January 2012

Narrowing The Achievment Gap: A Case Study On How St. Cloud School District 742 Improved Academic Growth For Black Students In Three Years

George Earl Nolan

NARROWING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: A CASE STUDY ON HOW ST. CLOUD SCHOOL DISTRICT 742 IMPROVED ACADEMIC GROWTH FOR BLACK STUDENTS IN THREE YEARS

by

George Earl Nolan
Bachelor of Science, Southwest State University, 1991
Master of Science, Minnesota State University – Mankato, 2002

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Grand Forks, North Dakota
December
2012

This dissertation, submitted by George Earl Nolan, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

Dr. Gary Schnellert, Chair

Dr. Marcellin Zahui

Dr. Sherryl Houdek

Dr. Assion Lawson-Body

Dr. Douglas Munski

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the Graduate School at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

Dr. Wayne Swisher
Dean of the Graduate School

December 13, 2012
Date

Title	Narrowing the Achievement Gap: A Case Study on how St. Cloud School District 742 Improved Academic Growth for Black Students in Three Years
Department	Educational Leadership
Degree	Doctor of Education

In presenting this dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my dissertation work or, in his absence, by the chairperson of the department or the dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this dissertation or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my dissertation.

George Earl Nolan
December 10, 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES x

LIST OF TABLES xi

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS xii

ABSTRACT xiii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Background 1

Statement of the Problem 7

Purpose of the Study 8

Research Questions 8

Significance of the Study 8

Limitations 9

Delimitations 9

Assumptions 10

Design of the Study 10

Definition of Terms 10

Summary 13

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 15

Achievement Gap 15

Factors Contributing to the Black-White Achievement Gap 17

Family Factors 17

School Factors 18

Communities 19

Peer Pressure 19

Smaller Class Size 20

Teacher Quality and Support 21

Literacy Development 22

Ebonics 22

Reading and Writing 23

Mathematics Achievement 25

Ways to Close the Gap 25

Preschool: The Beginnings 25

Desegregation 26

Stereotype Threat 26

Institutional Racism 27

Institutional Change and Educational Activity Related to Student Culture 30

Culturally Relevant Instruction 36

School Culture and Student Achievement 36

Administrator and Teacher Beliefs 40

Summary 41

III. METHODOLOGY 43
Introduction 43
Statement of the Problem 44
Research Questions 44
Research Methodology 45
Research Design 46
Population and Data Collection 46
Instrumentation 47
Validity 48
Reliability 48
Survey, Data Collection, and Analysis 48
Case Study Protocol 49
Field Procedures 49
Guide for Writing the Case Study Report 49
Ethical Considerations 49
Summary 50
IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS 51
Introduction 51
School District 51
District-Wide Programs Description 53
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) 54
Response to Intervention (RTI) 55

Vertical Teams 55

District-Wide Practices Description 55

Data Driven Decision Making 56

AYP Teachers 57

Learning Cohorts 57

District-Wide Instructional Strategies Description 57

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and English Immersion 58

School Intervention 58

Discovery, Talahi, Madison, and North Middle School 58

Data by Research Questions 59

Research Question 1 60

Research Question 2 62

Research Question 3 65

Research Question 4 70

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION 72

Summary 72

Conclusion 74

Research Recommendations 75

APPENDICES 78

A. Administrator Survey 79

B. Teacher Survey 84

C. Parent/Guardian Climate Survey, 2006 89

D. Parent/Guardian Climate Survey, 2007 97

E. Interview Protocol 105

REFERENCES 106

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.	MCA Reading Index Rates – St. Cloud School District #742	68
2.	MCA Math Index Rates – St. Cloud School District #742	68
3.	Percentage of Black Students That Met or Exceeded Reading MAP® Growth Targets	69
4.	Percentage of Black Students That Met or Exceeded Math MAP® Growth Targets	69

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	A Model of Effective Organizational Culture	38
2.	Research Design of the Case Study	46
3.	District-Wide Programs That Promote Student Achievement and Contribute to Improved Reading and Math for Black Students	54
4.	District-Wide Practices That Promote Student Achievement and Contribute to Improved Reading and Math for Black Students	56
5.	District-Wide Instructional Strategies That Promote Student Achievement and Contribute to Improved Reading and Math for Black Students	57
6.	Administrator/Teacher Survey, Research Question 1	61
7.	Administrator/Teacher Survey, Research Question 2	63
8.	Administrator/Teacher Survey, Research Question 3	65

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this time to say thank you to my family. This has been a long and grinding journey for me. Despite all of the ups and downs of this journey, I feel as if I have done the necessary work to have this research impact others. I want to thank my mother and father for providing me the passion and base to understand the needs of those who need help. I want to thank my friends who cheered me on this long quest. Your support and understanding has been essential.

I want to thank Dr. Schnellert for sticking with me and helping me with this process. Your patience and guidance has helped me value your loyalty and commitment to a student's success. Thank you also to Dr. Houdek for your encouragement and vested interest in seeing me complete my program.

To my colleagues and friends, you all know the difficult journey that lies ahead for educators. This dissertation serves as a window displaying a small piece of what is a difficult educational culture, and I enjoyed talking to you and gathering perceptions and thoughts on this problem. Thanks again.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to identify gradual growth and improvement in test scores of black students compared to white students for St. Cloud School District 742 as showed in NWEA and MCA testing. The achievement gap in the state of Minnesota has been a pervasive issue that has long been discussed and analyzed. School districts the size of St. Cloud have seen dramatic shifts in demographics that have caused administrators and teachers to change their instructional approaches.

This study looked at specific programs, practices, and instructional strategies that recognized growth and improvement in state testing and assessment for black students in St. Cloud School District 742. An increase in Somali immigrants along with a steady number of African-American families in the St. Cloud area has resulted in a significant number of students who either were new to the country or below grade level proficiencies in the areas of math and reading. From 2004-2006, the district saw a double digit drop in proficiency scores of students in math and reading from the previous school year of 2003-2004. District enrollment of black students increased 20% in one year's time (in 2004-2005) and continued to increase until school year 2005-2006 when School District 742 implemented new programs, practices, and strategies to help address the decline in math and reading proficiency scores. Within a three year period after the implementation of new interventions, the district saw an increase in

NWEA reading and math scores and improvement in MCA scores (This information was obtained by accessing the Viewpoint database, a database containing confidential information about individual students in the school district. Viewpoint data is protected by federal and state law, and local district policy, and therefore, no citation has been given.).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"*Quality is never an accident: it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction, and skillful execution; it represents the wise of choice of many alternatives*." Willa Foster

Background

"With passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, closing achievement gaps among . . . various student groups became a focus of federal education accountability" ("Achievement Gap," 2011, ¶ 2). Schools and districts were required to address federal accountability issues by changing the way they assessed student achievement ("Achievement Gap," 2011).

Black students' performance and the substantial proficiency gap between them and white students has long been observed and debated (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008); but recent trends in education, demography, and the economy continue to make the achievement gap a high-priority issue. State and national leaders recognize the nation cannot raise standards and improve student achievement without closing the achievement gap. Serious research attention has been given to the achievement gap between black and white students in a variety of educational settings (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill- Jackson, 2008).

Over the years, much literature has explored the influence of individual-family-school related attributes (e.g., gender, race, class, nutrition, genetics, parental

factors, institutional characters, etc.) on educational outcomes (Lee & Madyun, 2009). Although many school leaders already play a key role in mobilizing teachers, parents, and other community stakeholders to work together to improve schools and achievement levels for black K-12 students, leaders recognize that this is a challenging task (Boykin, Coleman, Lilja, & Tyler, 2004). Today's leaders must have skills that go beyond management and budgets. Today's leaders must make connections with a broad cross-section of educational stakeholders, build a thriving school community, and facilitate effective communication and collaboration. A school leader must not only be knowledgeable about curricular and instructional choices, he or she must advocate for children.

Efforts to address the achievement gap have consistently focused on socioeconomic causes as well. In light of this, it is not surprising that the effects of poverty remain the most significant socio-cultural cause of the academic achievement gap (Talbert-Johnson, 2004).

To gain positive results for black students and other students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds, educational leaders must "create a web of support around children and their families" (Houston, 2001, p. 428). The roles and duties of today's educational leaders are complex and challenging, sometimes without obvious rewards. To do the job well and withstand adversity requires a commitment not only of time, energy, and professional resources, but also of heart and soul. To make schools work for students from diverse backgrounds, a school's culture must be built on a foundation of respect for diversity, and it must support the high achievement of all students. The most effective educational leaders are collaborators, working with

their staffs, their students, and their students' families to establish educational climates that ensure the high achievement of African-American students (Charles & O'Quinn, 2001).

Concentrating on African-American students does not mean creating one separate pathway to success for African-American students and another for students from other backgrounds (Charles & O'Quinn, 2001). It does, however, mean creating institutional infrastructures, cultures, and environments that support the many different ways in which people learn. Charles and O'Quinn (2001) went on to state, "such institutions effectively meet the needs of individuals and diverse groups of learners, ultimately promoting the educational success of all."

If educational leaders are to make substantial progress toward building, sustaining, and replicating effective programs for black students, they need to understand the many dimensions of institutional racism. Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, and Upton (2000) advised that school leaders must do more to address institutional racism than create effective schools. Oakes et al. provided readers with the opportunity to explore institutional racism in the context of America's public schools. Other scholars have given suggestions for ways education leaders can begin to eliminate harmful policies and practices within their educational institutions and settings (Cheng & Starks, 2002).

What kind of institutional and instructional changes are needed to support the successful schooling of black students? In today's public schools, success for African-Americans is too often elusive (Cheng & Starks, 2002.). Overall, the data are not encouraging (Tidwell, 2000). Specifically, national data have shown that African-

American students score lower than students from other racial groups on measures of reading achievement (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003). Regardless of this, education remains the most effective road to success. Removing the barriers that prevent African-American students from accessing a high-quality public education is an essential first step in achieving access to the economic, social, and political resources that are needed to support strong families and a truly democratic society (Ferguson, 2003). It is important that teachers, school counselors, and school administrators continue to question the training of all educational professionals and discuss the fundamental questions related to African-American student achievement (Flowers & Flowers, 2008).

Changing the institutional culture of schools to focus on achievement and other related outcomes is a good idea as is having universally high standards. However, insisting on the goal of high achievement for all students without also providing the resources needed to support high achievement is self defeating. Although there have been years of "school reform," most schools serving black students and families still fail to provide them with a high-quality educational experience as evidenced by dropout rates of up to 47% for African-American students ("Black Male Graduation vs Dropout Rate," n.d.). Other schools throughout the country continue to place a large percentage of African-American students into "lower ability" tracks (Education Rights Center at Howard University School of Law, 2012).

Even schools that redesign their practices so that African-American students gain equal access to challenging educational programs often fail to address other important issues such as access to effective prerequisite courses, the need for

supportive and caring student-teacher relationships, and the need to increase the levels of parent and community involvement (Haycock, Jerald, & Huang, 2001). Given the cultural and academic disconnect between black students and the schools they attend, most of America's schools still do not support the high achievement of African-American students. Although universally high standards and a responsive and responsible system of assessment are admirable, effective schools must include a variety of supports that enable students from all backgrounds to attain high standards.

The concept of multiple pathways to academic success is entirely consistent with constructivist approaches to education now recommended by many experts. Among other things, constructivist approaches call for educators to build on the individual and cultural resources students bring with them to class (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001).

> However, this proven strategy is made much more difficult to enact given that the teaching workforce is largely White and middle class and the nation's students are increasingly poor and from diverse ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds. Simply put, most White, middle-class teachers do not have the knowledge or experience they need to build the cultural resources of their African-American and other diverse students. And not unlike their White, middle-class counterparts, many ethnically diverse teachers who also come from middle-class backgrounds frequently find themselves disconnected from the lived experiences and cultural backgrounds of their lower-income students and families. (p. 171)

Many widely-publicized "successful" school reform models have been measured by how much they improve test scores.

> Even if we accept standardized test scores as a measure of improved achievement, we must still recognize that many of these reform models have not brought about the changes needed to close the achievement gap between African-American and White students. (Alexander et al., 2001, p. 173)

Some schools have succeeded in generally improving achievement for many of their students, but such efforts have failed to decrease or eliminate existing gaps in achievement and dropout rates (Baker, 2005). When test scores raise more or less equally among African-American and white students, the achievement gap is maintained. Unfortunately, rising test scores can also be the result of an increase in student dropout rates (Baker, 2005).

A single-minded focus on high stakes assessment and accountability practices as the only measure of school and student success can undermine the entire school reform effort with a disproportionately negative impact on poor students of diverse backgrounds. Houston (2001) noted that, "If you lean your ladder against the wrong wall, you will paint the wrong house" (p. 428). He further described the problem of the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) wave of education reform as one that tries to force students' learning by giving them high-stakes tests and a narrow curriculum. Houston believed that this approach of applying external pressure is doomed to failure.

Many educators acknowledge the importance of authentically addressing diversity in school reform efforts. They recognize that designing effective educational programs for African-American students must go beyond the surface. It requires more than celebrating Black History Month, having African-American role models, or incorporating the historical contributions of people from diverse ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds into the curriculum. They are not always sure, however, how to integrate issues related to differences in students' backgrounds and learning preferences into the overall reform effort (Carnoy, 1994). "In principle, the public has

been behind closing the achievement gap, and schools have employed a variety of tactics to address it" ("Achievement Gap," 2011, ¶ 11).

Educational leaders have a responsibility to lean their ladders against the right wall, using their knowledge, resources, and power to ensure the academic success of all students. To do this, educational leaders must establish a climate of support and collaboration in which teachers, students, and families are valued, and each student's achievement and well-being is monitored and supported as part of a collective school-wide, family, and community responsibility. I believe institutional changes need to result in high achievement for all students.

Statement of the Problem

Most school districts across the United States similar demographically to Minnesota School District 742 have not been successful in closing the achievement gap (Barton & Coley, 2007, The Education Trust, 2009a). The state of Minnesota has one of the greatest gaps in achievement between black and white students (Kirk, 2012). In 2007, black eighth grade students passed the math test on average 37 points below that of white students, and black fourth grade students passed the reading test, on average, 33 points below white students (The Education Trust, 2009b). Specifically, black students have not made the gains necessary to decrease gaps in reading and math proficiency. The societal consequences that exist is concerning to many. In a global economy, it is essential that all students have the ability to achieve academically. Eliminating the achievement gap is a high priority for many schools locally and nationally ("Achievement Gap," 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to present how St. Cloud School District #742 implemented district-wide programs, district-wide practices, and instructional strategies that contributed to the growth and improvement in state testing and assessment scores of black students in the St. Cloud School District.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. How did district-wide programs promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?
2. How did district-wide practices promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?
3. What instructional strategies were used to improve reading and math achievement scores for black students?
4. How did parents perceive the strengths and vulnerabilities of the improvement efforts?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this case study provide school administrators and teachers with a model of School District 742's efforts to narrow the achievement gap between black and white students. The results may be of interest to scholars in education looking at best practices. It will also be instructive to school people in that every "real-world"

effort in education also includes some missteps and errors from which others can learn.

Limitations

"Progress seen over several decades in narrowing the educational achievement gap between black and white students has remained stalled for 20 years" (Strauss, 2010, ¶ 1).

Additionally, it is commonly assumed that a case study will have high internal validity and low external validity. That is, if well written and documented, it will reflect the reality of what it describes with fidelity (internal validity) but not be generalizable beyond the singularity of the case, therefore threatening external validity (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In answer to this charge, Popper (1959) posed the argument of the "black swan." A single case study has the power of falsification.

> Falsification is one of the most rigorous tests to which a scientific proposition can be subjected: If just one observation does not fit with the proposition, it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected. Popper himself used the now famous example 'all swans are white' and proposed that just one observation of a single black swan would falsify this proposition and in this way have general significance and stimulate further investigations and theory building. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 228)

So, one instance can indeed challenge a whole proposition. In this study, the notion, "the achievement gap between African-American and white students is permanent" can be disproved by one case showing a narrowing of the achievement gap.

Delimitations

This case study focuses on one school district of a particular size within Minnesota. The city in which the district is located is suburban. Therefore, this case study did not examine school practices in rural or urban schools. The case study

focused on improvement in test scores of students, and perceptions and practices of administrators, parents, and teachers involved in the project.

Assumptions

The following assumptions are central to this study:

- Respondents told the truth as they answered survey questions.
- The answers given by respondents reflect their behavior, i.e., what they say they do on a survey or in an interview, they actually do.
- People construct an understanding of reality as they shape it in the telling, i.e., through language and through the stories they tell.

Design of the Study

This mixed-methods study included the same survey to be given to administrators and teachers, and a separate survey to be given to parents. The administrator and teacher surveys were developed by and used as part of a recent case study dissertation (Trimis, 2009). The parent survey was created by School District 742.

Definition of Terms

- *Achievement gap*: Refers to a gap in proficiency of Caucasian students compared to minority students and is based on average test scores.

> "The achievement gap is a persistent, pervasive, and significant disparity in educational achievement and attainment among groups of students as determined by a standardized measure. When analyzed according to race and ethnicity, achievement disparities negatively impact educational outcomes for poor children and children of color on a consistent basis" (the public schools of North Carolina as cited in Koch, 2008, p. 11).

- *Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP)*: A means of measuring, through standards and assessments, the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012b). The aim of NCLB "is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, ¶ 3).
- *African-American*: A designation of racial background that in this paper will be used interchangeably with the term "black."
- *AYP teachers*: Teachers placed at schools in School District 742 that did not meet AYP measures to address the low achievement scores of students.
- *ELL*: An English Language Learner (ELL) is described as an active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support programs. This term is used mainly in the United States to describe K-12 students.
- *MAP® growth*: MAP® is an acronym for Measures of Academic Progress®. The term MAP® was coined by an organization called the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA; 2012). As part of Minnesota's assessment system, the Minnesota Department of Education measures whether or not students meet state math and reading academic standards, which are statements of what they should know and be able to do in a particular grade. Minnesota's Department of Education uses

NWEA's MAP® testing tools for growth to determine what level of proficiency each individual student is at. If students meet state standards, they are considered to be proficient. With input from educators, the Minnesota Department of Education has created a growth model. The growth model is designed to help parents and educators track students' progress toward proficiency from year to year in order to better determine whether they are gaining and maintaining skills necessary to be successful after high school.

- *MCA II (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment Series II)*: The state tests that help districts measure student progress toward Minnesota's academic standards and meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The reading and mathematics tests are used to determine whether schools and districts have made adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward all students being proficient in 2014. Reading and mathematics tests are given in Grades 3-8, 10 and 11 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011).
- *PBIS*: PBIS stands for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. PBIS is a "decision making framework that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based academic and behavioral practices for improving important academic and behavior outcomes for all students" (PBIS.Org, 2012, ¶ 1).
- *Practices*: For the purpose of this paper, practices are systematic behaviors based on specific goals that support or supplement

relationships within the school community. Examples would be parent involvement, mentoring of new faculty members, or cultural liaison activities.

- *Programs*: For the purpose of this paper, programs are purchased, named, commercial sets of activities with specific goals used across grade levels. Accelerated Reader is an example of a program.
- *RTI*: Response to Intervention (RTI) is a framework that is used to improve outcomes for all students. RTI helps to ensure the provision of high-quality instruction and interventions that are matched to the needs of students requiring additional academic and behavioral supports. After initial screening of all students, changes in instruction or goals can be made according to the level of student need. Student progress is monitored frequently and instruction is then differentiated and modified, as necessary (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012a, ¶ 1).
- *SIOP*: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol "is a research-based and validated model of sheltered instruction. Professional development in the SIOP Model helps teachers plan and deliver lessons that allow English learners to acquire academic knowledge as they develop English language proficiency" (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2012, ¶ 2).

Summary

Chapter I presented the concerns regarding the achievement gap between black students and white students. A case study of one school district attempting to turn this problem around during a recent three-year period is the focus of this research project.

Surveys of administrators, teachers, and parents along with interviews and document analysis comprise the data collection employed.

Chapter II presents the literature review on achievement gap, institutional racism, and school culture. Chapter III explicates the methodology of the study. Chapter IV presents qualitative and quantitative results of the study. Chapter V presents conclusions and recommendations for educators as well as suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Achievement Gap

The linking of academic achievement with assessment and remediation has been limited when attempting to help African-American students. Because of the lack of skill achievement within this population, federal monies have been earmarked for improving skills and fulfilling the expectations of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and state proficiency testing (Dimitriadis, 2001). In the United States, African-American adolescents disproportionately attend large urban comprehensive schools that have a high concentration of low socioeconomic status students. Academic achievement and graduation rates in many of these schools are low in comparison to national averages (Baker, 2005). These students are at higher risk for school failure, special education assignment, suspension, expulsion, and school violence (Ferguson, 2003).

Researchers have attempted to connect high dropout rates and school failure of African-American K-12 students with increased violence (Noguera, 2003). For example, African-American K-12 students lead the nation in homicide—both as victims and perpetrators, have the greatest rate of suicide, and have the highest rate of incarceration, conviction, and arrest.

> According to the National Center for Education Statistics . . . 24% of adolescents attending urban schools represent the highest percentage of

> households [in the United States] that are at the poverty level. These students also experience a lack of access to health care, inadequate nutrition, crime-ridden neighborhoods, and access to sufficient education. (Martin, Martin, Gibson, & Wilkins, 2007, p. 690)

African-Americans, for example, are almost twice as likely as European-Americans to have a Low Birth Weight (LBW) child and almost three times more likely to have a Very Low Birth Weight (VLBW) child (Berliner, 2009). School facilities are limited, funding is scarce; often, poor communities do not provide support for their schools.

In almost every category of academic failure, African-American K-12 students are over-represented (Dallmann-Jones, 2002; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004). One study documented that only 2% of African-American boys enrolled in the public school system of a large Midwestern United States city achieved a cumulative grade point average of at least a 3 on a 4-point scale. The consensus among researchers is that minority students lag behind their counterparts and are not achieving academically (Dimitriadis, 2001). According to the Education Trust, Inc. (2002-2003), 67% of African-American students performed below basic levels on a Minnesota basic standards math test in comparison to 20% of Caucasian students (p. 3). Academic achievement of African-American K-12 students is critically influenced by the social environment (Clark, 1991).

A new report that focuses on black males being proficient in reading and math suggested that the picture is even bleaker than generally known (Gabriel, 2010). Gabriel cited that only 12% of black fourth grade boys are proficient in reading, compared with 38% of white boys, and only 12% of black eighth grade boys are proficient in math compared to 44% of white boys (Gabriel, 2010).

The home life of African-American K-12 students is often quite different from their Caucasian middle class peers. Many do not have as many resources for their educational needs (Baker, 2005; Pinckney, 2000). In addition to minimizing their academic abilities, many African-American adolescents limit contact with other students and increase contact with same-race peers to help maintain positive self-esteem and minimize stress (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005).

Some African-American adolescents lack motivation to perform and achieve because they believe that their teachers do not expect much of them and do not care. Black adolescent students are repeatedly denied access to adequate education, are subjected to low teacher expectations, and are often placed in special education classes and excluded from school (Pollard, 1993). There are multiple factors that contribute to the achievement gap between African-American and Caucasian students. Research has highlighted the variables of family, school, and structural factors as most salient to African-American academic performance. Entwisle et al. (2004) suggested several interventions that may be effective at narrowing or closing the gap.

Factors Contributing to the Black-White Achievement Gap

Family Factors

Research suggests that having a strong family support system increases the chances of academic success. In a report conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Policy Information Center, Barton and Coley (2007) suggested, "When parents, teachers, and schools work together to support learning, students do better in school and stay longer in school" (p. 2). Additionally, Barton and Coley (2007) stated that "single -parent families, parents reading to children, hours spent watching

television and school absences account for about two thirds of the large differences among states in the National Assessment of Educational Programs reading scores" (p. 2). Other family factors to consider are the effect poverty has had on the achievement gap. Kober (2001), author of the Center on Education Policy's report, *It Takes More Than Testing: Closing the Achievement Gap*, stated that health problems, poor nutrition, low birth weight, substandard housing, high violence, and substance abuse all contribute to the achievement gap between black and white students. Kober further stated,

> Home and community learning opportunities are critical. In general, minority children are less likely than white children to have parents with high levels of educational attainment. This factor, together with others such as lower family income and parents' work schedules, may limit the extent to which parents can foster positive opportunities for learning at home. (¶ 15)

School Factors

In the book, *Can Schools Narrow the Black-White Test Scores Gaps,* Ferguson (1998) concluded that ability was not related to race, but rather ability was related to achievement. After testing the students for their ability levels, it became apparent that the teachers had grouped their students fairly accurately. Ferguson (1998) recommended more studies be conducted to determine whether or not tracking or grouping according to ability is beneficial or detrimental to African-American students. Tyson (2002), in her study of 56 middle class black students, found that negative attitudes toward school were commonly linked to low performance. These results challenged Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) paper. Their study suggested that black students were culturally opposed to achievement because black students achieving good grades were perceived as "acting white" by peers (Tyson, 2002).

In an article titled *Black Children Still Left Behind*, Finkel (2010) reviewed federal statistics on suspensions and expulsions that reported that African American students are punished disproportionately. Out of 48.5 million total students in a 2006 DOE Office of Civil Rights report, 17% were African-American, but blacks were more than double the percentage of those impacted by corporal punishment (36%), out of school suspension (37%) and expulsions (38%; Finkel, 2010).

Communities

Sociologist William Julius Wilson spoke about the inequality of different social structures or communities on the individual. This brought to mind the question, "Are strong neighborhood churches still available to the community or has their prevalence and impact waned?" (Barton & Coley, 2010, p. 19). Wilson (1998) further suggested that we should look at what was going on in the neighborhoods and communities during the period when the achievement gap was closing and during the period when it began to widen. Such a research project would be instructive.

Peer Pressure

Another issue that has contributed to the achievement gap between black and white students is the peer pressure that exists among black students to not act white by getting good grades. Peterson-Lewis and Bratton (2004) stated:

> For more than 15 years, the empirical research and popular culture arenas have resounded in discussion of the "acting White" hypothesis – the contention that many African-American youths avoid academic achievement because of a peer culture that declares achievement a White domain and that negatively labels achievement-related behaviors as "acting White." (pp. 81-82)

Mocombe (2011) argued that "As black youth in the inner cities or suburbs, become adolescents they are disadvantaged in school by the social functions the Black underclass and the larger mainstream society reinforces" (p. 41).

Smaller Class Size

A smaller class size is a popular remedy for closing the achievement gap between black and white students. Reichardt (2001), in *Reducing Class Size: Choices and Consequence*, discussed how three states—California, Wisconsin, and Tennessee—used a smaller class program to improve test scores. In 2000, California's average class size was 30 for third graders. The state lowered class sizes to 20. The state saw an improvement in the test scores of black students from about 0.6% to 3.0 percentage points in the SAT 9 Achievement test. Reinhardt reported that Wisconsin saw a greater improvement in student achievement than California. The Wisconsin program, Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE), targeted school districts that had a significant number of poor students. The number of students in classes kindergarten through third grade was lowered to 18, and as was also found in the state of Tennessee, test scores went up (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Small learning communities are used to help bridge the achievement gap between black and white students.

In a study by Lee and Friedrich (2007), the authors discussed how learning communities helped black students share the "same teachers" rather than the same subjects. "The key in this belief is for the student to have a 'caring adult' who can serve as a source of social attachment, personal guidance, and rapport for each student by meeting on a regular basis" (p. 266).

Teacher Quality and Support

More African-American students are taught by teachers with low competency test scores (Ferguson, 1998) than white students. As a corrective, Ferguson suggested that schools hire only those teachers who attained a certain benchmark on a competency test as an effective way to close the black-white achievement gap. According to Brunette (1999), students' cultural behaviors must be taken into consideration when dealing with students of color. "A teacher must appreciate and accommodate the similarities and differences among cultures. Effective teachers of culturally diverse students acknowledge both individual and cultural differences and identify these differences in a positive manner" (Brunette, 1999, ¶ 3). Another important practice for teachers is to build relationships with the black students they work with.

> In interviews with African-American high school students who presented behavior challenging for staff [they] revealed that they wanted their teachers to discover what their lives were like outside of school and that they wanted an opportunity to partake in the school reward systems. (Brunette, 1999, ¶ 4)

The North Carolina Education Research Council reviewed a study of teacher quality comparing student achievement over a two-year period. The Council concluded that "the effects of even a single ineffective teacher are enduring enough to be measurable at least four years later. Good teachers in subsequent grades boost achievement, but not enough to compensate for the effects of an earlier ineffective teacher" (as cited in Charles & O'Quinn, 2001, p. 8). Charles and O'Quinn also found that providing one-to-one tutoring (ideally by certified teachers) enabled students to "catch up" and master the necessary study skills needed for independent learning.

Their research also revealed that pushing African-American students to take advanced placement or college preparation courses raised their test scores and did not result in higher dropout rates. Charles and O'Quinn concluded that "the gains from taking a more demanding mathematics curriculum are even greater for African-American and Latino students than for white students" (p. 8).

According to Palumbo and Kramer-Vida (2012), teachers need to monitor student work and to provide specific feedback quickly, so students can immediately improve products and correct misconceptions, or receive praise for a job well done. Student errors and mistakes are teaching moments.

Literacy Development

Ebonics

Beaulieu (2002a) proposed that Ebonics (black English) is an authentic issue of African-American culture that is currently downplayed and/or ignored by the African-American and mainstream education communities to the detriment of the successful education and cultural development of African-American K-12 students. The result is poorly developed language arts programs for vernacular speakers and large-scale literacy failures throughout the African-American community. Using the voices of prominent linguists and the authority of linguistic research, Beaulieu (2002a) attempted to reroute the debate over the legitimacy of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)/Ebonics (Pinckney, 2000). Beaulieu (2002a) connected Ebonics to cultural connections and its value to the African-American community and presented a discussion of the merits of language arts programs for African-American students and other standard American English language learners that incorporate the study and use

of AAVE/Ebonics (and other native languages) as an integral part of the formalized study and mastery of standard American English. This approach resulted in "Students who are 'bidialectal,' culturally competent, and equipped to successfully engage in native language and mainstream literacy activities" (Pinckney, 2000, p. 204).

Cummins (2011) advocated:

> The case for literacy engagement as a primary determinant of achievement is both logical and empirical. Logic dictates that literacy engagement is crucial because academic language is found primarily in printed text rather than in everyday conversation. Thus, EL students' opportunities to broaden their vocabulary knowledge and develop strong reading comprehension skills are likely to be greatly enhanced when they have abundant access to printed texts and engage actively with these texts" (Cummins, 2011, p. 142).

Reading and Writing

In a trio of articles focused on literacy, Beaulieu (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) examined issues of language and literacy development for African-American K-12 students over the course of early childhood, elementary, and secondary schooling. Language, literacy, and reading development pose some of the greatest challenges to the successful education of African-American K-12 students (Pinckney, 2000). With consistently low performance on language and literacy assessments and an African-American adult illiteracy rate of 44%, these issues deserve serious attention within the context of a larger discussion on improving schooling for African-American students. Failing to learn to communicate, read, and comprehend at levels commensurate with the demands of the "information age" is a prescription for educational failure and long-term social and economic marginalization. Each phase of the African-American child's literacy growth, development, and learning requires close attention to specific literacy issues, challenges, and opportunities (Ogbu, 2003).

In her article titled *African-American Children and Literacy: Literacy Development in the Early Childhood Years*, Beaulieu (2002b) planted the early childhood years firmly on the radar screen of public schooling issues and outlined some of the key factors in the early years that contribute to children having difficulties learning to read. Beaulieu looked at the challenges and promises of early childhood education and provided descriptions of public prekindergarten programs that are making a measurable difference in African-American K-12 students' early language, literacy, and reading development.

In the article *African-American Children and Literacy: Literacy Development Across the Elementary, Middle, and High School Years*, Beaulieu (2002c) explored the complex landscape of language, literacy, and reading development issues as they affect the successful literacy education of African-American students throughout their formal schooling years. Using a standard of literacy that requires students to become learned and accomplished as readers, speakers, writers, thinkers, and technology users, and bidialectally proficient, Beaulieu described the successful literacy education of African-American K-12 students and youth (Pollard, 1993). As Yeung and Pfeiffer (2009) stated, "Psychological literature on children's cognitive development emphasizes the importance of environmental influences in early childhood" (p. 125). This literature contends that "much that shapes the final human product takes place in the home during the first years of life" (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009, p. 125).

Denbo and Beaulieu (2002) commented on work by Beaulieu:

> For the middle and high school years, Ms. Beaulieu reminds us that the physical and psychosocial changes of adolescence must be taken into consideration as we [educators] develop and implement literacy education

> programs and opportunities for older students. Helping students to define and embrace their "personhood," one of the most important tasks of adolescence, becomes an important avenue for literacy education. Literacy development in the secondary years is greatly enhanced by authentic classroom discourse and reading, writing, and thinking activities that connect and allow students to reflect on their cultural and social experiences. (p. 52)

Denbo and Beaulieu (2002) spoke about Beaulieu's work and how Beaulieu challenged teachers to become knowledgeable about . . .

> . . . adolescence, [Beaulieu] requires that we learn about and identify student strengths, challenges educators to undergo personal and professional journeys to improve their success as educators of multicultural students, and queries our knowledge of successful teaching and learning strategies for secondary school students." (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002, p. 52)

Mathematics Achievement

In his article *African-American Children and Algebra for All*, Tate (2002) related algebra and the achievement gap to institutional and cultural barriers that must be overcome for the "Algebra for All" movement to be successful.

> Citing a shift from the basic skills movement of the '60s and '70s to a more demanding vision of mathematical literacy, he [Tate] makes a strong case for changes in school systems that create mechanisms and for supporting policies that foster opportunities for all students, especially African American students, to participate in college preparatory courses, such as algebra and geometry. (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002, p. 52).

Ways to Close the Gap

Preschool: The Beginnings

Preschool programs can boost development and school readiness. In a recent study conducted by Magnuson of the University of Wisconsin, it was found that "children who had attended a center-based or school-based preschool program the year before entering kindergarten scored higher on tests of reading and math skills at kindergarten entry than children who had not attended such programs" (cited in

Haskins & Rouse, 2005, p. 4). Non-traditional families can benefit if their children can enter a preschool program. The chances of closing the achievement gap then increase.

Desegregation

Desegregation has been seen in the past as a way to close the achievement gap. Leaked and Flats (1993) argued that desegregation is no longer needed based on the success seen by schools in such cities as Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Instead of busing students to suburban schools, Leaked and Flats discussed how the implementation of culturally-specific education has helped black students improve academically. Their argument is based on empirical research that suggests that "instructional strategies complement the cultural and learning styles of black children" (p. 370).

Stereotype Threat

Another potential clue to the achievement gap, negative stereotypes concerning academic abilities is of particular interest because relatively limited research has been conducted on its effects related to K-12 students. The phenomenon of stereotype threat was first examined by Claude Steele and his colleagues at Stanford University (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995). Steele and Aronson (1995) also proposed that differences in academic performance between minority and non-minority students, as measured by standardized achievement tests such as the SAT, could be partially explained by anxiety and evaluation apprehension produced by knowledge of negative stereotypes related to group membership.

Consistent with his hypothesis, Steele (1997) found that when a task was presented to African-American college students as indicative of verbal academic ability, they performed far worse than a matched group of students who were told the

identical task measured psychological processes involved in verbal problem solving. Another popular manipulation of evaluation apprehension was to present a measure as a "traditional" test of achievement or intellect (evaluative) or as a "culture-free" or "non-biased" test (non-evaluative). Interestingly, Steele found that, irrespective of presenting the task as evaluative or non-evaluative, simply indicating one's race prior to taking the test was sufficient to activate stereotype threat. Similar findings have been produced between males and females using the same paradigm with mathematics performance as the dependent variable (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999). Moreover, this stereotype threat effect has been produced not only with academic achievement tests, but also with visual spatial reasoning tasks (Mayer & Hanges, 2003; McKay, Doverspike, Bowen-Hilton, & Martin, 2002).

Although the effects of stereotype threat have been well documented at the college level (see Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002, for a review), few studies have specifically measured the effect of stereotype threat on K-12 students (Walton & Cohen, 2003). Given the unprecedented use of high-stakes testing in K-12 schools to determine promotion and graduation, this phenomenon seems deserving of study among the younger population. If K-12 students experience stereotype threat during standardized state testing, this phenomenon could partially explain the achievement gap between white and minority students.

Institutional Racism

Although racism is a familiar subject, the discussion of institutional racism may be overwhelming, stressful, or shocking to some people. It is important to understand both intentional and unintentional racism if educational environments are

going to support the high academic achievement of African-American K-12 students (Entwisle et al., 2004). Hilliard (cited in Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002) has repeatedly stated, "Many African-American students have reached and continue to reach high levels of academic achievement . . . . Failure to replicate these successes has a great deal to do with institutional racism" (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002, p. 3).

Racism has become institutionalized in American schools through hierarchical conceptions of intellectual ability. The bell curve, for example, assumes high levels of intellectual abilities for only a small percentage of the population (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1994).

This assumption does not motivate educators to create and nurture intellectual ability. Instead, it supports the institutionalization of a hierarchical notion of innate mental ability through practices such as academic tracking. These hierarchical conceptions of intellectual ability have led to a focus on the individual and cultural characteristics of students rather than the ways that a school social system structures academic success for some students and academic failure for others. The result is a variety of school policies and practices that frustrate the full development of the intellectual potential of African-American students (Entwisle et al., 1994).

In his book, *Waiting for a Miracle: Why Schools Can't Solve Our Problems—and How We Can*, Comer (1998) stated,

> The United States has probably come closer to creating the "good society" than any society of its complexity in the history of the world. Despite its complexity and history of slavery, the United States is a place where democratic ideals remain alive. (p. 131)

Nonetheless, Comer (1998) also presented his concerns about the inherent flaws in America's belief in a meritocracy and the damage this belief has engendered. Comer expressed the belief that we already have in place the strategies and practices that can be used to redress remaining inequities. Denbo (2002b) and Shaffer, Ortman, and Denbo (2002) addressed issues related to the effects of institutional racism. In her work, *Why Can't We Close the Achievement Gap,* Denbo (2002b) presented an overview of institutional racism in America's schools and the resulting privileges experienced by white students. Institutional racism is concise and by design and many of these issues are topics that educators have been struggling with for decades (Entwisle et al., 1994).

It is helpful to look at racism, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) together to get a better understanding of what many African-American students face. Shaffer et al. (2002) critiqued the lack of research and data on African-American students disaggregated by class and gender within race. They further discussed what is known or theorized about poverty and its relationship to the achievement of African-American students, middle-class African-American student achievement, achievement of African-American male students, and the achievement of African-American female students.

Finally, Ford (2002) and Fearn (2002) addressed the issues of special education and gifted education. Ford explained the causes of underachievement among African-American students. He suggested specific administrative solutions to decrease the identification of African-American students in special education and increase their identification for gifted. Fearn offered descriptions of programs that successfully

reduce overrepresentation of African-American students in special education programs. Strategies that help reduce the overrepresentation of black students in special education programs support that: Students participate and learn in a high quality curriculum and instructional program and the school climate respects the cultural and linguistic diversity of students and staff members. Families are appropriately and sensitively involved in the education of their children, and teachers have the professional development and support they need to address student needs in the classroom (Osher, Woodruff, & Sims, 2010).

Recognizing and addressing racism is an important priority for those who want to support the high achievement of African-American students. Educators must incorporate the voices, experiences, and hopes of diverse populations of students into a school's culture without labeling, devaluing, or tracking them, or requiring them to be submerged into a bureaucratic melting pot. Although it is not easy to address racism and support diversity, it is imperative that these become widespread educational goals if schools are to succeed in supporting high achievement among all students (Ferguson, 2003).

Institutional Change and Educational Activity Related to Student Culture

In her article, *Cultural Diversity and Academic Achievement*, Bowman (1994) discussed cultural differences and the achievement gap. Bowman argued that teaching supports learning only when the "meaning of children's and teachers behavior is mutually intelligible. . . . Teaching consists of meaning-making episodes as adults and children create common interpretations of events and actions and standard ways of representing these interpretations" (p. 189).

Brunette (1999) discussed how effective teachers enthusiastically acknowledge cultural differences. According to Brunette, "Positive identification creates a basis for the development of effective communication of instructional strategies. Social skills such as respect and cross-cultural understanding can be modeled, taught, prompted, and reinforced by the teacher" (¶ 3).

Culture has been defined as "the body of learned beliefs, traditions, and guides for behavior that is shared among members of any human society" (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 5). Culture is a powerful experience in the everyday lives of individuals and groups of people. As an ever-evolving constellation of influences, culture shapes the essence, experiences, and worldviews of individuals, groups, communities, and institutions alike. No person or institution is exempt from its influence. Within the world of schools, cultural experiences have a profound effect on the ways in which students approach learning and the schooling experience, including their relationships with teachers and peers. Similarly, cultural experiences also affect the ways in which teachers approach both teaching and their own learning (i.e., professional development), as well as their relationships with students and colleagues. Furthermore, every school and school system reflects an institutional culture that is represented by a set of beliefs, values, policies, and practices that support and nurture students, families, and educators toward high performance or create insurmountable barriers to success. Culture mediates all learning. It is the lens through which all learning experiences are filtered (Ferguson, 2000).

As a result, each member of the learning community brings to the schooling experience his or her own unique cultural style and ways of viewing the world and his

or her place in it. Very often there is discordance between the cultural styles and worldviews of African-American students and their teachers, typically resulting in poor development and learning outcomes for the students and a less than satisfying teaching experience for the teachers (Ferguson, 2000).

If tuned in to culture, teachers are better prepared to develop the kinds of learning opportunities that will engage and motivate their students to master challenging educational materials and goals. As such, education leaders—in the field, in academia, in communities, and in government—cannot have a meaningful conversation about improving education for African-American students without having issues of culture—African-American and otherwise—out in the open, at front and center stage (Fremon & Renfrow-Hamilton, 2001). Diverse cultural styles and worldviews have a profound influence on how people relate to one another. However, high-quality relationships between teachers, their students, families, and communities, built on a foundation of mutual knowledge, understanding, trust, and respect, are fundamental to an effective instructional program. The critical first steps in this journey for teachers who are seeking to acquire skills in culturally-relevant pedagogy are: (a) to understand more about the concept of culture in general; and then (b) to explore their own cultural backgrounds, including how their own cultural experiences have worked to shape their belief systems about other people and their own worldviews (Fremon & Renfrow-Hamilton, 2001).

In a society in which assimilation and acculturation were the mainstay experience for large groups of America's early European immigrants, this becomes an especially difficult task because many of the cultural rituals, practices, and belief

systems of those early groups have been lost. The result is that many of today's descendents of northern European ethnic and cultural groups have been left without important knowledge about the intrinsic value of culture, in general, and their own ethnic and cultural heritages, in particular. However, to become more effective at meeting the learning needs of African-American students, educators must commit to becoming more culturally knowledgeable, and specifically, to gaining authentic cultural knowledge of the African-American experience in America and the life experiences of African-American students. They must also develop authentic relationships with African-American students, families, colleagues, and communities (Green, 2002).

Denbo (2002a) outlined an institutional framework that allows one to see how a school's culture shapes the effectiveness of the school as an institution by influencing the nature and performance of its many parts. Institutional culture, manifested as an entrenched system of beliefs, traditions, policies, and practices, can affect the quality of a school's social/emotional climate, expectations for student achievement, student and adult relationships, community relationships, approaches to diversity, professional development opportunities, resources, and scheduling.

In *A No-Excuses Approach to Closing the Achievement Gap*, Williams (2002) presented a belief system that supports the educational success of African-American students. In this system, "all children can learn" is more than rhetoric; it is a statement of real purpose, intent, and meaning (McDonald & Sayger, 1998).

"No excuses" means just that—schools and teachers accept responsibility for educational success by focusing on two essential institutional components: a shared

focus on teaching and learning and pedagogical strategies that are specific to the needs of African-American students as learners. Noguera (2003) reminded his readers that any strategies developed for the improvement of educational outcomes for the nation's diverse student body must be grounded in a well-developed theory of human development, one that acknowledges the role of culture and cultural environments in human development and teaching and learning.

Boykin (2002) noted that "schools traditionally are not culturally-neutral terrains" (p. 115). He made a case for the educational and cultural empowerment of African-American K-12 students through a model of comprehensive school change called the Talent Development Model which maximizes every student's academic and social/emotional development through a rigorous curriculum and appropriate support, assistance, structure, and facilitating conditions. Citing the efficacy of building the cultural assets of African-American K-12 students in light of a growing body of research examining the interface of cognition and context, Boykin advocated for fusing such a model with teaching and learning practices frequently seen in African-centered approaches to schooling.

Ladson-Billings (2002) pointed out that by unraveling the intricacies of culturally-relevant pedagogy, it is ultimately "just good teaching" (p. 91). She defined culturally-relevant pedagogy as "pedagogy of opposition, not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (p. 94). According to Ladson-Billings, culturally-relevant teachers use students' culture as a vehicle for learning. To ensure that African-American students have adequate opportunity to reach their greatest potential—as students and as members of familial

and world communities—she argued that pedagogy must speak to the development of cultural competencies and the development of a broader sociopolitical consciousness, one that allows students to engage the world and others critically.

Guild (2002) discussed the intersection of culture and learning styles and the need to attend thoughtfully to the diversity of cultures and learning styles reflected in today's students. Guild indicated that differences between the norms of students' homes and communities and the norms of most school cultures are seriously damaging to both students and teachers alike. Guild cautioned that there are tremendous variations among individuals within groups; and without care, we can be misled into stereotyping and labeling, ignoring differences within cultural groups. This would mitigate the potential for making education meaningful to students with individual learning needs.

Finally, Guild (2002) offered specific administrative suggestions for making culture and learning style connections for students and teachers in schools and classrooms. These connections have been shown to improve learning outcomes for African-American students.

Successful institutional change needs the support of culturally-relevant pedagogy to improve the school experiences and outcomes for African-American students. Changes in institutional structures can enhance opportunities for African-American students to meet and exceed high standards of learning only if issues of culture—as they affect the quality of teaching, learning, and human relationships—are simultaneously addressed. A culturally-relevant school experience is important for all children, especially children from diverse ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds.

To this end, educators must commit themselves to acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to design and implement culturally-relevant pedagogical strategies. Without them, a significant proportion of African-American K-12 students will be consigned to an educational dead end and the social and economic consequences that invariably follow (Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002).

Culturally Relevant Instruction

In *Cultural Vibrancy: Exploring the Preferences of African American Children toward Culturally Relevant and Non-Culturally Relevant Lessons*, Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2011) watched the vibrant faces of African-American children engaged in a culturally relevant lesson. The interest level, teacher-student camaraderie, and connectedness to the culturally relevant curriculum were exceptional. The need for experiences and curriculum that mirror home life, community, and African-centered principals, such as collectivity, engagement, sharing, and respect, are often devoid in educational settings where the majority of African-American students are taught by non-blacks (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011).

School Culture and Student Achievement

The terms school climate and school culture are often used as synonyms, though school culture is a more contemporary term. School climate . . .

> . . . refers to the quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures. . . . This climate support[s] people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 5)

Often simply referred to as "the way we do things around here," school culture includes . . .

> . . . the historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood, in varying degrees, by members of the school community. This system of meaning often shapes what people think and how they act. (Stolp, 1994, p. 2)

Many scholars have noted the relationship between a positive school culture and student achievement (Goldring, 2002; National School Climate Council, 2007; Stolp, 1994). Goldring listed six key traits of positive school culture:

1. A shared vision based on values that allows teachers and principals across all school levels to speak with a single voice.
2. Traditions, including metaphors, symbols, rituals, and ceremonies.
3. Collaboration.
4. Shared decision making.
5. Innovation.
6. Communication, both internally between staff members and externally to parents and stakeholders. (p. 33)

The principal of a school can have a strong impact on school culture, usually based on what that person does, not only on what he or she says. "Principals should work to develop shared visions—rooted in history, values, beliefs—of what the school should be, hire compatible staff, face conflict rather than avoid it, and use story-telling to illustrate shared values" (Stolp, 1994, p. 4).

Mattison and Aber (2007) stated, “Parents’ perceptions of school climate have also been found to play an important role in students’ academic and social development” (p. 2).

It is interesting that “school cultures are unique. . . . No two schools will be exactly alike” (Boyd, 1992, ¶ 4, Item 3). Table 1 shows the intangible (i.e. deeper, more abstract) and tangible (observable) aspects of school culture based on an extensive review of the literature by van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel, and Coetsee (2005).

Table 1. A Model of Effective Organizational Culture.

Foundation	**Content**	**Result**
Intangible manifestations	*Tangible manifestations*	
Beliefs and convictions	Language	
Philosophy	Stories	
Mission statement	Heroes and heroines	
Vision	Curriculum	
Aims and objectives	Rules and regulations	
Assumptions	Behavior manifestations	Effective/ineffective
Ethos	Rituals, ceremonies, traditions	
Values	Discipline	
Organizational behavior	Leadership style	Academic achievement
Norms	Individual & team behavior	

Adapted from “Organizational Culture and Academic Achievement in Secondary Schools,” by P.C. van der Westhuizen, M. J. Mosoge, L. H. Swanepoel, and L. D. Coetsee, 2005, *Education and Urban Society*, *38*(1), p. 35. Copyright 2005 by SAGE Publications.

Norms of school culture that have been shown to support significant, continuous, and widespread improvements in instruction include the following: "high expectations; experimentation; use of the knowledge bases; involvement in decision making; protection of what's important; collegiality; trust and confidence; tangible support; appreciation and recognition; caring, celebration, and humor; traditions; and honest, open communication" (Boyd, 1992, ¶ 1).

Schools can be improved in three ways: with technical means, in terms of increasing resources such as adding more computers; with cultural means, by engaging teachers' values, beliefs and norms; or by political means, by using political constituencies in the redistribution of resources and opportunities (Jones, Yonezawa, Mehan, & McClure, 2008). All three dimensions need to be engaged simultaneously to effectively change school culture.

Finally, research on school culture notes that student engagement is a critical factor affecting student achievement. According to Klem and Connell (as cited in Jones et al., 2008):

> Regardless of how engagement is defined, research indicates that higher levels with engagement are linked to improved academic performance in school. Student engagement has been found to be one of the most robust predictors of achievement and behavior in schools, a conclusion that holds regardless of whether students come from families that are relatively advantaged or disadvantaged socially or economically. Students who are engaged are also likely to earn higher grades and test scores and have lower drop-out rates. (p. 8)

"There is a significant gap between school climate research and the education of teachers" (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 8). The National School Climate Council called for the "development of a growing 'bank' of case studies

written by and/or with school leaders" (p. 11) to use not only as teaching but also as research tools. Reeves (2006) asserted that four essentials must be present when trying to change school culture:

1. "*Define what you will not change*," placing "change in the context of stability."
2. "*Recognize the importance of actions*" over pronouncements.
3. "*Use the right change tools for your school or district*," discriminating between "*culture tools*, such as rituals and traditions; *power tools*, such as threats and coercion; *management tools*, such as training, procedures, and measurement systems, and *leadership tools*, such as role modeling and vision."
4. "*Be willing to do the 'scut work.'*" (pp. 92-94)

Administrator and Teacher Beliefs

What school administrators and teachers believe about the possibilities for teaching and learning for African-American K-12 students has a profound effect on what they choose to teach, how they will teach it, and how they determine what students have learned. As things currently stand, students who are perceived to be culturally enriched and cognitively capable are afforded the most challenging and supportive opportunities to learn. Students, who are perceived to be culturally and cognitively deficient as a result of cultural differences, are given less challenging educational opportunities and support for their educational efforts. What teachers believe and think that they know about their students, the ways in which they interpret student behavior or respond to children's use of native languages, can significantly

affect their approaches to discipline, the quality of their interactions with students during the learning process, and the quality of their relationships with colleagues, families, and members of the school community (Raffaele-Mendez et al., 2002).

Summary

Achievement disparities are often attributed to socioeconomic factors. According to 2009 data from the Census Bureau, of all children younger than 18 living in families, 15.5 million live in poverty, defined as a family of four with less than $21,947 per year. This includes 4.9 million, or about 10%, of non-Hispanic white children, and one in three black and Hispanic children, at 4 million and 5.6 million, respectively (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011; Children's Defense Fund, 2010).

> Yet, it's important to recognize that **this achievement gap is already present *before children enter kindergarten*, and grows only slightly afterward**. Any organization focused on K-12 education, therefore, is likely trying to help children who are already struggling – by simply *equalizing* the quality of education (for underperforming and overperforming groups) would not necessarily close the achievement gap between them." (GiveWell, n.d., ¶ 2)

With the advent of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (U. S. Department of Education, 2001), the focus on high-stakes standardized testing has become even more intense as states have had little choice about developing testing programs to measure and report student achievement. To avoid leaving children behind, NCLB has increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools and required students to be tested in Grades 3-8 on the basics of mathematics, reading, language arts, and/or science.

While the intent behind NCLB may be admirable, standardized testing is often problematic for minority students who, as a group, consistently score lower on

standardized measures of achievement (Steele, 1997). In fact, African-American and Hispanic students have continued to score well below white students on academic achievement tests (Vanneman, Hamilton, & Jahman, 2009). This finding has often been labeled the "achievement gap" because of the large disparity between the higher test scores of white students and the lower test scores of minority students. Although some progress has been made (Barton, 2003), the achievement gap has failed to substantially close over several decades. As a result, scholars have searched for causes of the achievement gap, several of which have been identified, such as family and community differences (Jencks & Phillips, 1998), fewer opportunities for minority students to study a rigorous curriculum with highly-qualified teachers (Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992), social expectations (Lumsden, 1997; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), and a negative stereotype concerning academic abilities (Steele, 1997).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

St. Cloud Area School District 742 is the largest school district in Central Minnesota. It is located 70 miles northwest of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The district has eight elementary schools, two junior high schools (Grades 7-8), two high schools (Grades 9-12), two alternative learning schools, an early childhood center, and a community education center. In the 2006-2007 school year, the percentage of blacks in the district was 12.9%; in 2007-2008, it was 13.5%; and in 2008-2009, it was 14.9%.

This research project was a case study of district-wide interventions carried out by St Cloud Area School District 742 from 2006-2009. The district made improvements in raising academic scores for black students. The reading and math proficiency scores of black students improved and this case study reviews the programs, practices, and instructional strategies that occurred during a multi-year period to influence test scores. This chapter also covers the research design, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, case study protocol, and ethical considerations.

Statement of the Problem

Most school districts that have demographics similar to School District 742 have not been successful in closing the achievement gap. The concern is that most diverse students, specifically black students, have not made the gains necessary to decrease the gap in reading and math proficiency. The literature review in Chapter II focused on several reasons why the achievement gap existed among African-American students. Research results presented in Chapters IV and V summarize district-wide programs, practices and instructional strategies that were implemented to improve the academic scores of black students in the school district.

Research Questions

This case study focused on how Minnesota School District 742 implemented programs, practices, and strategies that narrowed the achievement gap between black and white students during the years of 2006-2009. The research questions were as follows:

1. How did district-wide programs promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?
2. How did district-wide practices promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?
3. What instructional strategies were used to improve reading and math achievement scores for black students?

4. How did parents perceive the strengths and vulnerabilities of the improvement efforts?

Research Methodology

This mixed-methods case study used both qualitative and quantitative measurements. The model for this case study was a "single embedded" type (Yin, 1994). What this means is that this case study focused on one event: the St Cloud Area School District's district-wide interventions to raise reading and math proficiency scores. The primary unit of analysis was St Cloud Area School District 742. Other sub-units of analysis included teachers, administrators, and parent perceptions of the interventions. Because sub-units were analyzed, they are considered to be "embedded" units of analysis.

Survey results from selected teachers and administrators who worked at Discovery, Talahi and Madison Elementary, and North Middle School were part of the research methodology. Students' NWEA and MCA scores for years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 were used as primary documentation that the achievement scores between black and white students improved. Also, a review of documents presented by the district was used to help examine the case study.

Data was triangulated using the various sources of information. This increased reliability of results. Triangulation of data is a powerful solution to strengthen a research design (Holtzhausen 2001). The time frame of the case study began in the autumn of 2006 and ended in the spring of 2009.

Research Design

Table 2 demonstrates the relationship between research questions, data collection, and data analysis.

Table 2. Research Design of the Case Study.

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Qualitative or Quantitative
1. How did district-wide programs promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?	Survey results, test scores, interviews	Percentage comparisons	Both
2. How did district-wide practices promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?	Survey results, test scores, interviews	Percentage comparisons	Both
3. How did instructional strategies contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?	Survey results, test scores, interviews	Percentage comparisons, Notes of interviews	Both
4. How did parents perceive the strengths and vulnerabilities of the improvement efforts?	Survey results	Percentage comparisons	Quantitative

Population and Data Collection

The study consisted of three surveys that were administered to school district teachers, administrators, and parents. The administrator and teacher surveys were identical. The surveys may be found in Appendices A and B, respectively. The surveys were given to 50 teachers and 11 administrators who were randomly selected

from the school district. Surveys were distributed via survey monkey. A parent climate survey (different from the one given to teachers and administrators) designed by the district was sent out to 7,000 parents each year. One thousand eight hundred and seventy five (1,875) parents responded in 2006-2007, 1,990 parents responded in 2007-2008, and 1,988 parents responded to the survey in the year 2007-2008. Surveys were sent to parents during the 2006-2007 school year (Appendix C) and the 2007-2008 school year (Appendix D).

Interviews took place with specific individuals who experienced the district-wide interventions. Three administrators and three AYP teachers who worked at Talahi, Madison, and North Junior High were all interviewed. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The interview protocol may be found in Appendix E.

Instrumentation

The teacher and administrator surveys were identical. The surveys were first used by Trimis (2009) in a case study dissertation conducted at the University of Southern California. Trimis gave permission via email to use the survey (E. A. Trimis, personal communication, June, 2009). No reliability or validity data were supplied by Trimis, but eight other researchers used the survey in a variety of dissertations. The parent climate survey was developed by the curriculum director, director of equity services, and the coordinator of grants and research of St Cloud Area District 742.

Validity

There are several procedures that protected the construct validity in the case study. Using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a clear chain of evidence through careful documentation of sources, and having key informants review the draft of the case study chronology ensured that a consistent operational definition of "district-wide intervention" remained stable throughout the investigation (Yin, 1994).

Reliability

Reliability is a measure of whether the same results are repeatable should an experiment be done again. In a case study design, using a careful case study protocol (i.e., a plan for precisely how to carry out field work, analyze information, and write the case report itself) as well as creating a case study data base are two ways to ensure that the same results could be obtained if the investigation were repeated.

Survey, Data Collection, and Analysis

The surveys given to the teachers and administrators have 37 questions and are answered with Likert responses: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The response set does not include a neutral middle term. In other words, respondents had to take a definite stand when answering the survey items. In addition, parent survey responses were analyzed through means and percentages.

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Participant's names were coded and answers were recorded in a journal. Answers were analyzed qualitatively according to similar themes.

Case Study Protocol

Field Procedures

The teacher surveys were administered at randomly selected schools in the district. The surveys were equally distributed to teachers at three elementary schools and one middle school via survey monkey in the fall of 2012. Interviews took place in the office of Julia Espe, the curriculum director, the conference room of the three AYP teachers, and the office of the principals at their respective schools.

Guide for Writing the Case Study Report

- Chapter IV presents quantitative results of the surveys and a qualitative discussion of major topics or themes from the interviews. Chapter IV also shows relationships between teacher, administrator, and parent perceptions of school climate in the district.
- Chapter V presents the summary and conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Staff, teachers, and administrators were notified in writing about the study and given a consent form about participation in interviews and that their participation was optional. At no time did any of the participants feel they were obligated in any way to participate, though the participation rate was high. There were no names on the reply instruments and the surveys. Additionally, this researcher was employed by the district so access to district information was all approved by the School District Superintendent and Administrative Cabinet.

All data associated with the research was filed in confidence as required by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Dakota. All respondents were

assured in the interviews and the surveys that the intent of the study was to help other schools with information collected and lessons learned in order to improve practices and policies in other school districts and to eliminate the achievement gap in school districts other than St. Cloud School District 742.

Summary

Chapter III reiterated the problem of the achievement gap among diverse students. There are four research questions which this case study research project attempted to answer. This mixed-methodology case study used both survey results and analysis (quantitative research) and qualitative research to answer the research questions and record thoughts of the intervention strategies implemented by the district. Multiple sources of data led to triangulation and greater reliability of results.

Teachers and administrators were asked to respond to two identical surveys. Follow-up interviews filled in gaps of information about respondents' perceptions of successes and failures resulting from interventions implemented over a multi-year period. A case study protocol showed how fieldwork was conducted, what some of the guiding questions were, and a general plan for how to present the results. This researcher was employed in the district and was able to: (a) access program description notes; (b) speak to Dr. Julia Espe, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; (c) speak to principals; (d) speak to AYP teachers; and (e) review district documents on programs, practices and instructional strategies the school district used during the three years black students improved their reading and math scores.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to review School District 742's improvement in growth and improvement in scores of black students and white students. What specific programs, policies, and instructional strategies within the district led to the improvement of black students' test scores, thus decreasing the achievement gap between black and white students? A description of the school district and a review of research questions will be presented and summarized. In addition, NWEA (MAP®) growth results from 2006-2009 and MCA Index results will be shown and analyzed.

School District

St. Cloud School District 742 is the largest school district in Central Minnesota. It is located 70 miles northwest of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The district has eight elementary schools, two junior high schools (Grades 7-8), two high schools (Grades 9-12), two alternative learning schools, an early childhood center, and a community education center. The school district's enrollment has been around 9,500 students during the last few years (St. Cloud Area School District, 2009-2012).

The district has seen a dramatic increase in the number of students of color. The increase is due to the relocation of Somali families into the St. Cloud Area and an

increase of black families from Minneapolis and Chicago. In the 2006-2007 school year, the percentage of blacks in the district was 12.9%; in 2007-2008, it was 13.5%; and in 2008-2009, it was 14.9%. With the increase in the number of black students to the district, the district as a whole saw an increase in the number of students who lived in poverty go from 25% in 2005 to 52% in the year 2006. For black students, the percentage of black students who received free and reduced lunches was well over 70% in the year 2006 (This information was obtained by accessing the Viewpoint database, a database containing confidential information about individual students in the school district. Viewpoint data is protected by federal and state law, and local district policy, and therefore, no citation has been given.).

Most of the students entering the district were new to this country and had limited academic experiences. Black students whose families relocated to St. Cloud had significant academic issues. It was imperative for the district to develop programming to address the unique needs of these incoming students.

During the 2006-2009 school years, the school district teaching staff numbered approximately 760 teachers. During 2000-2006, 65% of teaching staff had a master level degree. In 2006, the percentage of teaching staff with a master's degree increased to 70%. Additionally, a total of 25 AYP teaching positions were created to help the school district get out of "in need of improvement" status which is a designation given to school districts who have significant achievement gaps between white students and student subgroups. AYP teachers, specifically, were hired and trained to support classroom teachers. AYP teachers are considered teacher leaders,

who helped with instructional coaching and helped organize instruction based on MAP® and MCA testing.

St. Cloud School District's new Director of Instruction, Julia Espe, placed AYP teachers in Talahi, Discovery, Madison Elementary, and North Middle School which had the highest percentages of black students. Additionally, the district hired cultural navigators to help bridge the adjustment and transition of Somali and African-American families. Navigators were usually Somali or African-American. The idea was to help communicate and provide outreach. The district also created an "English as a Second Language" program. This program, especially, was to design and coordinate an "English immersion" curriculum. This curriculum was to help new to the country students learn English in an academic setting. Most students were from refugee camps in Kenya. Students had limited or no schooling thus the task of helping them transition to a new country, a new area, and new expectations.

District-Wide Programs Description

Table 3 summarizes major programs implemented at St. Cloud School District to address the needs of students, and especially immigrants from refugee camps new to the country. Specifically, programs included: PBIS, or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, a decision-making framework that helps decision makers select and implement research-based effective interventions for improving academic and behavioral outcomes for students (PBIS.Org, 2012); RTI, or Response to Intervention, which addresses high quality instruction and matching the needs of students to academic and behavioral supports (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012a, ¶ 1); and "vertical teams" or groups of teachers that collaborate across grade

levels to be sure curriculum is relevant to students needs and that transitions between grade levels are seamless with no duplication of information (Bagdon, 1999-2012).

Table 3. District-Wide Programs that Promote Student Achievement and Contribute to Improved Reading and Math for Black Students.

Program Name	Research Based Strategy	Summary of Activity
PBIS	Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, & Horner (2008)	Encourages positive interaction and integration of positive behavior
RTI	Shapiro (2011)	Weekly meetings to see if students need interventions academically or behaviorally
Vertical Teams	Strauss & Corbin (1998)	Alignment of departments to help align curriculum, Vertical teams meeting quarterly

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

School District 742 implemented a PBIS program to help address school and classroom culture. PBIS is a program that encourages positive interaction and pro-social growth. It emphasizes the need to acknowledge positive interaction and behavior amongst students, teachers, and staff. PBIS components were defined and expressed in the mission statement of each school; key terms used were relationships, positive interactions, and cooperation between teachers, students, and families. At the time of this report, in each building, you could see visual reminders of behavioral expectations and positive reinforcement. Behavioral rubrics were displayed in prominent places and within those rubrics you would see school expectations of students in regard to their behavior.

Each school also provided lesson plans that educated students on how to be respectful and emphasized acceptance of other individuals. PBIS teams were formed in each building that helped promote the importance of PBIS and helped organize activities that recognized positive interactions.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

RTI is an important program that supports struggling children. Students are identified through a poor performance on a classwide, schoolwide, or districtwide screening intended to indicate which children may be at risk of academic or behavioral problems. Students may also be identified through other means, such as teacher observation. The district or school provide students with research-based interventions while the student is still in the general education environment and closely monitors the student's progress or response to the interventions (Shapiro, 2011).

Vertical Teams

The district decided to develop vertical teams by departments. Each vertical team was comprised of teachers from both elementary and secondary schools. The goal of these vertical meetings was to align curriculum from the elementary to secondary level. This gave teachers a better understanding of how to align the curriculum in a way that allowed opportunities to offer leveled readings and curriculum to students at every ability level. With each curriculum aligned, teachers were able to supplement curriculum.

District-Wide Practices Description

Table 4 summarizes major practices initiated at St. Cloud School District to address the achievement gap between black and white students, and to help integrate

Somali refugees into U.S. society and learning practices. Specific practices implemented include: data-driven decision making, hiring AYP teachers, and development of learning cohorts.

Table 4. District-Wide Practices that Promote Student Achievement and Contribute to Improving Reading and Math for Black Students.

Practices	Research Based Strategy	Summary of Activity
Data Driven Decision Making	Bambrick-Santoyo (2010)	Monthly review of data (formative and summative data) and quarterly review of NWEA testing
AYP Teachers	Daniels & Bizar (2005)	Co-teaching and support of teachers
Learning Cohorts	Dufour & Eaker (1998)	Professional Learning Community that provides professional development and support to faculty

Data Driven Decision Making

The district made data driven decision making an important part of instruction. Teachers had to understand how to look at their in-classroom data (formative and summative assessments). The district also required teachers and principals to use NWEA testing (MAP® tests) data to monitor student skill levels. The data was placed in a data warehouse system called Viewpoint. Teachers and principals were expected to look at data monthly to monitor the progress of students. In *After the Test: Closing the Achievement Gap with Data*, Symonds (2004) advised that schools need quarterly, monthly, or even weekly feedback on progress; also, teachers need structured opportunities to reflect, discuss, collaborate, and learn new Instructional strategies.

AYP Teachers

AYP teaching positions were created to help schools in the district that were at "in need of improvement" status. AYP teachers were specifically hired to support classroom teachers. AYP teachers are considered teacher leaders, who have helped with instructional coaching and with organizing instruction based on MAP® and MCA testing.

Learning Cohorts

Groups of teachers learn together in Professional Learning Communities how to better serve students by becoming better teachers, improving teaching methods, by monitoring student progress through data stored in databases. Professional development is a major focus of learning cohorts and Professional Learning Communities with the end result being improved student achievement.

District-Wide Instructional Strategies Description

Table 5 summarizes instructional strategies promoted at St. Cloud School District to address the achievement gap.

Table 5. District-Wide Instructional Strategies That Promote Student Achievement and Contribute to Improved Reading and Math for Black Students.

Instructional Strategy	Research Based Strategy	Summary of Activity
SIOP	Echevarria, Vogt, & Short (2008)	Teachers plan and deliver lessons that allow English Learners to acquire academic knowledge during push into content areas classes
English Immersion	Slavin & Cheung (2003)	Instructional strategy to help students learn English at an accelerated rate

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and English Immersion

As described in the *Definition of Terms* section in Chapter I, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol is a model of instruction that has been researched and validated. It works! This model of instruction helps teachers develop curriculum based on instruction methods that help English language learners acquire content they need while developing proficiency in the English language (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2012). The "English as a Second Language" program also attempts to design and coordinate a curriculum to help students new to the country learn English in an academic setting.

School Intervention

Discovery, Talahi, Madison, and North Middle School

Between the years 2006-2009, Discovery, Talahi, and Madison elementary schools, and North middle school saw a significant increase in black students enrolling in their schools. All three schools received two AYP teachers per building. These teachers supported classroom teachers by providing coaching and mentoring, by co-teaching specific lessons, and by organizing to provide flexible instructional groupings. Additionally, AYP teachers organized data review meetings to make sure that teachers were looking at their classroom data. When building principals and AYP teachers were interviewed, common themes emerged from the data and were recorded. One theme that became apparent was that looking at data daily was important. Teachers and principals also discussed how skill levels of students in each classroom were so different and diverse that constantly looking at data allowed them to adjust and game plan more effectively the needs of individual students. Flexible ability

grouping was an important strategy. This allowed laser focused instruction for students to address weaknesses and impose specific skill building.

The three elementary schools and North Middle School also had a new program called Jump Start. Jump Start is an English Immersion concept that provides transitional instruction for students who do not speak or read English. Each Jump Start classroom had an ELL teacher and a cultural navigator in it. Cultural navigators were used to translate English to Somali students while the ELL teachers used SIOP and other teaching strategies to help students learn. AYP teachers and principals believed that this was an important tool the district provided to help students. The use of cultural navigators also provided important outreach and communication to black families. Each site encouraged and facilitated monthly family meetings with both Somali and African-American families. These meetings encouraged family participation, created a better understanding of what instructional approaches were being used, and helped parents feel that their student's participation in school was a true partnership.

Data by Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. How did district-wide programs promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?
2. How did district-wide practices promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?

3. What instructional strategies were used to improve reading and math achievement scores for black students?
4. How did parents perceive the strengths and vulnerabilities of the improvement efforts?

Research Question 1

How did district-wide programs promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?

To answer Research Question #1, district-wide programs were evaluated in a couple of different ways, through survey, document analysis, and interview questions with administrators, AYP teachers, and parents.

Survey results and interviews showed, most administrators agreed that the professional development programs offered through learning cohorts was a good strategic way to help train teachers and administrators to help understand diverse learners, understand the need to differentiate instruction, to understand and master content, and to understand diversity and culture. Seventy-two percent (72%) of administrators/teachers surveyed believed that the district wide professional development program for teachers enabled all children in the district to meet state academic content standards. When interviewed AYP teachers agreed that the professional development training offered over the three years prior to the survey believed that this was one of the main reasons the district was able to boost achievement of black students. Eighty-one percent (81%) of administrators/teachers surveyed believed that the school district provided timely assistance for students who experienced difficulty in attaining proficient level of standards.

In addition to professional development, the district created a program such as Jump Start which was an important piece to implement. It was important in two ways. First, it provided important literacy strategies; and secondly, students were able to learn in a small classroom setting. In the interview conduct with AYP teachers all agreed that the district Jump Start program helped reduce the achievement gap. Table 6 shows a more complete breakdown of percent responses addressing survey questions dealing with Research Question 1.

Table 6. Administrator/Teacher Survey, Research Question 1.

What district-wide programs promote student achievement?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My school has a district-wide professional development program or programs for teachers to enable all children in the school to meet the state academic content standards.		9.1%	72.7%	18.2%
2. My school has a district-wide program or programs to increase parental involvement through means such as family literacy services.		36.4%	54.5%	9.1%
3. My school has a district-wide program or programs providing training to teachers in effective instructional methods and strategies.			63.6%	36.4%
4. My school has a district-wide program or programs that provide effective, timely assistance for students who experience difficulty in attaining the proficient or advanced level of the state content standards.		9.1%	81.8%	9.1%

Table 6 Cont.

What district-wide programs promote student achievement?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. My school has a district-wide program or programs to assist teachers in the use of academic assessments to provide information on, and to improve, the achievement of individual students and the overall instructional program.		27.3%	36.4%	36.4%
6. My school has a district-wide program or programs that provide teachers training in effective classroom management and discipline strategies.	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%

Research Question 2

How did district-wide practices promote student achievement and contribute to improving reading and math achievement scores for black students?

When surveyed, 63% of administrators agreed that the district provided training and support to teachers in effective instructional methods and strategies. Thirty-six percent (36%) agreed and 36.4% strongly agreed that the district provided help to teachers in the use of academic assessment to improve overall instruction. The district implemented data driven decision making, an important strategy to help assess the needs of students and to improve instruction. Fifty-four percent (54%) agreed and 27% strongly agreed that the district encouraged teachers to collaborate with each other on instructional matters on a regular basis. This appeared to reinforce that professional learning communities were helpful in giving teachers time to collaborate and discuss instruction strategies for students.

When asked what instructional strategies were implemented to target the closing of the achievement gap, 54% of teachers responded that when developing lessons, teachers selected content that met the district student competencies and performance standards. Five percent (5%) agreed and 36% strongly agreed the district provided instructional strategies to help teachers close the achievement gap. Table 7 illustrates a more complete picture of percent responses to survey questions addressing Research Question 2.

Table 7. Administrator/Teacher Survey, Research Question 2.

What district-wide practices promote student achievement?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with other teachers on instructional matters on a regular basis.		18.2%	54.5%	27.3%
8. Teachers have an active role in identifying and implementing professional development goals and objectives for the school.		18.2%	45.5%	36.4%
9. I have regular discussions with my teachers regarding their teaching.		9.1%	36.4%	54.6%
10. The evaluation feedback I give to teachers assists them to improve their teaching effectiveness.		9.1%	81.8%	9.1%
11. The teachers are aware of specific areas of interest I look at when visiting their classrooms.		9.1%	63.6%	27.3%
12. Assessment of student learning is directed to improving, rather than just monitoring, student performance.		9.1%	45.5%	45.5%

Table 7 Cont.

What district-wide practices promote student achievement?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
13. The assessment of student learning is based on specific, clearly identified academic standards for student performance.		9.1%	45.5%	45.5%
14. Teachers seek feedback from other teachers to improve their teaching.	9.1%	36.4%	54.5%	
15. Decisions about school improvement are always based upon our school improvement plan.		27.3%	54.5%	18.2%
16. Teachers at this school have comparable expectations regarding student academic performance.		36.4%	36.4%	27.3%
17. Professional development training over the past year has provided useful information helping teachers increase their teaching effectiveness.		20.0%	60.0%	20.0%
18. Teachers at this school are encouraged to use the same or similar instructional strategies.		27.3%	63.6%	9.1%
19. There is an intentional effort to improving home-school relations and parent participation.		10.0%	50.0%	40.0%
20. Academic content students are expected to learn is dictated by district's adopted curriculum.		18.2%	63.6%	18.2%
21. Academic content students are expected to learn do teachers select.		27.3%	54.5%	18.2%
22. Academic content students are expected to learn is selected by the students.	30.0%	50.0%	10.0%	10.0%

Research Question 3

What instructional strategies were used to improve reading and math achievement scores for black students?

Table 8 illustrates percent responses of participants to survey questions addressing Research Question 3.

Table 8. Administrator/Teacher Survey, Research Question 3.

What instructional strategies were implemented to target the closing of the achievement gap?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
23. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously select content that meets the district's student competencies and performance standards.		9.1%	54.5%	36.4%
24. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously select instructional materials based upon their knowledge of their students' developmental needs and learning styles.			45.5%	54.5%
25. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously select teaching methods and strategies that accommodate individual student needs and interests.		10.0%	50.0%	40.0%
26. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously prepare lessons with high expectations designed to challenge and stimulate all students.			54.5%	45.5%
27. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously consider how to build upon their students' existing knowledge and experiences.			36.4%	63.6%

Table 8 Cont.

What instructional strategies were implemented to target the closing of the achievement gap?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
28. When teachers design lessons, they consciously consider how to create active learning experiences for their students to facilitate engagement.		91.1%	63.6%	27.3%
29. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously consider how to create cooperative learning experiences for their students.		22.2%	55.6%	22.2%
30. When teachers develop lessons, the consciously design lessons that require integration of content from more than one content area.		10.0%	50.0%	40.0%
31. When teaching, teachers monitor students' understanding of the content and make adjustments accordingly.		10.0%	20.0%	70.0%
32. When teaching, teachers move among students, engaging individually and collectively with them during the learning experience.			27.3%	72.7%
33. When teaching, teachers consciously implement a teaching strategy and instructional materials that stimulates higher-order thinking skills.			72.7%	27.3%
34. When teaching, teachers create social interaction among students by requiring students to work as a team with both individual and group responsibilities.		9.1%	63.6%	27.3%
35. When teaching, teachers vary the size and composition of learning groups.		18.2%	72.7%	9.1%

Table 8 Cont.

What instructional strategies were implemented to target the closing of the achievement gap?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
36. When a student is having difficulty with an activity or assignment, the teachers are usually able to adjust it to his/her level.			72.7	27.3
37. At my school, peer tutoring is often used to assist struggling students.	9.1	27.3	45.5	18.2

Survey results indicated participants felt teachers were helping students to achieve. Seventy-two percent (72%) of respondents felt teachers moved among students, engaging individuals and the collective group of students during learning experiences. Sixty-three percent (63%) of respondents strongly agreed when teachers develop lessons, they consciously consider how to build upon their students' existing knowledge and experiences.

In Figure 1, MCA reading index percentage points the district received between 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. There is a 14 percent increase in index points for black students. In 2006, 28 percent of black students meet Adequate Yearly Progress. In 2009, 42 percent meet Adequate Yearly Progress.

In Figure 2, MCA math index percentage points the district received between 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. There is an 8% increase in index points for black students. In 2006, 32.3% of black students met Adequate Yearly Progress. In 2009, 40% met Adequate Yearly Progress.

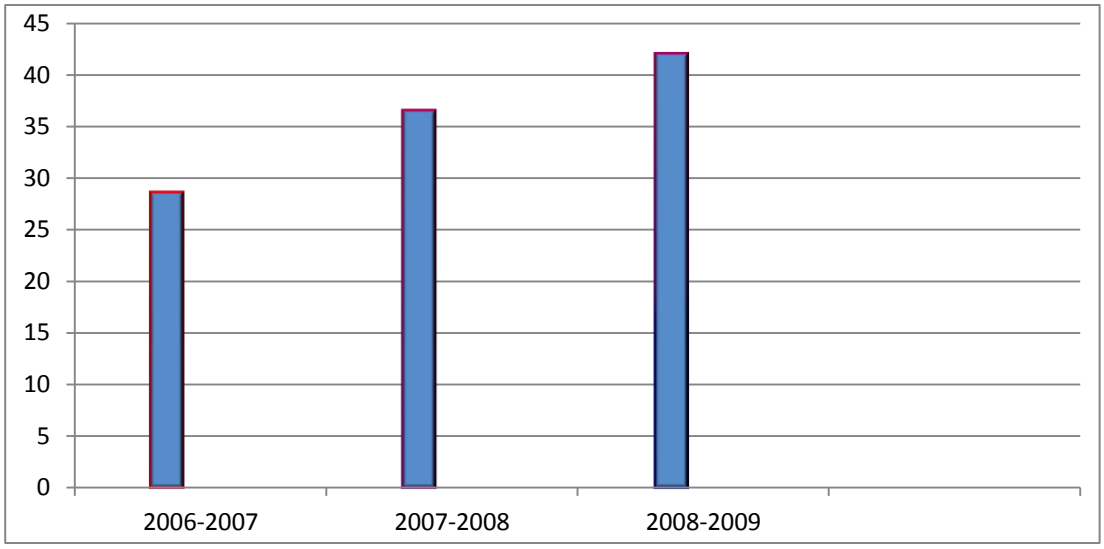

Figure 1. MCA Reading Index Rates – St. Cloud School District #742.

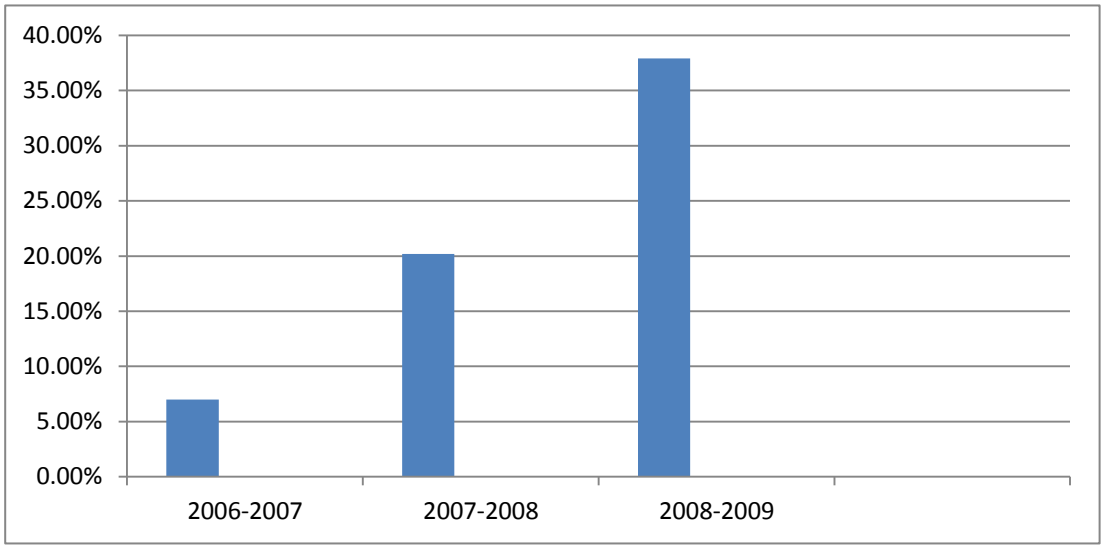

Figure 2. MCA Math Index Rates – St. Cloud School District #742.

In Figure 3, the average growth in MAP® reading scores increased for black students by almost 30% who met or exceeded growth targets. In 2006-2007, 7% of black students met or exceeded growth targets. In 2008-2009, 37% of black students met or exceeded growth targets.

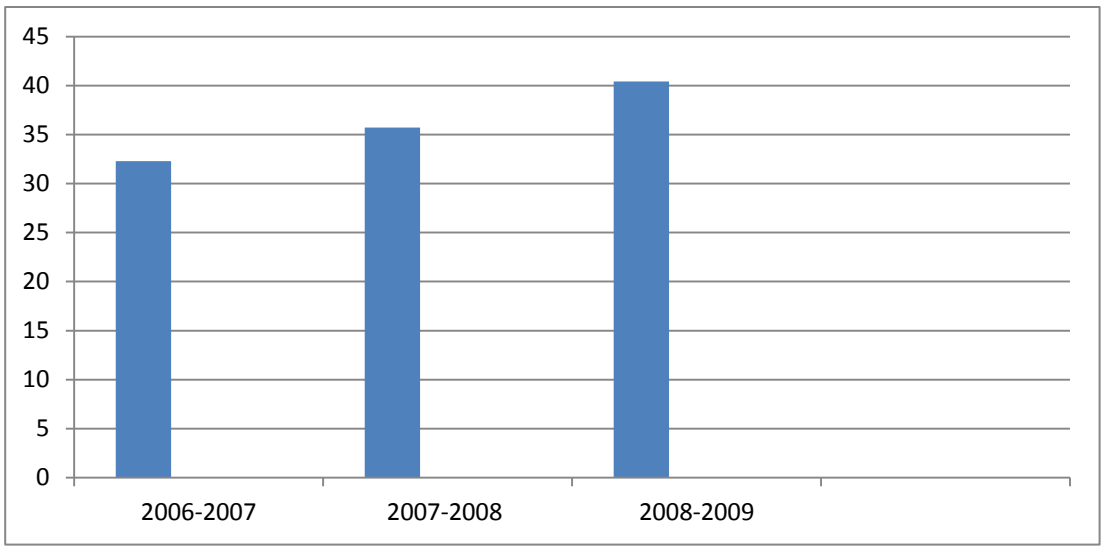

Figure 3. Percentage of Black Students That Met or Exceeded Reading MAP® Growth Targets.

In Figure 4, the average growth in MAP® math scores increased for black students by almost 20% who met or exceeded growth targets. In 2006-2007, 4% of black students met or exceeded growth targets. In 2008-2009, 24% of black students met or exceeded growth targets.

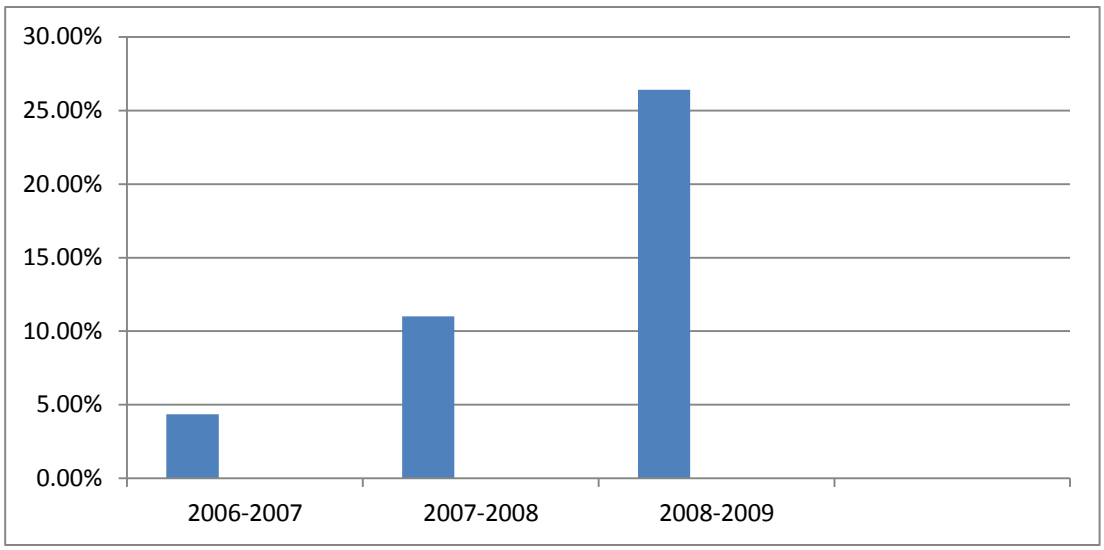

Figure 4. Percentage of Black Students That Met or Exceeded Math MAP® Growth Targets.

Research Question 4

How did parents perceive the strengths and vulnerabilities of the improvements efforts?

The district sent out parent climate surveys every year during the duration of this study. Parent surveys were reviewed for years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. There were no parent surveys given to parents for the 2008-2009 school year. These surveys record parents' perceptions on how the district is doing in the areas of: school climate, relationships between students and teachers, responsiveness to issues that parents feel are important, helping parents understand their children's progress based on MAP® and MCA testing, and communicating to parents the core values of School District 742.

In the 2006-2007 survey, 64% of parents who responded strongly agreed that the atmosphere at their child(ren)'s school was open and friendly. Seventy-five percent (75%) of parents who responded strongly agreed that they understood their child(ren)'s progress based on MAP® and MCA testing. This is important because this indicates families understood that data driven decisions make an important aspect of the district instructional strategies. Fifty percent (50%) of families strongly agreed in the survey that when they contact the school, they get a receptive and helpful response to issues they feel are important.

In the 2007-2008 survey, the number of parents who strongly agreed that their child(ren)'s school was open and friendly increased; it improved to 71% when the question was asked. Seventy-six percent (76%) strongly agreed that they understood their child(ren)'s progress based on MAP® and MCA testing. Fifty-three percent

(53%) of families strongly agreed that when they contact the school, they get a receptive and helpful response to issues they feel are important.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION

Summary

After reviewing and analyzing results of surveys and interview questions, district MCA and MAP® scores several things emerged that reinforced how the district improved the academic scores for black students in the district. District led professional development was important to give teachers and administrators the tools to address the needs of students. Implementing PBIS RTI and Vertical Teams were important programs. Professional development was essential in getting administrators and teachers on board.

In the Administrative/Teacher survey (see table_) a total of 80 percent of the 61 respondents *strongly agreed/agreed* that the district-wide program offered by school district 742 promoted district wide professional development for teachers that enabled all children in the district to meet the academic standards. One hundred percent (100%) of the 61 respondents *strongly agreed/agreed* that the district wide programs in St. Cloud District provided training to teachers in effective instructional methods and strategies. Ninety percent (90%) of teachers and administrators believed that the district-wide programs provided effective, timely assistance for students who experience difficulty in attaining the proficient or advanced level of the academic content standards. Nine percent (9%) disagreed.

Data driven decision making was another important concept for the district to implement. The use of data to adjust instruction and be strategic in providing interventions for students was an important approach to helping students be successful.

In the administrative/teachers survey, 90 percent of 61 respondents *strongly agreed/agreed* that the district-wide practices of assessment of student learning is based on specific, clearly identified academic standards for student performance. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents *strongly agreed/agreed* that the assessment of student learning is based on specific, clearly identified academic standards for student performance. Interestingly enough, only 54 percent in the survey agreed that teachers sought feedback from other teachers to improve their teaching. Despite co-teaching being an important practice in the district, half of the respondents agreed that teachers sought feedback from other teachers which is an important aspect of using co-teaching as a best practice.

Developing best instructional strategies such as cultural responsive instruction (SIOP) and English Immersion pushed teachers to try different approaches to instruction. In the administrative/teacher survey 100 percent of the 61 respondents *strongly agreed/agreed* that teachers consciously selected instructional materials based on their knowledge of their student's development needs and learning styles. Also, 90% of respondents to the survey believed when developing their lessons, teachers consciously selected teaching methods and strategies that accommodate individual student needs and interests. SIOP and English Immersion are both highly effective instructional strategies.

Conclusion

The achievement gap has continued to grow in the United States. School districts similar to School District 742 have been confronted with one persuasive issue that has been encountered in this study. That is, while some school districts have seen some success with closing the achievement gap, and many positive results have occurred at individual school levels, those positive results are not consistently evident at the district level. The purpose of this case study was to conduct a district-wide review of what was successful at a district level at closing the achievement gap. The reason 2006-2009 school years were chosen was due to the dramatic numbers of black students that came into the district at that time, how the district responded immediately to this influx of black families, and what interventions the district implemented to help black students narrow the achievement gap.

From 2006-2009, the district saw an increase of 14 points in reading MCA index scores for black students and 10 points in math MCA scores for black students. Additionally, the percentages of black students who met or exceeded MAP® reading growth targets went from 7% in 2006 to 37% in 2009.

The achievement gap is a serious issue. I think, to make a significant impact on the issue, we must make a concentrated effort to approach the problem at the district level. I think trying to approach the achievement gap from a national or state perspective would be too broad a perspective. School districts have a better understanding of resources students have in their area. Each district is unique in its student population, and it is easier to adjust interventions at the district level to address the needs of students in a district than it would be to try and address the problem at a

state or national level. The mistake of addressing the achievement gap at a national level started with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The concept of the legislation was appropriate, but the implementation was too big and expensive. I believe the federal government did not give states the financial support needed to adequately implement No Child Left Behind.

School districts have to take the lead in closing achievement gaps. School District 742 took the lead and saw significant improvement in achievement data during a three year period.

Research Recommendations

School districts have to provide in-depth professional development opportunities for staff. Providing staff with the knowledge and tools to work with diverse learners and giving them blueprints for developing curriculum is an effective way of dealing with students who struggle academically.

Data driven decision making has to be a pillar in addressing the achievement gap. Teachers must be able to use formative and summative assessments to adjust their instruction and properly identify learning goals and targets to track student learning.

Communication and coordinating educational services for families of color is another best practice. Family involvement in a child's schooling provides an intangible benefit to the student and family.

Being a part of School District 742 provided me with valuable insight and knowledge. I believe the district has continued to see good growth and gains with their black students; and, if we are to tackle our achievement gap state-wide or even

nation-wide, this school district would be a good school district to model.

I truly believe that closing the achievement gap can be done. It has to be a district wide approach to solving the complex issues that exist. My specific recommendations are:

- Strategically address the achievement gap at the local level. The superintendent and school board have to make this a priority.
- Professional development has to be a centerpiece for teachers and administrators. Specific trainings should be directed to culturally proficient instruction and strategies (SIOP) and dedicated time that is laser-focused. The training needs to be done with fidelity and not lectured based. It needs to be hands on and done in a way that gives teachers actual strategies to use. Small group pull outs, flexible groupings, and co-teaching models such as implemented by AYP teachers seem to have a significant impact on student success.
- School districts will need to have an expansive data-based system for teachers and administrators. The data has to be able to warehouse formative assessment and summative assessments. Teachers and administrators need to understand accelerated growth models and plan regular data retreats to review and analyze data.
- Culturally specific support and outreach for families is essential. Cultural liaisons can be an effective strategy to help communicate with families and to help with classroom support for non-English speaking students.

This case study provided me an opportunity to discuss the gains black students experienced during a three year period. It is important to continue to review the impact effective and strategic academic support can have at the district level. School District 742 did this and was able to improve the academic scores of their black students.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY

Research Question 1: What District wide programs promote student achievement?

1. My school has a district-wide professional development program or programs for teachers to enable all children in the school to meet the state academic content standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

2. My school has a district-wide program or programs to increase parental involvement through means such as family literacy services.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

3. My school has a district-wide program or programs providing training to teachers in effective instructional methods and strategies.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

4. My school has a district-wide program or programs that provide effective, timely assistance for students who experience difficulty in attaining the proficient or advanced level of the state content standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

5. My school has a district-wide program or programs to assist teachers in the use of academic assessments to provide information on, and to improve, the achievement of individual students and the overall instructional program.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

6. My school has a district-wide program or programs that provide teachers training in effective classroom management and discipline strategies.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Research Question 2: What district wide practices promote student achievement?

7. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with other teachers on instructional matters on a regular basis.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

8. Teachers have an active role in identifying and implementing professional development goals and objectives for the school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

9. I have regular discussions with my teachers regarding their teaching.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

10. The evaluation feedback I give to teachers assists them to improve their teaching effectiveness.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

11. The teachers are aware of specific areas of interest I look at when visiting their classrooms.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

12. Assessment of student learning is directed to improving, rather than just monitoring, student performance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

13. The assessment of student learning is based on specific, clearly identified academic standards for student performance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

14. Teachers seek feedback from other teachers to improve their teaching.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

15. Decisions about school improvement are always based upon our school improvement plan.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

16. Teachers at this school have comparable expectations regarding student academic performance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

17. Professional development training over the past year has provided useful information helping teachers increase their teaching effectiveness.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

18. Teachers at this school are encouraged to use the same or similar instructional strategies.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

19. There is an intentional effort to improving home-school relations and parent participation.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

20. Academic content students are expected to learn is dictated by district's adopted curriculum.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

21. Academic content students are expected to learn do teachers select.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

22. Academic content students are expected to learn is selected by the students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Research Question 3: What instructional strategies were implemented to target the closing of the achievement gap?

23. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously select content that meets the district's student competencies and performance standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

24. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously select instructional materials based upon their knowledge of their students' developmental needs and learning styles.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

25. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously select teaching methods and strategies that accommodate individual student needs and interests.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

26. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously prepare lessons with high expectations designed to challenge and stimulate all students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

27. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously consider how to build upon their students' existing knowledge and experiences.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

28. When teachers design lessons, they consciously consider how to create active learning experiences for their students to facilitate engagement.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

29. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously consider how to create cooperative learning experiences for their students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

30. When teachers develop lessons, they consciously design lessons that require integration of content from more than one content area.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

31. When teaching, teachers monitor students' understanding of the content and make adjustments accordingly.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

32. When teaching, teachers move among the students, engaging individually and collectively with them during the learning experience.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

33. When teaching, teachers consciously implement a teaching strategy and instructional materials that stimulates higher-order thinking skills.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

34. When teaching, teachers create social interaction among students by requiring students to work as a team with both individual and group responsibilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

35. When teaching, teachers vary the size and composition of learning groups.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

36. When a student is having difficulty with an activity or assignment, the teachers are usually able to adjust it to his/her level.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

37. At my school, peer tutoring is often used to assist struggling students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

APPENDIX B

TEACHER SURVEY

Research Question 1: What district wide programs promote student achievement?

1. My school has a district-wide professional development program or programs for teachers to enable all children in the school to meet the state academic content standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

2. My school has a district-wide program or programs to increase parental involvement through means such as family literacy services.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

3. My school has a district-wide program or programs providing training to teachers in effective instructional methods and strategies.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

4. My school has a district-wide program or programs that provide effective, timely assistance for students who experience difficulty in attaining the proficient or advanced level of the academic content standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

5. My school has a district-wide program or programs to assist teachers in the use of academic assessments to provide information on, and to improve, the achievement of individual students and the overall instructional program.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

6. My school has a district-wide program or programs that provide teachers training in effective classroom management and discipline strategies.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Research Question 2: What district *wide practices promote student achievement?*

7. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with other teachers on instructional matters on a regular basis.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

8. Teachers have an active role in identifying and implementing professional development goals and objectives for the school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

9. I regularly discuss my teaching with my administrator(s).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

10. The evaluation feedback I receive from my administrator(s) assists me to improve my teaching effectiveness.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

11. I am aware of specific areas of interest that my administrator(s) looks at when visiting my classroom.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

12. Assessment of student learning is accomplished to improving, rather than just monitoring, student performance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

13. The assessment of student learning is based on specific, clearly identified academic standards for student performance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

14. Teachers seek feedback from other teachers to improve their teaching.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

15. Decisions about school improvement are always based upon our school improvement plan.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

16. Teachers at this school have comparable expectations regarding student academic performance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

17. Professional development training over the past year has provided useful information helping me increase my teaching effectiveness.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

18. Teachers at this school are encouraged to use the same or similar instructional strategies.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

19. There is an intentional effort to improving home-school relations and parent participation.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

20. Academic content you expect your students to learn is dictated by district's adopted curriculum.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

21. Academic content you expect your students to learn do you (or you and your colleagues) select.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

22. Academic content you expect your students to learn is selected by your students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Research Question 3: What instructional strategies were implemented to target the closing of the achievement gap?

23. When developing my lessons, I consciously select content that meets the district's student competencies and performance standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

24. When developing my lessons, I consciously select instructional materials based upon my knowledge of my students' developmental needs and learning styles.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

25. When developing my lessons, I consciously select teaching methods and strategies that accommodate individual student needs and interests.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

26. When developing my lessons, I consciously prepare lessons with high expectations designed to challenge and stimulate all students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

27. When developing my lessons, I consciously build upon my students' existing knowledge and experiences.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

28. When developing my lessons, I consciously consider how to create active learning experiences for my students to facilitate engagement.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

29. When developing my lessons, I consciously consider how to create cooperative learning experiences for my students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

30. When developing my lessons, I consciously create lessons that require integration of content from more than one content area.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

31. When teaching, I monitor students' understanding of the content and make adjustments accordingly.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

32. When teaching, I move among the students, engaging individually and collectively with them during the learning experience.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

33. When teaching, I consciously employ teaching strategies and instructional materials that stimulate higher-order thinking skills.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

34. When teaching, I create social interaction among students by requiring students to work as a team with both individual and group responsibilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

35. When teaching, I vary the size and composition of learning groups.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

36. When a student is having difficulty with an activity or assignment, I am usually able to adjust it to his/her level.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

37. At your school, peer tutoring is often used to assist struggling students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

APPENDIX C

PARENT/GUARDIAN CLIMATE SURVEY, 2006

Parent/Guardian Climate Survey

Thank you for participating in the St. Cloud Area School District 742 Climate Survey. After you have completed the survey, **please return it in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope**. Survey costs have been paid for with funds from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative. If you have any questions contact Andrea Preppernau at 320-202-6821 or Andrea.Preppernau@isd742.org.

To Begin:
Answer all questions for the school of the OLDEST District 742 student living in your home. Using a #2 pencil, enter all of your question responses on the enclosed answer sheet by filling-in/darkening the circles that correspond to your answer (please do not write on this document). DO NOT write your name on the answer sheet. Fill in only one circle for each question response. If you do not know the answer to a question, leave it blank.

Please write the two-digit number of your oldest child's school in the Identification # boxes on the answer sheet (see the school numbers listed below), and then darken the corresponding circles below the numbers. Please enter the numbers starting on the left side of the boxes. Do <u>not</u> enter numbers on the right side or in the center of these boxes.

16- Clearview
25- Kennedy
28- Lincoln
31- Madison
35- Discovery
36- Talahi
40- Westwood
51- Oak Hill
52- North Jr. High
54- South Jr. High
57- Apollo High School
59- Tech High School
65- Area Learning Center (West and Wilson)
29- Roosevelt Early Childhood Center
72- St. Cloud Children's Home

Tell us about the school climate of your <u>oldest</u> child by answering questions 1 - 53 on the answer sheet provided – darken one circle per question.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The atmosphere at my child's school seems open and friendly.	A	B	C	D	E
2. There is good communication between my child's school and me.	A	B	C	D	E
3. I am informed about my child's progress.	A	B	C	D	E
4. I know what my child's teacher(s) expects of my child.	A	B	C	D	E
5. My child is safe at school.	A	B	C	D	E
6. When I contact the school, I usually get a receptive and helpful response.	A	B	C	D	E
7. School staff members are accessible to me and responsive to my concerns.	A	B	C	D	E
8. My child is safe going to and from school.	A	B	C	D	E
9. There is adequate supervision during school.	A	B	C	D	E
10. There is adequate supervision before and after school.	A	B	C	D	E

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11. Teachers show respect for the students.	A	B	C	D	E
12. Students show respect for other students.	A	B	C	D	E
13. The school meets the social needs of the students.	A	B	C	D	E
14. The school meets the academic needs of the students.	A	B	C	D	E
15. My child is happy at school.	A	B	C	D	E
16. The school expects quality work of its students.	A	B	C	D	E
17. The school has an excellent learning environment.	A	B	C	D	E
18. I know how well my child is progressing in school.	A	B	C	D	E
19. I like the school's report cards/progress reports.	A	B	C	D	E
20. I respect the school's teachers.	A	B	C	D	E
21. I respect the school's principal.	A	B	C	D	E
22. Overall, the school performs well academically.	A	B	C	D	E
23. The school succeeds at preparing children for future work.	A	B	C	D	E
24. The school has a good public image.	A	B	C	D	E

25. I am satisfied with my opportunities for involvement at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
26. The school's assessment practices are fair.	A	B	C	D	E
27. I believe boys and girls are treated equally at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
28. I support my child's learning at home.	A	B	C	D	E
29. I feel good about myself as a parent.	A	B	C	D	E
30. Good student behavior is important to having a successful school.	A	B	C	D	E
31. I am satisfied with the student behavior in my school.	A	B	C	D	E
32. A handful of students cause most of the discipline problems at my school.	A	B	C	D	E
33. It is acceptable for parents to contact school administration if they think a teacher or other staff person has unfairly disciplined their child.	A	B	C	D	E

Continue on the next page ⇒

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
34. The behavior expectations in my child's school are clearly communicated to staff, students, and parents.	A	B	C	D	E
35. The behavior expectations in my child's school are consistently enforced among students.	A	B	C	D	E
36. When it comes to dealing with student misbehavior my child's school could be doing a better job.	A	B	C	D	E
37. In the end, most students suffer because of a few persistent troublemakers.	A	B	C	D	E
38. Support from the community is important in helping students achieve.	A	B	C	D	E
39. After school programs are important in fostering student development.	A	B	C	D	E
40. Community services should play a greater role in student development in our school.	A	B	C	D	E
41. Our school would benefit from a broad range of community services available to **students**.	A	B	C	D	E

42. Our school would benefit from a broad range of community services available to **families**.	A	B	C	D	E
43. I believe students of different races get along at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
44. I appreciate the opportunity for my child to attend school with children from different races.	A	B	C	D	E
45. When a bullying incident occurs, someone at our school contacts the parents of both the bully and the victim.	A	B	C	D	E
46. Someone at our school follows-up when a parent reports their child has been bullied at school.	A	B	C	D	E
47. Our school has clear policies for dealing with bullying between students.	A	B	C	D	E
48. My child's school has specific times and places set aside where students can talk about bullying.	A	B	C	D	E
49. My child's school has clear policies for dealing with bullying between students.	A	B	C	D	E
50. I tell my child to immediately report bullying to me or to an adult in their school.	A	B	C	D	E

Continue on the backside of this page ⇒

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
51. My child's school teaches students specific skills to avoid being harmed by bullies.	A	B	C	D	E
52. Compared to one year ago, students are now more familiar with District safety, weapon and discipline policies and procedures.	A	B	C	D	E
53. Compared to one year ago, school climate throughout the District has improved because of an enhanced district-wide focus on student health and safety.	A	B	C	D	E

Tell us about your family by completing questions 54 - 56 on the answer sheet provided – darken one circle per question.

54. Number of children in the school district.	A. 1 - 2 children B. 3 - 4 children C. 5 - 6 children D. 7 or more children
55. Primary racial/ethnic background* (CHOOSE ONE). *This question is optional. The information gathered is used to assure that all racial/ethnic backgrounds are represented within the survey responses.	A. American Indian/Alaskan Native B. Asian/Pacific Islander C. Black (Not Hispanic Origin) D. Hispanic/Latino E. White (Not Hispanic Origin)
56. Relationship to the **oldest** child.	A. Mother B. Father C. Grandparent D. Other/Guardian

Thank you for your help!

Please return the answer form in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.
<u>DO NOT</u> fold the answer form.

APPENDIX D

PARENT/GUARDIAN CLIMATE SURVEY, 2007

To: District 742 Parent/Guardian
From: Jenny Merriam, Office of Grants and Research
Re: District Climate Survey
Date: March 27, 2007

Parent Guardian Climate Survey

District 742 needs your help! In continuing efforts to evaluate the progress of the St. Cloud Area School District's current goals and to make new priorities for the future, ***your input is necessary*!** Presented here is the opportunity to provide feedback by participating in the parent/guardian climate survey. Your participation is important for many district purposes and is greatly appreciated.

Survey participation is voluntary. The answers you provide will be completely confidential and your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. You will in no way be associated with the responses you provide. Thank you in advance for your help with this important project.

To Begin:
Answer all questions for the school of the **OLDEST** District 742 student living in your home. Using a **#2 pencil**, enter all of your question responses on the enclosed answer sheet by filling-in/darkening the circles that correspond to your answer (please do not write on the questionnaire). DO NOT write your name on the answer sheet. Fill in only one circle for each question response. If you do not know the answer to a question, leave it blank.

After you have completed the survey, **please return it in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope**. If you have any questions contact Jenny Merriam at 320-253-9333 Ext. 1265, or Jenny.Merriam@isd742.org.

Please write the two-digit number of your oldest child's school in the **Identification #** boxes on the answer sheet (see the school numbers listed below), and then darken the corresponding circles below the numbers. Please enter the numbers starting on the **left side** of the boxes. Do <u>not</u> enter numbers on the right side or in the center of these boxes.

16- Clearview
25- Kennedy
28- Lincoln
31- Madison
35- Discovery
36- Talahi
40- Westwood
51- Oak Hill
52- North Jr. High
54- South Jr. High
57- Apollo High School
59- Tech High School
65- Area Learning Center (West/Wilson)
29- Roosevelt Early Childhood Center
72- St. Cloud Children's Home

Continue on the backside of this page ⇒

Please tell us about the school climate of your <u>oldest</u> child by answering questions 1 - 53 on the answer sheet provided – darken one circle per question.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The atmosphere at my child's school seems open and friendly.	A	B	C	D	E
2. There is good communication between my child's school and me.	A	B	C	D	E
3. I am informed about my child's progress.	A	B	C	D	E
4. I know what my child's teacher(s) expects of my child.	A	B	C	D	E
5. My child is safe at school.	A	B	C	D	E
6. When I contact the school, I usually get a receptive and helpful response.	A	B	C	D	E

7. School staff members are accessible to me and responsive to my concerns.	A	B	C	D	E
8. My child is safe going to and from school.	A	B	C	D	E
9. There is adequate supervision during school.	A	B	C	D	E
10. There is adequate supervision before and after school.	A	B	C	D	E
11. Teachers show respect for the students.	A	B	C	D	E
12. Students show respect for other students.	A	B	C	D	E
13. The school meets the social needs of the students.	A	B	C	D	E
14. The school meets the academic needs of the students.	A	B	C	D	E
15. My child is happy at school.	A	B	C	D	E
16. The school expects quality work of its students.	A	B	C	D	E
17. The school has an excellent learning environment.	A	B	C	D	E
18. I know how well my child is progressing in school.	A	B	C	D	E
19. I like the school's report cards/progress reports.	A	B	C	D	E
20. I respect the school's teachers.	A	B	C	D	E
21. I respect the school's principal.	A	B	C	D	E

22. Overall, the school performs well academically.	A	B	C	D	E
23. The school succeeds at preparing children for future work.	A	B	C	D	E
24. The school has a good public image.	A	B	C	D	E

Continue on the next page ⇒

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
25. I am satisfied with my opportunities for involvement at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
26. The school's assessment practices are fair.	A	B	C	D	E
27. I believe boys and girls are treated equally at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
28. I support my child's learning at home.	A	B	C	D	E
29. I feel good about myself as a parent.	A	B	C	D	E
30. Good student behavior is important to having a successful school.	A	B	C	D	E
31. I am satisfied with the student behavior in my school.	A	B	C	D	E
32. A handful of students cause most of the discipline problems at my school.	A	B	C	D	E
33. It is acceptable for parents to contact school administration if they think a teacher or other staff person has unfairly disciplined their child.	A	B	C	D	E
34. The behavior expectations in my child's school are clearly communicated to staff, students, and parents.	A	B	C	D	E

35. The behavior expectations in my child's school are consistently enforced among students.	A	B	C	D	E
36. When it comes to dealing with student misbehavior my child's school could be doing a better job.	A	B	C	D	E
37. In the end, most students suffer because of a few persistent troublemakers.	A	B	C	D	E
38. Support from the community is important in helping students achieve.	A	B	C	D	E
39. After school programs are important in fostering student development.	A	B	C	D	E
40. Community services should play a greater role in student development in our school.	A	B	C	D	E
41. Our school would benefit from a broad range of community services available to **students**.	A	B	C	D	E
42. Our school would benefit from a broad range of community services available to **families**.	A	B	C	D	E
43. I believe students of different races get along at this school.	A	B	C	D	E

Continue on the backside of this page ⇒

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
44. I appreciate the opportunity for my child to attend school with children from different races.	A	B	C	D	E
45. When a bullying incident occurs, someone at our school contacts the parents of both the bully and the victim.	A	B	C	D	E
46. Someone at our school follows-up when a parent reports their child has been bullied at school.	A	B	C	D	E
47. Our school has clear policies for dealing with bullying between students.	A	B	C	D	E
48. My child's school has specific times and places set aside where students can talk about bullying.	A	B	C	D	E
49. My child's school has clear policies for dealing with bullying between students.	A	B	C	D	E
50. I tell my child to immediately report bullying to me or to an adult in their school.	A	B	C	D	E
51. My child's school teaches students specific skills to avoid being harmed by bullies.	A	B	C	D	E

52. Compared to one year ago, students are now more familiar with District safety, weapon and discipline policies and procedures.	A	B	C	D	E
53. Compared to one year ago, school climate throughout the District has improved because of an enhanced district-wide focus on student health and safety.	A	B	C	D	E

Tell us about your family by completing questions 54 - 56 on the answer sheet provided – darken one circle per question.

54. Number of children in the school district.	A. 1 - 2 children B. 3 - 4 children C. 5 - 6 children D. 7 or more children
55. Primary racial/ethnic background* (CHOOSE ONE). *This question is optional. The information gathered is used to assure that all racial/ethnic backgrounds are represented within the survey responses.	A. American Indian/Alaskan Native B. Asian/Pacific Islander C. Black (Not Hispanic Origin) D. Hispanic/Latino E. White (Not Hispanic Origin)
56. Relationship to the **oldest** child.	A. Mother B. Father C. Grandparent D. Other/Guardian

Thank you for your help!
Please return the answer form in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. DO NOT fold the answer form.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Note: All people interviewed were asked the first five questions below to achieve standardization of answers. Additional questions were asked of each individual in order to corroborate other findings or discover new information. Those individual questions were recorded in writing and on tape during the interview.

1. Do you think the district was successful in the way it tried to boost the achievement levels of diverse students during the years of 2006 to 2009?

2. What were some of the successes you experienced and heard about? For students? For teachers?

3. What were some of the barriers to success for students? For teachers?

4. What else could be done to promote greater achievement among diverse groups of students?

5. If you could change one thing about the way this district-wide effort was carried out, what would it be?

REFERENCES

Achievement Gap. (2011, July 7). Bethesda, MD: 2012 Editorial Projects in Education (Original work published August 3, 2004). Retrieved from Education Week Web site: http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/achievement-gap/

Annie E. Casey Foundation, The. (2011). 2011 Kids Count® Data Book: America's children, America's challenge, Promoting opportunity for the next generation. Baltimore, MD: Author.

Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Olson, L. S. (2001, Summer). Schools, achievement, and inequality: A seasonal perspective. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *23*(2), 171-191.

Bagdon, C. (1999-2012). How to develop vertical teaming between middle & high schools [Online blog]. *eHow mom*. Retrieved from http://www.ehow.com/how_7784647_develop-between-middle-high-schools.html

Baker, P. (2005). The impact of cultural biases an African-American students' education: A review of research literature regarding race-based schooling. *Education and Urban Society*, *37*(3), 243-256.

Bambrick-Santoyo, P. (with Atkins, N.). (2010). *Driven By Data: A Practical Guide To Improve Instruction*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Barton, P. E. (2003, October). *Parsing the achievement gap: Baselines for tracking progress* [Policy information report]. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. Retrieved from http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICPARSING.pdf

Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2007). *The family: America's smallest school* [Policy information report]. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2010, July). *The black-white achievement gap: When progress stopped* [Policy information report]. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. Retrieved from http://content.yudu.com/Library/A1uv19/practice/resources/20.htm

Beaulieu, L. M. (2002a). African-American children and literacy: Moving past the Ebonics debate to a common understanding. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 115-124). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Beaulieu, L. M. (2002b). African-American children and literacy: Literacy development in the early childhood years. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 125-132). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Beaulieu, L. M. (2002c). African-American children and literacy: Literacy development across the elementary, middle, and high school years. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 133-146). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Berliner, D. C. (2009, Fall). Are teachers responsible for low achievement by poor students. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, *46*(1), 18-21.

Black male graduation vs dropout rate [Online article]. (n.d.). *A New Era of Education: Beyond the Bricks* Web site. New York, NY: Washington Koen Media. Retrieved from http://beyondthebricksproject.com/black-male-graduation-vs-dropout-rate

Bowman, B. T. (1994). Cultural diversity and academic achievement. Urban education program. *Urban monograph series*. Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL).

Boyd, V. (1992). *School context: Bridge or barrier to change*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Retrieved from http://www.sedl.org/change/school/culture.html

Boykin, A. W. (2002). Talent development, cultural deep structure, and school reform: Implications for African immersion initiatives. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 81-94). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Boykin, A. W., Coleman, S., Lilja, A., & Tyler, K. (2004). *Building on children's cultural assets in simulated classroom performance environments: Research vistas in the communal learning paradigm*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University.

Brunette, J. (1999). *Critical behaviors and strategies for teaching culturally diverse students*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED435147).

Carnoy, M. (1994). *Faded dreams: The politics and economics of race in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Center for Applied Linguistics. (2012). Helping educators work effectively with English Language Learners. *CALsiop (sheltered instruction observation protocol)* Web site. Retrieved from www.cal.org/siop

Charles, T., & O'Quinn, S. (2001). *Eliminating the black-white achievement gap: A summary of research*. Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Education Research Council.

Cheng, S., & Starks, B. (2002). Racial differences in the effects of significant others on students' educational expectations. *Sociology of Education, 75*(4), 306-327.

Children's Defense Fund. (2010, September 16). *Millions more children living in poverty; Now is the time to act and invest in the future of our children*. Retrieved from http://www.childrensdefense.org/newsroom/cdf-in-the-news/press-releases/2010/millions-more-children-living-poverty.html

Clark, M. (1991). Social identity, peer relations, and academic competence of African-American adolescents. *Education and Urban Society, 24*(1), 41-52.

Comer, J. P. (1998). *Waiting for a miracle: Why schools can't solve our problems—and how we can*. New York: Plume Publishing.

Cummins, J. (2011). Fueling academic growth for English learners. *Reading Teacher, 65*(2), 142-146.

Dallmann-Jones, A. S. (2002). A case for separate at-risk education standards. *Journal of School Improvement, 3*(1), 34-38.

Daniels, H., & Bizar, M. (2005). *Teaching the best practice way: Methods that matter, K-12*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Day-Vines, N., & Day-Hairston, B. (2005). Culturally congruent strategies for addressing the behavioral needs of urban African-American K-12 students. *Professional School Counselor, 8*(3), 236-243.

Denbo, S. J. (2002a). Institutional practices that support African-American student achievement. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 55-70). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Denbo, S. J. (2002b). Why can't we close the achievement gap? In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 13-18). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Denbo, S. J., & Beaulieu, L. M. (Eds.; forward by Jones, V.). (2002). *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Dimitriadis, G. (2001). Border identities, transformed lives, and danger zones: The mediation of validated selves, local social networks, and successful paths in community-based organizations. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *22*(3), 361-374.

Dufour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Echevarria, J. J., Vogt, M. E., Short, D. J. (2008). *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP® model* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.

Education Rights Center at Howard University School of Law. (2012). *Access to Curriculum*. Retrieved from http://www.educationrightscenter.org/Access_to_Curriculum.html

Education Trust, Inc. (2002-2003, Winter). Education watch Minnesota: Key education facts and figures; Achievement, attainment and opportunity – From elementary school through college. *EdWatch Online State Summary Reports*. Retrieved from http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/MN_statesum.pdf

Education Trust, The. (2009a). *Closing the gaps*. Retrieved from http://www.edtrust.org/issues/pre-k-12/closing-the-gaps

Education Trust, The. (2009b). *Education watch state report: Minnesota vital statistics*. Retrieved from http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Minnesota_0.pdf

Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Olson, L. S. (1994). The gender gap in math: Its possible origins in neighborhood effects. *American Sociological Review*, *59*(6), 822-838.

Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Olson, L. S. (2004). Temporary as compared to permanent high school dropout. *Social Forces, 82*(3), 1181-1205.

Fearn, K. (2002). Special education: What can be done? Programs that use promising practices in educating students who have been placed at risk. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 43-48). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Ferguson, R. (1998). Can schools narrow the black-white test score gap? In C. Jencks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The black-white test score gap* (pp. 318-374). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Ferguson, A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Ferguson, R. (2003). Teachers' perceptions and expectations and the black/white test score gap. *Urban Education*, *38*(4), 460-507.

Finkel, E. (2010). *Black children still left behind: Educators see new strategies to address persistent achievement gaps and discrimination against African-American students*. Norwalk, CT: District Administration.

Flowers, T., & Flowers, L. (2008). Factors affecting urban African-American high school students' achievement in reading. *Urban Education, 43*(2), 154-171.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(2), 219-245. doi:0.1177/1077800405284363

Ford, D. K. (2002). The recruitment and retention of African-American students in gifted education: Beyond deficit ideologies. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 31-42). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Fordham, A., & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of acting white. *The Urban Review, 18*(3), 176-206.

Fremon, C., & Renfrow-Hamilton, S. (2001). *Are schools failing black boys?* [LEGL 4500/6500—Employment Law]. University of Georgia. Retrieved from http://www.terry.uga.edu/~dawndba/4500FailingBlkBoys.html

Gabriel, T. (2010, November 9). Proficiency of black students is found to be far lower than expected. *New York Times*, p. A22.

GiveWell. (n.d.). *Overview of reasoning: K-12 education (focus on NYC), The achievement gap*. Retrieved November 27, 2012 from http://www.givewell.org/united-states/education/detail

Goldring, L. (2002). The power of school culture. *Leadership, 32*(2), 32-35.

Grant, C. A., & Ladson-Billings, G. (Eds.). (1997). *Dictionary of multicultural education*. Phoenix, AZ: The Oryx Press.

Green, L. J. (2002). *African American English: A linguistic introduction*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Guild, P. B. (2002). An educational leader's guide to culture and learning style. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 103-114). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Haskins, R., & Rouse, C. (2005). *Closing the achievement gaps: The future of children*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

Haycock, K., Jerald, C., & Huang, S. (2001). Closing the gap: Done in a decade. *Thinking K-16, 5*(2), 3-21. Retrieved from http://www.doe.state.la.us/Lde/uploads/3435.pdf

Hoffman, K., & Llagas, C. (2003). *Status and trends in the education of blacks* (NCES 2003-034). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Holtzhausen, S. (2001, July 16-18). *Triangulation as a powerful tool to strengthen the qualitative research design: The Resource-based Learning Career Preparation Programme (RBLCPP) as a case study*. Paper presented at the Higher Education Close Up Conference 2, Lancaster University, Lancaster, Lancashire, England.

Houston, P. (2001). Superintendents for the 21st century: It's not just a job, It's a calling. *Phi Delta Kappan, 82*(6), 428-433.

Jencks, C., & Phillips, M. (1998). The black-white test score gap: An introduction. In C. Jencks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The black-white test score gap* (pp. 1-51). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Jones, M., Yonezawa, S., Mehan, H., & McClure, L. (2008, April). *School climate and student achievement*. UC Davis School of Education Center for Applied Policy in Education. Retrieved from http://education.ucdavis.edu/sites/main/files/Yonezawa_Paper_WEB.pdf

Kirk, J. (2012, September 8). Achievement ;gap still a concern in Minnesota. *Marshall Independent*. Retrieved from http://www.marshallindependent.com/page/content.detail/id/535865.html

Kober, N. (2001, April). *It takes more than testing: Closing the achievement gap*. *A report of the Center on Education Policy*. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy.

Koch, J. M. (2008). *Effects of an early elementary school counseling intervention on academic achievement, behavior and school climate*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest LLC.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2002). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally-relevant pedagogy. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 95-102). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Leaked, D., & Flats, C. (1993). Do we need to desegregate all of our black schools? *Educational Policy*, *7*(3), 370-387.

Lee, M., & Friedrich, T. (2007). The 'smaller' the school the better? The Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) program in U.S. high schools. *Improving Schools*, *10*(3), 261-282.

Lee, M., & Madyun, N. (2009). The impact of neighborhood disadvantage on the black-white achievement gap. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 14*(2), 148-169.

Lewis, C. W., James, M., Hancock, S., Hill-Jackson, V. (2008). Framing African-American students' success and failure in urban settings: A typology for change. *Urban Education, 43*(2), 127-153.

Lumsden, L. (1997). *Expectations for students* [ERIC Digest, Number 116]. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED409609)

Martin, D., Martin, M., Gibson, S. S., & Wilkins, J. (2007, Winter). Increasing prosocial behavior and academic achievement among adolescent African American males. *Adolescence*, *42*(168), 689-698.

Mattison, E., & Aber, M. S. (2007). Closing the achievement gap: The association of racial climate with achievement and behavioral outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 40*(1-2), 1-12.

Mayer, D. M., & Hanges, P. J. (2003). Understanding the stereotype threat effect with "culture-free" tests: An examination of its mediators and measurement. *Human Performance, 16*(3), 207-230.

McDonald, L., & Sayger, T. V. (1998). Impact of a family and school based prevention program on protective factors for high risk youth. *Drugs and Society, 12*(1-2), 61-85.

McKay, P. F., Doverspike, D., Bowen-Hilton, D., & Martin, Q. D. (2002). Stereotype threat effects on the Raven Advanced Progressive Matrices scores of African Americans. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *32*, 767-787.

Minnesota Department of Education. (2011). *No questions left behind: A guide to Minnesota's accountability plan under the No Child Left Behind Act*. Roseville, MN: Author.

Minnesota Department of Education. (2012a). *Response to intervention*. Retrieved from http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/BestPrac/RespInterv/index.html

Minnesota Department of Education. (2012b). *School performance (AYP)*. Retrieved from http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/JustParent/AYP/

Mocombe, P. (2011). A social structural reinterpretation of the 'burden of acting White': A hermeneutical analysis. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *32*(1), 85-97. doi:10.1080/01596306.2011.537076

National School Climate Council. (2007). *The school climate challenge: Narrowing the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice guidelines and teacher education policy*. Retrieved from http://www.ecs.org/html/projectsPartners/nclc/docs/school-climate-challenge-web.pdf

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110 § 1001. (2004, September 15). Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education Web site: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html#sec1001

Noguera, P. A. (2003). The trouble with black boys: The role and influence of environmental and cultural factors and the academic performance of African-American males. *Urban Education, 38*(4), 431-459.

Northwest Evaluation Association. (2012). *Help all kids learn: Education is complicated*. Retrieved from http://www.nwea.org/products-services/assessments/help-all-kids-learn

Oakes, J., Quartz, K. H., Ryan, S., & Upton, M. (2000). *Becoming good American schools: The struggle for civic virtue in education reform*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Oakes, J. A., Gamoran, A., & Page, R. N. (1992). Curriculum differentiation: Opportunities, outcomes, and meanings. In P. W. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Curriculum: A project of the American Educational Research Association* (pp. 570-607). New York: Macmillan.

Ogbu, J. (2003). Origins of human competence: A cultural perspective. *Child Development, 52,* 413-429.

Osher, D., Woodruff, D., & Sims, A. (2010). *Exploring relationships between inappropriate and ineffective special education services for African American children and youth and their overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system*. Paper presented at the Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Palumbo, A., & Kramer-Vida, L. (2012). An academic curriculum will close the academic achievement gap. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 85*(3), 117-121.

PBIS.Org. (2012). *OSEP Center on positive behavioral intervention and supports: Effective school interventions*. Retrieved from http://www.pbis.org/school/what_is_swpbs.aspx

Peterson-Lewis, S., & Bratton, L. (2004). Perceptions of "acting black" among African-American teens: Implications of racial dramaturgy for academic and social achievement. *The Urban Review, 36*(2), 81-98.

Pinckney, A. (2000). *Black Americans* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Pollard, D. (1993). Gender, achievement, and African-American students' perceptions of their school experience. *Educational Psychologist, 28*(4), 341-345.

Popper, K. (1959). The logic of scientific discovery. New York: Basic Books.

Raffaele-Mendez, L., Knoff, H., & Ferron, J. (2002). School demographic variables and out-of-school suspension rates: A quantitative and qualitative analysis of a large ethnically diverse school district. *Psychology in the Schools, 39*, 259-277.

Reeves, D. (2006). Leading to change: How do you change school culture? *Educational Leadership, 64*(4), 92-94.

Reichardt, R. (2001, April). *Reducing class size: Choices and consequences* [Policy brief]. Aurora, CO: Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Sailor, W., Dunlap, G., Sugai, G., & Horner, R. (Eds.). (2009). *Handbook of Positive Behavior Support*. New York: Springer Science + Business Media, LLC.

Sampson, D., & Garrison-Wade, D. F. (2011, June). Cultural vibrancy: Exploring the preferences of African American children toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant curriculum. *Urban Review*, *43*(2), 279-309. doi:10.1007/s11256-010-0170-x

Shaffer, S., Ortman, P. E., & Denbo, S. (2002). The effects of racism, socioeconomic class, and gender on academic achievement of African-American students. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 57-80). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Shapiro, E. S. (2011). *Tiered instruction and intervention in a response-to-intervention model*. Retrieved from RTI Action Network Web site: http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/tiered-instruction-and-intervention-rti-model

Slavin, R. E., & Cheung, A. (2003, December). *Effective reading programs for English language learners: A best-evidence synthesis* (Report No. 66). Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR)/Johns Hopkins University.

Spencer, S. J., Steele, C. M., & Quinn, D. M. (1999). Stereotype threat and women's math performance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *35*(1), 4-28.

St. Cloud Area School District. (2009-2012). *Welcome to District 742!* Retrieved from http://www.isd742.org/education/school/school.php?sectiondetailid=8433&linkid=nav-menu-container-1-124078

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist, 52,* 613-629.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 797-811.

Steele, C. M., Spencer, S. J., & Aronson, J. (2002). Contending with group image: The psychology of stereotype and social identity threat. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 34,* 379-440.

Stolp, S. (1994, June). *Leadership for school culture* [ERIC Digest 91]. Retrieved from https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/jspui/bitstream/1794/3312/1/digest091.pdf

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Strauss, V. (2010, August 3). Report: When/why progress in closing achievement gap stopped. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/equity/the-achievement-gap-when-progr.html

Symonds, K. (2004). *After the test: Closing the achievement gap with data*. San Francisco, CA: Bay Area School Reform Collaborative.

Talbert-Johnson, C. (2004). Structural inequities and the achievement gap in urban schools. *Education and Urban Society, 37*(1), 22-36.

Tate, W. (2002). African-American children and algebra for all. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 147-158). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Tidwell, B. J. (2000). Parity progress and prospects: Racial inequalities in economic well-being. In L. A. Daniels (Ed.), *The state of black America 2000: Blacks in the new millennium* (pp. 287-316). Washington, DC: National Urban League.

Trimis, E. A. (2009). *Closing the achievement gap: Breakthrough in the urban high school* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis database. (UMI No. 3355450)

Tyson, K. (2002). Weighing in: Elementary-age students and the debate on attitudes toward school among black students. *Social Forces, 80*(40), 1157-1189.

van der Westhuizen, P. C., Mosoge, M. J., Swanepoel, L. H., & Coetsee, L. D. (2005). Organizational culture and academic achievement in secondary schools. *Education and Urban Society, 38*(1), 89-109. doi:10.1177/0013124505279959

Vanneman, A., Hamilton, L., Baldwin Anderson, J., & Rahman, T. (2009, July). *Achievement Gaps: How Black and White Students in Public Schools Perform in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress* (Statistical Analysis Report; NCES 2009-455). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2009455.pdf

Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2003). Stereotype lift. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *39*, 456-467.

Williams, B. (2002). No-excuses approach to closing the achievement gap. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African-American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 71-80). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.

Wilson, W. J. (1998). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.). *Student Achievement Goal in Education (SAGE) Program*. Retrieved from http://dpi.wi.gov/sage/

Yeung, W.-J. J., Pfeiffer, K. M. (2009). The black-white test score gap and early home environment. *Social Science Research*, *38*, 412-437.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.