objectively identify educational inequalities. By studying schools that teach similar populations of students from the same
geographical region, it is impossible to ignore the impact that schools play in the achievement of all students. Data is powerful; it separates personal agendas from organizational necessities. By collecting, analyzing, and then exhibiting data in a transparent way, it is difficult for teachers, parents, and even school board members to deny certain disparities in practices, certain deficiencies in systems, and certain gaps in outcomes.

Actually addressing and then removing such systemic patterns of inequity requires more than awareness though, it requires action. Igniting reform for true excellence necessitates the will to do so; it requires both a close examination of personal beliefs coupled with a critical analysis of professional behavior. While convincing research suggests that beliefs are the best predictors of individual behavior and that educators’ beliefs influence their perceptions, judgments, and practices, research also states that beliefs are hardy and highly resistant to change (Bandura, 1986; Dewey, 1933; Pajares, 1992; Rokeach, 1968). Understanding the nature of beliefs, attitudes, and values is essential to understanding educators’ choices, decisions, and effectiveness regarding issues of diversity, social justice, and equity. Assessing beliefs in an effort to make them known and subject to critical analysis is an important initial step in the process (see Brown, 2004 for a review of measures, instruments, inventories, and studies that assess educators’ personal and professional beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and preconceptions.). For, it is assumed that, the more critically conscious educators become, the more prone they are to behave appropriately and constructively in actual educational situations involving students of diverse cultures, ethnic groups, backgrounds, abilities, economic levels, etc. and the more attentive they will become to redressing social injustices and
developing enduring educational practices embodying equity. According to Scheurich and Skrla (2003), “The success of our society will soon be directly dependent on our ability as educators to be successful with children of color, with whom we have not been very successful in the past” (p.5). These alarming gaps challenge us to dig deeper inside the schools for more subtle causes. Scott (2001) calls these internal causes of inequity systemic inequities because they are built systematically into the processes and procedures of the system that is the school. A school culture that perpetuates the status quo and turns a blind eye to the social injustices that permeate our schools is not really “excellent.” As such, excellence and equity must be pursued concurrently to assure that all students are served well and that all are encouraged to perform at their highest level. Excellence without equity is not excellence—it is hypocrisy. Phase Two of this research was needed to document the specific strategies that principals of “excellent, equitable schools” use to confront and change past practices anchored in open and residual racism and class discrimination.
V. DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to clearly identify and discuss the themes and findings in the data that were gathered throughout this empirical study. The data, which were gathered from the Honor Schools with large gaps (LGS) and the Honor Schools with small gaps (SGS), are structured and presented for the reader around each of the five components of faculty trust (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness) and scrutinized to determine significant similarities and differences between the two school groupings. In breaking down the data, template analysis was used to organize and display emerging themes found in each of the schools. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the findings (guide to the analysis), while Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 provide the reader with a visual verification of the findings of the themes found in each of the components of faculty trust.

Table 5.1: The Five Components of Faculty Trust and the Sub-Themes that Emerged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme 1</th>
<th>Component 1: Benevolence</th>
<th>Component 2: Reliability</th>
<th>Component 3: Competence</th>
<th>Component 4: Honesty</th>
<th>Component 5: Openness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Our Babies”</td>
<td>“Our Babies”</td>
<td>“High Expectations”</td>
<td>“Strong Faculty”</td>
<td>“Using and Sharing Data”</td>
<td>“Welcoming”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme 2</th>
<th>Component 1: Benevolence</th>
<th>Component 2: Reliability</th>
<th>Component 3: Competence</th>
<th>Component 4: Honesty</th>
<th>Component 5: Openness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“TOO MUCH”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Shared Vision”</td>
<td>“Collaboration”</td>
<td>“Open and Frequent Communication”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme 3</th>
<th>Component 1: Benevolence</th>
<th>Component 2: Reliability</th>
<th>Component 3: Competence</th>
<th>Component 4: Honesty</th>
<th>Component 5: Openness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 5.2: Template Analysis of Small Gap Schools (SGS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Trust Components/Themes</th>
<th>SGS1</th>
<th>SGS2</th>
<th>SGS3</th>
<th>SGS4</th>
<th>SGS5</th>
<th>SGS6</th>
<th>SGS7</th>
<th>SGS8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benevolence</strong>&lt;br&gt;“Our Babies”</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong>&lt;br&gt;High Expectations</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shared Vision</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong>&lt;br&gt;Strong Faculty&lt;br&gt;“Hiring Practices Matter”</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong>&lt;br&gt;Collaboration</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honesty</strong>&lt;br&gt;Using and Sharing Data</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Openness</strong>&lt;br&gt;Welcoming</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Openness</strong>&lt;br&gt;“Too Much” Parent Involvement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Openness</strong>&lt;br&gt;Open and Frequent Communication</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Openness</strong>&lt;br&gt;Discussions of Race and the “Gaps”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**

S = Strong    M = Moderate    0 = No Evidence    N = Negative Evidence
Table 5.3: Template Analysis of Large Gap Schools (LGS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Trust Components/Themes</th>
<th>LGS1</th>
<th>LGS2</th>
<th>LGS3</th>
<th>LGS4</th>
<th>LGS5</th>
<th>LGS6</th>
<th>LGS7</th>
<th>LGS8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence “Our Babies”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability High Expectations</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability Shared Vision</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence Strong Faculty</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence Collaboration</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty Using and Sharing Data</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness Welcoming</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness “Too Much” Parent Involvement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness Open and Frequent Communication</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness Discussions of Race and the “Gaps”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**

- **S** = Strong  
- **M** = Moderate  
- **0** = No Evidence  
- **N** = Negative Evidence

**Benevolence**

The main purpose of this study was to examine and better understand how principals lead to achieve excellence and equity. This study found that a leader achieves this goal not through sheer will and deliberate authoritative force; but rather, excellence
and equity is achieved by creating the conditions/opportunities essential for faculty trust to exist and thrive. In order to create and maintain a school environment that is conducive to promoting and sustaining excellence and equity for all, parents and their children must be willing to make themselves vulnerable to the faculty, and the faculty must surrender some control back to the parents. For this to occur, parents must possess confidence that the school and its personnel have their best interest at heart and will take the necessary action to protect this interest (i.e. the child and his or her future), and the teacher must be willing to view the parent as a powerful ally, who is responsible and capable. These acts of benevolence can potentially create a cycle of respect and gratitude between home and school.

“Our Babies”

Small Gap Schools

It is evident that these administrators and teachers in the SGS feel a heightened sense of ownership or responsibility to the students within their schools and classrooms. The description of this relationship is stronger than the traditional professional-client relationship. One principal referred to the students in the building as “our babies,” implying that the faculty love these students in an unconditional manner and are willing to do whatever it takes to ensure individual success (SGS7-P). There is strong evidence in the majority of all the SGS schools that continues to attribute their success in student achievement to the faculty’s unyielding devotion and sense of personal responsibility to teach and help every student achieve success, as seen in the following quotes:

It doesn’t matter where they come from. You can pull them up … You can’t look at your population and say they’re never going to get it. (SGS1-AP).
Whichever it takes to help the children learn, that’s what we’re here to do. (SGS5-NT).

What are we doing for that person who can’t get the light bulb on? What are we doing? Do we write them off? Or are we continually changing what we do in our school to affect that kid, and improve that kid? (SGS2-P).

This altruistic faculty’s attitude is recognized and applauded by parents and administrators. Parents did not attribute the school’s successes to bureaucratic mission statements or traditional school reform efforts. These parents praised the people within the school for their shared efforts to reach every student, regardless of background or status, and for making the six hours of school the best part of many children’s’ day (SGS2-P).

This common theme of loving the children is supported by the events and activities mentioned throughout the interviews. As found in SGS5, in which every interview participant mentioned the Assistant Principal’s efforts to ensure that children from a lower socioeconomic status, who were “bussed” in from another geographic area, attended the annual Saturday school carnival. This administrator secured an activity bus, and she transported students and their parents to this day’s events and returned them to their homes. This conscious effort to bring these students to a fun event that has little to nothing to do with academic achievement or proficiency illustrates the sense of compassion and commitment to the child as an individual. This action did not go unrecognized, and it translated into building trust throughout the entire community because it embraces the very definition of benevolence. Many other schools understand the importance of family and their interests/needs and take this into consideration when planning events. For example, in SGS4 parent events and workshops are planned and the
staff coordinates a variety of simultaneous activities to get the entire family involved, which creates a synergistic type of effect.

There are other examples of selfless actions performed by many of the faculty members at other SGS schools that further support this sense of responsibility to the individual student. However, perhaps more importantly there is data that reveals that this component of faculty trust is not only reciprocal but throughout the SGS communities. The faculty report that many of the parents and community members have the teacher’s best interest at heart and share their ideals and love for all children. The majority of SGS schools recognize that they are fortunate to possess a strong parental volunteer effort with a common goal of assisting all students and addressing any school needs. “Yard work” appeared to be the only area that was difficult to find parents to volunteer for (SGS3-P). At SGS4, the principal recognizes that even if there is not a strong visible sign of parental involvement the majority show their support from home through working with their children and following through with the recommendation from the faculty.

In many of these schools, the community also exudes benevolence towards the students and teachers. Many of the businesses and restaurants support the school through donations and financial support to help provide incentives to students and to show their appreciation to the teachers. Perhaps the best example of community support occurred during a state of emergency, when an ice storm significantly impacted the students of SGS3. One hundred and seventy five students were unable to make it home due to the road conditions. The majority of the students were from a lower socio-economic status from a predominately Latino community several miles from the school. The teachers, parents, and community rallied providing every student with not only supervision but
also blankets, pillows, toiletry items, and pizza. Actions such as this create a reciprocal sense of respect and trust throughout all levels of the learning community.

*Large Gap Schools*

There is an obvious difference between Large Gap Schools (LGS) and the Small Gap Schools (SGS) in regards to the way the faculty and parents articulate the mission and sense of purpose of the school. In all but one of the SGS schools, there is strong evidence of the previously discussed heightened sense of responsibility towards the individual child at the school. The majority of the LGS schools primarily credit the teachers and their talents when describing what makes the school excellent opposed to the shared commitment to every student found in the SGS schools. Two of the LGS schools do appear to be very student focused and communicate the loving child centered philosophy of the SGS schools; however, a stronger theme emerged from these schools as a whole. The majority of the faculties from the LGS schools credit the support they provide and receive from one another as the reason for their schools’ success. LGS3 did launch a tutoring program in one of the lower socio-economic communities that was being “bussed into” their schools, as part of the district’s overarching plan to balance student populations; however, this program was moved back to the home school. This change occurred because too many of these students were coming for extra support and the traveling faculty members were overwhelmed. Discontinuing this popular and parent convenient remediation program (opposed to restructuring/strengthening it) is a missed opportunity in creating trust throughout this critical population of the school’s parents. The following quotes support the philosophical differences and the lack of the “whatever it takes” attitude found in all of the SGS schools.
I don’t think we can guarantee that every child is going to be successful. But we need to And it’s a goal. I mean it’s not 100 percent all the time with all the kids. It’s not even 100 percent with… you know what I’m saying. It’s not even 100 percent with a portion of them all the time. It’s hit or miss. (LGS 8 – P)

We provide them the opportunity to be successful. (LGS 4 – P)

One school (LGS7) did provide strong evidence similar to the SGS schools that embraces the same child centered philosophy and practice.

We teach the child. And that’s what’s so critical in making sure that a school is a School of Excellence… that you don’t teach a test… you teach the child. The standard course of study guides what we do… teachers have to adjust based on the individual needs of children… pull small groups of children while the others are working on relevant tasks that will keep them engaged in learning. (LGS 7 – P)

The community and parents’ actions are benevolent in nature in many of these schools. In many of the schools, parents do volunteer in the same manner found in the SGS schools and generate the same sort of financial support to benefit the school’s programs. However, much of the business support seems to be directed more towards the faculty and staff than towards the children they serve. The communities’ businesses that were mentioned in these interviews discuss more of the benefits of dining out and having lunches catered to the teachers as tokens of appreciation. The researcher is unable to conclude if this support is narrowly tailored because the teachers and parents are failing to articulate to the businesses how they can better assist in supporting student achievement or if this is the conscious choice of the business leaders.

Benevolence is an essential ingredient in creating and sustaining trusting relationships between teachers and parents. The assistant principal at SGS2 describes how the benevolent and selfless actions from the faculty towards their students inspire the parents who return the favor through support or filling a classroom/school need, which
creates a cycle of respect and altruistic acts. These acts can create a sense of community much faster and more powerful than proximity ever could. Often when organizations and their leaders are pursuing greatness, or in this case “excellence,” they forget the importance and power of being good.

Reliability

Faculty trust cannot be created or sustained through good deeds and keeping the other stakeholders best interest in mind by itself. In order to accomplish the mission of today’s schools and meet the demands associated with high-stakes testing, there has to be follow-through and action. Reliability is an essential component in creating faculty trust because, in order to depend on a party, one must have confidence that the other will act consistently in the appropriate and needed manner. High expectations and the existence of a shared vision are two common themes that support the necessity for this component of faculty trust.

High Expectations

Small Gap Schools

Possessing, communicating, and keeping high expectations throughout all areas of the learning community was found in 100% of the SGS schools. Many of the team members interviewed at these schools credited these expectations as one of the most essential ingredients in creating excellence and equity in their school. “All kids perform regardless of their background” at this school (SGS6-P). These standards tie into the previously discussed theme of the heightened sense of responsibility and love for all students. A sense of urgency and pressure exists throughout all levels of the school’s hierarchy to give every student the opportunity, the tools, and support needed to achieve
success. This may be due to the dangers associated with losing the esteem and public recognition of being one of the best schools in the area, as measured by high-stakes testing; however, this pressure seems to be derived more from a place of compassion for the child.

The SGS schools have high expectations for all of their students, as opposed to many schools that focus primarily on the students that are considered at-risk of not being considered proficient by the state assessments. A common expectation exists in the majority of these SGS schools that every child is routinely challenged and displays concrete evidence of at least one year’s academic growth regardless of his or her current level, academic ability, or family background.

I have high expectations with academics… The higher your expectations, the more the child’s going to rise to that. Because if you give them just a mediocre, average expectation and they meet it, they’re never going to perform higher than that… (SGS 3 – NT)

We have extremely high expectations… I believe in equity. It is important for all children to have access and have the opportunity to do well in school. (SGS 5 – AP)

Our expectation is that every child will succeed. I think that’s a high aspiration, but one that’s attainable. (SGS 6 – P)

We really try to constantly challenge the students. We want to make sure that they’re showing growth and that’s our goal, if we can show that magical year’s growth with every student… (SGS 4 – P)

Excellence is any time a person can maximize their potential. I think one of the most faulty problems with No Child Left Behind is that it ignores the growth factor. I think that every child deserves a year’s worth of growth in the standard course of study. And that’s at a minimum and so that means that kid that already walks in knowing the third grade curriculum when their in second grade still deserves to grow. (SGS 7 – P)

The higher your expectations, the more the child’s going to rise to that. Because if you give them just a mediocre, average expectation, and they meet it, they’re never going to perform higher than that … It doesn’t matter where they come
from, what their background is, what their mom or dad says, it’s what each child needs (SGS3-NT).

In order for this expectation to become the reality, the principals put forth a consistent and conscious effort to support the teacher’s need to continue to grow and learn professionally. The principals at the SGS schools accomplish this through pairing new teachers with experienced mentors that match their areas for needed growth, by creating a common planning time for grade levels to meet and discuss, and by finding funds to purchase resources, materials, and training that teachers identify as needs to improve their craft. These schools tend to focus “more on learning than on teaching” (SGS2). This philosophical statement implies that the faculty has a common understanding that they have a duty to continue to find strategies to ensure that every child is successful, and by constantly doing this is what makes them great teachers and excellent schools.

Many of the SGS schools reported that the principal communicates and reinforces these teaching and learning expectations through regular classroom visits or walkthroughs, or by having regular team meetings with teachers.

She’s very into teachers performing best practice in the classroom. She looks for that when she goes in. She’s not afraid on an observation to write down an area of improvement. Actually, I don’t know anybody who gets an observation that doesn’t have some area in which they need to grow … This might be a suggestion of how you can improve this. And I appreciate that, and I think a lot of teachers do, because they can say, Oh, she’s not cracking the whip on me (SGS5-ET).

A few of the schools hold weekly meetings with the administrative team and the grade level to discuss classroom and student progress. This “hands on” approach to leading is a similarity between the SGS schools, and this process helps the administrators increase classroom reliability. The SGS teachers understand that they are responsible for teaching the standard course of study in an individualized manner to ensure student learning.
So they came to me and they said through our conversations we realized we are not really doing a great job with teaching problem solving, can you help us? To me my eyes just lit up because that’s the power in what a professional learning community is, is that people analyze their own needs … you know I went and did the research and called an we’ve got a staff development coming in here starting to do a problem solving staff development. (SGS7-P)

A group of us went to him (principal) and said, “You know… my kids are really having trouble with problem-solving. You know, we need some help, we need some professional development on that.” So starting next week, we have a six-session course on cognitively guided instruction… he listens to us to help us with what we need. (SGS 7 – ET)

Whether she’s been teaching five years or two… it doesn’t matter. We’ve got some excellent teachers here… so the one thing I do is find her a mentor. I find somebody who is willing to really take some time helping this person. The other thing that I do is that I try to get her out to see what other teachers are doing. The best learning experience for teachers is to see how other teachers teach (SGS 3 – P)

Parents at the SGS schools communicated that they want their child challenged at school. In addition to high academic expectations, parents and teachers also communicated that their schools possessed and communicated consistent high expectations for proper behavior for students and faculty alike. All of the schools (SGS and LGS) acknowledged that they had their share of discipline issues (most stated these issues were relatively minor when compared elsewhere). These schools stated that they address inappropriate student behavior when it occurs. The majority of the SGS schools have positive behavior plans in place that define what is expected in each area of the school (bus, hallway, classroom, cafeteria, restroom, etc…) and provide awards for following these set procedures. The data collected from the interviews and examining their discipline reports reveal that all of the SGS schools, with the exception of SGS3, have provided high office level consequences (out of school suspensions). These
schools also have high expectations in relation to involving and communicating with parents, which will be further discussed in this chapter under the subheading Honesty.

As with benevolence, this component of reliability also is reciprocal. The parents have proven themselves reliable and dependable allies with the teachers. The equity audits reveal that all of these schools (SGS and LGS) have a daily attendance rate of 95% or greater, which is above the district and the state’s average. This illustrates that the parents are acting in a reliable manner, by getting their children to school to receive the instruction needed to be successful. Many of the teachers and administrators also commented and appreciated the support they receive within the homes. The follow through and assistance, academically and socially, help foster this mutual reliability that ultimately increases the trust level between home and school.

Large Gap Schools

The LGS schools were not as uniformed as the SGS schools in providing evidence for the need for high expectations for every child. The responses from the participants from the LGS schools varied much more from site to site than the SGS schools. Only half of the LGS schools supported the SGS school universal belief and practice of setting high expectations for all members for the learning community with the same strength. The majority of the schools did provide some evidence of high expectations for their students and teachers. However, two of these schools provided no evidence of high expectations being a vital part of their school’s culture or overall vision. The researcher is not stating that these teachers or principals do not have high expectations for their students. These schools focused more on the mission to create an atmosphere that makes students feel “happy” and to “make learning fun” (LGS3-P).
Ironically, this same principal outlawed parties and celebrations of students’ birthdays during the school day. This does provide evidence that this principal is concerned primarily with academics. This mission to make school fun was echoed in another LGS school.

It’s making sure that everyone is happy… If people believe we’re great, we’re great… So… a school of excellence is about… teachers being a real collegial team, and they’ve got to trust each other, and they’ve got to be talking nice to each other. (LGS 8 – P)

The expectations for teachers were equally as vague in many of the LGS schools.

In my case it’s been really nice, she leaves me alone and let’s me do my job. She is not a micro manager by any means. In fact, I tell her every once in a while you need to get out and into the classrooms more than just observing (LGS2-ET).

*Shared Vision*

*Small Gap Schools*

These higher expectations are part of a larger theme that was consistent in the SGS schools. The majority of these schools’ high expectations were part of the principal’s shared vision of the school. As detailed in the review of the literature, many researchers consider a strong principal with a shared vision as an essential element to excellence and equity. These instructional leaders and their staff do not use confusing educational jargon when explaining their mission as educators; rather, they have a simplistic and profound vision for their school. Many of their mission statements are similar to that of SGS7’s, which is purely to “make sure that everyone is achieving success.” This mission statement/vision embodies the previously stated similarities of high expectations and the “whatever it takes” ideology among the SGS schools. This mission of individualized success was stated repeatedly throughout the interview process. Some did have a stronger vision of collaboration between home and school than others,
but regardless of the specific nuances at each school, every team member (with the exception of SGS4) provided evidence that this vision was more than just bureaucratic rhetoric because it was repeated by the other team members of a school. Thus, the principals at the majority of the SGS schools were successful in creating a shared vision throughout the learning community and defining what one can expect and rely on within the school.

We have a real mix, but I think there’s this feeling of striving for excellence no matter where … no matter which neighborhood (SGS3-P).

I think high expectations should exist for everybody regardless of where you come from. I have never seen anybody rise to low expectations. If they’re gonna rise, then you have to keep them high and have them reach for them… but we must be supporting them along the way. (SGS 8 – AP)

We’re looking for each child, regardless of what their background is, to show growth. We want them to meet the benchmarks and the expectations… regardless of disability, or background or race, or whatever it might be. (SGS 4 – ET)

Our expectations here are at a minimum to make a full year’s growth no matter where they come in. She (principal) and I share a lot of the same ideals. We are very much optimistic about “all kids can learn.” (SGS 8 – NT)

**Large Gap Schools**

The majority of LGS schools failed to provide evidence that there is an institutional goal for every child to experience success. One LGS school principal’s vision differed greatly from those instructional leaders at SGS schools. Where the SGS school leaders provided evidence that their expectations for learning was for every child to be successful, one principal stated his goal for the school was to reach the 95% proficiency mark and then maintain this performance rating (LGS4). Two of the eight LGS schools did provide strong evidence that they, like the SGS schools, strive to create an environment that allows all students to succeed academically. The principal from
LGS7 provides the counter argument why the goal of maintaining 95% proficiency is inappropriate for today’s schools with her quote that embodies the notion of focusing on every child.

We need to remind ourselves that we may have 95% of our children on grade level, but we need to ask ourselves which parent are we going to look at and say, ‘We think we can teach every child but yours?’ And that’s what makes a School of Excellence, making sure that everyone in the building is ensuring that everyone is learning… Given the right resources every child is going to be able to be successful. (LGS7-P)

These high expectations for students and their learning was shared by other LGS schools, but not to the extent found in the SGS schools.

There was also an absence of evidence to permit the researcher to conclude that many of the LGS schools had a shared vision of excellence (more than half). Many principals spoke to their mission for teaching, but these thoughts were not supported when interviewing his or her team members. Only one of the LGS schools provided strong evidence of a shared vision. This LGS school appeared to be metaphorically hungry to raise the proficiency level of their students (LGS7). Creating this shared vision for excellence that challenges the status quo and strives for excellence and equity may make these large achievement gaps disappear.

It begins truly with staff development. That’s how we started that. In insuring that all children learn, we have to have an understanding that there is economic diversity, and there is racial diversity, and we’ve got to talk about it in order to make sure that all children are successful, because none of our experiences are the same. Some of us come from houses where there was poverty. Some of us come from homes where there was wealth, and we have no understanding of how difficult it is to learn if you didn’t have breakfast that morning. So the staff has to be aware about that. Our families, our parents, have to be aware of that . . . Being in a school and being that school leaders is making sure that communication gets everybody on the same page. Here’s why we do what we do. Here’s why it’s important. What can we do to make it better? All the time thinking, what can we do to make it better? Not being satisfied with status quo (LGS7-P)
The majority of LGS principals were vague in stating their vision for their school and for excellence.

If people believe that we’re great, then we’re great. And we all of a sudden start attracting really great teachers that want to come work here, and really great people that . . . you know it’s funny how that happens. I mean it’s just about starting out by saying “Don’t go out of here and say anything negative about this school, ever. Ever!” . . . School of Excellence really is. It’s not only about making sure that the students are successful, but making sure that the culture is good, and the climate is good, and sometimes that’s about you know, being really mean. (LGS8-P)

The shared understanding of knowing what is expected, valued, and wanted are common elements and characteristics in most successful systems. Most people (children and adults alike) want to please those in perceived roles of power and aspire for positive recognition. Teachers, students, and parents are no different. Unlike the LGS schools, the SGS teachers, parents, and principals provide strong evidence that all members of their systems understand the expectations and strive to meet these challenges daily. The leaders in the SGS schools take the time to define what excellence looks like in a deliberate manner. Identifying success acts as a metaphorical beacon that guides everyone through the change process for making schools excellent and equitable.

**Competence**

The essence of trust revolves around competence or belief that another party can perform the tasks required. In schools, leaders hope that parents have confidence in their faculty and educational practices. If parents feel that the teachers of their child’s school or its leadership are incompetent, there is little to no hope for a partnership or a productive relationship. In much of this section and in the review of the literature, the importance of creating a partnership between the home and the schools has been cited numerous times. It is difficult at best to respect or partner with an individual or body that
is believed to be incompetent. At the school level, a parent could potentially view incompetence as providing a disservice or a detriment to his or her child, which could create a hostile and combative environment for all parties involved. It is for this reason that hiring practices matter and collaboration amongst colleagues are essential in schools striving to be excellent and equitable.

*Strong Faculty: “Hiring Practices Matter”*

*Small Gap Schools*

There has been much research published detailing the high teacher turnover rates in many of today’s schools. The SGS schools appear not to suffer from this teacher trend. According to the data collected through the equity audits, the majority of the teachers in these schools have taught ten or more years. All of these schools possess a higher percentage of veteran teachers than the state and district average. This experience and longevity may produce confidence in many teachers, which may translate into perceived competence throughout the learning community. Paradoxically, the majority of the SGS schools are below the district and state average for percentage of classes taught by “highly qualified” teachers. One may argue that competence in the classroom comes from practical years of experience rather than coursework and certificates.

When the opportunity to hire does present itself at the SGS schools every principal spoke to the importance of bringing the right person aboard. Finding the right person can be difficult at times, as seen in SGS 4 where the principal kept her 5th grade at 28 students per class simply because she could not find the “right” teacher for the position. “She will not just fill the slot” (SGS4-PL) The majority of SGS school principals choose to use a committee approach to selecting a candidate. The general
feeling amongst these leaders is to utilize shared decision making and not to make decisions in isolation. The majority of these leaders are not looking for the candidate who “knows all the right answers” or who has the most prestigious degrees; rather, the leaders at SGS schools are looking for those candidates who value relationships and those who may be able to bring something different to the school’s culture. The following quotes substantiate these claims:

Even when we had a year and a half ago to hire an assistant principal, you know, we used a team. You know, I interviewed first of all the folks that came in, and then dwindled it down to 4 or 5 people and then we had some team interviews, and I really took into consideration what they had to say, and what they were needing, it felt like we were needing at this school. (SGS 5 - P)

We interview through teams. The team that has the opening is a part of the interview staff, and usually when somebody comes in and meets the team, the thing that they pick up on is the energy of and the ability of the teachers sitting in on the interview, and they want to be a part of that. (SGS1-P)

I think the key to that is to involve the staff in the hiring process. We’ve got, for instance, today we’ve got a 1st grade interview, and we’ll have two of our 1st grade (teachers) on that team, and I tell every candidate who comes in that this is a two-way interview.” (SGS2-P)

What we do is interview as a team. So whoever or whatever grade level we’re interviewing for, that grade level participates in the interview” (SGS 4 - P).

The SGS school leaders are aware of the teacher shortage that is plaguing many of their neighboring schools. It is for this reason that many of them are constantly searching for talented teachers. It is common practice for the principal of SGS3 to interview strong teachers even if he does not have an opening. This principal does this to create a contact for the future, so when a position does become vacant, the individual feels compelled to apply. The best recruiters for these administrators are the teachers that are currently working for them. These educators deepen the pool of applicants because they are excited about their working conditions and the collaborative atmosphere that exists in
these schools. Perhaps it is for this reason that the principals of these schools work so hard to display their support for the teachers in the building and do not attempt to micromanage their teaching practices.

All of the SGS schools reported that they had strong teachers. One administrator referred to herself as “a leader of experts” (SGS1-P). These SGS principals also make menus and not mandates when it comes to delivering instruction. The teachers are expected to teach the standard course of study, but are given the flexibility to choose the best method for their style to accomplish this task. Many of the teachers referenced how they are treated and viewed as professionals by the principals and in return act accordingly. These schools possess a level of expectation for all faculty members because they view themselves as the “role models for our (their) students and their parents too” (SGS1-P).

Large Gap Schools

On average, the LGS staff is younger and less experienced, but is deemed higher qualified by state standards. The principals at these schools echoed those sentiments already shared about the importance of hiring quality teachers and not to micromanage. However, the LGS schools do share the SGS belief of finding the right person, but they are vaguer in describing who exactly the right person is at times.

I don’t care if you know any of the answers because I can train you. I can send you to literacy training, to math training… I want to know, “Are you a positive person?” That’s all I really care about. Do you wake up in the morning and say… or are you a psycho? So… that to me is the most important thing. (LGS 8 – P) I’m sure in her interviews she (principal) listens to what they are saying and how they feel about children and how they feel about education. And it’s those people who are looking for very positive things and who are really excited about what they are doing and about where they are going and who have a vision for a school that is very supportive of everyone and everything. (LGS 2 – ET)
I’m always looking for, you know… that enthusiasm, that kind of little bit of creativity, that willingness to go the extra mile kind of… and for somebody basically who knows what they know and knows what they don’t know… people that are open to learning… enough confidence to say, “I don’t know how to do this. Help me.” (LGS 3 – P)

Many principals do share the SGS committee hiring practice to find the candidate that is best fit for the team.

He was very careful about who he picked to place strategically on those teams, and those personalities we saw. And I could tell that, because even sitting in on the interviews, which I got to, even though we felt sometimes there might have been somebody that was a little stronger, we went with the other person because of personality and style. (LGS 5 – ET)

We look to see whether they’re knowledgeable… we look at experience. We want the best. We look at how they would fit in with the team too… we don’t want everybody alike. (SGS 6 – AP)

Flexibility, willingness to sit down and take some pretty blunt feedback from teammates and understand that it’s done professionally… a desire to get better, to try new things. We ask some specific questions about their philosophy of teaching different content areas, and how they would handle certain situations, and we can get a good feel for the person. (LGS 5 – P)

One principal compares her position to that of an orchestra leader. She “hires good people and lets them do their jobs, makes sure they know what their jobs are, makes sure they know what their expectations are, and lets them do their job” (LGS8-P). The LGS principals credit the faculty and their talents for the school’s successes and recognition.

The staff… and it’s a beautiful building. The staff is really committed to excellence… and shares ideas. They’re always looking for ways to improve. (LGS 3 – P)

Collaboration

Small Gap Schools

All of the SGS principals share the commitment to making teaching a collaborative process. This universal practice strengthens the professional atmosphere in
the schools. Teachers are provided with the opportunity to collaborate and are expected to work together to plan, grow, assist, and solve problems. This collaboration also helps foster the common philosophy in these schools to respect the pupil. One teacher (SGS4) stated that she worked so closely with her fellow teachers that they all “bleed together” and have a common focus to solve problems that assist every child to be successful, regardless if he or she is under their direct care. This cultural practice is noticed and appreciated by parents. SGS1 principal believes that this professional practice has resulted in the “majority of the parents trusting our (the school’s) decisions and believe that when they put their child in our hands they put their child in a good place where their child can be successful.”

We really get teachers involved, our leadership team. We really sit down and we really talk about it and get the team feeling at grade level as well as whole school” (SGS3-P)

I’m really big into shared decision making. And that was something that was new for the staff too. In fact we kind of laughed. Our first leadership meeting, we were doing kind of round table, and having folks interact and share, and they all just kind of (said), ‘we never spoke before at a leadership meeting.’ (SGS4-P)

There is a real emphasis on collaboration and pinpointing so our teams plan together at least twice a week, and in that planning we recognize that every teacher won’t be doing the same thing in the same way, but they’re talking about instruction, they’re talking about lesson plans, and they’re talking about student achievement, and they’re looking for ways to help each other be successful, and to share resources, but everybody is not having to do the same work alone, because we share the instructional planning and we share looking for resources, and we share looking at assessments, then you can build on every thing. (SGS1-P)

“I provide for them, and I’ve started doing it this year going to other school a day of planning outside of the regular work day, one a quarter. And I do that for them to really lay out everything they’re going to do that quarter.” (SGS3-P)

“So they know that they can take a half-day as a team to sit down and do some planning, and we’ve figured out about how much that would cost us substitute-wise and have the PTA fund it this year” (SGS2-P)
“And with planning we do once a week, every morning for an hour we plan in the morning as a team, and we get together and have a meeting … we’re all on the same page … we plan writing and reading.” (SGS3-NT)

“We collaborate on ideas and strategies that teachers can use in the classroom to make sure that those kids are learning and they are getting what they need on their level” (SGS8-NT)

The faculty members of the SGS schools believe that the parents of the children they serve are also competent in nature. All of these schools cited and respected the appreciation and support they receive from the parents at home. Many of the schools’ teachers and administrators stated that many of the parents are highly educated and value the instructional process. These teachers are not afraid to assign homework or to communicate with parents where certain weaknesses are because they feel confident that the parents can address these issues within the home. The parents’ competence transcends supporting school from the home. All of these schools utilize the strengths of their parents to fill the voids within their school and help strengthen their programs. All parties benefit from this mutual respect and confidence between teachers and parents.

*Large Gap Schools*

There is not much difference between the SGS and LGS schools in providing evidence of themes identified in this subsection. The principals in all schools (LGS and SGS) set the tone in respecting the competence of the faculty; this perception and attitude towards teachers and their profession is often contagious throughout the learning community. This is the only sub-theme in which 100% of all schools involved in the study provided strong evidence. All schools feel teaching at its best is when it is a collaborative process, which allows all teachers to grow and learn from one another. True teaching is in no means similar to “a collection of independent contractors in the
building” (LGS4). Teachers can no longer share only a parking lot and meet the needs of their students. The LGS teachers also collaborate regularly to share best practices with one another and to assist with the decision-making process.

We have a leadership team, and we have tam members rotating on and off of that each year, but we try to run most decisions through the leadership team. If we’re talking about things that are more relevant to a specific grade level, then we try to involve all the teachers at that grade level. (LGS5-P)

That’s our main decision making body. We take feedback from our team and meet as a leadership team, each of the grade chairs, and along with those grade chairs we have our IRT in ther, our assistant principal and principal… how is going to best suit students because that’s always our focus. It’s the students. It’s not about “Well, this schedule would work better for me. I really want this schedule. No, it’s what’s going to work best for the students. (LGS4-ET)

First grade has gone through the writing curriculum and they have established an incredibly sufficient benchmark for the end of each quarter where they want them to be and what it looks like. It’s much more detailed than the rubric that you might see in the county … so that’s one of the things that they have been doing as part of their professional learning communities. (LGS1-AP)

We pulled in all the 4th and 5th grade teachers, got coverage for them, and used that whole afternoon to you know number the papers and put them in folders an actually sit and pour and use the rubric and understand what was accepted, and then we even graphed and targeted it and put it on the chalkboard. (LGS5-P)

I’m team lead, so my goal for my team and myself professionally is to create a collaborative community, make sure that we’re working together to reach the same end point. (LGS4-ET)

In order for a student to achieve personal success, teachers and all parties must effectively do their jobs. Teachers must be able to identify the individual needs of a student and deliver the curriculum in a manner that allows the child to understand and connect it to previously learned skills and concepts. Parents must also do their jobs at home to support their child and their efforts to meet the high expectations communicated by the school. The LGS and SGS schools are very similar in providing a component strong staff that is willing to collaborate regularly to meet the diverse needs of their
students. A difference does exist between the two groups. The LGS schools credit their younger and more “qualified” staff and their teaching talents as the primary reason for success, and the SGS faculties attribute their competence as educators as only one ingredient in the recipe for creating excellence and equity.

Honesty

It would be strange, to say the least, if one failed to mention honesty as a significant component of trust. Honesty is best described as the degree to which a party demonstrates integrity, represents situations fairly, and speaks truthfully to others. Honesty is a crucial component to faculty trust for obvious reasons, but honesty is also instrumental in the leadership process. One can only be considered a successful leader if he or she has followers. To complicate matters, society has grown skeptical and has learned to distrust leaders initially and their agendas because of countless politicians abusing their powers and public trust. Honesty is no longer a word that is used to often describe people in leadership positions; many of these individuals of power are now commonly viewed and referred to as “masters of spin,” because they have learned to blur the truth (and put their own spin upon it) to allow for a more favorable way of presenting it to the public and their constituents. The leaders in this study utilize and share data openly and frequently to help appear honest and help generate the much needed support throughout the learning community.

Using and Sharing Data

Small Gap Schools

100% of the administrators at the SGS schools provide evidence that they utilize and share data. Half of these leaders and their team members acknowledged that data and
sharing it open and honestly was a cornerstone of their leadership style and credit this practice for their school’s success. Data is utilized to explore achievement trends and reveal what areas need to be improved. This is the tool that one principal uses to “facilitate her team of experts” (LGS-1). This data is used not to solve the problems of the school; but rather, data is utilized to identify the problems and to assess current practices. Data initiates the conversation in a non-judgmental manner and allows for the team to discuss possible remedies or solutions.

Data is what separates organizational necessity from a leader’s personal agenda. It is widely understood among practitioners and researchers in educational leadership the need to utilize data to initiate, implement, and institutionalize many reform efforts. As school systems and their leaders become more technologically advanced, the access to data becomes more readily accessible. This has the potential to overwhelm many leaders because it is difficult to determine what pieces of data should be shared and deemed an organizational priority and what pieces of information should be discarded. It is for this reason that many SGS schools utilize leadership teams to help analyze and disaggregate data to assist in providing the school’s direction. One school is actually forming a “data team” to help hone others’ skills and confidence in accessing and analyzing data (SGS7). This team existence displays the upmost honesty from an administrator. No longer will this school’s teachers and parents rely on one person or outsiders to provide information detailing their progress. By teaching these skills and creating this team, this school has brought the school improvement process to its purest form.

All of the SGS schools use data to measure student achievement and to illuminate the achievement gaps throughout their school. The SGS leaders were aware that these
gaps existed in their school and they do not hide this information from their constituents or put the proverbial spin on the data. These principals use data to fuel reform efforts and to challenge the status quo. They use this data and combine it with teacher input to select staff development that is tailored to address individual needs. This process also provides the much needed information to locate those teachers that are achieving great success that could and should be used to assist other teachers to allow them to experience more success within the classroom.

As far as the data, that’s me driving the school. We look of course at data that’s provided by the state and the end of grade test scores… but we also look at on-going data from assessments that we give and from performance measures that we take throughout the year to assess what kind of job we’re doing… and to look at how successful the children are being toward benchmarks that we’ve set up for them. It also helps us determine how we need to allocate our resources… human and material… we do look at gaps but you have to look beyond gaps to the individuals… You have to look beyond the group to see what individuals accomplish. (SGS 1 – P)

We sit down in January and go through all of our data. Who do we have that’s struggling, who do you think is not going to make it, who are we really worried about at this point, and what resources are they getting. We went to each grade-level to determine which 12 or 15 children were performing at level 2 and could be bumped up to level 3. The principal just dies if she knows they don’t qualify for Title I support. When we have enough money, we hire intervention teachers to work with these students. (SGS 1 – AP)

We have to have data to back up our decisions… to prove to her why it would be better. Our grade-level was doing flex-grouping, which is basically ability grouping… and while for some students it’s probably really good, for others it gives a false impression of themselves. We really wanted to change but we had to sit down with her with our pros and cons. We actually wanted to change the practice two years ago but at that point the data didn’t show… and now this year was the first time that she’s like, “Ok, now you have enough data.” That’s what I mean when I say she wants us to follow through… not for a week but for a year or two! (SGS 5 – ET)

We use data to look at student growth primarily. We use the data to determine what we need to focus on as far as the learning goes, which of course will determine the resources that you need as well. We look at it individually with teachers in their grade-levels… your class is doing this on this, her class is doing
this… What’s going on? We need to support each other so that both classes are doing that. We try to focus on those needs for our Cougar time when we offer enrichment and remediation. We also offer an accelerated learning program after school and we use the data to select students for that. (SGS 7 – AP)

We look at previous experiences with particular events or staff development sessions to determine what we need to do… we do a review process after each event or activity… we sit and do a plus-delta. We really use that information to future planning. (SGS 8 – AP)

We have a lab where we have Success Maker and that gives us constant reports about our 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders, where they are in reading and math. This software program is totally individualized and gives us a grade equivalent. (SGS 6 – P)

The SGS schools also provide parents with frequent conferences to share data about their individual child’s progress. All of the SGS schools have the expectation for their teachers to partner with parents and keep these vested stakeholders informed regularly. In addition to calling parents when issues arise, many schools have formal conferences prior to report cards being distributed every marking period. This provides the teacher the opportunity to explain a student’s strengths and weaknesses within the classroom setting. This honest and direct approach to communicating with parents also helps communicate expectations for student achievement.

Whether it is on the micro level (the individual child) or the macro level (the whole school), the commitment to sharing data openly and honestly allows for critical conversations to take place. By resisting the urge to only report the good and ignore the bad, the SGS schools are consistently moving closer to the ideal model for excellence and equity. One parent feels the principal’s practice of sharing data helps cultivate an understanding of the larger picture of the school’s mission. This parent elaborated that the principal, in addition to sharing testing and achievement data, regularly shares
research findings with parents (SGS2-P). Knowledge is in fact power, and by sharing this power, schools may truly become excellent and equitable.

*Large Gap Schools*

The majority of the LGS school leaders shared a similar sentiment for the importance of using and sharing data. When asked if data was used in the decision-making process, one principal responded by saying, “I would be shocked if you thought I didn’t” (LGS7). This administrator’s response can be used to present the argument that the majority of all principals operating under the demand and pressures associated with NCLB must use data because it is instrumental in evaluating success. LGS1 utilizes data not only in their decision making and evaluation process, but they use data to help teachers and students grow. This administrator uses the data distributed from the district and state and the school has created their own instruments to generate important data. By analyzing individual classroom trends in cognitive areas on benchmark exams and sharing the results openly with teachers, many have sought out those teachers who are performing exceptionally well and are collaborating with them to improve their own instructional practices. The principal credits this practice, of collecting and disseminating data, for creating a professional learning community throughout the building, one that exudes trust and the combined goal of success in every classroom.

LGS3 shares a similar practice and this principal shares his colleague’s view on how this honest approach of not withholding data builds trust. Having access to their fellow teacher’s achievement data allows people to see the need to collaborate and grow. This practice of sharing data is how this school begins every year. It provides focus on where improvement is needed and sets the tone for the year. By sharing data in this
manner, teachers understand how they as educators are going to be measured. This provides direction and the incentive to improve current classroom practices. One principal (LGS1) feels that this process is important because it provides the opportunity to explain local and state standards, but more importantly, it promotes honesty with parents and helps everyone get on the same page and use a common language.

Many of the principals see sharing data as not “keeping secrets.” The majority of these leaders do not want to keep secrets on their progress and their plans for continued improvement. These leaders use this data to formulate a plan for improvement and to assess how successful their programs and strategies were for the year prior. One principal does not speak highly of the school improvement process mandated by the state. In her opinion, this is merely one very large form that she fills out and hands in (LGS3-P). She feels that it is not plausible to create a yearly plan because the needs of her school are constantly changing. Many of her colleagues in the LGS schools did not share this principal’s view of data and the process in which it is collected.

We look at data all the time. We look at … who does the best job… you know… who has the highest percentage. Eventually they say… I need to know this because I can improve and I see where I’m weak… let me go down there and work with a colleague to see if I can learn some techniques or teaching methods that will help my kids be more successful. (LGS 1 – P)

We have common assessments that we came up with on our own. We look over the results and if we notice everyone struggled with question 10, which might have been about inferences, we work together to reword it and to look for more trends. (LGS 3 – BT)

There has been a big push in looking at data, discussing it with your team, using the data to decide what we are going to do with the kids who aren’t getting it and with the ones who are… looking at how we can push them further. (LGS 4 – NT)

Examining achievement data illuminates the instructional weaknesses throughout a school and identifies the areas that must be improved for school striving to create
excellence and equity. This process also identifies those areas that can and should be celebrated. Honesty is sharing both the bad and the good. In the era of increased accountability in our schools the media and states often make much of the data readily available for interested people. School leaders must not rely exclusively on the government and media to share student achievement trends and patterns. The majority of principals in this study (LGS and SGS) possess the tools to break down data and share their concerns with all the stakeholders. Many leaders (both LGS and SGS) go beyond and invite others (teachers and parents) to assist in analyzing the data and identifying themes. This practice embodies honesty and pours the foundation necessary to construct strong partners in the pursuit for excellence and equity.

**Openness**

The fifth and final component to faculty trust is openness. This is defined as how freely another party welcomes communication and shares information with the people it affects. Many themes and differences emerged from the data between the SGS schools and the LGS schools. These themes that detail the school’s attitude and practices towards openness include making the campus feel welcoming to all, “too much” parent involvement, frequent communication, and conversation about the “gaps” throughout the school.

**Welcoming**

*Small Gap Schools*

Multiple schools stated that this was a conscious effort and part of their overarching mission to make parents feel welcome in the school. All SGS principals recognize climate as being critical to the success of the school. They like many
principals have moved away from the traditional authoritative style of leadership and adopted a softer and collaborative style. “It can’t be my school and my way, because it’s our school, our success, our decisions and I think it’s very important to have a family atmosphere where everyone’s welcomed, everyone’s valued where everyone feels important and everyone feels a part” (SGS1-P).

I do not believe that learning can take place in an atmosphere of fear … is just that there is real pleasant feeling here (SGS3-P).

When one principal was asked to elaborate on the need for parents in classrooms, she simply stated, “If you don’t want volunteers then you’re hiding something” (SGS1-P). A welcoming environment gets parents in the classrooms to help overburdened teachers fill in many of the needs that go unfunded, help provide more children with individualized attention/instruction, and assists in building trust because it showcases that there are no secrets within the classroom.

Large Gap Schools

The LGS schools differ greatly from their SGS counterparts throughout all of the sub-themes under this component of faculty trust. The majority of these schools fail to provide the same evidence or speak with the same passion on the topic of parent involvement and the need to make the school feel welcoming. Many of these schools identify their mission solely on academics and everything else is secondary. One school principal created a rule banning all parties. “We don’t do birthday parties, we don’t do holiday celebrations…We are about learning, these people that work here are professionals-reading, writing, math, science… Let these professionals do what they’re trained to do” (LGS3-P). This authoritative stance has the potential to make a school feel
unwelcoming to many parents. One of the only principal’s that stated the need for a welcoming environment still tied it back to academics.

We try to look at students and progress they have made and I think what makes it an excellent school is not just test scores but how the children feel about the day they spend here. (LGS 5 – P)

“To Much” Parent Involvement

Small Gap Schools

This welcoming feeling was universal at the SGS schools and many principals explained that this parent involvement was needed because it provides a “checks and balance” effect for many teachers and “keeps them on their toes” (SGS3-AP). The majority of SGS schools (6 out of the 8) provided evidence that the level of parent involvement is at times considered “too much.” The participants of these schools report the school’s culture is so welcoming and parent friendly that the partnership often reaches an uncomfortable level. The researcher concludes that it is this strong (and at times uncomfortable) parent presence that largely fuels excellence and equity within these schools. Teachers report feeling this pressure to perform from parents and this pressure acts as a strong motivator to challenge one’s students and oneself within the classroom. Perhaps this explains why the SGS2 principal identifies his mission to encourage as much as possible parent involvement in the school because he strongly believes that the more parent involvement the more successful our school will be. The majority of the SGS leaders’ attitudes toward parent involvement are very similar to that of SGS2. Many joke that the parents at their schools should be on the payroll because of their constant presence and hard work. These parents’ involvement and motivation appears to be child focused and compliments the school’s overarching mission of excellence. All
interviewees in SGS schools stated that the parents’ intentions and actions were positive in nature and not malicious or counterproductive.

**Large Gap Schools**

The majority of LGS schools do not provide evidence that their level of parent involvement is at times uncomfortable for the teachers. Only one school (LGS8) reported “too much” parent involvement; and ironically, this principal has sarcastically asked vocal and critical parents to send her their resume. This action directly contradicts the philosophy and practices at all of the SGS schools, which cater to the parent and strive to salvage every relationship because it is in the best interest for the child. The LGS schools either wanted more involvement or were content with the level of support they were receiving. These school leaders also seem to focus more on the amount of financial support than emotional/human support donated from parents. The majority of the LGS teachers feel very comfortable with the parents and did not report the same level of stress from these stakeholders, and as a result the LGS teachers and school leaders may not feel the external pressure to challenge the status quo.

**Open and Frequent Communication**

**Small Gap Schools**

This parent pressure and general philosophy to view the parent as the client, may explain why all of these schools frequently and openly communicate with parents. Parents have regular conferences with teachers and are called often. 100% of the SGS schools report that there is a general expectation to keep parents constantly informed, and the parents at these schools confirmed that this is the general rule of the school. One
principal sends personalized postcards to parents containing messages of support and praise (SGS2).

The assistant principal and I look at every report card in the school… we always make comments to every student in the school. “Love the way you’re doing.” Or “Let’s get going in math. If there’s anything I can do, come see me.” I think that providing that kind of support for a kid academically is encouraging. I have this Purple Panda Postcards that I send out too. I tell the teachers that when someone is doing a great job I want them to jot something down and we’ll pay for the postage. (SGS 2 – P)

These schools do not only communicate with the affluent parents, but they are expected to communicate with all parents (regardless of any language barriers). All of these schools translate items for their large Hispanic population of parents. These leaders understand that many of the parents from the lower socio-economic levels are unable to secure transportation to come to school meetings. It is for this reason that many of these teachers and principals travel to community centers to offer conferences and parent workshops and bring translators with them. A few of the other schools have a partnership with a taxi company that assists with bringing parents to the school for meetings and conferences. These schools report that these proactive approaches to communicating with parents have been well received and greatly appreciated.

The SGS schools do not only partner and communicate with parents; they also work with churches and afterschool programs. Teachers and school leaders provide these caring individuals with the information needed to assist students with their schoolwork and studies.

Every child has a data notebook. We conduct at least one student-led conference per year, usually in the spring from kindergarten up through fifth grade. Children keep charts and graphs on… behavior, attendance, reading performance… and they keep it in this notebook. In the spring, the child sits down with the parent and the child conducts the conference. (SGS 8 – AP)
These teaching practices and general operational philosophy brings to life the widely known African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child.” The majority of these educators humbly praise the parents and the community for their successes within the classroom and for being considered a school of excellence.

*Large Gap Schools*

Many of the LGS schools do openly and frequently communicate with parents. They also distribute newsletters and translate many of the same materials to accommodate their large population of Latino students. The majority of the LGS teachers and administrators also spoke about the importance of communicating with parents about the good. This builds the needed trust and foundation for support to assist with future contacts that may be more difficult and less pleasant. However, these schools also did not seem as relentless in communicating with all parents. There were fewer incidences of traveling into the children’s community or providing transportation to generate more parent partnerships. One school principal (LGS2) explained that they host a series of student led conferences throughout the year and if their parent is unable to attend (because of transportation or work schedule); they supply a “surrogate parent” for the child to interact and share his or her progress. There was only mention of bringing the conferences to the parent or demonstrating flexibility to increase communication or build relationships with school and home, as was often seen in many of the SGS schools. However, the function for home visit differs from that of many of the SGS conferences because it used to discuss behavior issues.

The principal expects every child to be involved and on task. She will do home visits if a child is struggling behaviorally. (LGS 2 – P)
Discussion of Race and the “Gaps”

Small Gap Schools

The researcher was surprised that the most equitable schools in this study discuss issues of race and class less than the schools with larger gaps. The majority of the leaders and teachers of these schools stated that rarely do they discuss the “achievement gaps” because they are constantly focusing on the individual child. The majority of these schools tailor remediation plans to fit the individual child that is not experiencing success. They already attack the curriculum from a multitude of different angles to help students comprehend and master the necessary skills. One principal (SGS7-P) does not talk about race with teachers; rather he leads many private conversations with teachers about the individual child’s home life and identifies the potential barriers to his or her success that they must overcome.

We can’t let it be an excuse, we can’t let it be blame, and it has nothing to do with race or anything literally. You can be from any nationality or any race and come from an abusive family…or from extreme poverty where you are fighting day to day just to eat. How can you expect a kid wanting to come to school bright eyed and chipper wanting to learn, when they have seen their mother get beat the night before. So we talk about things from a home life perspective, but it never goes into race or anything like that. (SGS7-P)

Large Gap Schools

Race and the widening gaps are frequent topics of conversation at the LGS schools and are often used as the basis in the majority of their staff development. Many principals articulated that they are attempting to cultivate the shared understanding of diversity both culturally and economically. In order to break the cycle of poverty and oppression, one must first understand this phenomenon in its entirety (without placing blame on the victim). However, one principal explained that he will talk about these
issues when a parent attempts to play the “race card” (LGS1). This sentiment was shared by another teacher in this building that race only becomes a focal point when a parent with a concern brings it to the forefront. The majority of the LGS leaders do initiate and facilitate discussions concerning the gaps and achievement trends found in their data. Perhaps the SGS schools’ faculties have evolved past this initial stage of understanding diversity issues and recognizing the inequities that exist in today’s schools. Conceivably educators must look at achievement problems on the micro level and try to solve problems one child at a time in their quest to teach for true excellence and equity.

Many of the principals in this study agree that climate and culture is crucial to a school’s success. The vast majority of the principals (LGS and SGS) also see and attest to the importance of communicating with parents. However, the teaching and leadership practices in the SGS schools reveal that communication is believed to be reciprocal in nature. The SGS schools are welcoming to parents and their ideas. The majority of LGS schools communicate current happenings and issues with parents, but are less likely to create the culture that welcomes parents and their voices. This may be why only one of the LGS schools report having “too much” parent involvement. The pressure associated with opening a school to parents may be a small price to pay. This pressure stemming from parent involvement that the majority of SGS schools report may be the fuel that is powering excellence and equity in these schools.

Summary

Schools and the means in which they are assessed and measured have developed into extremely complex systems. It is very tempting to focus exclusively on numbers and the titles that go along with them. This study’s findings conclude that the most excellent
and equitable schools focus on relationships and building trust throughout all levels of the learning community. Possessing faculty trust and its five components (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness) allows and encourages strong working partnerships to be created and sustained between home and school and amongst colleagues. Often schools look at parents as the problem for a child’s academic troubles; school leaders must shift this paradigm and begin seeing parents as the solution.
CHAPTER VI

Introduction

Educators, parents, researchers, and even students are cognizant of the “gaps” in academic achievement and proficiency in our schools. There is increasing pressure to address these gaps, and create a level playing field that allows all children to thrive. By 2014, Congress has demanded, with No Child Left Behind, that these discrepancies disappear from all classrooms in the country and that all subgroups (economic and racial) are 100% proficient (United States Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2006). This call for reform has successfully generated an awareness of the inequities that exist and much debate and finger pointing; unfortunately, few school leaders have provided solutions or a blueprint for others to follow in order to create excellence and equity in today’s schools.

There are schools that are excellent for all learners and more and more educators are disproving the largely shared notion that a school system cannot influence student achievement as much as family background does. These excuses for social and academic injustice and the sense of helplessness that often coexists in these school cultures are often highly contagious and have the potential to spread quite quickly throughout all levels of a learning community. This mindset and the shared belief that schools are unable to break this achievement cycle in children that belong to economically disadvantaged or non-majority families strengthens and perpetuates the marginalization of these children and future generations. It is for this reason that leaders and researchers must provide evidence of the existence of schools that are successfully teaching all
children, and more importantly, share the tools that are required to engineer, construct, and sustain equitable and excellent schools.

The body of empirical evidence, which can be used to combat the arguments of naysayers for the necessity of school reform and the staunch defenders of the status quo, is growing. This study successfully adds to the research that concludes schools can be excellent and equitable (Comer, 1984; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Reyes et al., 1999; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Providing research that further supports the original hypothesis that schools can overcome family background in their pursuit to provide every child with the tools necessary to be considered successful may silence critics, inspire educators to initiate reform, and provide hope to parents and their children struggling to succeed in today’s rigid school settings. As stated in Chapter 1, knowing that these schools of excellence and equity exist is not enough, it is vital to provide research that details how these schools evolved.

This study provides additional ammunition to support the efforts of educational leaders that are striving for social justice and systemic equity everyday and, despite countervailing pressures, are choosing to resist, survive, and remain determined to transform schools (Riester, et al, 2002; Scheurich, 1998). Exploring and analyzing the efforts of schools that have experienced considerably more success than others in reducing the achievement gaps between majority and non-majority students has allowed the researcher to successfully detail the common themes amongst these schools that explain how they promote and support both excellence and systemic equity in their schools. This study also reveals how the SGS schools differ from other schools that are also considered by North Carolina to be excellent, but are plagued with large gaps in its
achievement data. The researcher revisits the original research questions that guided this empirical study, and then provides for the reader an explanation on what the findings gathered from this study truly mean and how they impact and add to the existing body of research in the field of educational leadership. These sections are followed by two other sections, the first section is designed to cite the implications that these results have for current practitioners, and the second section provides the researcher’s recommendation for further study based on these results.

Answering the Research Questions

This study was designed primarily to answer how principals of K-5 public “Honor Schools of Excellence” are pursuing, supporting and advancing social justice, excellence, and systemic equity in a suburban southeastern county. The researchers divided this complex question into five sub questions to guide and focus in this study. The first sub-question asked, what are principals of K-5 “Honor Schools of Excellence” doing to ensure the success of all of their students? These principals are not making decisions or leading in isolation. They are utilizing a shared decision making approach to leadership and are encouraging/supporting strong trusting relationships between home and school. These principals have successfully created a shared vision of excellence throughout all levels of the learning community that targets the individual child. These schools exude collaboration, respect, and trust.

The researcher was unable to gather the empirical evidence necessary to answer the next sub-question that asked about the important first steps these principals took as they moved toward high achievement for all. The vast majority of these schools have been considered high-achieving schools for several years and because of this most of the
participants did not provide insight into this topic. It would be of great interest to investigate the initial steps the school leaders took to create these trusting collaborative cultures that share the common goal to teach the individual child.

The third sub-question asked, “What similarities do school leaders, who are successful in creating equity and excellence, have in common?” The faculties in these schools are comprised of competent teachers that collaborate regularly. The schools’ reform efforts are tailored to meet the needs of the individual child. These faculties share high expectations for all students and exhibit a selfless and relentless commitment to each child’s pursuit of these goals. The schools that are excellent and equitable also report high levels of parent involvement and pressure. These similarities and findings are further discussed in the subsequent sections in detail.

The next section of this chapter is dedicated to connecting the findings and building upon the literature related to leadership for social justice and systemic equity, which was the fourth sub-question.

The last sub-question for this study asked: “What can be learned from Honor Schools of Excellence that could benefit other schools with similar demographics?” Schools with similar demographics can learn much from this study and its findings. Perhaps most importantly, these schools have been provided with evidence that reveals the large achievement gaps do not have to exist in today’s schools. The section entitled *Implications for Practice* provides the reader with a detailed account of how these findings can assist practitioners that are attempting to lead excellence and equity in their schools.
**Adding to the Literature**

Utilizing Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy’s (2006) concept of faculty trust and its five components allowed the researcher to not only organize and structure the volume of data generated, but it also allowed for the conclusion of the importance of trust in creating the culture necessary for excellence and equity. All of the SGS schools provided some level of evidence for each of the five components of faculty trust (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness). The LGS schools were more inconsistent in providing such evidence. Hoy and others (2006) et al., do not mention in their studies whether faculty trust can exist without each of the five components present within the school culture. The researcher supports the notion that these components are all important to create faculty trust, but is unable to conclude if it is all or nothing because several schools in this study failed to provide evidence for a specific component. This phenomenon does not necessarily mean that this component does not exist within the school culture in some sort of form or fashion. It may be present in the school but absent in the data. Or, it may be present in the school to varying degrees. These components may be powerful when utilized throughout the planning stages, as points of reference to assist leaders when trying to improve upon or create faculty trust throughout their learning community. Considering and implementing strategies to improve each component of faculty trust has the potential to create a synergistic effect; and thus, this deliberate action may yield greater results in improving the culture of a school. In the following subsections the researcher will continue the dialog to explore if Hoy’s et al., (2006) components must all be present to create faculty trust and with this, to create excellence and equity.
Both the SGS schools and the LGS schools are high achieving schools; the difference between the two sets of schools is that the SGS schools are excellent for all students regardless of family background, ethnicity, or economic status. The SGS schools and the LGS schools, which were all recognized by the state for being “Schools of Excellence,” possess strong competent faculties that collaborate regularly with one another. This finding supports the power of collaboration between teachers because it appears to be truly vital to a school’s overall success (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 2000; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Louis & Kruse 1995; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). The faculty trust component of competence can thus be determined to be a major component for success; however, this component alone does not necessarily create the necessary conditions for equity or high achievement for all students. Competence alone does not directly translate into trust.

This study further supports the findings presented by Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2006) that strong teachers yield powerful results in the classroom and create higher academic achievement. This study’s results also support the argument that experience is a more powerful measure for teachers’ strength than the state’s certification requirements to be deemed highly qualified. The SGS schools had a larger percentage of veteran teachers throughout their faculties than their LGS counterpart, which were considered by state standards to be higher qualified. The researcher speculates that the years in the classroom allow teachers the opportunity to draw from a plethora of resources and to develop their personal teaching style. More importantly, these years of service allow teachers to build trust among their colleagues, their principals, their students, and the
parents. It is these relationships and their strong reputations that have allowed these teachers to outperform their younger and more educated (by state standards) peers.

Reform Tailored to the Child

The majority of schools in America are launching reform efforts in an effort to meet the requirements associated with NCLB and high stakes testing. The SGS schools and LGS schools are no different in this regard; however, there is a strong difference between the two school groups’ focus, vision, and implementation in regards to reform. The SGS schools generated better results for all of their students by focusing on the child as an individual and attempting to understand and assist with the individual barriers influencing learning. This individual focus/ selfless commitment to the child appears to be the greatest difference between the SGS schools’ and LGS schools’ operating style. The LGS schools do discuss culture, race, and poverty. These crucial items are major factors in their reform efforts and staff development training. It is uncertain if the SGS schools started at this level of awareness and evolved towards their individual approach to reform.

The SGS student centered approach embraces and exudes the relentless loving style of teaching and leadership described by Scheurich and Skrla (2003). These schools also exhaust all instructional strategies and are willing to partner with whomever in order to locate methods “for all students to achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any student’s race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents, or home language” (p.3). It is within these acts of benevolence and the openness to welcome new strategies and partnerships that provides further evidence of the need for faculty trust in the pursuit for excellence and equity. The researcher questions if benevolence or love
alone could yield such results. Many consider teaching to be a moral craft; thus, one would assume that there are numerous teachers that share this common love for all children and yet the gaps in today’s schools are still present and widening in many schools.

**Excellence Fueled by Parent Pressure**

The vast majority of schools that participated in this study (both SGS and LGS) provided evidence that they were welcoming to parents and valued their input, contributions, and partnerships. However, the majority of SGS schools reported the feeling of too much parent involvement at times and only one of the LGS schools shared this sentiment. The researcher concludes that creating a school culture that is so open to parent involvement and communication largely promotes excellence and equity. This action facilitates the individual faculty member and instructional leader responsive to the parents and their interest, which is the very definition of faculty trust. This pressure forces many teachers and principals out of their comfort zones and challenges them to strive for excellence for every child.

Creating and sustaining an open and welcoming culture appears to be the most powerful indicator for achieving excellence and equity in today’s schools. However, Hoy and Tarter warned in their 1997 *The Road to Open and Healthy Schools* that too much parent involvement and pressure could be counterproductive. It is for this reason that schools striving for excellence and equity must possess “institutional integrity” if they wish to continue to maintain the integrity of its educational program and mission (Hoy, 1997). If the SGS schools were completely open to parents and community members, they would become vulnerable to narrow and short sighted interests of community groups.
or individuals; indeed, these schools and teachers must be protected from unreasonable community and parental demands to some extent.

The principals at these schools must be able to strike a balance between openness and academic integrity. If this steadiness were not present, schools would be unable to cope successfully with destructive outside forces. This study’s findings add to the volumes of research studies that conclude the principal and his or her leadership are imperative to a school’s success. However, the principal alone cannot create excellence and equity. He or she must break down barriers throughout the learning community to create the culture and the conditions necessary to ignite the flames of faculty trust and each of its components. A school’s success cannot be attributed to one person; rather, excellence and equity in schools is the result of all parties (administrators, teachers, parents, and students) trusting one another, collaborating with one another, and working with one another to assist the individual child to achieve success.

Implications for Practice

The findings in this study provide school leaders with direction and information to generate excellence and equity throughout their schools. Many school systems are searching for the proverbial “silver bullet” that will generate quick results. The truth of the matter is that gimmicks and quick fixes may provide some increases in achievement, but to create excellence and success among all students regardless of race, socio-economic status, or family incomes faculties and their leaders must take a critical look within their system. True excellence cannot be achieved in quiet solidarity nor can it be purchased from a manufacturer in a clean package. Excellence and its rewards are earned collaboratively through relationships built upon a strong foundation of trust. This
conclusion is similar to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy’s findings from their 1999 empirical study in urban elementary schools. They discovered that, in schools where the level of trust was found to be high, there was a robust and honest exchange of ideas and teachers went well beyond the minimum requirements of their contractual agreements. School leaders striving for excellence must risk making themselves and their faculties vulnerable to parents and the students that they serve. They must make their schools open and inviting and create opportunities for families and teachers to interact, communicate, and collaborate. Leaders must demand that every parent, regardless of language barriers or transportation issues, knows his or her child’s teacher and understands how they can lend support at home. Teachers must relinquish some control and reveal personal and pedagogical weaknesses or areas that are in need of support. Parents can no longer be viewed or treated as the problems; the teachers must learn to see them as part of the solution.

Principals must change schedules, procedures, and hiring practices to allow for more collaboration in order to produce excellence. Teachers must have the time to share and learn from one another. The principal must create common planning times and the expectation for this regular collaboration to occur. Instructional leaders must not be tempted to hire those individuals that confidently and foolishly appear to have all the answers in their possession. Principals must recruit and retain teachers that know where to look for the right answers and are committed to relentlessly helping every child achieve success. These schools must open their classrooms, resources, and expertise to one another and to the families of the children they are serving.
The principal must learn to break the achievement data down to the individual child level and share these findings with teachers. Teachers must be trained to look at this information on an individual basis and recognize the potential barriers in learning for each child not experiencing success. Principals must then provide the financial resources and human support needed to learn new techniques to reach these unique learners. These leaders must avoid creating lofty mission statements that use educational jargon. All of today’s schools should operate under a similar mission that excellence can only be achieved if every student is succeeding. This level of consciousness for creating the conditions for trust is referred to as “school mindfulness” (Hoy, 2006). Leading in a mindful manner allows teachers to feel supported and secure enough to take reasonable risks, experiment, and become resilient.

Recommendations for Further Study

As in all research studies, additional questions or issues were unearthed or unable to be answered throughout the investigative process. This study examined Honor Schools of Excellence in one geographic location. By focusing primarily on schools that have obtained the top recognition from the State of North Carolina in this area that spans 20 miles, many great leaders for equity and excellence were not subjects. The researcher is aware that there are schools and leaders that are making significant leaps towards creating excellence for all students. Much could be learned from studying these leaders for social justice and equity.

The majority of the schools that were ultimately selected have received similar recognition for years and have created a culture and the expectation for success. It would be of great interest to study the schools that were at one time unsuccessful and plagued
with inequities and successfully launched reform movements that generated excellence and equity. A study of this nature would provide valuable insight to the change process and could provide hope and inspiration to low performing schools. If nothing else, a study of this nature would provide additional evidence that equity and excellence can exist in today’s schools.

In 1999, Teshannen-Moran concluded that the overall level of trust in a school was heavily influenced by socio-economic status. This served to be a more significant factor than racial diversity or student mobility. The SGS schools in this would be considered by many to be affluent in nature and comprised by a high percentage of students from a higher socio-economic status. Finding schools that possess a high level of faculty trust, despite having a large population of economically disadvantaged students, would yield powerful data to assist with the reform efforts in education throughout our nation. These are the schools and the students that we as a society are failing; and for this reason, these are the areas that researchers must focus their attention.

This study did not break down or analyze the data according to position within the school. The researcher predicts that philosophical differences and similarities may emerge according to job title and or years of experience. Studying these differences and similarities may lead to gaining a better understanding of the culture of inequity and school reform within the public school system. This study also focused solely on elementary schools. It would be of great importance to replicate this study at the middle and high school level. This would provide school leaders empirical evidence and proven strategies that promote excellence and equity throughout all levels of our educational system. Understanding the differences and similarities at these three distinct levels in
achieving success for all students would help district leaders create and implement a synergistic plan for excellence and equity.

Conclusion

Excellence and equity can exist in today’s schools. Success for all students regardless of family background, socio-economic status, and race is not an “urban legend” like Big Foot or the Loch Ness Monster. It is imperative that researchers continue to collect, analyze, and share empirical evidence documenting its presence in our schools. This challenges school leaders, teachers, parents, and students to partner and collectively dare to test the status quo and provide all students with the tools and educations necessary to be competitive and active participants in the twenty-first century.
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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for PRINCIPALS

1) Describe _______ K-5 Elementary School. What makes it a “School of Excellence?” Has it always been a “School of Excellence?” Why/why not? How? How do you define excellence? What are your goals? Values?

2) Describe YOUR philosophy of education and schooling and how it impacts YOUR leadership style. What is your focus? Mission?

3) How do you recruit, retain, and support good teachers and good teaching? What are your expectations for your school’s curriculum? What are your expectations for your school’s instructional program? For professional development? Evaluations?

4) Talk about your students and your expectations for their success (academic achievement and personal development). Any discipline issues?


6) What are some of the major challenges facing your school community and how do you go about addressing them? How are decisions made? How are resources allocated? Do you use data? How?

7) Do you ever discuss issues of race, class, and/or diversity with the teachers, parents, students, and/or community members? Why/why not? How? Do you discuss gaps?

8) Is there anything else we should know about _______ K-5 Elementary School and what makes it a “School of Excellence?”
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS
(@ 60 minutes each)

1) Describe _______ K-5 Elementary School. What makes it a “School of Excellence?”
Has it always been a “School of Excellence?” Why/why not? How? How do you define
excellence? What are your goals? Values?

2) Describe your principal’s philosophy of education and schooling and how it impacts
his/her leadership style. What is your principal’s focus? Mission?

3) How does your principal recruit, retain, and support good teachers and good teaching?
What are his/her expectations for your school’s curriculum? What are his/her
expectations for your school’s instructional program? For professional development?
Evaluations?

4) Talk about your students and your expectations for their success (academic
achievement and personal development). Does your principal share these ideals?
Why/why not? How? Any discipline issues?

involved? Why/why not? How?

6) What are some of the major challenges facing your school community and how does
your principal go about addressing them? How are decisions made? How are resources
allocated? Do you use data? How?

7) Do you and/or your principal ever discuss issues of race, class, and/or diversity with
the teachers, parents, students, and/or community members? Why/why not? How? Do
you discuss gaps?

8) Is there anything else we should know about _______ K-5 Elementary School and
what makes it a “School of Excellence?”
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for TEACHERS

1) Describe ______ K-5 Elementary School. What makes it a “School of Excellence?” Has it always been a “School of Excellence?” Why/why not? How? How do you define excellence? What are your goals? Values?

2) Describe your principal’s philosophy of education and schooling and how it impacts his/her leadership style. What is your principal’s focus? Mission?

3) How does your principal recruit, retain, and support good teachers and good teaching? What are his/her expectations for your school’s curriculum? What are his/her expectations for your school’s instructional program? For professional development? Evaluations?

4) Talk about your students and your expectations for their success (academic achievement and personal development). Does your principal share these ideals? Why/why not? How? Any discipline issues?


6) What are some of the major challenges facing your school community and how does your principal go about addressing them? How are decisions made? How are resources allocated? Do you use data? How?

7) Do you and/or your principal ever discuss issues of race, class, and/or diversity with the teachers, parents, students, and/or community members? Why/why not? How? ? Do you discuss gaps?

8) Is there anything else we should know about ______ K-5 Elementary School and what makes it a “School of Excellence?”
Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for PARENT LEADERS
(@ 45 minutes each)

1) Describe _______ K-5 Elementary School. What makes it a “School of Excellence?” Has it always been a “School of Excellence?” Why/why not? How? How do you define excellence? What are your goals? Values?

2) Describe your principal’s philosophy of education and schooling and how it impacts his/her leadership style. What is your principal’s focus? Mission?

3) How does your principal recruit, retain, and support good teachers and good teaching? What are his/her expectations for your school’s curriculum? What are his/her expectations for your school’s instructional program? For professional development? Evaluations?

4) Talk about your children and your expectations for their success (academic achievement and personal development). Does your principal share these ideals? Why/why not? How? Any discipline issues?


6) What are some of the major challenges facing your school community and how does your principal go about addressing them? How are decisions made? How are resources allocated? Do you use data? How?

7) Do you and/or your principal ever discuss issues of race, class, and/or diversity with the teachers, parents, students, and/or community members? Why/why not? How? ? Do you discuss gaps?

8) Is there anything else we should know about _______ K-5 Elementary School and what makes it a “School of Excellence?”
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants [Principals]
Social Behavioral Form

IRB Study #
Consent Form Version Date: 11/4/05

Title of Study: *Good Schools, Good Leaders: Portraits of Excellence!*

Principal Investigator: Kathleen M. Brown, Ed.D.
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: School of Education
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919-843-8166
Email Address: BrownK@email.unc.edu
Co-Investigators:
1) Jennifer Benkovitz, Co-PI (Doctoral student in Educational Leadership, School of Education)
2) Nakia Hardy, Co-PI (Doctoral student in Educational Leadership, School of Education)
3) Anthony J. Mutillo, Co-PI (Doctoral student in Educational Leadership, School of Education)
4) Thad Urban, Co-PI (Doctoral student in Educational Leadership, School of Education)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kathleen M. Brown
Funding Source: NA

Study Contact telephone number: 919-843-8166
Study Contact email: BrownK@email.unc.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be uncommon or previously unknown risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.