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Perceptions of Elementary School Principals: Turning High Poverty Elementary Schools In South Carolina Into High-Performing Elementary Schools

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Perceptions of Elementary School Principals: Turning High Poverty Elementary
Schools in South Carolina into High-Performing Elementary Schools

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Dedication

The completion of this degree would not have been possible without my family's unwavering support. During this journey, I became a wife and a principal as well as moved away from my hometown. I could not have tackled these life changes in the midst of finishing this doctorate without my family. My parents believed in me and encouraged me even when I wanted to disengage in this process. Thank you for instilling in me a strong work ethic, an ability to persevere, and high expectations. I always wanted to make you both proud. My sister's humor and wit kept me laughing through the completion of this doctorate. My family members continue to be my biggest fans.

As I completed this journey, I was honored to be a part of two school staffs that continued to push me and inspire me until the end. Thank you to the staffs at both Kelly Mill Middle School and Pontiac Elementary School for your continued support in this endeavor.

When my husband asked my father for my hand in marriage during this process, my father insisted that he continue to encourage me on this journey. To my husband of just five months, thank you for your patience and for loving me through the frustrating struggle to the finish line. I love you.

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Abstract

Current research illustrates that some schools, often referred to as high-performing, high-poverty schools, have led their low-income populations to high levels of achievement (Ambrose, 2008). Hypothesizing that some schools were doing quite well with students from low-income families, the director for the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, Ronald Edmonds and other researchers looked at achievement data from schools in major cities around the country where student populations were from high-poverty areas.

During the 1980s a list was developed that identified common characteristics that were present in effective schools. These traits became known as the Correlates of Effective Schools. These correlates appeared repeatedly in high-performing schools, despite the schools' socioeconomic levels (Lezotte, 1991).

Research regarding high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools specifically located in South Carolina is limited. The purpose of this research was to learn how principals of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina promote high levels of student achievement. The results of this descriptive study identified the primary correlates that principals perceive are present in high-performing, high-poverty schools and generated recommendations that lend support to low-performing, high-poverty schools in South Carolina.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In 2004, Lincoln Elementary School, located in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, scored in the top 20% of all elementary schools on Kentucky's accountability index, a composite indicator of test scores and other performance measures. This is a remarkable achievement for any elementary school but even more so for Lincoln Elementary with of almost 90% of enrolled students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. As one of the best performing schools in the state, (Kannapel & Clements, 2005), Lincoln Elementary is among a growing number of schools across the nation that is demonstrating that disadvantaged students can achieve at the highest levels.

Despite nearly four decades of work at the national, state, and local levels to assist children from low-income households, the academic gap between their performance and that of their peers continues (Anderson, 2001). States have mandated innovative school reforms; but in most schools, minority and low income students continue to perform poorly when compared to their white, often advantaged, peers (Lee, 1998). Closing the achievement gap and achieving success for all students presents a challenge for schools, particularly those located in high-poverty areas (Brock & Groth, 2003).

Current research, however, illustrates that some schools, like Lincoln Elementary, often referred to as high performing, high-poverty schools, provide

opportunities that support low-income students to achieve at high levels (Brock & Groth, 2003). Unique schools throughout the United States have led their low-income student populations to high levels of achievement, matching their more affluent peers (Ambrose, 2008).

Unfortunately, the majority of high-poverty schools are not producing high achievement levels by their students. For example, South Carolina had 645 elementary schools during the 2011-2012 school year and of those schools, 390 were Title I elementary schools. Title I programs are designed to provide additional educational opportunities in schools where student needs are the greatest due to socioeconomic factors (South Carolina Department of Education, 2012). Of those 390 schools, only 179 scored a report card rating of A. Forty-eight Title I elementary schools received an F rating.

In this study, the researcher examined those 134 South Carolina Title I elementary schools that earned an ESEA Rating of A, with a 75% or higher poverty index. The 134 principals of those schools were invited to participate in the study, which analyzed elementary schools whose students had comparable socioeconomic populations. The goal of this study was to provide educators with a better understanding of how the seven Correlates of Effective Schools impact high-poverty schools. Previous research had not examined high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in South Carolina. The intention of this research was to discover how high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina promote high levels of student achievement.

Design

The study's sample schools included Title I elementary schools with an ESEA report card rating of A and a 75% or higher poverty index during the 2011-2012 school year as designated by the South Carolina Department of Education database (South Carolina Department of Education, 2012).

A quantitative study method was used. Quantitative research is commonly used to investigate research questions using questionnaires for data collection, with the intent of generalizing from a sample to a population (Creswell, 2003). The researcher distributed a survey questionnaire via email to all participating school principals. The survey was cross-sectional, as the data was collected at one point in time. A descriptive study was used. In a descriptive study, no attempt is made to change the behavior or conditions. Rather, the researcher measures things as they are. In this study, the researcher measured the extent to which principals perceived that each of the seven Correlates of Effective Schools were manifested in the school environment of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools.

The specific research questions investigated include:

1. What do principals in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in South Carolina have in common? For this question, the researcher used survey results and examined the responses from the principals who served in schools that were both Title I with a 75% or higher poverty index and that received an A rating on the 2012 report card. The researcher examined data that focused on the gender of the principal, and the highest level of education

received and noted similarities in the responses.

2. Which of the correlates do South Carolina elementary principals believe are most present in their own high poverty, high-performing schools?

The researcher gathered data for this question through surveys completed by the administration at the identified schools. The survey requested that the principals use a 10-point scale to identify the degree to which each correlate was present in their school. The scale allowed each participating principal to determine how favorable each correlate was to him or her by selecting a rating of 1-10.

3. How do principals of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina rank the seven correlates according to the correlates' significance in their schools? On the questionnaire the principals were requested to force rank the correlates by importance. This will reveal which of the correlates are perceived to be most important by principals of high performing, high-poverty schools.

Significance

There is an abundance of research that highlights characteristics of effective schools. Similarly, there is adequate research that examines high-poverty schools. Studies that combine these two research areas and focus on high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools are atypical. Furthermore, researchers have not looked closely at the high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools specifically located in South Carolina.

The mandates of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 require that states implement statewide accountability systems and penalties will be enforced upon

consistently low-performing schools (US Department of Education, 2012). These systems must be based on challenging state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. Assessment results and state progress objectives must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group is left behind. School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Another reason it is vital to turn high-poverty schools into high-performing schools is the penalty imposed by the No Child Left Behind Act to significantly increase the choices available to the parents of students attending Title I schools that fail to meet state standards. School districts must give students who are attending schools that have been identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring the opportunity to attend a better public school, which may include a public charter school, within the school district. The district must provide transportation to the new school, and must use at least 5% of its Title I funds for this purpose (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The result of these accountability measures is that it is imperative that the low-performing Title I elementary schools in South Carolina learn from those schools that are producing high achievement levels with similar student demographics. If the Title I schools that earned an F rating on the ESEA report

card learn the lessons that high-performing, high-poverty schools can teach, academic achievement would rise for all students in South Carolina, including those students from poverty.

Conceptual Framework

Oscar Lewis laid claim to the term “culture of poverty” in his 1961 book *The Children of Sanchez*. He conducted ethnographic studies of small Mexican communities and uncovered approximately 50 attributes shared within these communities; some of which include: frequent violence, a lack of a sense of history, and a neglect of planning for the future (Gorski, 2008). Despite studying very small communities, Lewis used his findings to suggest a universal “culture of poverty” (Gorski, 2008).

Over the last 50 years researchers have studied Lewis’ findings and concur that there is no such thing as a “culture of poverty”. The differences in values and behaviors among poor people are just as great as those between poor and wealthy people (Gorski, 2008). The “culture of poverty” concept is constructed from a collection of smaller stereotypes that, unfortunately, have become the universal norm (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Many culture of poverty theorists argue that people would succeed if they simply broke away from the culture that surrounded them (Tooley, 2009). This theory assumes that all people in poverty are part of a homogenous group that recreates their social position because they do not know any better (Tooley, 2009).

The “culture of poverty” phenomenon distracts us from a perilous culture that does exist today-the “culture of classism” (Gorski, 2008). For years, low-

income schools repeatedly have had low achievement levels because educators did not question the myths about poverty that have been ingrained in society. For example, the “culture of classism” supports the myth that poor people are unmotivated and have a weak work ethic. The reality of this, however, is that poor people do not have a weaker work ethic or lower levels of motivation than wealthier people (Wilson, 1997). Although poor people are often stereotyped as lazy, 83% of children from low-income families have at least one employed parent and close to 60% have at least one parent who works full-time (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009). According to the Economic Policy Institute (2002), poor working adults spend more hours working each week than their wealthier counterparts.

Another myth that the “culture of classism” supports is that poor parents are uninvolved in their children's learning, largely because they do not value education. However, the truth is that low-income parents hold the same attitudes about education that wealthy parents do (Compton-Lilly, 2003). Low-income parents are less likely to attend school functions or volunteer in their children's classrooms because they have less access to school involvement than their wealthier peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). They are more likely to work multiple jobs, to work evenings, to have jobs without paid leave, and to be unable to afford child care and public transportation. This “culture of classism” tolerates low expectations for low-income students.

Perhaps the most disappointing element derived from the “culture of classism” is the deficit theory. In education, when teachers define students by

their weakness rather than their strengths, this is considered the deficit perspective. Deficit theory, then, suggests that poor people are poor because of their own moral and intellectual deficiencies (Collins, 1998). Deficit theorists draw on deep-rooted stereotypes and ignore conditions that support the cycle of poverty (Gorski, 2008). This type of thinking reinforces the idea that there is a universal norm (typically white, middle class, male) against which all students should be assessed and to which all students should aspire (Parrett & Budge, 2012). The deficit theory often promotes thinking that low-income and minority youth cannot escape their circumstances, that they lack the innate abilities that their middle-class peers have, are passive, and therefore cannot become contributing members of the school setting (Ambrose, 2008).

The implications of deficit theory are alarming for education. If educators begin to believe this theory that poor people do not value education, then they will dodge any responsibility to address the inequities of the school systems across our country that serve students from low-income households. Educators whose beliefs are aligned to the deficit theory do not view the problem of underachievement as a lack of responsiveness on the part of the school; rather they believe that underachievement is exclusively a result of poverty (Budge & Parrett, 2012). How educators think about poverty is important, because it influences how they respond to students and their families (Budge & Parrett, 2012). Paul Gorski points out:

We should never, under any circumstance, make an assumption about a student or parent-about their values or culture or mindset-based on a

single dimension of their identity...the “culture of poverty” is a myth. What does exist is a culture of classism, a culture most devastating to our most underserved students. This is a culture worth changing (Gorski, 2008).

The challenge for school leaders is to confront the “culture of classism” in schools and classrooms so low-income students receive a fair and equitable education so they, too, can reach their fullest potential.

Delimitations

This study focuses on Title I elementary schools in South Carolina. The focus does not extend beyond South Carolina nor does the study examine secondary schools. Further research is necessary to study high-poverty, high-performing schools at the secondary level.

The study focused on the 2011-2012 school report card data only and did not analyze historical data or trends over a period of time. Primary data collection methods involve electronic surveys. Participation in this study will not be representative of every Title I elementary school in South Carolina with the identified report card rating of A. While all of the identified schools were invited, not all school districts or school principals elected to participate. Therefore, the results were not comprehensive beyond the specific population from which the sample was selected.

Definition of Terms

Becker and Luthar (2002) consider poverty and ethnicity synonymous; however, this assumption should be challenged. Although these two sub-groups

share poverty in common, the ethnic backgrounds of minority students may present different needs than the needs of non-minority students that are identified as poor. A high percentage of minorities may be low-income, but all minorities are not low-income nor are all low-income students, minorities. Therefore, measuring a performance gap that exists between a sub-group of students inclusive of both low-income and minority students may be misleading (Ambrose, 2008). For this reason, this study focused only on low income students and did not include minorities as a sub group in the parameters.

The following definitions provide explanations of the meanings of terms used throughout the study:

Achievement Gap is the difference between how well low income and minority students perform on standardized tests when compared to their peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the minimal levels of improvement schools must make under federal guidelines (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

PASS (Palmetto Assessment of State Standards) is the acronym for South Carolina's yearly assessment program given to students in grades 3-8.

High-performing, High-poverty Schools are schools that have disproportionately high numbers of low-income students yet demonstrate high-achievement.

Low-income students are those students who qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. Children from families with incomes at or below

130% of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents. For the period July 1, 2011, through June 30, 2012, 130% of the poverty level was \$29,055 for a family of four; 185% was \$41,348. (US Department of Agriculture, 2011).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was reauthorization of legislation that provides funding for education for low-income students. The act requires that schools increase the achievement of special populations of low-income, minority, and special education students and make progress each year in mathematics or reading. Failure to meet these requirements results in penalties to schools and school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Annual School Report Card is a published document for each school in South Carolina which provides test data, school profiles, and a Report to the People submitted by the school principal and School Improvement Council.

Excellent rating is based on the Annual School Report Card and indicates that school performance substantially exceeds the standards for progress toward the 2020 SC Performance Vision.

At-Risk rating is based on the Annual School Report Card and indicates that school performance fails to meet the standards for progress towards the 2020 SC Performance Vision.

South Carolina Performance Vision is that by 2020 all students will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy, participate in a democratic society and contribute positively as

members of families and communities.

Title I is an abbreviated reference to Title I, Part A of Public Law 107-110, the purpose of which is to enable schools to provide opportunities for children served to acquire the knowledge and skills contained in the challenging state content standards and to meet the challenging state performance standards developed for all children. This purpose is accomplished by such efforts as providing an enriched and accelerated educational program, promoting school-wide reform through school-wide programs or through additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional time, significantly upgrading the quality of instruction by providing staff in participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development, and affording parents meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at home and at school (South Carolina Department of Education, 2012).

Correlates of Effective Schools, based on the research of Ron Edmonds and Larry Lezotte, are the means to achieving high and equitable levels of student learning. The seven correlates are: Instructional leadership, clearly stated and focused mission, safe and positive environment, high expectations for all students, frequent monitoring of student progress, maximize learning opportunities, and positive communication between school/home/community (Effective schools, 2012).

Reward Schools are the highest performing Title I schools in a given year. Monetary rewards are provided to schools in this category.

Priority schools are the lowest performing Title I schools. A supplemental

allocation is provided to schools in this category to support interventions.

Exemplary indicates that the student demonstrated exemplary performance in meeting the grade-level standard on the PASS test.

Met indicates that the student met the grade-level standard on the PASS test.

Not Met indicates that the student did not meet the grade-level standard on the PASS test.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), was first enacted in 1965 as the principal federal law affecting K-12 education. The *No Child Left Behind Act* is the most recent reauthorization of ESEA (US Department of Education, 2013).

Local Education Agency is a public board of education or other public authority within a state which maintains administrative control of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, or school district (US Department of Education, 2013).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), an independent benchmark, is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what American students and can do in various subject areas. Since 1969, The National Center for Education Statistics has conducted NAEP assessments in reading, mathematics, science, writing, US history, geography, civics, and the arts (US Department of Education, 2013).

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation will be divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the

statement of the problem, a brief overview of the study's design, the conceptual framework, and terms along with definitions of these terms that will be used throughout the study. Chapter 2 is the literature review. The literature review will focus on themes and will reference various researchers who have studied high poverty, high-performing schools around the country. The research methodology will be the focal point of Chapter 3. This chapter will illustrate specific data collection methods as well as describe the site selection, sampling, and instrumentation used. Chapter 4 is the data analysis and presentation of results. The chapter will present the findings in tables using survey questionnaire results. The final chapter, 5, will provide implications from the study and a discussion of the results. It will also provide recommendations for practitioners and recommendations for future research and will be supported with discussion. Chapter 5 will be followed by references and appendices.

Summary

Poor children are, in general, neither read to aloud as often, nor are they exposed to complex language and large vocabularies (Rothstein, 2008). Their parents have low-wage jobs and are more frequently laid off, causing family stress which result in discipline issues at school (Rothstein, 2008). Childhood poverty rates are higher in the United States than in any other industrialized country. As of 2010, 36% of all people who lived in poverty were children (Budge & Parrett, 2012). Another 16 million children lived in low-income families (Budge & Parrett, 2012). Nonetheless, case studies have proven that high-poverty schools can become high-performing schools. With the implementation of the No

Child Left Behind Act, educators face tremendous pressure to increase low-income students' achievement levels. Research that examines the school practices of these high-poverty, high-performing schools may help schools with similar student demographics implement these practices and, ultimately, raise achievement levels.

This chapter described the problem facing high-poverty schools across the country and provided evidence that low-income students can perform at high levels. Richard Elmore asserts, "We have much more to learn from studying high-poverty schools that are on the path to improvement than we do from studying nominally high-performing schools that are producing a significant portion of their performance through social class rather than instruction" (2006).

The research will continue to take a closer look at the Correlates of Effective Schools and how these characteristics manifest themselves in high-poverty, high-performing schools. The case studies and literature review in Chapter 2 will support that any elementary school, regardless of the student poverty level, has the capacity to reverse long-embedded trends of low-achievement (Budge & Parrett, 2012). Although improvements in public education alone will not eliminate poverty, such improvements are an important part of the solution (Budge & Parrett, 2012)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review analyzes the existing literature relevant to high poverty, high-performing schools. The chapter begins with a look at how poverty contributes to students' academic decline in school. Next, the chapter focuses on the history and the journey public education has taken to achieve academic success for students in underrepresented subgroups, including those students from poverty. Then, the literature review takes a closer look at the Correlates of Effective Schools. After that, the chapter will focus heavily on the impact of the principal in high poverty, high-performing schools. Finally, the chapter reviews case studies conducted at high poverty, high-performing schools across the country.

The effects of poverty will be far-reaching if society does not begin to seek out reform efforts. The number of people in poverty in 2009 climbed to 46.3 million, the largest number since poverty rates have been published (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The federal government defines poverty as a certain level of income relative to family size (Parrett & Budge, 2012). In 2009, the poverty level for a family of four was \$22,050 (Fass, 2009). According to Sarah Fass (2009) with the National Center for Children in Poverty, that income level is inadequate for even the bare necessities. Fass estimates that a family of four living in a lower-cost region of the country needs between \$37,000 and \$41,000 to meet its basic needs. Nonetheless, the need for extensive

economic changes in our country is not an excuse for maintaining the status quo in our schools (Rothstein, 2008).

The first part of this literature review focuses on the negative effects poverty has on children in schools and the policies that have been employed in public education to demand high poverty schools begin to show academic gains from their student populations. Kati Haycock (2010, as cited in Parrett & Budge, 2012) asserts, “Some say we can’t fix education until we fix poverty. It’s exactly the opposite; we can’t fix poverty until we fix education.”

Poverty in America’s Schools

Pimpare (2008), author of *A People’s History of Poverty in America*, states, “There is a general ignorance about the lives led by poor Americans, an ignorance, whether real or feigned, that shapes public discourse about poverty and welfare, and policy itself.” The cycle of poverty in a family is not easily broken, and many families who have been poor for generations continue to be poor (Duncan, 1992). The income level of the adults in the family is directly associated with the educational level attained by the youth in the family (Hoynes, H., Page, M., & Stevens, A., 2006). Some of the problems with which poor Americans contend include:

...dysfunctional, abusive homes where education is not valued; a lack of parental involvement because of disinterest or work obligations; a failure of students to develop effective study skills; negative peer pressure about the value of learning; environmental conditions such as living in a high crime, high noise area or not having a quiet place and time to study; poor

nutritional factors that affect ability to concentrate as well as IQ and motivational level. (Swain, 2006, p. 52)

Naturally, people prefer reading about school successes rather than reading about school failures, and in the recent literature on school turnarounds, it is hard to locate studies of failed turnarounds in low-performing schools (Duke, 2006). However, in order to transform low-performing schools, one must first identify the characteristics of a low performing school. There is sparse literature describing characteristics of low performing schools. There is far more research identifying how schools improve. Schools in poverty are often characterized by high teacher turnover, fewer resources, and low staff morale (Wyckoff, 2003). These schools are most likely to have teachers with less experience than teachers in affluent schools (Wyckoff, 2003). Teaching in high-poverty schools brings more barriers than teaching in schools with populations of higher economic status. Teachers in failing schools teach in classrooms in which they are not adequately prepared to teach. Conditions include: unsafe climates, poor attendance, low achievement, rundown facilities, and material scarcity (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003). These conditions make it difficult for school principals to attract and retain quality teachers (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003).

According to the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Educational Research (2006), there are two themes that are directly related to the concept of low-performing schools: teacher qualifications and principal quality. The focus on inexperienced teachers reflects that no matter how effective such teachers may ultimately become, their inexperience in the early

years of their teaching career typically render them less effective than their more experienced counterparts (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006). Based on research conducted in North Carolina, evidence emerged that principals with better qualifications tend to select, when given the choice, to serve schools with higher performing students and higher quality teachers (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006).

The US Department of Education (2002) recognizes that US states currently lack the knowledge and resources to turn around failing schools. Common conditions present in schools identified as “failing” include high teacher absenteeism, high rates of teacher turnover, and low expectations for student achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006).

One widely circulated approach to poverty is derived from the research of Ruby Payne, author and educator. Payne categorizes people as being in poverty regardless of whether their incomes are below the poverty line; rather, she suggests that the poverty category applies to anyone who carries the “poverty of culture” mindset (Bomer, 2008). Dr. Payne defines poverty as, “the extent to which an individual does without resources (Payne, 2005).” Payne (2005), notes that, “One of the key correlations to students who don’t pass state assessments is their socioeconomic status.” Levin and Riffel (2000), agree, “Economic deprivation has had a profound impact on educational outcomes.” Other researchers have cautioned against linking poverty and performance without considering all of the variables related to student achievement (Edmonds, 1979). Research suggests that the strength of poverty as a predictor of student

achievement can be considerably reduced when students are taught by highly qualified instructors (Haycock, 1999).

Children who live in poverty are at great risk of academic failure (Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994). Bracey's work (2006) recognizes that words help children reframe information. Children from low-income families hear, on average, 13 million words by age 4. In middle-class families, children hear about 26 million words during that same time period. In upper-income families, they hear a staggering 46 million words by age 4. Bracey's work supports the idea that kids from low-income families are less likely to know the words a teacher uses in the classroom or words that appear in reading material. When children are not familiar with the words, they do not want to read. A similar study by Hart and Risley (1995) that followed the outcomes of children selected from different socioeconomic backgrounds found that by age three, the children of professional parents were adding words to their vocabulary at about twice the rate of children in welfare families. IQ tests performed later in childhood with these same students showed the welfare students' scores trailing behind those of the more affluent children by up to 29%. Hart and Risley theorized that children living in poverty learn the vocabulary they need to get along in their families and communities but not the vocabulary required for success in school.

Lower socioeconomic children also have fewer cognitive-enrichment opportunities. They have fewer books at home, visit the library less often, and spend considerably more time watching TV than their middle-class income counterparts (Kumanyika & Grier, 2006). Studies in children have shown that

family income correlates significantly with children's academic success, especially during the preschool, kindergarten, and primary years (Jensen, 2009). Lower income students financial limitations often exclude their children from healthy afterschool activities such as music, drama, and athletics (Bracey, 2006).

Further contributing to a child from poverty's academic failure is health and nutrition. A study by two prominent neuroscientists suggested that intelligence is linked to health (Gray & Thompson, 2004). Children in poverty have more untreated ear infections, and as a result, hearing loss. They have a higher rate of asthma than middle-class children as well as a greater exposure to lead. Each of these health-related factors affect attention, reasoning, and learning.

Nutrition plays a critical role. Children who are raised in homes living below the poverty level are exposed to food with lower nutritional value (Basch, 2011). Poor nutrition negatively affects students' academic achievement by adversely affecting cognition and health. A high absenteeism from school is correlated with these diminishing health factors (Basch, 2011). Sanford neuroscientist and stress expert Robert Sapolsky (2005) found that the lower a child's socioeconomic status, the lower his or her overall health.

Understanding how a school's academic achievement begins to slip can provide important insights into the adjustments needed to reverse the process (Duke, 2006). Using the phrase "changing demographics" is no longer an adequate explanation for a school's decline (Duke, 2006). Jonathan Kozol (2005) warns that reforms based solely on improving scores on standardized

tests risk turning low-income students into “examination soldiers” who are trained to recall facts rather than acquire and apply useful knowledge. High-performing, high-poverty schools focus on multiple indicators of high performance including increased attendance, improved graduation rates, and increased parent involvement (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Knowing more about the factors that contribute to declining performance will provide a starting place for school turnaround efforts.

The push in Educational Policy to achieve High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools:

By the mid-1960’s, many American school districts were desegregated. Equality in voting had been attained by African Americans yet the races were still separated by economics. To address the issue of poverty, the federal government, under the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, as part of the Johnson Administration’s War on Poverty Campaign, introduced the most comprehensive legislation in the history of the US in hopes of providing more educational opportunities to low-income children (US Department of Education, 2012). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) declared that every student in public schools had the right to an education that would provide the knowledge and skills necessary to become productive citizens (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The allocation formulas of this policy directed financial assistance to the local education agencies with the greatest proportions of poor children (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). Title I authorized grants to schools agencies that proposed to improve their educational programs for poor children

in specific ways. Since its initial passage in 1965, ESEA has been reauthorized seven times, most recently in January 2002 as the No Child Left Behind Act. Each reauthorization has brought changes to the program, but its central goal of improving the educational opportunities for children from lower income families remains (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003).

With the onset of No Child Left Behind, the federal government declared that public education requires a federal presence to ensure academic progress and academic equality for all students (Schmidt, 2008). While the federal government has played a significant role in the reformation of public education since 1965, the momentum for the NCLB policy largely originated from social concerns for America's declining test scores. Eighteen years after the passage of the ESEA, Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell and the National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report in 1983 entitled, *A Nation At Risk* (Schmidt, 2008). The report was based on concerns regarding the nation's low academic proficiency despite federal efforts to improve public schools (Caboni & Adisu, 2004). Additionally, the report argued that American students were too poorly educated to effectively compete in the global marketplace (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). The report noted that the United States was lagging behind other countries in science, technology innovations, and commerce while educational systems in other countries were flourishing (Schmidt, 2008). While the report expressed the need for educational reform, it never influenced any actual reform at the federal level. Nonetheless, *A Nation at Risk* was an essential step towards much needed educational reform. While the report was

lost at the federal level, state governors used the publication to create a sense of urgency for school reform (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009).

Ten years after the publication, presidential candidate H. Ross Perot called for the use of standardized tests, namely the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), to “monitor the annual progress of students in each school” (Caboni & Adisu, 2004). Test results on the NAEP steadily increased in Texas and, as a result, demonstrated to the nation the usefulness of an accountability and standards-based testing program. Texas governor at the time, George W. Bush, embraced the idea of an accountability system that would improve the nation’s schools. Perot’s accountability program is regarded as the initial benchmark that led to, and influenced, the future of educational reform with President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act (Schmidt, 2008).

The No Child Left Behind Act was the first time the nation had ever declared that schools have a responsibility to teach every single child to meet their state’s standards of learning (Chenoweth, 2007). The statement of purpose of NCLB declares that its implementation “is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education” (2012). This statement of purpose developed out of a concern for underrepresented subgroup students. NCLB strives to ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, receive the education to which they are legally entitled.

When the federal government determined that economically disadvantaged students would be a subgroup whose test scores would contribute

to a school's Adequate Yearly Progress, they claimed that poor children are members of a legitimate category and that those children share features that are related to their experience in school. The federal law ensures that the improvement of poor children's test scores is a major focus of every school in the country (Bomer , 2008).

While the nation's achievement gap explains the purpose of NCLB, Title I of NCLB ensures schools make steps towards closing the achievement gap. In order for schools to continue receiving federal funds, they must develop an annual assessment to test student proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. NCLB requires Title I schools to achieve incremental gains, otherwise known as Adequate Yearly Progress. While NCLB's accountability measures are controversial, as evidenced by the literature, its' deliberate purpose is to ensure that no one student, or group of students, is left behind in their reading and mathematics abilities.

The foundation of NCLB provisions is called Adequate Yearly Progress. AYP requires that each individual state must develop, and integrate into their curriculum, a standards-based accountability program that demonstrates student proficiency levels in the core subject areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics. Student proficiency levels are assessed based on the results of students' scores on standardized tests administered yearly. These standardized tests are designed by each state and approved by the U.S. Department of Education (2012). Testing students allows each state to monitor the progress, decline, or stagnation of their students' scores in each district on an annual basis

(SC Department of Education, 2013). States can then assess which schools, or entire districts, may need increased academic support if they are not making adequate yearly progress towards 100% proficiency in 2014.

In 2008, six years after the implementation of NCLB, Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education, gave her own progress report on how the legislation is impacting U.S. education. Before a joint committee session of Florida's Committee on K-12 Schools and Learning Council she stated:

We can be proud of where this has brought us. We've made important strides. Most fundamentally, all states now have accountability systems and annual student assessments. This is a change from before in 2005-2006 when only about half of all states had yearly assessments, and before 2001 when only 11 states had approved assessment systems. Six years has given us the perspective to see what we've accomplished, and the experience to improve on what we're doing (Spellings, 2008).

The PASS test was created in South Carolina to serve as the state's standards-based accountability program. As mandated in Chapter 19, Title 59 of the 1976 Code, the Education Accountability Act was amended in May of 2008 to provide for the development of a new statewide assessment program (US Department of Education, 2012). This program, known as the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards, was first administered in the Spring of 2009. It is currently administered to South Carolina public school students, including charter school students in grades three through eight.

The purpose of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test is to

measure student performance on the South Carolina Academic Standards. The PASS test results are used for school, district, and federal accountability purposes, including No Child Left Behind (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013). The PASS test includes tests in five subject areas: writing, English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Total scale scores and performance levels are provided for each PASS test (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013). The three performance levels are categories that reflect the overall knowledge and skills exhibited by students on each test: Exemplary, Met, Not Met (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013)

As part of state report cards, No Child Left Behind requires all states to report the results of those tests publicly (Chenoweth, 2007). Because NCLB requires that schools break down scores by different kinds of students, it is possible to see how well those schools serve different groups of students. NCLB is the first policy in public education intended to address the nation's achievement gaps.

Six years after No Child Left Behind's passage, and midway to the nation's goal of having students on grade level or better in reading and math by 2014, the U.S. Department of Education released documents showing the progress each state was making. The intention of these reports was to help states map a course of action for future progress. The report for South Carolina, *Mapping South Carolina's Educational Progress 2008*, published by the US Department of Education, revealed how low income students were performing on the accountability measurements. In 2008, 51.5% of South Carolina schools

were comprised of low income students, as determined by the National Center for Educational Statistics. This was almost 11% higher than the US average. According to the same report, just 37.1% of schools in South Carolina were achieving Adequate Yearly Progress while 70% of schools nationwide were achieving this standard set by No Child Left Behind. The report also revealed that 97.7% of elementary classes in low-poverty schools were being taught by highly qualified teachers. A table embedded in the report, *South Carolina's Record of 4th grade Reading and Math Achievement for 2006-2007*, also published by the US Department of Education, revealed that 39% of low-income students were proficient on the standardized assessment. While this data indicates that progress had been made since the launch of No Child Left Behind, the data also revealed that there was still a discrepancy between low-income schools and other schools.

The empirical evidence on the impact of No Child Left Behind on student achievement to date, is extremely limited (US Department of Education, 2013). The No Child Left Behind Act is the source of considerable controversy and debate in the education community. Some educators and policymakers question the feasibility and fairness of its goals and time frames. By 2010, 38% of schools were failing to make adequate yearly progress (McNeil, 2011). Other educators and policymakers advocate for No Child Left Behind arguing the accountability measures are vital levers of change for all students (McNeil, 2011). Nonetheless, as schools scramble to meet the requirements for No Child Left Behind, students from poverty are inaccurately portrayed in the research as the

cause, not the effect, of failing schools nationwide (Tooley, 2009).

Correlates of Effective Schools: Predictive Indicators of High Performing Schools

The Effective Schools Movement surfaced in the late 1970's and early 1980's in response to a federal paper written by James Coleman, a prominent education researcher (Effective Schools, 2012). In 1966, James Coleman's equality assessment was the second largest study ever conducted in the United States (Suber, 2011). Coleman and his associates investigated schools across the nation, including rural, urban, and suburban settings. Coleman concluded, "The stronger variable impacting student achievement was the parent's socioeconomic class." (Suber, 2011).

Using data from over 600,000 students and teachers from across the country, Coleman's federal paper asserted that academic achievement was less related to the quality of a student's school and more related to the student's family background (Kiviat, 2001).

There was a similar study to that of Coleman conducted by Silberman. Silberman had previously published a book in 1970, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education*. In the book he concluded from his lengthy studies that schools were not only ineffective but mindless as well. In 1971, Silberman and his colleagues observed classrooms and interviewed teachers, principals, and administrators. They studied classroom practices and what students were learning. This study contradicted his earlier findings about ineffective schools (Suber, 2011).

Determined to prove that schools can make a difference, director for the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, Ronald Edmonds, refused to accept Coleman's report as conclusive (Effective Schools, 2012). During the year of 1979, Edmonds and other researchers looked at achievement data from schools in major cities around the country where student populations were from high poverty areas. Specifically, he studied 55 inner city schools in Detroit and 20 schools in inner-city New York (Suber, 2011). His research was conducted in schools where the majority populations were poor and minority (Suber, 2011).

Nationwide, these researchers found schools where poor children were learning but were puzzled as to why certain schools made a difference and others did not. What were some schools doing differently to result in poor children demonstrating high levels of learning? Edmonds concluded, "We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us, we already know more than we need to do that, and whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far."

Researchers began to document the characteristics of effective schools. Edmonds noticed that these effective schools have a climate of expectations in which the personnel seek to be instructionally effective for all children and no child is allowed to fall below the minimum achievement standards (Suber, 2011). He also noticed that teachers in these schools frequently monitored student progress through classroom assessments in order to relate instructional objectives to student progress (Suber, 2011). During the 1980's a list was

developed that identified common characteristics that were present in effective schools. These unique traits became known as the Effective Schools Correlates because they correlated with high levels of student achievement. These correlates appeared repeatedly in high performing schools, despite the schools' demographics or socioeconomic levels (Effective Schools, 2012). The Seven Correlates of Effectiveness include:

1. Instructional Leadership
2. Clearly Stated and Focused Mission
3. Safe and Positive Environment
4. High expectations for all students
5. Frequent monitoring of student progress
6. Maximize learning opportunities
7. Positive communication with school, home, and community (Effective Schools, 2012).

Teaching and learning is at the core of Effective Schools (Lezotte, 1985). First, Effective Schools have principals who are instructional leaders. These leaders communicate the mission to all stakeholders and become the driving force behind school change (Lezotte, 1985). Second, Effective Schools establish clear goals and priorities. Third, Effective Schools are safe and orderly, as routine discipline problems impede the learning process (Lezotte, 1985). Fourth, Effective Schools hold high expectations for all students. Students in Effective Schools use higher order thinking skills, explore their creativity, and sharpen their communicative ability (Lezotte, 1985). Fifth, Effective Schools monitor student

progress frequently. Effective Schools also adjust teaching to accommodate the needs of all learners (Lezotte, 1985). Sixth, Effective Schools focus on student time on task. Finally, positive home and community relationships are evident in Effective Schools.

The principle of the Correlates of Effective Schools is the belief that schools can achieve quality and equity (Marzano, 2000). Today, attention has shifted from effective schools research to school improvement research (Bennett & Harris, 1997). While effective schools research asks, “What do effective schools look like?,” school improvement research asks, “How do schools improve over time?” Lawrence Lezotte has updated the Correlates of Effective Schools to reflect a 2nd Generation of correlates. This 2nd Generation research validates the 1st Generation correlates and assures that they are still valid today. However, successful implementation of both generations of correlates, Lezotte states, will move schools toward the “Learning for All” mission (Effective Schools, 2013)

Leadership at High Poverty, High-Performing Schools

In the foreword of the book, *No Excuses*, Adam Meyerson asserts, “No single curriculum or teaching methodology is the secret to the success of the high-performing schools. What they all have in common is excellent leadership” (Carter, 2001). High performing, high-poverty schools strive to build leadership capacity to better meet the needs of students from poverty. A common characteristic of public education in the US is the tendency to rarely abandon policies and practices, even when refuted by overwhelming research (Parrett & Budge, 2012). A lack of willingness to challenge issues such as retention,

ineffective teaching, and low expectations is what separates low performing, high-poverty schools from high-performing, high-poverty schools (Parrett & Budge, 2012). These leaders from high performing, high-poverty schools persistently confront entrenched, counterproductive strategies and beliefs (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Educational literature describes transformational leadership as imposing leadership practices necessary to facilitate change (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). High poverty schools become high performing in part by abandoning what does not work and replacing those approaches with those that do work (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

Walters, Marzano, and McNulty conducted a study of the impact of leadership on student achievement (2003). After evaluating 30 years of research, they concluded that the principal does indeed have a significant impact on achievement. These researchers identified two variables that impacted whether the principal would positively or negatively influence student achievement. First, it is important that the principal is able to accurately identify and focus on the correct school and classroom practices necessary to positively change student achievement. Improvement efforts must be targeted appropriately. The second variable is the degree of change in a school and the way in which a school leader supports the school staff through the oftentimes inevitable changes that must occur in order for student achievement to increase. Support is necessary for school staff members to change embedded practices and shifts in classroom practices.

Instructional leadership focuses on the leader's influence on student achievement (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Richard Elmore (2006) describes his observations of successful schools with high concentrations of poor children to see what they were doing to improve the level of instruction in their classrooms. Elmore says, "These high-performing, high-poverty schools were not just different in degree from other schools, they were different in kind." He explains that these school leaders had clear expectations for student learning and demonstrated a sense of urgency about improvement. In the schools Elmore observed, he noticed challenging curricula and professional development. Most importantly, he noted that the school leaders insisted that the classrooms in these schools were open to colleagues for analysis of instructional practice.

The Center for Educational Policy and Analysis confirms that the impact of school leadership is second only to that of the teacher in determining school effectiveness (Leithwood, 2003). Successful principals of high poverty, high performing schools set the direction of the school by articulating the vision, and focusing all staff on achieving its goals. These leaders set high expectations, and regularly monitor the performance of the school (Leithwood, 2003). High expectations hold incredible power, often single-handedly determining the fine line or enormous chasm between success and failure (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

Statewide System of School Support in collaboration with other educational organizations established *HP2*. This organization recognizes schools that are consistently high-performing and high-poverty. Effective

leadership, at both district and school levels, seemed to be the most common theme of all HP2 schools (Ball, 2001). Described by one principal as “moral leadership,” the principals of HP2 schools recognized that this ethical approach to schooling included respect, high-expectations, and empowerment (Ball, 2001). These principals consistently agreed that schooling was more than preparation for academic attainment. For the students they served from poverty, education laid the foundation for success in life. One commonality of these HP2 schools is that all stakeholders acknowledge that significant student gains would not be sustained without effective leaders who serve as catalysts for the specific actions required for them to achieve high levels of learning (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

Stability of leadership is a hallmark of effective schools (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Frequent changes in leadership are disruptive. Additionally, sustained focus is needed to improve low-performing schools (Ball, 2001). It is not unusual at high-poverty, high-performing schools for principals to remain for multiple years (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Of the HP2 schools recognized, the average principal tenure was more than eight years (Ball, 2001). Similarly, if a school consistently loses effective teachers each year, student achievement will typically remain flat (Parrett & Budge, 2012). The revolving door of newly hired teachers results in low student achievement in low-performing, high-poverty schools (Rothstein, 2008). High-performing, high-poverty schools recruit and retain excellent and effective educators.

Principals in high-performing, high-poverty schools ensure that the necessary financial resources, material resources, and human resources are

available for students to be successful (Ball, 2001). Approximately 70-80% of a typical school's budget is dedicated to personnel (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

Therefore, recruitment and retention of talented staff is a top priority. In HP2 schools, principals used the schools' resources innovatively and often secured additional funding with external stakeholders (Ball, 2001).

Additionally, managing time is important for leaders. High-performing, high-poverty schools find a way to extend learning time for students who need it (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Developing a learning-centered schedule is important to students as well as teachers, who need time for collaborative professional development (Chenoweth, 2007).

The literature cited multiple ways the leaders in high-poverty, high-performing schools are the driving force behind the success of such schools. These leaders are not isolated. They develop relationships with district office personnel, school families, and community members to support their mission of high expectations and success for every student (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Strong leadership is essential for the dramatic change that is required to turn a school around (Galvin & Parsley, 2005).

Case studies of High Poverty, High-Performing Schools

Aristotle said that we can demonstrate the possible by studying the actual (Carter, 2001). High-poverty schools become high performing by abandoning what does not work and replacing those approaches with those that do work (Parrett & Budge, 2012). The emphasis on federal accountability standards has resulted in an increase in the research conducted on high-poverty, high

performing schools nationwide (Matchinger, 2007). In 1999, the Education Trust's release of *Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations* regenerated interest in Ron Edmond's claim that high-performing, high-poverty schools exist (Ambrose, 2008). In this release, the report noted the following characteristics that were common among high poverty schools that were exceeding academic expectations:

1. Standards were used to design instruction and assess student work.
2. Instructional time for reading and math were increased.
3. A large proportion of funds were used to support professional development.
4. Systems were in place to monitor individual student progress and provide immediate support to students when needed.
5. Efforts focused on encouraging parental involvement.

Karin Chenoweth is a senior writer with Education Trust and author of *It's Being Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools*. This book highlights 15 schools that provide evidence that high-poverty schools can produce high academic results. Furthermore, it proves that low achievement among poor children is not inevitable (Chenoweth, 2009). In the book, the schools that were studied had similar characteristics. The schools had a minimum of 25% of students living in poverty and had closed or narrowed the achievement gap sufficiently within a few years. Two years of data was studied to determine progress. Of the schools studied in the book, magnet schools, exam schools, and charter schools were excluded.

Take for example Frankford Elementary in Frankford, Delaware. This

elementary school, highlighted in Chenoweth's book, is located in a rural area and in 2005, 76% of its students met the standard for free and reduced price meals. Sharon Brittingham became the principal in 1997 and when she arrived, the entire district was under legal review by the Office of Civil Rights because of a class action suit for racial discrimination. Special education students were kept completely segregated and African American boys were suspended at disproportionate rates. Brittingham told the teachers that if they did not believe all kids could learn, they needed to leave. Her demand for individual student diagnosis and thoughtful instructional practices worked to get almost every student meeting state reading and math standards by 2005.

Another organization that studies high-poverty, high-performing schools is the Heritage Foundation. The organization organized a national *No Excuses* campaign. The participants agree that there is no excuse for the academic failure of most public schools serving poor children. The organization highlighted 13 *No Excuses* schools in a book written by Samuel Casey Carter (2001). All of the *No Excuses* schools had a school-wide average score at or above the 65th percentile on national achievement tests, although 75% or more of their students qualified for the free-reduced price meals (Carter, 2001).

Cascade Elementary is a *No Excuses* school located in Atlanta, Georgia. This public school serves a 99% African-American population with 80% of those students coming from low-income families. Cascade is a turnaround story. In 1995, the fifth graders scored in the 44th percentile in reading and 37th percentile in math. By 1999, the fifth graders scored in the 82nd percentile in reading and

74th percentile in math. “Once a child knows you believe in him, he can compete anywhere in the world,” said principal Alfonso Jessie (Carter, 2001).

Another researcher, Gordon Cawelti with the Educational Research Service (1999) wrote *Portraits of Six Benchmark Schools: Diverse Approaches to Improving Student Performance*. Cawelti’s research asked, “Are there schools that are getting good results even though they serve kids who are tough to teach?” Relying on classroom observations and interviews with principals, teachers, students, and parents, Cawelti identified six schools with academic growth and success that serve low-income students.

In an effort to address the barriers that urban school districts were facing, Douglas Reeves (2011), representing the Center for Performance Assessment, developed the 90/90/90 model in 1995. This school improvement model is made up of three key components: more than 90% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, more than 90% of students are from ethnic minorities, and more than 90% of the students met or achieved high standards according to independently conducted standards based tests. Reeves (2011) indicated that the 90/90/90 model accentuates the belief that all students can learn when given the right tools, opportunities, and educational support. The data was collected from more than 130,000 students in grades K-12 in 228 buildings in inner-city urban schools, suburban schools, and rural schools. These 90/90/90 schools operate on five key premises:

1. A strong focus on academic achievement
2. Clear curriculum choices

3. Frequent assessment of school progress and multiple opportunities for improvement
4. A focus on writing in all areas
5. Collaborative scoring on student work

The educational practices of these 90/90/90 schools are worthy of notice. Pate and Gibson (2005) observed that school districts including Wayne Township Metropolitan School Corporation of Indianapolis, Indiana and Riverview Gardens and Hazelwood school districts in St. Louis, Missouri have implemented the principles of the 90/90/90 model and have been successful in not only increasing standardized test scores among students but also shrinking the gap between poor students and their counterparts. One of the most powerful findings of the 90/90/90 study is the continuous nature of the success of these schools (Reeves, 2011). One report from the Milwaukee Public School System reported, “Techniques used by the 90/90/90 schools are persistent. The students are still poor and their economic opportunities have not improved. Nevertheless, more than 90% of the students in these schools continue to meet or exceed state standards.” While poverty and other demographic variables may be important, they are not conclusive in predicting student success (Reeves, 2011).

The Achievement Trap reports that in 2007 about 3.4 million K-12 students across the country resided in households below the national median rank, yet ranked academically in the top quartile (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiJulio, 2007). This academically advanced group of students also included more than one million students who qualified for free and reduced lunch. According to the

Achievement Trap, when these high-achieving, low-income students began elementary school, their demographics reflected that of the US and was not limited to one race, gender, or geographical area. Unfortunately, the report indicated that these students were losing ground during elementary school. Among first-grade students performing in the top academic quartile, only 28% were from lower-income families, while 72% were from higher income families (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiiJulio, 2007). Further data revealed that only 56% of lower-income students maintained their status as high achievers in reading by fifth grade, compared to 69% of higher income students (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiiJulio, 2007). Although high-achieving lower-income students can be counted in the millions, there should be more (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiiJulio, 2007).

The literature undeniably supports that there is evidence of high-performing, high-poverty schools. In his book, *No Excuses*, Carter (2001) challenges the education profession, "What is preventing us, as a profession and a nation, from ensuring all high-poverty schools become high performing?" These high-poverty schools show impressive academic achievement from students whose background characteristics would logically preclude such success (Marzano, 2003).

Summary

There were several emerging themes from the research. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that public educators no longer tolerate widespread failure in schools serving poor and minority children (Chenoweth, 2007). It demands that students be taught to state standards and requires that

schools report their results. The research proved that there are several predictors of high-performing schools. The work of Larry Lezotte and Ron Edmonds, *The Correlates of Effective Schools*, have proven to be one of many research-based indicators to identify effective schools based on characteristics that schools possess. Principal leadership emerged as the single most important factor of a high-poverty school becoming high-performing. This suggests that the recruitment of excellent principals for high poverty schools is crucial. Finally, all schools could learn something from the qualities shared by schools that have been successful in educating poor students successfully (Chenoweth, 2009). Multiple case studies by various national organizations continue to prove that there is a great deal of evidence that high-poverty schools can be high-performing.

Chapter three will describe the methodology, study population, data collection, and framework for a quantitative study of South Carolina Title I elementary schools that have earned an ESEA Rating of A on the 2012 state report card. This study investigated the *Correlates of Effective Schools* and how these characteristics manifest themselves in these Title I schools.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and articulate the design methodology for this study. Specifically, the chapter will discuss the overview of the problem, review of the research questions, the school selection process, instrumentation, and procedures for data collection.

Overview of the Problem:

According to The State of America's Children report published in 2012 by the Children's Defense Fund, there were over one million homeless children enrolled in public schools during the 2010-2011 academic year. Homeless children are twice as likely as other children to repeat a grade in school, to be expelled or suspended, or to drop out of high school. Further, living in a neighborhood with a high poverty rate is associated with a learning loss equivalent to a full year of school. Matchtinger (2007) acknowledged that "high poverty schools are below average in student achievement, graduation rates, and other important school outcomes." This report, The State of America's Children, reported that the biggest roadblock in student achievement is the lack of high quality teachers in the high poverty school systems.

Review of the Research Questions:

In this quantitative study, the researcher measured the extent to which the seven Correlates of Effective Schools manifest themselves in the school environment of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools. This data

will be identified on the rating scale using the perceptions of school principals that participate in the study.

The specific research questions the researcher investigated included:

1. What do principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in South Carolina have in common? For this question, the researcher used the survey results and examined responses from principals who served in schools that are both Title I, with a 75% or higher poverty index and that received an A rating on the 2012 report card. The researcher examined the data that focused on the gender of the principal, the highest education received, and the years of experience in the school and noted similarities in the responses.
2. Which of the correlates did South Carolina elementary principals believe were present in their own high poverty, high-performing schools? The researcher gathered data for this question through surveys completed by the administration at these schools. The survey requested that the principals use a 10-point scale to identify the degree to which each correlate was present in their school. The scale allowed each participating principal to determine how favorable each correlate was to him or her by selecting a rating of 1-10.
3. How did principals of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina rank the seven correlates according to the correlates' significance in their schools? On the questionnaire the principals were requested to force rank the seven correlates by importance. This revealed which of the correlates were perceived to be most important by principals of high performing, high-poverty schools.

As the researcher reviewed the study, it became apparent that additional research could be addressed from the existing research questions. In addition to analyzing how the principals in the sample ranked the correlates as most important, the researcher also used the forced ranking in the survey to determine how these principals ranked the correlates in order of least importance. The survey provided an open-ended optional space for principals in the sample to identify critical success factors in their particular school. This data was compiled and analyzed to determine if trends existed amongst this sample of principals. Further, using the descriptive statistics, the researcher was able to run seven Mann Whitney tests to determine if principal gender impacted how the correlates were ranked. Mann Whitney tests are nonparametric tests used to compare two groups, in this instance, males versus females. For each of these tests, p values were determined if there was a statistically significant correlation between the two variables. The data for these additional supplemental questions will be pursued and presented in Chapter 4.

Hypothesis:

As a former teacher and a current administrator in a Title I school, the researcher recognized that each of the Correlates of Effective Schools is vital for schools that have students living in high-poverty areas. However, the researcher's hypothesized that the principals who completed the survey questionnaire would identify the following characteristics as the most important for their schools' success: Instructional leadership and safe and positive environment.

A study published in Education Next found that the effect of highly effective principals on student achievement is equivalent to 2-7 months of additional learning each school year, while ineffective principals negatively impact student achievement by a comparable amount. Further, according to Split, Hughes, and Kwok (2012), the primary factor in student motivation and achievement is not the student's home environment; it is the school and the teacher. Therefore, a safe school environment is critical to a student's success in school.

Selection of Sites:

Criterion-based sampling was used for this quantitative study. This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that cannot be obtained as well from other choices (Maxwell, 2005). This type of purposeful sampling involves selecting participants who meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Maxwell, 2005). The parameters of the study included Title I elementary schools in South Carolina. More specifically, the study's sample schools were Title I elementary schools with a report card rating of A and a 75% or higher poverty index during the 2011-2012 school year. This information was obtained from the South Carolina State Department of Education.

South Carolina had 645 elementary schools during the 2011-2012 school year. Of those schools, 390 were Title I elementary schools. Of those 390 Title I elementary schools, only 179 scored a report card rating of A. Forty-eight Title I elementary schools received an F rating. This study examined at those Title I

elementary schools that received an A rating and have had a 75% or higher poverty index.

There were 134 Title I elementary schools in South Carolina that earned an ESEA Rating of A with a 75% or higher poverty index. These 134 school principals were the school administrators who were invited to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

After careful formulation of research questions and determining the sample, the next step in the quantitative research study is developing a data collection instrument. Likert scaling is a bipolar scaling method, measuring either a positive or negative response to a statement. In this particular research study, rather than using the Likert Scale, in an effort to increase the validity of the survey results, the researcher enlarged the scale in measuring the degree that a correlate was present. This data followed a discrete uniform distribution on a support of 1-10 with 10 representative of high evidence that a correlate is present. Using this measurement scale, a principal can rate how his/her school demonstrates each of the correlates without having to give a negative evaluation of his/her school. In statistics, this discrete uniform distribution is a type of probability in which all outcomes are equally likely (Creswell, 2003). There are two types of uniform distributions. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used discrete uniform distribution because the possible results were only the numbers 1-10. Using the measurement scale of 1-10, it was possible to determine the level that each of the correlates is present in the school. In this

particular research study, the discrete uniform distribution determined which of the Characteristics of Effective Schools were present in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in South Carolina.

The discrete uniform distribution must have both validity and reliability. Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. The survey administered to each administrator in the selected schools specifically measured the degree to which the Characteristics of Effective Schools were present. The researcher piloted this survey questionnaire using 18 elementary school principals in one school district in South Carolina. This pilot testing is important to establish the content validity of the survey questionnaire and to improve the questions, format, and the scales (Creswell, 2003).

A questionnaire is appropriate for use in a quantitative study because it can reach a large number of participants relatively easily. Unlike an interview or participant observation, the questionnaire allows for data to be obtained quickly. A single-stage sampling procedure was used, because email addresses of the principals who were invited to participate in the survey were accessible. Creswell (2003) noted that two qualitative researchers, Salant and Dillman, suggested a four-phase administration process. After consideration of the proposed process, the researcher adjusted the process slightly. First, the researcher created awareness of the survey by emailing a brief notification to elementary principals who worked in these selected schools during the 2011-2012 school year. The survey was emailed two days after the letter. A week later, the third notification, an email reminder, was distributed to those administrators who had not taken the

survey. Thus, in total, the research process concluded within four weeks.

Once the data was collected, a statistical program was used for the statistical analysis. The data tables were compiled using the statistic program IBM SPSS. The initial screen is similar to an Excel file. Each row contains data for one person and each column contains information for each variable. To get data into SPSS, the Excel data file was imported based on the Google Doc results from the survey. For this data, descriptive statistics were analyzed.

Risk Assessment

There was a possible risk of anonymity being compromised because the survey requested that the participants identify the school with which they were associated to allow the researcher to determine participation. The researcher minimized the risk by requesting neither names nor linking school names with data. All data was analyzed collectively. This was minimal risk for the completion of this survey, as all participating schools were being recognized for the positive work they are doing with their students.

Benefits Assessment

This research is necessary so school leaders of low-performing, high-poverty schools in South Carolina can begin to understand what characteristics principals of high poverty, high performing schools perceive to be the most important factors to their success when working with low socioeconomic students.

Summary

This chapter provided the overview of the problem, a review of the

research questions, a review of the site selection, and instrumentation. This researcher sought to determine which Characteristics of Effective Schools were most widely used in high-poverty, high-performing schools. Chapter 4 will present the findings from the survey.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to analyze South Carolina Title I elementary schools to provide educators with a better understanding of how the seven correlates of effective schools impact high-poverty schools (Effective Schools, 2012; Marzano, 2000). The results of this study will aid in understanding how high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina promote high levels of student achievement. This chapter contains the results from the analysis of the survey data for this study. Initially, descriptive statistics for the survey sample of principals are provided. Then, the results related to each of the three research questions are presented, and the chapter concludes with a summary.

Analysis of Research Question 1

The first research question of this study was: What do principals in high-performing, high-poverty schools in South Carolina have in common? To answer this question, data on the gender and educational attainment of the principals were examined. The survey sample for this study consisted of the principals of the 134 Title I elementary schools in South Carolina with an ESEA report card rating of A and a 75% or higher poverty index during the 2011-2012 school year. A total of 51 of these individuals participated in this study. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 4.1*Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 51)*

	<i>n</i>	%
Principal in 2011-2012		
No	0	15.7
Yes	51	84.3
Gender		
Female	39	76.5
Male	12	23.5
Education		
Master's degree	7	13.7
Master's degree + 30 hours	26	51.0
Educational Specialist (Ed.S.)	11	21.6
Educational Doctorate (Ed.D.)	6	11.8
Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.)	1	2.0

All of the participants, 51, reported being employed as a principal in the identified high-poverty, high-performing school during 2011-2012, and most of the participants (76.5%) were female. The most common level of education was a master's degree + 30 hours (51.0%), followed by educational specialists (21.6%), master's degrees (13.7%), educational doctorates (11.8%), and doctor of philosophy (2.0%).

Analysis of Research Question 2

The second research question of this study was: Which of the correlates do South Carolina elementary principals believe are present in their own high poverty, high-performing schools? As discussed in Chapter 1, there are seven key correlates of effective schools: instructional leadership, a clearly stated and focused mission, a safe and positive environment, high expectations for all students, frequent monitoring of student progress, maximization of learning opportunities, and positive communication with school, home, and community. Table 2 reveals the mean rating for each of these seven areas.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics for Ratings of Seven Correlates of Effective Schools (N = 51)

Area	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Instructional Leadership	6	10	9.02	.97
Clearly Stated and Focused Mission	3	10	8.84	1.38
A Safe and Positive Environment	6	10	9.47	.95
High Expectations for All Students	6	10	9.31	.99
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress	5	10	9.06	1.05
Maximized Learning Opportunities	5	10	8.98	1.05
Positive Communication with Home, School, Community	5	10	8.98	1.09

The ratings were made on a 1 through 10 scale with higher values indicating that the characteristic was perceived by the principals to be more present in their school. The highest mean ratings were for a positive and safe environment (M = 9.47, SD = .95) and high expectations for all students (M = 9.31, SD = .99). High mean ratings were also given to frequent monitoring of student progress (M = 9.06, SD = 1.05) and instructional leadership (M = 9.02, SD = .97). The lowest ratings were given to having a clearly stated and focused mission (M = 8.84, SD = 1.38), maximizing learning opportunities (M = 8.98, SD = 1.05), and having positive communication with home, school, and community (M = 8.98).

The Correlates of Effective Schools as perceived by principals to be the most prevalent in high-performing, high-poverty schools were a positive and safe environment and high expectations for all students followed by frequent monitoring of student progress and instructional leadership. However, all seven of the Correlates of Effective Schools had ratings of 8.84 or higher on a 10-point scale, indicating that all of the correlates were perceived to be substantially present in the high-performing, high-poverty schools included in this study.

Analysis of Research Question 3

The third research question was: How do principals of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina rank the seven correlates according to the correlates' significance in their schools? Table 4.3 presents the percentage of principals and how each principal ranked each of the seven correlates as most important.

Table 4.3

Percentage of Principals Ranking Each of the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools as Most Important (N = 51)

	<i>n</i>	%
Instructional Leadership	14	27.5
Clearly Stated and Focused Mission	8	15.7
A Safe and Positive Environment	18	35.3
High Expectations for All Students	13	25.5
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress	3	5.9
Maximized Learning Opportunities	4	7.8
Positive Communication with Home, School, Community	8	15.7

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100.0% because some principals selected two of the correlates as most important.

The correlate that was ranked first most commonly was a safe and positive environment (35.3%), with instructional leadership ranked first by 27.5% of the sample. Having high expectations for all students was also frequently ranked first by 25.5% of the sample. Based on these results, the principals of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina ranked a safe and positive environment, instructional leadership, and having high expectations as most significant in their schools.

Table 4.4 presents the percentage of principals who ranked each correlate as least important.

Table 4.4

Percentage of Principals Ranking Each of the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools as Least Important (N = 51)

	<i>n</i>	%
Instructional Leadership	3	5.9
Clearly Stated and Focused Mission	16	31.4
A Safe and Positive Environment	9	17.6
High Expectations for All Students	3	5.9
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress	1	2.0
Maximized Learning Opportunities	9	17.6
Positive Communication with Home, School, Community	18	35.3

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100.0% because some principals selected two of the correlates as least important.

The correlate ranked as least important most often was positive communication with home, school, and the community (35.3%), followed by a clearly stated and focused mission (31.4%). A safe and positive environment (17.6%) and maximized learning opportunities (17.6%) were also ranked as least important with substantial frequency, while frequent monitoring of student progress (2.0%), instructional leadership (5.9%), and high expectations for all students (5.9%) were rarely ranked as least important.

Additional Analysis

In addition to the quantitative analyses for the three specific research questions of this study, principals were also asked to respond to one open-ended question about any other factors they considered to be critical to the success of their high-poverty, high-performing school. The categorized responses to this question are shown in Table 4.5.

There is some subjectivity here because the researcher had to read the responses and categorize the responses accordingly. The statements were summarized rather than posted in the results verbatim. The most common responses were associated with the use of data-driven instruction (19.6%), involving parents in instruction (19.6%), common planning teams or professional learning communities (17.6%), and an emphasis on educating all students (17.6%). Other participants commented that it was difficult or impossible to rank the seven listed correlates because all were necessary (15.7%), or that key factors related to support from principals and administrators (13.7%), building quality relationships with students (11.8%), teacher training (11.8%), consistency (7.8%), after-school programs (7.8%), frequent classroom observations (5.9%), offering incentives to students (3.9%), increasing collaboration among grade levels (3.9%), and using response-to-intervention models (3.9%).

Table 4.5

Summary of Responses to Open-Ended Question About Critical Success Factors for Effective Schools (N = 51)

	<i>n</i>	%
Data driven instruction	10	19.6
Involve parents	10	19.6
Common planning teams/PLCs	9	17.6
Educate all students	9	17.6
Can't rank them, all are necessary	8	15.7
Support from principals/administrators	7	13.7
Relationships with students	6	11.8
Teacher training	6	11.8
Consistency	4	7.8
After-school programs	4	7.8
Classroom observations	3	5.9
Incentives for students	2	3.9
Collaboration among grade levels	2	3.9
Response to intervention	2	3.9

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100.0% because multiple responses were provided.

A final set of supplemental analyses was performed to determine if principal gender affected the importance rankings for the seven correlates. Table 4.6 shows the mean rank for each of the seven correlates as a function of gender along with the results from seven Mann-Whitney tests comparing the rankings of males and females.

Table 4.6

Comparison of Males and Females Mean Rankings of Each of the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools (N = 51)

	Females (<i>n</i> = 39)	Males (<i>n</i> = 12)	<i>p</i>
Instructional Leadership	3.31	2.50	.213
Clearly Stated and Focused Mission	4.38	3.67	.356
A Safe and Positive Environment	2.95	2.67	.837
High Expectations for All Students	3.44	2.17	.026
Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress	4.33	3.67	.295
Maximized Learning Opportunities	4.46	4.67	.581
Positive Communication with Home, School, Community	4.97	5.17	.909

Note. Lower mean rankings indicate more importance because each correlate was ranked from 1 = *most important* to 7 = *least important*. The *p* values are from Mann-Whitney tests comparing the rankings of females and males.

Mann –Whitney tests are non-parametric tests that are used to compare groups. In this instance, the seven Mann-Whitney tests that were performed compared the rankings of male principals vs. female principals. The results showed that there were no differences between males and females in their rankings of the importance of instructional leadership ($p = .213$), a clearly stated and focused mission ($p = .356$), a safe and positive environment ($p = .837$), frequent monitoring of student progress ($p = .295$), maximized learning opportunities ($p = .581$), or positive communication with home, school, and community ($p = .909$). However, there was a statistically significant difference in the rankings of the importance of high expectations for all students ($p = .026$). The mean rankings for this correlate shown in Table 4.6 indicated that male participants tended to rank high expectations for all students as more important (mean rank = 2.17) than female participants (mean rank = 3.44).

Summary

The first research question was: What do principals in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in South Carolina have in common? The demographic characteristics of the participants indicated that most of the principals serving in these schools were female and most had obtained a master's degree + 30 hours.

The second research question was: Which of the correlates do South Carolina elementary principals believe are present in their own high poverty, high-performing schools? The results indicated that the correlates of effective schools that were perceived to be the most prevalent in high-performing, high-

poverty schools were a positive and safe environment and high expectations for all students followed by frequent monitoring of student progress and instructional leadership.

The third research question was: How do principals of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina rank the seven correlates according to the correlates' significance in their schools? The results indicated that a positive and safe environment and high expectations for all students were perceived to be the most important in high-poverty, high-performing schools, followed by frequent monitoring of student progress and instructional leadership.

The results indicate principals agree with the correlates drawn by Effective Schools (2012) and Marzano (2000) that instructional leadership, a clearly stated and focused mission, a safe and positive environment, high expectations for all students, frequent monitoring of student progress, maximization of learning opportunities, and positive communication with school, home, and community were key Correlates of Effective Schools. Specifically, all seven of the correlates of effective schools had high ratings (8.84 or higher on a 10-point scale) meaning that all seven were identified by the participating principals in the study to be present in the high-performing, high-poverty schools included in this study.

Supplemental results based on responses to open-ended questions indicated that other factors considered critical to the success of high-poverty, high-performing schools were the use of data-driven instruction, involving parents in instruction, common planning teams or professional learning communities, and an emphasis on educating all students. Comparisons between male and female

principals indicated that male principals tended to rank high expectations for all students as more important than female principals, but that there were no other differences in the importance rankings between male and female principals. In the next chapter, these results are discussed and recommendations are offered for future studies and educational practice.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussions, and Implications

Effective Schools Correlates provide a framework for school improvement based on seven guiding principles, or correlates, derived from empirical investigations and case studies of school success (Effective Schools, 2012). The correlates describe the culture and learning climate of schools in which all students are achieving. The correlates have continually led administrators, teachers, and all other stakeholders towards looking at ways to improve a school's culture and the achievement levels of all of its students (Marzano, 2000). This chapter will provide a discussion incorporating the results from Chapter 4. It will also describe implications for practitioners as well as implications for future research.

Discussion

The survey results revealed that the elementary school principals' perceptions of the most important Correlates of Effective Schools closely aligned to the researcher's hypothesis. The researcher predicted that the principals in the sample would perceive instructional leadership and a safe and positive environment as the most important factors that contribute to their high-poverty school's success.

An additional level of input from teachers in the high-poverty, high-performing schools would have been beneficial to validate the perceptions of these school principals. One limitation of this research is that the researcher

requested that the principals assess their own work. The data reveals that according to principal's perceptions, all seven of the Correlates of Effective Schools had ratings of 8.84 or higher on a 10-point scale, indicating that all of the correlates were perceived to be considerably present in the high-performing, high-poverty schools included in this study. People, naturally, are likely to inflate their evaluation of their own efforts. There is no evidence to suggest that the teachers would identify the same correlates that their principal identified as being present in high degrees in the schools in which they serve.

It is inconclusive as to whether or not the teachers in the high-poverty, high-performing schools would have ranked the Correlates of Effective Schools in the same order of importance as their school principals. Sometimes, teachers see the school and the students through a different lens than that of the school principal. Using the teachers of these high poverty high performing elementary schools in South Carolina as a second level of input in this study would have increased the validity of the results.

Literature repeatedly details the significant work being done in high-poverty, high-performing schools. The results from this study indicate that elementary principals that serve in high-performing, high-poverty schools believe the seven correlates are present in high degrees in their schools. The purpose of this study was to identify the primary characteristics that principals perceive to be present in high performing, high poverty schools. The researcher hopes that recommendations are generated that lend support for low performing, high poverty schools in South Carolina elementary schools. Given that the principals

of high poverty, high performing schools believe that a safe and positive environment and instructional leadership contribute to their school's academic achievement, it is recommended that this study be expanded to develop clearer understanding of what comprises these two correlates. Once this information is obtained, principals of low performing, high poverty schools can better grasp the factors most important to embed in their school climate.

It cannot be determined that the Correlates of Effective Schools would be identified with a high degree of presence if the sample group was something other than high poverty, high performing schools. There are many other variations of students that are served in schools including special education students, gifted students, and students of color. Research on Correlates of Effective Schools does not yet distinguish their impact on schools with other characteristics besides large populations of high poverty students.

During the design of this study, it was important to the researcher to extend the focus beyond the 90-90-90 research studies. The 90-90-90 school improvement model that was discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review requires that at least 90% of the population be represented as a minority group. The researcher attempted to frame the literature study so that it specifically focused on poverty, rather than race. Poverty looks different in every community and it is inaccurate to frame poverty and race synonymously. In a rural community where the agriculture-based economy has struggled and the population is predominantly white, poverty will appear differently than it will in an urban setting with a racially diverse population where opportunities for

employment are limited (Parrett and Budge, 2012). In the United States, the requirement to be considered a Title I school is that 50% or more of the student body population of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. However, the researcher designed the study in an effort to focus on the elementary schools in South Carolina with 75% or higher of students coming from poverty. After the extensive literature review that revealed the negative effects poverty has on children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, it is remarkable that elementary schools in South Carolina are overcoming these learning barriers and maintaining high expectations for all of their students.

If existing accountability systems could actually measure the value that schools add to student learning, independent of family background, the schools that are now ranked as “high-performing” would probably be separated into two categories: schools in which students’ academic performance is directly related to the quality of teaching and learning and schools in which performance is largely attributed to income and social class (Elmore, 2006). Unfortunately, the existing federal accountability system does not distinguish between schools that produce results through high-quality teaching and those that produce results largely through social-class. The *Achievement Trap* (2007) also recognizes, “If childhood achievement levels were independent of economic background, we would expect that half of the top academic achievers would come from each half of the economic scale.”

An interesting trend from the data revealed some contradiction on the part of the participants. Table 4.4 indicates that 18 principals, 35.3% of the

sample, ranked positive communication with home, school, and community as the least important of the correlates. However, Table 4.6 indicates that when given the option to provide an open-ended response about critical factors for effective schools, 10 of the principals, 19.6%, acknowledged that involving parents was important. Further research about the involvement of parents in high poverty, high performing elementary schools is needed to confirm the data from this study.

The researcher performed seven Mann-Whitney tests to determine if principal gender had an effect on how principals ranked the Correlates of Effective Schools in order of importance. The results showed that there were no differences between males and females in these rankings with the exception that male principals tended to rank the correlate of high expectations for all students slightly higher than female principals.

As we consider the subject of poverty as it relates to education, many educators are inclined to refer to Ruby Payne's work on poverty. The researcher points out that several studies have recently criticized her book, *A Framework for Poverty*, maintaining that her book includes negative stereotypes that drew from a longstanding tradition in the US of viewing the poor from a deficit perspective (Bomer, 2008). Founder of EdChange and Assistant Professor at Hamline University, Paul Gorski, (2005), challenges Ruby Payne's work, "I see regression, stereotyping, and classism." Gorski points out that Payne fails to address contemporary trends in education reform, such as school choice, and

voucher programs that contribute to poverty by institutionalizing classism. In fact, Gorski continues:

Her work contains a stream of stereotypes, providing perfect illustrations for how deficit-model scholars frame poverty and its educational impact as problems to be solved by fixing poor people instead of the educational policies and practices that cycle poverty. The root of her framework, that people in poverty must learn the culture of middle class in order to gain full access to educational opportunities is steeped in deficit thinking (pg.8).

The need to understand the relationship between poverty and education grows increasingly urgent (Gorski, 2005). There is certainly more advanced work to be done on this subject of high poverty, high poverty schools as they relate to Ronald Edmunds' and Larry Lezotte's Correlates of Effective Schools. This quantitative research contains areas where follow up phone calls, interviews, and observations could have been conducted to check the accuracy of the high ratings that principals revealed when surveyed about their perceptions of the Correlates of Effective Schools present in their schools. A mixed-methods approach would offer the researcher both quantitative and qualitative data to support the notion that, when present in high degrees, the Correlates of Effective Schools do indeed positively impact high poverty, high performing schools.

Implications for Practitioners

It is reasonable to expect that our educational system would help to correct the high-achievement disparity that already exists between lower-income and higher-income students when they enter first grade (Wyner, Bridgeland, &

DiiJulio, 2007). If the achievement of low income students across the nation is to increase, high-achieving students from low-income families need to be provided greater opportunities to grow academically over time.

The results of this study suggest that when transforming high poverty, low-performing schools, school principals may want to consider the implementation of the seven Correlates of Effective Schools. There is a need to extend the research to seek other research-based practices that have a positive impact on student achievement in high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools. Suggestions for practitioners to support elementary schools that have a high population of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are as follows:

1. Based on the results from the study, a safe and positive environment was the correlate that was ranked as the most important correlate by the participating elementary school administrators of high-performing, high-poverty schools. Successful schools understand the challenges low income families face and provide wide ranging support for students (Jensen, 2009). Therefore, practitioners should seek out ways to enrich the life of every student. This may include changing practices that provide unmerited consequences for low income families such as fees to participate in clubs or sports teams and provide tutors at no cost to help students who struggle with curriculum concepts. Larry Lezotte indicates that this correlate includes an increased emphasis on the presence of certain desirable behaviors such as cooperative learning (Lezotte, 1991). Lezotte encourages practitioners to create schools as places where students actually help one another and feel safe and supported. The National Center for

Education Statistics reports that 51% of elementary schools in America reported that they used security cameras to monitor their school during the 2010-2011 school year. Additionally, in an effort to ensure safety, 94% of elementary schools nationwide reported controlling access to building during school hours. During the 2009-2010 school year, 43% of elementary schools in America reported the presence of one or more School Resource Officers at their school at least once a week during the school year. Maslow identifies safety as one of the hierarchy of needs for a person. He indicates the safety level is more likely to be found in children because they generally have a greater need to feel safe in their surroundings (McCleod, 2007).

2. The survey data revealed that 76.5% of the principals were females at high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina during 2010-2011 school year. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that during 2010-2011, there were 55% male principals in elementary schools and 44% female principals serving in South Carolina. Comparative national norms indicate that during this same year, there were approximately 49% male elementary principals and 50% female elementary principals in the United States. This high percentage of female elementary principals in the study leads the researcher to speculate that more female principals are apt to find passion in serving in high-poverty elementary schools when given the option.

3. Professional development for teachers has the potential to substantially impact instructional improvement. Federal requirements to increase test scores of children from economically disadvantaged families have fueled the demand for

professional development (Bomer, 2008). Table 4.5 identifies factors that principals identified as critical factors to their school's success. These open ended responses included data driven instruction, teacher training, and professional learning communities. This indicates that professional development centered around data could be helpful to teachers so they can learn more about the students they serve and how to better use the data to impact student achievement. Engage NY defines Data Driven Instruction and Inquiry (DDI) as a precise and systematic approach to improving student learning throughout the year. The inquiry cycle of data-driven instruction includes assessment, analysis, and action and is a key framework for school-wide support of all student success.

4. For schools that have large populations of students from poverty, develop community partnerships. Seek out free medical services for students without health care and free tutoring from nearby university students. These high poverty schools are encouraged to request book donations from libraries or the service organizations in the community for students of poverty to take home. The literature review for this study revealed that children of poverty lacked many of these resources.

Implications for Future Research

Presented below are suggestions for researchers to conduct future research around high-poverty, high-performing schools:

1. Future quantitative studies are recommended to research each of the correlates individually to better understand how high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools establish these type of conditions in their school culture. A

qualitative study of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools would illustrate the specific correlates in a much deeper context. Qualitative research seeks to understand some aspect of daily life from the perspective of those involved; thus it is grounded in lived experience (Maxwell, 1996). This type of research seeks to particularize, rather than generalize (Maxwell, 1996).

Qualitative research is richly descriptive and the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Maxwell, 1996). It is not uncommon to find low performing schools implementing effective schools correlates in their school environment. The difference in achievement of these schools and high performing schools is often the intensity, the coherence, and the willingness to stay focused on the correlates implementation over time (Effective Schools, 2012). Qualitative research would likely unveil these differences.

2. For the purpose of this research study, the definitions of the 1st Generation Correlates were used; however, further research on the 2nd Generation Correlates may prove to be an interesting study for researchers to analyze in the context of a school. Lezotte (1991) recognizes that the global definition of the correlate, high expectations for all students, has broadened over time. Historically, this correlate encouraged teachers to deliver the lesson by evenly distributing questions asked among all students and provide each student with an equal opportunity to participate in the learning process. Unfortunately, over time, this methodology proved to be insufficient to assure mastery for many learners (Lezotte, 1991). This correlate's broader context examines the school's response when some students do not learn. Researchers who study this

correlate in isolation are encouraged to identify schools that have set high expectations for all students by examining the transformation of a school's culture from an institution designed for instruction into an institution designed to assure learning (Lezotte, 1991). The concept of a positive and safe school environment conducive to learning for all students most recently places an increased emphasis on the presence of certain desirable behaviors including cooperative learning (Lezotte, 1991). Schools with a high degree of this correlate are places where students help and support one another. Schools would likely find it beneficial to begin to view this correlate as much more than simply the elimination of undesirable behaviors (Lezotte, 1991). Researchers in a future study may look closely at how schools are able to get students to work cooperatively and what curriculum, if any, these schools use to teach respect and tolerance.

3. It is to be assumed that the value of these correlates in middle schools will equal the value that they are to the elementary schools. It is recommended that this study be replicated yet focus on high-poverty, high-performing secondary schools in South Carolina to determine if the presence of each of the correlates is interpreted differently by these school principals at the secondary level. Data from the South Carolina State Department website indicates that in 2011-2012, there were 224 middle schools in South Carolina. Of those, 57 were Title I schools with a poverty index of 75% or higher. The data reveals that of those 57 Title I middle schools, 13 of these high-poverty schools had an ESEA rating of A in 2012 and 13 of these high-poverty middle schools had an ESEA

rating of F in 2012.

4. Future studies nationwide of high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools are encouraged to determine if the data is conclusive in support of the presence of the seven Correlates of Effective Schools. Researchers are recommended to conduct a similar study using elementary schools across the country with similar demographics (75% and higher free and reduced lunch enrollment and high ratings on the state's accountability standards) to determine if principals' perceptions in high poverty high performing elementary schools across the country reveal that the presence of the Correlates of Effective Schools does positively impact academic achievement.

5. Replicating the study but focusing the study on a different student population sub-group may create more validity for the Correlates of Effective Schools. It is uncertain if the Correlates of Effective Schools are perceived to be present in high degrees in schools that serve a high representation of special needs students, gifted students, or even students of color.

6. Conduct longitudinal studies of high-poverty, high performing schools to determine trends in their academic achievement and note patterns of success in schools that sustain high achievement over time.

Conclusions

As schools face public demands for increased student achievement, more researchers are studying high-poverty, high-performing schools. This study was conducted to analyze South Carolina high poverty, high performing elementary schools to determine how principals in these schools believe the seven

Correlates of Effective Schools impact student achievement. The sample for this study consisted of the principals of the 134 Title I elementary schools in South Carolina with an ESEA report card rating of A and a 75% or higher poverty index during the 2011-2012 school year. A total of 51 of these principals participated in this study. This is approximately 40% of the sample. Based on the results shared in Chapter 4, the correlates that these principals perceived to be the most common in high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools were a positive and safe environment and high expectations for all students followed by frequent monitoring of student progress and instructional leadership. There is a pattern of evidence in the literature that identifies that, when present, the Correlates of Effective Schools, can aid in maintaining high academic achievement in high-poverty schools.

The data revealed from the questionnaire that elementary school principals perceive that the seven correlates are manifested in high degrees in their high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina. These seven correlates include: instructional leadership, a clearly stated and focused mission, a safe and positive environment, high expectations for all students, frequent monitoring of student progress, maximization of learning opportunities, and positive communication with school, home, and community.

There are 134 high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina that show us what is possible. These schools should compel us to learn from them to help underachieving students who live in poverty, regardless of where they attend school. As Ronald Edmonds said, "Whether or not we do it

depends upon how we feel about the fact that we haven't done it so far." (Budge & Parrett, 2012).

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Appendix A:
Survey Questionnaire

Pilot survey: Recognizing the similarities in High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools in elementary schools in South Carolina

Your school has been recognized as a high-performing, high-poverty school! Congratulations for the work you do each day to ensure that all of your students are successful. The purpose of this research is to determine if there are commonalities in these high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in South Carolina. Based on the work of Ron Edmunds and Larry Lezotte, the Characteristics of Effective Schools will be the qualifying evidence that the research will study closely.

* Required

*School Name**

*Were you the principal of this school during the 2011-2012 school year?**

- Yes
- No

*As a school principal, what is your highest degree of education?**

- Bachelors degree
- Masters degree
- Masters degree + 30 hours
- Educational Specialist (EdS)
- Educational Doctorate (Ed.D)
- Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD)

*What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male

Definitions: Characteristics of Effective Schools

- 1. Instructional Leadership:** Principals are the driving force behind school change and curriculum focus in classrooms.
- 2. Clearly Stated and Focused Mission:** The mission of the school is communicated to all stakeholders
- 3. A Safe and Positive Environment:** Order is expected and it is acknowledged by all stakeholders that routine discipline problems impede the learning process.
- 4. High Expectations for All Students:** Students use higher order thinking skills, explore their creativity, and sharpen their communicative ability.
- 5. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress:** Teachers adjust teaching to accommodate the needs of all learners appropriately.
- 6. Maximized Learning Opportunities:** Focus is on student time-on-task
- 7. Positive Communication with Home, School, Community:** Relationships are evident and nurtured.

Using a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest degree evident and 10 being the highest degree evident, please indicate to what degree the following characteristic is present in your school.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Instructional Leadership	<input type="radio"/>											
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*Using a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest degree evident and 10 being the highest degree evident, please indicate to what degree the following characteristic is present in your school.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Clearly Stated and Focused Mission	<input type="radio"/>											
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*Using a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest degree evident and 10 being the highest degree evident, please indicate to what degree the following characteristic is present in your school.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A Safe and Positive Environment	<input type="radio"/>											
---------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--	--

*Using a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest degree evident and 10 being the highest degree evident, please indicate to what degree the following characteristic is present in your school.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

High Expectations for All Students	<input type="radio"/>											
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*Using a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest degree evident and 10 being the highest degree evident, please indicate to what degree the following characteristic is present in your school.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress _____	<input type="radio"/>										
--	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

*Using a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest degree evident and 10 being the highest degree evident, please indicate to what degree the following characteristic is present in your school.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Maximized Learning Opportunities _____	<input type="radio"/>										
---	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

*Using a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest degree evident and 10 being the highest degree evident, please indicate to what degree the following characteristic is present in your school.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Positive Communication with Home, School, and Community _____	<input type="radio"/>										
--	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

*Rank the Characteristics of Effective Schools from 1-7 in order of importance with #1 being the most important characteristic in a high-poverty, high-performing school.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Instructional Leadership _____	<input type="radio"/>						
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*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Clearly Stated and Focused Mission _____	<input type="radio"/>						
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*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A Safe and Positive Environment _____	<input type="radio"/>							
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*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

High Expectations for All Students _____	<input type="radio"/>							
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*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress _____	<input type="radio"/>							
--	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--

*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Maximized Learning Opportunities _____	<input type="radio"/>							
---	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--

*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Positive Communication with Home, School, and Community _____	<input type="radio"/>							
---	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Your responses will be helpful to continue research to determine how best to support high-poverty elementary schools in South Carolina. Please share any other information about your school's success that may contribute to the research.

Appendix B:

First electronic mailout to survey participants

As an elementary principal addressing similar issues as many of you, finding out more about what works best for students in a high-poverty school is an interest of mine. I am completing a dissertation from the University of South Carolina focusing on this topic.

In (2) days you will receive a survey link requesting that you participate in a study focusing on high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in South Carolina. You have been asked to participate in the survey because your elementary school received an A rating on the 2011-2012 state report card and has 75% or higher poverty index. I commend you for the work you do each day for your students. Your participation in this study is appreciated. The study will take less than five minutes to complete. I will use the data to demonstrate what characteristics are most effective in high-poverty, high-performing schools in an effort to share this data with those elementary schools in low-performing, high-poverty elementary schools.

Thank you for your time and participation. For more information about this survey or the data I receive, please contact me at kbarber@richland2.org

Appendix C: Internal Review Board Approval Letter



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

July 22, 2013

Ms. Katie Barber
College of Education
Education Leadership & Policies
Wardlaw
Columbia, SC 29208

Re: **Pro00027178**

Study Title: *Recognizing the Similarities in High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools in Elementary Schools in South Carolina*

Dear Ms. Barber:

The Office of Research Compliance, an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB), reviewed the referenced study on behalf of the USC IRB, and determined that the proposed activity is exempt from the Protection of Human Subjects Regulations (45 CFR 46.102). No further oversight by the IRB is required; however, the investigator should inform this office prior to making any substantive changes to the study, as this may alter the exempt status of the study.

If you have questions, please contact Arlene McWhorter at arlenem@sc.edu or (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa M. Johnson".

Lisa M. Johnson
IRB Manager

cc: Edward Cox