

Fall 2007

Leadership Behaviors that Improved Student Achievement in Three Selected Georgia High Schools

Cynthia Freeman-Small

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LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS THAT IMPROVED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN
THREE SELECTED GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOLS

by

CYNTHIA FREEMAN SMALLS

(Under the Direction of Walter S. Polka)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools. The participants were chosen based on successfully achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) during 2005-2006 school years, as outlined by the Georgia Department of Education. Fifteen leaders from three Georgia high schools were interviewed to examine their roles in improving student achievement. Research protocol questions guided the interview to capture the “essence” of the work of leaders. Each participant answered seven questions derived from the review of literature to identify the leader’s behavior that improved student achievement. The qualitative, phenomenological research design was employed; the researcher analyzed statements into clusters of meaning. Clusters were then transformed into summaries of experiences.

The leadership behaviors, themes and patterns that emerged from the data collection and data analysis were as follows: (1) high expectations, (2) developing relationships, (3) identifying the right personnel, (4) setting achievement goals, (5) using data to guide instruction and decision making, (6) assisting low achievers, (7) involving all stakeholders, (8) monitoring student and teacher progress, and (9) implementing strategies to improve student achievement. According to the researcher’s findings in the

study, the use or practice of the nine leader behaviors, themes, and patterns are actions by school leaders that were instrumental in improving student achievement.

INDEX WORDS: Achievement, High Schools, Leaders, No Child Left Behind, Data, Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT), Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), Policy, Leadership Behaviors, Qualitative Research, Title I

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2007

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Electronic Version Approved:
December 2007

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all of my students, friends and family members who encouraged and prayed for me throughout this journey. This journey is a testament that with prayer, perseverance, and passion, we can accomplish anything. I dedicate this study to my parents, Ralph and Evelyn Freeman, and to Charles and Patricia Smalls. Thank you for standing in the gap and interceding in prayer on my behalf. To my wonderful husband Dwight, my daughter Adana, and my son Myles, thanks for your patience, encouragement and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge all those who offered a word of encouragement and support throughout this journey. Sincere thanks to my dissertation committee, Dr. Walter Polka, Dr. Linda Arthur, Dr. Eric Brooks. Your guidance and advice was invaluable. Thanks to my fellow cohort members Jason, Debra, Anthony, and Sharbrenia for encouraging and helping me keep my eyes on the prize. Finally, a special thanks to Dr. Donald Hall, whose encouragement prompted me to take this journey in the first place.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“We need to build leadership around certain core questions and simple procedures that any leader could use to immediately improve the performance of schools” (Schmoker, 2001, p.3.).

The onset of No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB, 2002) has resulted in increased pressure on schools and school districts. The premise of this legislation required school officials to be accountable for student achievement. The leader’s role is an instrumental part in achieving proficiency by 2014. The importance of leadership in improving student achievement is well documented. A classic thirty-year study of the relationship between school leadership and student achievement confirmed through meta-analysis that there is a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement (McRel, 2003). This research identified twenty-one leadership responsibilities that are associated with student achievement, thereby creating the Balanced Leadership Framework which describes the tools and skills necessary to improve student achievement (Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2003). According to Popham (2006), achievement is the outcome gained by the efforts of quality and quantity of student work.

The mandates of the No Child Left Behind Legislation (2002) have prompted school leaders to consider all facets of achievement, including the achievement gap, which has been defined in Movement in the Village as 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”.

Achievement gaps are visible as early as kindergarten and persist through high school, with evidence of the gap existing on all standardized tests (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Even within the same school and social group, there is a disparity. Research ties fourteen factors to the achievement gap, but low-income and minority children are at a disadvantage in all areas. According to Barton (2004), the factors that correlate with the gap in student achievement before and beyond school include birth weight, lead poisoning, hunger and nutrition, introducing literacy to young children, time spent watching television, parent availability, student mobility, and parent participation. In addition, the school-related factors are rigor of curriculum, teacher experience and attendance, teacher preparation, class size, technology-assisted instruction, and school safety.

The demands of No Child Left Behind legislation (2002) have prompted school leaders to consider all factors that impact student achievement. Neuman (2000) contended that there are some common leadership strategies and behaviors that will improve student achievement: shared vision, establishing clear priorities, promoting professional learning, establishing a strong accountability system, building a strong school-to-community relationship, and reorganizing and using data to guide instruction.

The effective school researches were the initial key catalyst in that they identified research based characteristics that are linked to improved student learning. Accordingly, the following seven identified correlates for improving student achievement were established: clear school mission, high expectation of success, instructional leadership,

frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, safe and orderly environment, and home-school relations (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1994). However, the role of leadership and student achievement is a pervasive underpinning of the effective school's research.

Additionally, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), a subsidiary of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), further identified six professional standards for school leaders. One of the key standards related to the leader's role is that he/she promotes the success of all students by advocating on their behalf, by sustaining school culture, and by establishing instructional programs that foster student learning and professional development (CCSSO, 1996).

Additionally, a study conducted by O'Donnell and George (2005) examined selected middle schools in Pennsylvania to identify the relationship between principals' instructional leadership behaviors and student achievement, with emphasis on socioeconomic status. Participants were randomly selected to include 250 English and math teachers and seventy-five principals. The research was guided by the following questions: 1) Is there a significant relationship between principal instructional leadership behavior scores and the level of student achievement in eighth-grade reading and math? 2) Does teacher perception of principal instructional leadership behavior accurately determine student achievement of eighth-grade English and math students? 3) What is the relationship between principal instructional leadership behavior scores and students' socio-economic status (SES) in calculating student achievement in reading and math measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)? The selected participants completed the Hallinger's Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale

(PIMRS). This scale was used to measure the teachers' perception of the leadership behaviors performed by the principal (O'Donnell and George, 2005). The findings concluded that the teacher's perception of the principal's behavior that focused on improving student learning were identified as a predictor of student achievement. Additionally, principals of middle schools with high levels of poverty and low socioeconomic status focused on improving school climate to foster student achievement (O'Donnell and George, 2005).

Similarly, Waters (2005) sought to determine the relationship between instructional leadership behaviors of principals and student achievement. Secondly, the study examined teacher perceptions of principal instructional leadership behaviors in seven high poverty elementary schools in Virginia, as compared to fifth grade Standards of Learning (SOL) English and math scores. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) survey was administered to participants from seven elementary schools in Virginia. The PIMRS was used to identify the frequency of specific instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by principals. The findings of the initial research question concluded that the results could not predict what principal behaviors directly affect student achievement on the Math and English SOL tests. However, the findings in this study also revealed that through teacher perception, there is a significant predictor of changes in both English and Math (SOL) scores through certain leadership behaviors described in selected questions when one uses the multiple regression method (Waters, 2005).

Reubling, Stow, Kayona, and Clark (2004) suggested that leadership behavior is not effective in sustaining student achievement and aligning the curriculum to state

standards. Therefore, leadership can be both a problem and a solution to improving student achievement. The School Improvement Model Center (SIM) found that effective leadership is a missing element in school improvement and student achievement. Reubling, Stow, Kayona, and Clark further contend that leaders are not effectively implementing curriculum nor do they have an established system to monitor teachers' understanding of curriculum design and student relevance. The SIM Center chose schools in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, and New York to be part of a follow-up study during the 2000-2001 school years. The purpose of that study was to determine the quality and the extent to which new curriculum changes in language arts and mathematics were implemented. The SIM Center established a curriculum framework to aid teachers and school leaders in identifying philosophy statement, strands, program goals, and scope and sequence skills/concepts across curriculum. The follow-up study consisted of three components: interviewing school administrators involved in curriculum and assessment; surveying teachers implementing curriculum; and observing teachers. The findings of this study revealed that leaders need to change their behavior to improve learning. The findings further highlighted the absence of leadership behaviors that are paramount to school improvement (Reubling, Stow, Kayona, and Clark, 2004).

The study also found that leaders lack general knowledge about assessment and curriculum implementation for which teachers should be held accountable. The professional development did not focus on student learning outcomes, and resources were inadequate in sustaining achievement, according to Reubling, Stow, Kayona, and Clark (2004).

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform reported that student achievement set-backs are due in part to the lack of effective leadership. Despite the implementation of research-based school reform models, many students still struggle to achieve. This conclusion was drawn by the Annenberg Institute as a result of years of professional development and implementation of school reform models (Neuman, 2000). The role of the leader has changed from its traditional role of managing, monitoring and maintaining order in schools. Neuman (2000) emphasized that school districts must rethink the role of the leader and move towards a collective accountability system through distributed leadership. Through distributed leadership, all stakeholders assume responsibility for student achievement. Schools which struggle to improve student achievement according to Neuman lack the following leadership strategies: shared vision; clear priorities; continuous professional learning; strong accountability system; good instructional practices; and reflective use of data (Neuman, 2000).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2004) reported that the No Child Left Behind legislation (2002) is working. Student achievement across subgroups has increased, thereby shrinking the achievement gap (NAEP). Student subgroups according to The No Child Left Behind legislation are identified according to race, ethnicity, special education, being economically disadvantaged, and having limited English proficiency. The NAEP reports that America's nine-year olds have increased reading and math scores, posting the best scores since 1971. Additionally, Caucasians, African Americans, and Latinos have made great progress in math. Also the nation's thirteen-year-olds have earned the highest math scores ever recorded (Nations Report Card, 2004).

The demographics of American schools have continued to evolve. Minority groups have grown tremendously in America's public schools over the last twenty years, increasing from 22% to 30% between 1972 and 1998 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Today, there are more than 54 million students in America's schools: 61% are Caucasians, 39% are minority. However, 25% live in poverty and 13% have special needs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). By 2010, student enrollments are expected to grow beyond 55 million, with 45% coming from racial minority families or families living in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), there has been increased pressure to enhance students' performance and close the achievement gap between Caucasians and minority students (Reubling, Stow, Kayona, and Clark, 2004). The No Child Left Behind legislation has sought to level the playing field for all students by requiring schools and districts to improve achievement of various subgroups. Such legislation should have helped close gaps in achievement, causing them to narrow and ultimately to disappear (Johnson & Uline, 2005). All subgroups must improve academically every year or risk losing federal funding. School leaders must also set deadlines for closing the gap in achievement, with a goal of 100% proficiency in the next decade (Prince, 2004).

The achievement gap can best be defined as a substantive performance difference on each area of the state-testing system between various groups of students (Christie 2002). This included students with disabilities, those lacking proficiency in English, minority and non-minority students, and students who are both eligible and not eligible for free and reduced price lunch (Christie, 2002).

According to Williams (2003), the achievement gap is identified as a comparison of range-of-success indicators such as grades, test scores, dropout rates, college entrance and completion rates in every school across race and socioeconomic status. The achievement gap was once believed to be a problem affecting low-income inner-city schools with African American, Caucasian and Latino students (Prince 2004). Prince suggest that this belief is no longer valid, as the No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to report the gap in achievement of affluent schools with an abundance of resources and schools with a reputation of academic excellence.

Unfortunately, minorities are haunted by a legacy of discrimination and racism that has stifled their access to an equal education (Futrell, 2004). A study by Ikpa (1994) analyzed the effect of school desegregation policies upon the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students in the Norfolk Public Schools (Ikpa, 1994). The researcher sought to determine the effects of mandatory busing of 434 students. Using the quantitative and qualitative research design, the study found that the achievement gap increased between the two groups after the elimination of the policy of mandated busing for integration (Ikpa, 1994).

In a similar longitudinal study conducted by Bali and Alvarez (2004), the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) was compared to the General California Public School population. A selected group of students who had been enrolled in the district since first grade were used in the study. Students were selected from twenty-two elementary schools within the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD). The range consisted of reading scores of 1,147 students and math scores of 1221 students (Bali & Alvarez, 2004). The purpose of the study was to examine how the African American

/Caucasian and Latino/ Caucasian test score gaps develop in the early education grades in a California school district with a population of more than 80% African American and Latino students (Bali & Alvarez, 2004). The study found that gaps in achievement developed for both African American and Latino students. When compared to African American/ Caucasian achievement gaps, the Latino gaps develop later in math and are half the size of the African American /Caucasian achievement gaps (Bali & Alvarez, 2004).

Despite the continued inequalities and low expectations, there are some school districts that are succeeding in closing the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students. A study by the Golden Spike School of Illinois in 2003 identified fifty-nine schools that are high-poverty and high-performing and high-performing low poverty to determine the impact of lowering class size and increasing funding (McGee, 2004). Using the mixed study research design, the researcher concluded that an increase in revenue for instruction and smaller class sizes in High Poverty/ Low Performing schools did not have a great impact on improving student achievement. The study also concluded that 90% of the high-poverty, high-performing schools had strong active leaders and advocated for high standards, high expectations, and created a successful school culture that fostered high achievement (McGee, 2004). This study further established that the Illinois Public School system demonstrated that the achievement gap can be closed and the education of low-income children can be improved through an emphasis on early literacy, hard working teachers, time for instruction and parent involvement (McGee, 2004).

The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), New “Nation Report Card” reports that there is evidence that the achievement gap between minorities and whites has shrunk to its smallest size in history. The Caucasian/ African American gap in reading decreased between 1971 and 2004 by 26 points. The nation’s thirteen-year-old Caucasian, African American and Latino student’s average was significantly higher in 2004 than in 1971 and in 1975. Also the average reading score for African American and Latino students' was higher in 2004 than in 1971 and 1975, while Caucasian students' reading scores in 1971 and 2004 were not statistically different (NCES). African American and Latino students of all ages scored higher in math in 2004 than in 1973. The Caucasian-Latino score gap in math was significantly smaller in 2004 than in 1999 (Nation Report Card, 2004).

According to the Education Trust (2004) for the state of Georgia, attempts to narrow the achievement gap have been a constant focus at the state and local level. While significant progress has been made, gaps still exist between the top and bottom quartiles of Caucasian and minority students. Education Trust (2004) further stated that African Americans eighth graders in the state of Georgia scored three years behind that of their Caucasian counterparts in reading, math, and science, and two years behind in writing. Latino eighth graders have made the most promising gains in math in the state. This progress is still marginal since Latino students are more than three years behind their Caucasian counterparts in math, reading and writing and more than two years behind in science (Education Trust, 2004).

Suburban school districts in the State of Georgia, such as the one represented in this study, have struggled through changing demographics, increased enrollment, and

socioeconomic obstacles. This school district currently serves a growing population of minorities and economically disadvantaged youth and has sought to address the disparity between minority and majority student population by offering a myriad of services to help prepare all students. In an effort to level the playing field, this suburban public school district has instituted equitable curriculum, affording all students equal opportunities to take high-level courses, such as honors and advanced placement course credits along with numerous study sessions for students who are struggling to pass some or all parts of the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT).

There are a total of eight high schools in the targeted suburban school district. Schools were selected based upon academic success due to leadership behaviors and in meeting the expectations of the Georgia Department of Education Annual Yearly Progress report. The three participating high schools in this study achieved the State of Georgia Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2005-2006 school years. Data retrieved from the Georgia Department of Education website were rounded to protect the participants and the school district. The high schools will be referred to as Magnolia High School, Oak High School, and Dogwood High School to protect the identities of the leaders and the schools that they represent and to ensure confidentiality.

Statement of the Problem

The premise of the No Child Left Behind legislation has forced educators to address accountability measures in terms of learning outcomes of all students. The task of making adequate yearly progress (AYP) and significant gains in ethnic subgroups is enormous. The achievement gap continues to widen between whites and minority students. The No Child Left Behind Act has challenged teachers and school leaders to embrace culture through actively engaging minority students in the academic process. Effective leadership is paramount in the continued quest to narrow the gap in achievement. Therefore, the researcher proposed to examine the leadership behaviors that are improving student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools. The term “leader” for the purpose of this study is defined as any individual who holds a position of power and authority over subordinates within a school.

Research Questions

The researcher answered the following overarching question: What leadership behaviors impact student achievement in selected Georgia high schools? The researcher answered the following sub questions:

1. What is the leader’s perception of his or her role in increasing student achievement?
2. What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impact student achievement?
3. What strategies are used by the high school leaders to improve student achievement?

Significance of the Study

The researcher believes, consistent with contemporary research and various studies, that knowledge, character, diversity, and accountability are four attributes that denote effective leadership behaviors to improve student achievement. The leadership behaviors of school leaders may mean the difference between the success and the failure of students.

The No Child Left Behind legislation (2002) has made the achievement a national concern. School districts are requiring school leaders to meet or to exceed the components of this legislation or risk losing funding. Therefore, the researcher proposed to examine the leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools. It is the researcher's belief that this study has added to the knowledge in the field and has assisted other researchers, educational practitioners, policymakers, and state officials in their actions designed to improve student achievement gap.

Although a considerable amount of research has been completed in the area of leadership and student achievement, the researcher believes that this study helped to build a framework for other researchers that can be used to further identify the element of leadership behaviors that improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. This study provides superintendents with valuable insight as they seek to hire building-level administrators to serve schools with a high concentration of impoverished and minority students. This research further provides staff developers with a new leadership paradigm to assist school administrators in identifying leadership behaviors that correlate with improving the achievement.

In addition, policymakers may be able to use this research as an indicator for future legislation regarding education reform that seeks to improve student achievement.

Results of this study may contribute to the development of theoretical framework suitable for implementation to be included in leadership training on the closing of the achievement gap in public education.

As an educator, my academic preparation, professional practice, as well as participation in workshop and conferences has afforded me personal and professional growth, experience, and a wealth of knowledge in the advancement of education. My academic credentials have afforded me first-hand knowledge and experience as a general education classroom teacher and a teacher of special education and special needs students culminating with the practicing of the disciplines of guidance and counseling.

The researcher takes special interest in leadership and student achievement. As a school counselor, it is a personal issue when students are not achieving state and national standards. As a school leader, it is my responsibility to identify areas in which students are struggling and locate resources to ensure student success. While there are some limitations in my position as a counselor, I actively advocate for highly qualified teachers, smaller class size, and equality across the curriculum. As an aspiring principal, I plan to use the knowledge and strategies gained from research-based school reform models and from other practicing school leaders to continue to improve student achievement.

Limitations

This study is limited in the following ways:

1. Results of this study may reveal a different outcome if conducted in a different area of Georgia or another state.
2. The selection of the participants was based on the results of the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) of each school and its successfully achieving adequate yearly progress(AYP)
3. The findings of this research were dependent upon the cooperation, responses and honesty of the selected leaders.

Delimitations

The following delimitations have been identified for this study:

This study focused on the impact of leader behaviorisms in reducing the achievement gap of selected high schools in a suburban public school district, only in the State of Georgia only. The findings of the study may not be applicable to any other school district in the state. This study is further limited to high school leaders only.

Procedures

Design

The qualitative research design was used in this study. It served to identify the leader behaviors and accountability practices associated with school leaders in reducing the achievement gap in a suburban public school district in the state of Georgia. This study will serve to describe real-life expectations of the selected high school leadership. The phenomenological approach of the qualitative research design was applied.

Interviews and observations will be conducted to establish patterns, commonalities and predictors of success.

Population

The population of this study consisted of fifteen public high school employees who are the designated leaders of the selected schools. The school district represented in this has a total student enrollment of slightly below 50,000 students. The elementary enrollment is above 25,000 students, the middle school enrollment is slightly above 12,000, and the high school enrollment is above 13,000. The typical administrative structure of the elementary school consists of a building principal and at least one assistant principal. There are one principal and two or three assistant principals at each middle school, while the high schools are under the leadership of one principal, three or four assistant principals and with six or eight department chairpersons. The district employs a total of about fifty building-level principals and ninety assistant principals.

Sampling

The sample for this study consisted of selected high schools only. Leaders assigned to three of the eight high schools in the district participated in the study. The three high schools selected for this sample were based on the high schools' successfully achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2005-2006 school years. The participants included one building-level principal, two assistant principals, and two department chairpersons from each of the selected high schools.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the use of written notes and digitally-recorded interviews. An interview protocol was developed based upon the examination of the

review of literature of the leadership behaviors in practice by each participant as an individual and as part of a team focusing on: (1) student engagement, (2) parental involvement, (3) instruction and academic support, and (4) expectations for student.

Open-ended interview questions were mailed and emailed to each participant prior to the interview to help them become familiar with the questions. The same questions were used to conduct the face-to-face interview with each participant. The intent was to obtain broad perspectives, opinions and practices with clarity and diversity.

Data Analysis

The researcher organized data into charts, evidence of student success, and indicators of student achievement of each school to identify patterns. The digitally-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded to determine emerging themes and patterns. Data from the qualitative research approach were further analyzed, coded and categorized to corroborate patterns among principals, assistant principals and department chairs.

Definitions

The following terms were defined and used in this study for the purpose of clarification:

Achievement: the outcome gained by effort of quality and quantity of student work (Popham, 2006).

Achievement gap: According to Movement in the Village 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.”

End of Course Test (EOCT): According to the Georgia Department of Education, the EOCT is an assessment that provides diagnostic information to help students and teachers identify strengths and areas of opportunity, therefore improving performance in all high school courses and on other assessments, such as the GHSGT. The EOCT also provides data to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom instruction at the school and system levels

Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT): According to the Georgia Department of Education, the GHSGT is designed to ensure that students qualifying for a diploma have mastered essential core academic content and skills in the content areas. The tests identify students who need additional instruction in the concepts and skills required to acquire a diploma. Only the English Language Arts and Mathematics high school graduation tests are used to measure Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind legislation.

Equitable Curriculum: A flexible curriculum that is accessible to students from diverse abilities and does not segregate students based upon differences (Mason, Orkwis, and Scott, 2005).

Minority: According to Wikipedia, minority is a subordinate group that does not represent the majority of the total population of a given society. This includes any group that is disadvantaged with respect to a dominant group in terms of social economic status, education, employment, and political power.

Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS): a behavior rating scale that requires respondents to identify the frequency of instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by principals (Waters, 2005).

Summary

The importance of leadership in improving student achievement is a continuous phenomenon. The No Child Left Behind legislation has prompted school districts and school leaders to make student achievement their top priority. In an effort to improve student learning and narrow the achievement gap, some school districts are taking drastic measures. School leaders are examining policies and procedures that may impact student progress, such as attendance, discipline and curriculum alignment.

Schools have a great impact on student achievement; therefore, educators must be prepared for the task. Students are in need of an educational system that recognizes and values their abilities and their culture. The No Child Left Behind Act has challenged leaders and teachers to embrace culture through actively engaging students in the academic process. It is only through compassion, knowledge and an unwavering resolve that educators will be able to reduce the gap in achievement.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the major themes for this study. The achievement crisis, causes of poor achievement, history of the achievement in American policy, and its impact on education are presented. This chapter further discusses the empirical research that highlights the issues surrounding achievement and schools that are making the grade despite socioeconomic status and a high concentration of minorities. The impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 on reducing the gap between majority and minority students is discussed. Schools that succeed in spite of social economic barriers and a large number of minority students are reviewed in this section. Finally, an analysis of the leader's role in improving student achievement is presented.

Achievement Gap

Across the country, there is an unfortunate crisis that has plagued our schools. The achievement gap is a primary concern of legislators and school officials nationwide. Not since the historical ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* has the achievement gap generated such a national concern (Young, Wright, and Laster, 2005). There is a significant gap in achievement that has positioned minority students at the low end of the achievement pole. This growing crisis has prompted states to take a closer look at the achievement gap, which can best be defined as a substantive performance difference on each area of the state-testing system between various groups of students (Christie, 2002). This includes students with disabilities, students without proficiency in English, minority and non-minority students, and students who are both eligible for free and reduced price

lunch as those who are not eligible (Christie, 2002). According to Williams (2003), the achievement gap is identified as a comparison of range-of-success indicators such as grades, test scores, dropout rates, college entrance and completion rates in every school across race and socioeconomic status.

According to Movement in the Village, 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”.

Rothstein (2005), states that “the achievement gap is a phenomenon of averages, a difference between the average achievement level of lower-class children and the average achievement level of middle-class children. In human affairs, every average characteristic is a composite of many widely disparate characteristics” (p.18).

The Achievement Crisis in America

The National Association of Education Progress’s (NAEP) long-term trend assessment was designed to give information on the changes in the basic achievement of America’s youth since the early 1970s. The NAEP assessment is a national report of student performance at ages nine, thirteen, and seventeen in reading and mathematics. Between 1999 and 2004, average reading scores at age seventeen showed no measurable changes. The average score for seventeen-year-olds in 2004 was similar to that in 1971. Significant gaps in performance continue to exist between racial or ethnic subgroups (Nations Report Card, 2004).

Therstrom and Therstrom (2003) suggest that the racial achievement gap among African American and Latino students is widening. The average African American and Latino student exits high school with academic skills of an eighth-grader. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frequently reported the frightening statistic that African American and Latino students are achieving below the basis on all standardized measures in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades(Therstrom & Therstrom, 2003).

In 2001, The National Center for Education Statistics reported only one in fifty Latinos and one in one hundred African American seventeen year-olds could read and comprehend information from specialized text such as newspaper compared to one in twelve Caucasians. Three in ten African Americans and four in ten seventeen year-olds have mastered fractions, percent ages and averages, compared to seven in ten Caucasians students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

In 2005, the National Association of Educational Progress reported that 60% of all twelfth graders performed at the basic level on standardized measures. Basic levels are partial mastery of fundamental skills at each grade level. Twenty-three percent of twelfth-graders performed at the proficient level on standardized measures. A proficient level represents a solid academic foundation, demonstrating competency in all subject areas (NAEP). Also in 2005, African Americans and Latinos were less likely than Caucasians graduates to have completed advanced science and math courses and to have higher GPA's. In fourth-grade and eighth-grade reading, Caucasians scored higher on average than African Americans and Latinos. Latinos scored higher than African Americans in reading in 2005.

Causes of Poor Achievement

Contemporary research states that there is not a clear explanation as to the causes of poor achievement. However, studies have identified many factors that contribute to the achievement gap. The achievement gaps are visible as early as kindergarten and persist through high school, with evidence of the gap on all standardized tests. Even within the same school and social group, the gap exists (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). According to the Center on Education Policy (2001), factors that contribute to poor students and the achievement gap in school are as follows:

1. Limited participation of minority students in rigorous courses.
2. Watered-down instruction.
3. Less-qualified or less-experienced teachers.
4. Teachers with lower expectations.
5. Resource disparities between high-minority schools and other schools.
6. Concentrations of low-income and minority students in certain schools.
7. School climate less conducive to learning.
8. Student performance anxiety.
9. Negative peer pressure.
10. Disparities in access to high-quality preschool.

The Center on Education Policy (2001) suggests that there are societal, community and home factors that are contributing to poor student achievement and gaps:

1. Effects of poverty on learning.
2. Legacy of discrimination.
3. Limited learning supports in homes and communities.

4. Access to parent education.

Research ties fourteen factors to the achievement gap, and low-income and minority children are at a disadvantage. According to Barton (2004), the factors that correlate with the gap in student achievement before and beyond school are birth weight, lead poisoning, hunger and nutrition, reading to young children, television watching, parent availability, student mobility, and parent participation. In school, these factors include rigor of curriculum, teacher experience and attendance, teacher preparation, class size, technology-assisted instruction, and school safety.

Aronson (2004) argues that African American and Latino poor achievement is due in part to the “stereotype threat”. Aronson identifies psychological reasons that help explain the underperformance by African Americans, Latinos, and other groups such as women. According to the work of Steele & Aronson (1995), stereotype threat comes into play when a student whose race, culture or gender group is associated with negative stereotypes, such as intellectual inferiority. Their theory further emphasizes that the stereotype threat highlights the lagging performance of the middle and upper-middle class and highly-prepared Black college students who are determined to be falling short of their academic potential. The research identifies reasons why racial anxiety can inhibit the academic performance of well-prepared Black students (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Similarly, a study published by the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, compared the degree to which Caucasians, Latino, and African American students nationwide appear to base their overall self-esteem on academic performance during high school (Hendrie, 1998). The correlation between school performance and self-esteem declines modestly for most groups of students as they move through high school. Performance among black

males dropped dramatically (Hendrie, 1998). When faced with a challenge that tests limits of their skills' both African Americans and Hispanics did not perform well, largely due to anxiety hindering their performance. Over time, this phenomenon can contribute to misidentification and the high attrition rates amongst other minorities (Hendrie, 1998).

The achievement gap continues to increase throughout the nation. There are many factors that contribute to this problem, among which are teachers. Attracting qualified teachers to educate our nation's youth has been an enormous problem. This disturbing problem according to, Mattai, Perry, and Polka (1995), is due to the high attrition rate among urban teachers, particularly those who are not best equipped culturally to address issues of achievement. The average teacher turns in his or her roll book after five years and never looks back. Brandt (2000) contends that most teachers do their best under difficult circumstances and the problems they face go beyond their expectations. This issue has prompted the states to look at colleges and universities for an answer.

History of the Achievement

The historical landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* in (1954) initiated the first attempt to address the achievement concern between Caucasians and minorities in America. The Brown decision, according to Heward (2003), extended access to public education to African American and white students on equal terms. The United States Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The landmark case was a compilation of cases from Kansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, and Virginia, all of which challenged the constitutionality of racial segregation in public schools. The court consolidated all

five cases into *Oliver Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (Heward, 2003).

In efforts to further improve education for all, President Lyndon B. Johnson attempted to level the playing field for minorities through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act known as Title I, allocated 1 billion dollars to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach at least a minimum proficiency on challenging state academic assessments. This act is considered to be among the most important and far-reaching changes in the federal support of elementary and secondary education. The stated goal according to the U.S. Department of Education was to improve the opportunities of educationally-deprived children by helping them succeed in school, attain grade level proficiency, and improve achievement in basic and more advanced skills. The act states the following:

In recognition of the special educational needs of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance to local agencies serving areas with concentration of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children (Section 201, Elementary and Secondary School Act, 1965).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was amended in 1968 to form Title VII, which became the Bilingual Education Act. Title VII provided federal assistance to local schools to address the needs of students with limited English-speaking ability according to, the U.S. Department of Education.

Despite the controversial actions of President Johnson, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act sustained much criticism through the Coleman Report of 1966. The Coleman Report argued that despite the quality of teacher training and access to a quality curriculum, minority children were a few years behind their white counterparts, and the gap in achievement widened throughout the high school years. The Coleman study concluded that the academic achievement was related to family background in the early years, but going to school allowed for a greater disparity in the academic differences between whites and minorities. Despite its criticism, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 led the way for the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1975, which sought to provide both a free, appropriate public education for all students with disabilities and related services designed to meet the needs of each individual student (Williams, 2003). IDEA provides funds to assist states with the education of students with disabilities and requires states to protect the rights of students and parents. IDEA also insists that the states provide early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and for their families (Williams, 2003).

The grim progress in achievement continued despite federal mandates and billions of dollars spent to address the problem of literacy amongst minorities. In addition, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) shocked the country with some profound revelations about the lack of preparation and training of the average American student. It called for

the higher standards for student performance, increased graduation requirements, and achievement tests (Williams, 2003). A Nation at Risk according to the U. S. Department of Education was a report to the American people to inform them of the state of American education, prosperity, security and civility. While significant gains of the past positioned America as a world power, the educational foundation was threatened by lack of skill level, literacy, and training essential to sustain America as a world power. The purpose of the report was to identify the problems affecting American education and to make recommendations for solutions to this crisis. The indicators of risk, for example, include:

- Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate, according to tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.
- Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests was lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.
- International comparisons of students' achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on nineteen academic tests, American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.
- The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) demonstrates a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Average verbal scores fell over fifty points, and average mathematics scores dropped nearly forty points.
- Business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs in basic skills such as reading, writing, spelling, and basic computation.

- Over half the populations of gifted students do not match their test ability with comparable achievement in school.

The Goal 2000: Educate America Act resonated with the Nation at Risk report according to the U.S. Department of Education in that it sought to improve learning and teaching by providing a national structure for education reform that promoted research, consensus-building, and systematic changes needed to ensure equality in educational opportunities and high levels of educational achievement for all students. Goal 2000: Educate America according to the U.S. Department of Education established a framework to identify national academic standards to measure student progress and to provide support for students who are struggling. By the year 2000 every American student would be able to do the following:

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign language, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning and productive employment in our nation's modern economy.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) to formulate a plan to close the achievement gap among minority students; this includes students with disabilities, the economically disadvantaged, or those who have limited

English proficiency. NCLB was signed into law in 2002 and further expanded the government's role in education and set requirements in every school in America. The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (2001) cited components of The No Child Left Behind Act, stating that this Act had prompted school districts across the country to make closing the achievement gap top priority. Prince (2004) contends that under the No Child Left Behind Act, school districts are required to disaggregate student performance data separately by race, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities. All subgroups must increase academically every year or risk losing federal funding. School leaders must also set deadlines for closing the gap in achievement, with a goal of 100 percent proficiency in the next decade (Prince, 2004).

Leadership Defined

Leadership is defined by educators in many ways. It is a process that involves an influence over a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2004). According to Kotter (1996), leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with vision, and inspires them to produce despite the obstacles. Kouzes and Posner (2003) also contend that leadership consists of an identifiable set of skills and practices that are available to each charismatic leader. Peck (2003) also argues that leadership is an art that originates from a keen perception, excellent listening skills, and experience to establish a plan to improve student achievement. Sergiovanni says, "Leadership addresses normative and spiritual questions and is designed to bring people together in a quest to find meaning and significance in their lives" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p.xvi). Gardner (1990) emphasizes that leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which a leader or leadership team induces a group to pursue objectives held

by the leader or shared with his or her followers. Wheatley (1992) indicates that leadership is context- dependent and relational among leaders and followers, with an emphasis on community, dignity, meaning, and love.

Leaders can assume in many official positions in schools. The principal, assistant principal and department chairs are designated as the authority to guide and command school personnel. As emphasized by Waters, Marzano, McNulty (2003), what leaders do makes the difference in achievement and in the total school. The principal, assistant principal and department chairs bear the burden for instruction, achievement and overall culture of the school. The work of Hallinger suggested that instructional leaders should focus their efforts on curriculum and instruction while empowering teachers to lead and to build capacity and develop goals to improve student achievement. Instructional leaders should establish school mission and goals, align goals to meet academic standards, and build a culture of high expectation among students and teachers (Hallinger, 2003).

Strong instructional leadership is paramount in every aspect of education especially mathematics. All stakeholders must collaborate if schools are to improve their stagnant performance in all areas. According to Bartholomew, Melendes- Delany, and White (2005), assistant principals are often overlooked as a resource for creating, advancing, and sustaining a compelling vision for achievement. The Math Collaborative Project developed in New York City examined the process of developing and implementing programs designed to help assistant principals network and strengthen their instructional leadership capacity in mathematics within an urban setting, thereby highlighting assistant principals as another group who can lead students to high achievement.

The increased pressure on school leaders to improve achievement has prompted school districts to look to teachers to serve as leaders. Beachum and Dentith (2004) suggest that school leaders involve teachers in the decision-making process and work collaboratively to improve the educational climate. Teachers who lead (department chairs) are key to organizational change because of their ability to build community and commitment within the entire school through modeling the vision and mission. Crowther and Olsen (1996) put it this way:

Teacher leadership is “an ethical stance that is based upon the views of a better world and the power of teaching to shape meaningful systems. It manifests itself in actions that involve the wider school community and leads to the creation of ideas that will enhance the quality of life of the community in the long term.”(p.32)

Leaders’ Role in Improving Student Achievement

The focus of effective leadership in depleting the achievement gap has been a critical concern in education for the last twenty-five years (Johnson and Uline, 2005). Effective leaders, according to Johnson and Uline, create schools that are focused on ensuring academic success of every student. Leaders must be relentless about educating all students at high levels. The effective school researchers were the initial key catalysts in that they identified research-based characteristics that linked leadership to improved student learning. Accordingly, the following seven identified correlates for improving student achievement were established: clear school mission; high expectation of success; instructional leadership; frequent monitoring of student progress; opportunity to learn and student time on task; safe and orderly environment; and home-school relations (Edmonds,

1979; Lezotte, 1994). However, the role of leadership and student achievement is a pervasive underpinning of the effective schools' research.

The importance of leadership in improving student achievement is well documented. A classic thirty year study of the relationship between school leadership and student achievement confirms this notion through meta-analysis: that there is a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement (McRel, 2003). This research identified twenty-one leadership responsibilities that are associated with student achievement, thereby creating the Balanced Leadership Framework, which describes the tools and skills necessary to improve student achievement (Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2003). The balanced leadership framework used leader responsibility that correlated with student achievement; of the twenty-one identified responsibilities, there are fourteen that are significant to this research:

1. Communication- establishes open communication among teachers and students.
2. Discipline-protects teachers from issues and influences that detract time and focus from teaching.
3. Culture- fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.
4. Focus- establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention.
5. Ideals/Beliefs- communicates and operates from strong ideas and beliefs.
6. Input- involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.
7. Involvement Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment- is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.

8. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment- is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction and assessment practices.
9. Monitoring/Evaluating-monitors effective practices and their impact on student learning.
10. Order- establishes a set of standards, routines, and procedures.
11. Outreach – is an advocate for school and stakeholders.
12. Relationships- demonstrate an awareness of the personal aspect of teachers and staff.
13. Resources- provide teachers with materials and professional development necessary to be successful.
14. Visibility- frequent contact and interactions with teachers and students.

Marzano (2002, 2003) compared school level factors of researchers and found that his earlier notion of the school level factors evolved to a more comprehensive view of factors that impact student achievement. These factors are identified by researchers as factors that impact student achievement: guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parental and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism.

Neuman (2000) contends that there are some common leadership strategies and behaviors that will improve student achievement: shared vision, establishing clear priorities, promoting professional learning, establishing a strong accountability system building school-to-community relationship, and reorganizing and using data to guide instruction.

The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) has also outlined standards that will aid school leaders in professional development that fosters student achievement. These standards are the following: 1).The vision of learning, 2).Culture of teaching and learning, 3). Management of learning, 4). Relationships with the broader community to foster learning, 5). Integrity, 6). Fairness, 7). Ethics in learning, 8). Political, and 9). Social, 10). Economic, 11). Legal and cultural context of learning (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). The Council of Chief State School Officers indicates that school leaders must promote the success of all students by nurturing and sustaining school culture and instructional programs that foster student achievement (CCSSO, 1996).

Using Deming's total quality management plan (TQM), Davenport and Anderson (2002) outlined an eight-step process to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. The practices are as follows: (1) test score desegregation, (2) time line development, (3) instructional focus, (4). assessment, (5) tutorials, (6) enrichment, (7) maintenance, and (8) monitoring. The instructional leader's role is vital in monitoring teacher and student progress through observations, meetings and evaluations of practices employed.

Success cannot be expected in any school without an effective leader. Of the many goals of Southern Regional Education Board and High Schools That Work, leadership is one of its most prominent ones. An effective leader is a valuable component required for an effective school (SREB). All principals must have knowledge and skills to improve curriculum, instruction and student achievement (SREB). Effective leaders must be committed to learning by engaging in professional development. Professional

development will help increase a leader's knowledge of best practices and leadership strategies to aid in school improvement, thus allowing the leader to model the expectations of the school. Every effective leader must have a knowledgeable first rate support team. High Schools That Work has proven that high expectation and accountability is a vital part of student achievement. Standards need to be high, with assessments rooted in what is taught and tied to national measures. No group of students should be denied the "advantaged curriculum" given to the best and brightest (SREB). States are required by Southern Regional Education Board and High Schools That Work to develop a school-by-school accountability system that focuses on curriculum alignment, standards, assessments, reporting, professional development, and rewards (SREB). In efforts to close the achievement gap and to foster high standards, teachers must identify a student's weaknesses early. These include the physical and social problems that can prevent children from being ready to learn in school. States must find measures to deal with students who are lagging behind by realizing that different children learn in different ways and at different rates according to the Southern Regional Education Board.

Schlechty (1990) emphasized that a school leader must understand that if America's schools are to meet the needs of the twenty-first century, they must be restructured in a fundamental way. As a part of the leader's commitment to the craft of educating students, the leader must gain trust and respect of stakeholders and continue to reflect on how to improve leadership and add to the culture of the school.

The two-year study conducted in 1987 by the University of Washington and the Seattle School District agrees with the belief held by the Council of Chief State School

Officers that the leader's role is critical in promoting achievement of minority students. Using sixty-seven elementary schools and twenty secondary schools plagued by low achievement, the researcher administered a questionnaire to all district instructional staff designed to measure eighteen strategic interactions between principals and teachers (Andrews and Soder, 1987). The researcher also used gains in the individual student normal curve equivalent scores on the California Achievement Test as a measure to improve academic performance. Students were identified by ethnic groups and students who receive free or reduced lunch (Andrews and Soder, 1987). The findings suggest that the normal equivalent gain scores of students in strong-leaders schools were significantly greater in reading and math, while reading and math scores of those students with weak leaders were points lower. The study further found that minority students receiving free or reduced lunch gained a range of fifty-nine points over two years in the strong-leader schools, while there was an eleven point's gain in weak-leader schools (Andrews and Soder, 1987).

A recent study conducted by O'Donnell and George (2005) examined selected middle schools in Pennsylvania to identify the relationship between principals' instructional leadership behaviors and student achievement, with emphasis on socioeconomic status. Participants were randomly selected to include 250 English and math teachers and seventy-five principals. The research was guided by the following questions: 1) Is there a significant relationship between principal instructional leadership behavior scores and the level of student achievement in eighth grade reading and math? 2) Does teacher perception of principal instructional leadership behavior accurately determine student achievement of eighth-grade English and math students? 3) What is the

relationship between principal instructional leadership behavior scores and the students' socioeconomic status (SES) in calculating student achievement in reading and math measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)? The selected participants completed the Hallinger's Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). This scale was used to measure the teachers' perceptions of the leadership behaviors performed by the principal (O'Donnell and George, 2005). The findings concluded that a teacher's perception of principal behaviors that focused on improving student learning were identified as a predictor of student achievement. Additionally, principals of middle schools with high levels of poverty and low socioeconomic status focused on improving school climate that fosters student achievement (O'Donnell and George, 2005).

Similarly, Waters (2005) sought to determine the relationship between instructional leadership behaviors of principals and student achievement. Secondly, the study examined teachers' perceptions of principal instructional leadership behaviors in seven high poverty elementary schools in Virginia, as compared to fifth-grade Standards of Learning (SOL) English and Math scores. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) survey was administered to participants from seven elementary schools in Virginia. The PIMRS was used to identify the frequency of instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by principals. The findings of the initial research question concluded that the results were unable to predict what principal behaviors directly affect student achievement on the Math and English SOL tests. However, the findings in this study also revealed that through teacher perception, there is a significant predictor of changes in both English and Math (SOL) scores through certain leadership behaviors

described in selected questions when using the multiple regression method. These questions are 1) To what extent does your principal use data on student performance when developing goals? 2) To what extent does your principal inform teachers of the school's performance results in written form? 3) To what extent does your principal contact parents to communicate improved or exemplary student performance or contributions (Waters, 2005)?

Empirical Research Surrounding Student Achievement

In a longitudinal study conducted by Bali and Alvarez (2004), 23,447 students attending Pasadena Unified School District from 1999 through 2002 were compared to the General California Public School population of 6,147,375. The purpose was to examine how the African American-Caucasian and Latino-Caucasian test score gaps develop during early education grades in California school districts with a large minority population in which more than 80% of the students are African American and Latino. The methodology was a multivariate analysis that predicted the annual reading and math test scores of a student from first through fourth grade accounting for various school and family factors. The Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) selected fourth-grade students who were enrolled in the district since first grade. Students were selected from 22 elementary schools within the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD). The student group consisted of 1,147 student reading scores and 1,221 student math scores. The race gap could not be denied, as there was a significant test score gap between Caucasians and African American students in the first grade, while Latino students showed a significant gap in the second grade. The findings showed that the achievement gaps developed, for both African American and Latino students. When compared to African American-

Caucasian achievement gaps, the Latino gaps developed later in math and were half the size of the African American-Caucasian achievement gaps. In the first grade, the average reading scores of Latino students were more than thirteen points lower than that of Caucasian students, and those of African American students were on average six points lower than Caucasian students'. By fourth grade, Latino students' reading scores decreased by less than one percent, while African Americans' increased by two points (Bali & Alvarez, 2004).

Ogbu (2003), states in an ethnographic study that African American disengagement could be a contributing factor in increasing the gap in achievement among middle class students. Ogbu observed 110 classrooms at all schools at all levels in Shaker Heights, Ohio. His purpose was to determine how African American students' identity and beliefs about school success and the ability to apply institutional practices is problematic in overcoming the legacy of feeling like a second-class citizen in American society. The findings in this study suggest that middle and upper class African American parents and students are disengaged from the academic process in schools. This research further revealed that African Americans students and their parents did not understand how academic performance in high school courses can ultimately affect the type of courses they will initially take in college. Also, there was a limited understanding and exposure to career counseling and the transitioning from school to work. Ogbu recommends that African American students and parents work with school officials to set goals, to understand the importance of academic success, and to advise students on the requirements for post-secondary and occupational outlooks. He also emphasized the importance of schools identifying academically-successful role models in the community

and developing strategies to help parents establish a greater role in the education of their children. Ogbu states that teachers should be aware of their expectations of students and the negative and positive impact of what teachers expect from African American students (Ogbu, 2003).

Despite the continued inequalities and low expectations, there are some school districts that are succeeding in closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. A study by the Golden Spike School of Illinois in 2003 identified 59 schools to determine the academic performance of students attending schools that are high poverty and high performing and high performing low poverty by lowering class size and increasing funding (McGee, 2004). Using the quantitative and qualitative research design, the study concluded that an increase in revenue for instruction and smaller class sizes in High Poverty/ Low Performing schools did not have a great impact on improving student achievement. The study also concluded that 90% of the high poverty, high performing schools had strong active leaders who advocated for high standards, high expectations, and created a successful school culture that fostered high achievement (McGee, 2004). This study further established that the Illinois Public School system demonstrated that the achievement gap can be closed and the education of low-income children can be improved through an emphasis on early literacy, hard-working teachers, time for instruction and parent involvement (McGee, 2004).

Unfortunately, minorities are haunted by a legacy of discrimination and racism that has stifled their access to an equal education (Futrell, 2004). This notion rings true in a study by Vivian Ikpa, entitled the Effects of School Desegregation Policies upon the Achievement Gap between African American and Caucasian students in the Norfolk

Public Schools. The researcher sought to determine the effects of the policy-mandated busing for integration of 434 fourth-graders. The methodology was both quantitative and qualitative. The dependent variable was the achievement test scores on the Science Research Associates Assessment Survey Series of fourth grade students from selected elementary schools within the Norfolk Public Schools. The independent variables were school characteristics, school income level; school racial composition; teacher and student; school expenditures; instructional, (substitute and teacher) salaries. The study found that the achievement gap increased between the two groups after the elimination of the policy of mandated busing for integration (Ikpa, 1994).

Bacharach, Baumeister, and Furr (2003) sought to examine to what extent does the achievement gap decrease between Caucasians and African American students and male and female as they matriculate through secondary education. A cohort of 21,000 students participated in the National Educational Longitudinal Study in 1988 and in 1994. The actual sample consisted of 668 African Americans and 5,463 Caucasians students who completed demographic and achievement information on the basis of gender, race, and score on the science achievement test in 8th grade 10th grade and 12th grade (Bacharach, Baumeister, & Furr, 2003). The representative sample of eighth graders was monitored through high school to examine the change in the racial academic achievement gap in science. Students who participated in the study were given an achievement test as an indicator, consisting of all areas with a specific focus on science topics such as earth, life and physical science. The study used the hierarchical linear model to analyze the variables, which revealed that the racial disparities and the disparities linked to gender continue to increase throughout high school (Bacharach, Baumeister, and Furr, 2003).

Summary

This chapter included a review of the literature focusing on improving student achievement and eliminating the achievement gap. The literature highlighted sociopolitical, geopolitical, historical, economical and familial gaps that are pervasive in the broader American culture, placing the public schools almost to the point of stagnation, thereby fueling the achievement gap.

The research examined in this review of literature suggests that, historically, the achievement gap between majority and minority students has been a constant focus of policymakers and school districts for decades. The No Child Left Behind legislation (2002) continues this quest today as it requires all students to perform at high levels regardless of social economic status or family background. School leaders are positioned at the forefront of this challenge of underachievement in education. Years of compiled empirical research suggest that what leaders do matters and impacts student achievement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership behaviors that improving student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools. This chapter outlines the methodology that was used in this study. The following procedures are employed and discussed to create the framework for this research the research. Design, process, participants, sample size, data collection and an analysis of data are also described. Finally, a summary of the methodology used in this research is presented.

Research Questions

The researcher answered the following overarching question: What leadership behaviors impact student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools? The researcher answered the following sub questions:

1. What is the leader's perception of his or her role in increasing student achievement?
2. What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impact student achievement?
3. What strategies are used by the high school leaders to improve student achievement?

Research Design

The qualitative research design was used to gain knowledge of the "essence" of the leader's behaviors that improved student achievement in selected Georgia high schools in a suburban school district in the state of Georgia. The participants were chosen

based on successfully achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2005-2006 school years, as outlined by the Georgia Department of Education. Creswell (2002) suggested that qualitative research is an inquiry process based on tradition that explores social and human issues, through which the researcher paints a holistic, detailed picture of a participant in a natural setting. Denzin and Lincoln (2000), also defines qualitative research as a multi-method focus that documents people and events using a naturalistic approach. The qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to document and/or interpret a phenomenon in terms of the meaning.

Qualitative research is a form of naturalistic inquiry involving the study of real-life situations that are composed of rich, thick descriptions through the personal contact with participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). According to Vierra and Pollock (1992), qualitative research is a strategy used to generate theory derived from interviews, observation, and establishing patterns. The researcher used the phenomenology approach of the qualitative design to describe the real-life experiences of leaders. The purpose of the phenomenology approach is to highlight the unique occurrence of an individual or group through events, artifacts, and real-world experiences (Creswell, 2002).

“Phenomenology is the study of lives experiences and the way we understand those experiences to develop a worldview. It rests on an assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p.112).

Population

The population of this study consisted of fifteen public high school employees who were designated leaders of selected high schools. The schools are all part of a Georgia public school district. This school district has a student enrollment slightly above 50,000 students. The elementary enrollment is just under 25,000, the middle school enrollment around 13,000, and the high school just above 12,000. The typical administrative structure of the elementary school consists of a building principal and at least one assistant principal. There are one principal and three or four assistant principals at each middle school. The high schools are under the leadership of one principal, five or six assistant principals, and six or eight department chairpersons. The district employs about fifty building-level principals and ninety assistant principals.

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of selected high school leaders only. Three of the eight high schools selected to participate in this study are located in the State of Georgia. The participants were chosen based on successfully achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2005-2006 school years, as outlined by the Georgia Department of Education. The participants included three building-level principals, two assistant principals and two department chairs from each of the selected high schools in the district. The researcher randomly selected an assistant principal and a department chair from each of the respective schools.

Instrumentation

Three principals, six assistant principals, and six teacher leaders served as participants in this study. These individuals were identified and interviewed to gain

insight and perception about the leaders' role in improving student achievement through strategies and practice. These participants were chosen based on their track record of successfully achieving Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2005-2006 school years as outlined by the Georgia Department of Education. The survey method of discovery was used. In-person, face-to-face interviews were conducted during the month of August 2007.

Each interview was conducted at each leader's respective school. Both the leader and the researcher read and signed the Participant Inform Consent Form (see Appendix B) before the interviews were conducted. The researcher further emphasized that the interview would be audio recorded and that the identity of all leaders would remain anonymous, with permission granted for follow-up questions for clarity and concerns if necessary.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was interviews with three principals, six assistant principals and six department chairs. Participants were contacted by phone and email to confirm their participation in the study. All participants agreed to be interviewed after the researcher gained approval from the school district and Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). The researcher first obtained consent from the participants before conducting the interviews. A one-hour interview with each school leader was conducted and audio-taped. To elicit a deeper description of the work leaders, semi-structured open-ended questions and document analysis were used during the interviews. Qualitative interviewing is the art of obtaining rich, in-depth accounts of a respondent's life and experiences through questioning and

listening (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interview protocol (see Appendix C) was mailed to each participant prior to the interview. This allowed the participants to become familiar with the questions. The same questions were used to conduct a face-to-face tape-recorded interview with each participant. The intent was to obtain broad perspectives, opinions and practices with clarity and diversity. The interview guide (see Appendix C) used to conduct interviews addressed the following areas: (1) student engagement, (2) parent involvement, (3) instruction and academic support, (4) expectations for student. The researcher transcribed notes and digitally recorded interviews into categories to identify patterns and commonality in practice.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the Phenomenological Data Analysis as outlined by Creswell (1998). Creswell writes “Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings” (p.52). Marshall and Rossman (1999), contend that data analysis is a structured way of organizing a large amount of information by categorizing, coding, and testing emergent understanding.

Data from the qualitative research approach were analyzed, coded and categorized to corroborate patterns among principals, assistant principals and department chairs. The researcher then organized responses, evidence of student success and indicators of student achievement of each school to identify patterns. The following steps were used to analyze the data in this study:

1. Organization of statements into horizontal categories using Microsoft Word computer software.

2. Transformation of statements into clusters based on meaning or themes.
 3. Clusters were transformed into descriptions of experiences.
4. Report understanding of the “essence” of experiences and identifying commonalities among participants.

Glense (2005) states that “Coding is a progressive process of and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (i.e. observations notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature) which are applicable to your research purpose” (p.152).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in selected Georgia high schools. The overarching question for this study was as follows: What leadership behaviors impact student achievement in three selected Georgia high school?

The researcher answered the following sub questions:

1. What is the leader’s perception of his or her role in increasing student achievement?
2. What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impact student achievement?
3. What strategies are used by the high school leaders to improve student achievement?

Participants from three Georgia high schools that achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) during the 2005-2006 school years were interviewed during the month of August.

A description of each high school is presented, and data derived from the interviews of each leader were compiled, organized, and analyzed.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study was designed to examine the leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in selected Georgia high schools. Three Georgia high school principals, six assistant principals, and six teacher leaders were identified and interviewed to gain insight and perspective about the leader's role in improving student achievement through strategies and practices. The participants were chosen based on successfully achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2005-2006 school years, as outlined by the Georgia Department of Education.

The method of discovery in this study was qualitative. The researcher conducted interviews during the month of August 2007. Each interview was conducted at each leader's respective school. Each leader and the researcher read and signed the Participant Inform Consent Form (see Appendix B) before the interviews were conducted. The researcher further emphasized that the interview would be recorded, that the identity of all leaders would remain anonymous, and that there would be follow-up questions for clarity and concerns, if necessary. The interview guide (Appendix C) used to conduct interviews addressed the following areas: (1) student engagement, (2) parent involvement, (3), instruction and academic support, (4) expectations for students. The researcher transcribed notes and digitally recorded interviews into categories to identify patterns and commonality in practices.

The data from this study are presented in relation to the stated overarching research question along with the three sub-questions outlined in chapter one. The

overarching research question addresses how leadership behaviors impact student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools. The following three sub questions supported the overarching question:

1. What is the leader's perception of his or her role in increasing student achievement?
2. What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impact student achievement?
3. What strategies are used by the high school leaders to improve student achievement?

Research Design

The qualitative research design was employed to gain knowledge of the “essence” of the leader's behaviors that improved student achievement in selected Georgia high schools. This research method gave participants an opportunity to disclose specific strategies and practices that are effective in improving student achievement. The research design proved to be effective because leaders were able to divulge information about their work as leaders. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes the school portraits, the second section depicts the personal demographics of each participant, the third section summarizes the themes and patterns of leadership behaviors that improved student achievement, and the fourth section is a summary of the findings.

School Portraiture of Magnolia High School

Magnolia High School is the oldest school in the district, and it has changed significantly in the last ten years. In 1996, the Asian population at Magnolia High School

was just under 10%, the African American population was under 50%, the Latino population was just over 2%, and the Caucasian population was above 40%, with a total population around 1400 students. Currently, Magnolia High School has a population of just over 1,500, with a Latino population around 13%, Caucasian population just above 15%, an African American population around 60%, and an Asian population of just below 13%. Magnolia High School is a Title I school. About 80% of its students are from economically-disadvantaged households. Magnolia High School achieved Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years and has a graduation rate of about 60 %.

Participants Profile for Magnolia High School

Table 1 depicts the personal profile of the participants from Magnolia High School. Five leaders were selected to participate in the actual study. The education level of the leaders included three with a specialist degree in educational leadership, one with a Doctor of Education in education leadership, and two with a master's degree in school counseling and mathematics. The total years of experience in education ranged from 5-35 years. The ethnicity and gender of the leaders from Magnolia High School were four African American females and one Caucasian male. The ages ranged from 33-55 years of age.

Table 1: *Demographic Profile of Participants* (Magnolia High School)

| Participants | Educational Level | Years of Experience | Gender | Ethnicity |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------|------------------|
| P- A | Education Specialist | 23years | Female | African American |
| AP- B | Doctor of Education | 35 years | Male | Caucasian |
| AP- C | Education Specialist | 16 years | Female | African American |
| TL- D | Education Specialist | 8 years | Female | African American |
| TL- E | Master's | 5 years | Male | African American |
| | | | | |

P=Principal AP= Assistant Principal TL- Teacher Leader

School Portraiture of Oak High School

Oak High School, like Magnolia High School, has experienced a change in demographics over the last decade. In 1996, the Asian population was below 4%, the Latino population was above 2%, the African American population was around 30%, and the Caucasian population was about 70%, with a total student population of about 1850. Currently, Oak High School has a total population around 1,800, with an Asian population less than 3%, an African American population greater than 70%, a Latino population of 6%, a Caucasian population of 12%, and a multiracial population of 3%. Oak High School is not a Title I school; over 50% of its students are economically disadvantaged, and it has a graduation rate above 70 %.

Participants Profile for Oak High School

Table 2 depicts the personal profile of the participants from Oak High School. Five leaders were selected to participate in the actual study. The education level of each

leader included one with a specialist degree in education leadership, one with a masters in mathematics, one with a specialist degree in technology, one with a specialist in business education, and one with a PhD in psychology. The total years of experience in education ranged from 8-35 years. The ethnicity and gender of the leaders from Oak High school were two African American males, two Caucasian males and one Caucasian female ranging in age from 35-60 years of age.

Table 2: *Demographic Profile of Participants (Oak High School)*

| Participants | Educational Level | Years of Experience | Gender | Ethnicity |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------|------------------|
| P- F | Doctor of Psychology | 23years | Male | African American |
| AP- G | Education Specialist | 35 years | Male | Caucasian |
| AP- H | Education Specialist | 8 years | Male | African American |
| TL- I | Bachelors | 18 years | Male | Caucasian |
| TL- J | Education Specialist | 30 years | Female | Caucasian |
| | | | | |

P=Principal AP= Assistant Principal TL- Teacher Leader

School Portraiture of Dogwood High School

Dogwood High School is a relatively new school. It has been in existence for three years and has a student population slightly above 2000 students. The Asian population is 1%, the Latino population is slightly above 2%, the African American population is above 90%, the Caucasian population is slightly below 6%, and the multiracial population is slightly above 1%. Dogwood High School was not a Title I

school in the 2005-2006 school year, but became Title I shortly thereafter. Around 70% of Dogwood High School's student population is economically disadvantaged, it has a graduation rate just under 80 %.

Participants Profile for Dogwood High School

Table 3 depicts the personal profile of the participants from Dogwood High School. Five leaders were selected to participate in the actual study. The educational level attained by the leaders include three with a specialist degree in education leadership, one with a bachelor's in biology, and one with a bachelor's in English. The total years of experience in education ranged from 11-30 years. The ethnicity and gender of the leaders were two African American males, two African American females, and one Caucasian female.

Table 3: *Demographic Profile of Participants (Dogwood High School)*

| Participants | Highest Degree | Yrs. of Exp. | Gender | Ethnicity |
|--------------|----------------------|--------------|--------|------------------|
| P- K | Education Specialist | 11 years | Male | African American |
| AP- L | Education Specialist | 30 years | Male | African American |
| AP- M | Education Specialist | 18 years | Female | African American |
| TL- N | Bachelor's | 16 years | Female | African American |
| TL- O | Bachelor's | 26 years | Female | Caucasian |
| | | | | |

P=Principal AP= Assistant Principal TL- Teacher Leader

Qualitative Data Analysis

Fifteen leaders from three Georgia High School were selected to participate in this study. Participants were contacted by phone and email to confirm their participation in the study. All participants agreed to be interviewed after the researcher gained approval from the school district and Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). The researcher mailed the informed consent and the interview protocol prior to conducting the interviews.

The qualitative research data derived from the analysis of the interviews with high school leaders are presented to correspond with the research question. A narrative of recurring themes, patterns and similarities from participants' own experiences as "leaders" are further subdivided by prevalent topics resulting from data analysis. The schools were coded using the following pseudonyms: Magnolia, Oak, and Dogwood High School. Each leader respondent was denoted by his/her position, followed by a letter of the alphabet. In addition, responses were edited to avoid repetition of comments that did not address the interview question.

High Expectations

Research Sub question 1. What are the leaders' perceptions of their roles in increasing student achievement?

In the following text selections, the interviewees discussed the importance of having high expectations and their impact on increasing student achievement. The responses reveal many similarities among leaders. While some respondents varied, the descriptions reflect the leader's belief in high expectations for improved achievement.

The following passages were extracted from the leader interviews. Leaders contributed the following viewpoint on their role in increasing student achievement:

Leadership makes a big difference, but having high expectations is just as important: unrealistic expectations but high expectations that is obtainable and measurable. We are responsible for encouraging and motivating students to do their best. High expectation is critical in terms of leadership development. If educators spent more time convincing children that they can reach goals rather than dwelling on what they can not do, we could improve achievement significantly in one year. We were able to raise the expectations of some of our average students by encouraging them to take challenging courses and giving them the opportunity to further prepare for standardized measures and life after high school. Students were advised to have faith and to believe in themselves.

According to the teacher leaders, the equitable-curriculum employed by the school district has been a great tool for students to challenge themselves and to raise the expectation. This action allowed students to take honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes without being a gatekeeper of student progress. Some kids with deficits are better off taking honors and Advanced Placement (AP) because they are more challenged and will ultimately increase their knowledge of the subject matter.

One teacher leader had this to say: “You have to have high expectations to work here; that mind-set was put forth by the principal, and that’s what we mirror” (TL-O, Dogwood High School).

Building Relationships

Several high school leaders expressed the importance of building relationships with faculty, staff and students to foster student achievement:

Relationship-building with students, teachers, and parents is a way to bring all stakeholders together. Educators should seek to embrace all stakeholders to get the maximum success of the experiences. Relationship building, supporting and making an environment conducive to learning is essential in making people accountable, setting high expectations and following through with providing necessary resources that teachers, students and parents need to get the job done. We are focusing on teacher efficacy and improving community relations. This is going to touch everybody in every regard. We support and strongly encouraged our parents to become part of our parent volunteer group to assist with getting kids in the classrooms on time, to report suspicious behavior and to encourage and provide a motivational word to students who were caught on task. Our principal would always talk to the parents and let them know of any changes that were getting ready to occur that could affect their children.

Identifying the Right Personnel

In all cases, high school leaders believed that identifying the right personnel is essential to improved student achievement:

“Good solid teaching can bring students back to the point of engagement and make them feel like this is worth learning” (P-A, Magnolia High School). We took our master teachers to teach some of the lowest level classes. That was not well received by staff when we took one of them and gave them one class. The results were often good because they were master teachers. We looked at who was teaching those 11th grade classes that are the GHSGT classes (Algebra II, Chemistry, US History, and American Literature) We handpicked a couple of teachers to teach specific classes. We met with those teachers to let them know that they had been hand selected to teach certain classes.

We strategically placed teachers with certain classes. We believed that having the right teachers in the classes is important. We offered the tutorials and just constantly encouraged the kids and let them know the importance of the graduation test and how this test is going to impact them in their lives.

We have given a lot of credit to the staff and the stability of the staff. Over the past four years, we have had a 90% or better retention rate amongst our staff and faculty, which is remarkable under any circumstance, but especially considering all that our district has experienced. The principal of Dogwood High School offered this perspective: “Having a stable, competent faculty and staff is a critical component to having a school environment that obtains a consistent high student achievement. It speaks to my philosophy of bringing people together and having everyone involved” (P-K, Dogwood High School). We had to understand limits and surround ourselves with as much talent as possible. We had to make sure folks have various talent levels. We need various attributes from people to have successful results. Give people the opportunity to be creative, and take ownership of programs and things they may want to do. We can not be the ones to initiate and to develop every idea.

Research Sub question 2: What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impacted student achievement?

In the text selection, the overwhelming consensus among all the high school leaders was that there are certain behaviors leaders possess that directly impact student achievement, thereby closing the achievement gap. Several recurring behaviors with each participant were prevalent throughout the interviews. All leaders consistently exhibited the following behaviors to impact student achievement: used data to guide instruction

and decision-making, set achievement goals, assisted low achievers, involved stakeholders in achievement, and monitored student progress instruction.

Using Data to Guide Instruction and Decision Making

We used the End of Course (EOCT) data, Georgia High School Graduation (GHS GT) data, Advanced Placement (AP) data, and we also looked at failure rates. When we looked at the failure rates, we looked at the students in the class, not just overall failure rates but historical data as well. So, we gave each department its data to share. Every department made decisions about what they wanted and then drafted a plan. We always looked at the data to guide where one was going. We identified where we were by looking at the Georgia High School Graduation Test GHS GT disaggregated data and trend data by department and decided to create a common set of test-taking skills. We identified students who were struggling early and provided extra help, such as tutorials and workshops. We set departmental goals that supported the overall school goal for the year. We looked at the data for our particular department. Our students do very well in English Language Arts and writing, so we have to find a way to improve even a 90% average or at least to sustain it. The writing test is changing, so now we must begin to prepare students by adjusting our teaching methods and providing extra help.

The social studies department looked at GHS GT data to see where we were lacking. We also looked at individual teacher data. We were lacking in government and geography, so we focused on those two areas. Each class addressed this subject matter whether it be economics or world history. Bell-ringers focused on GHS GT and on Benchmark assessments to see where students were in the 11th grade. We also had tutoring after school, and encouraged that time be set aside during the day for students to

go to a teacher who would focus on deficit areas. We took data from previous years to identify areas in which we had success. In those areas, we looked at factors that may have allowed us to be successful during that time. Once we identified those factors, we tried to replicate them for the current situation. We also did the same for areas of opportunities. We modified our plan to address certain factors that may have contributed to less success.

The following leaders expressed this perspective regarding the use of data to improve student achievement:

You have to look at the data to see where you are; where you were, and where you want to go. We looked at the data to find out where our students came from and how they fared on various assessments. Then we looked at where we were at the current time and what kinds of gains and deficits occurred with those students. Then we set targets of where we wanted to be in the future based on that. We knew that we were at a 90% pass rate for math, and our target was 95%; then we started establishing those targets. Not only did we establish those targets in collaboration with; parents, students, teachers, and administrators, but we also advertised and constantly communicated what those targets so people could speak intelligently about the mission, vision, and the direction of the school. We gave pre-and post-assessments so we could measure students' strengths and weaknesses. The little things we did let us know who understood it and who did not. Pre-and post-assessments are key.

Setting Achievement Goals

Leaders from Magnolia, Dogwood and Oak High School conveyed similar feelings regarding setting achievement goals:

We knew that we were at a 90% pass rate for math and our target was 95%; then we started establishing goals. Not only did we establish those goals in collaboration with everyone, parents, students, and teachers, and administrators. But we also advertise and constantly communicated what those goals so people could speak intelligently about the mission, and vision. We wanted everyone to know that we were shooting for a 95% pass rate and we was shooting for “X” amount of students to achieve a pass plus on the graduation test. We were shooting for “X” amount to graduate; we were shooting for a certain amount to go on to college. We started setting lofty expectations and goals for our staff and students.

We set achievement goals, we sat down with the AYP data, and we reviewed data from the past three years. I knew that a school can safely makes a three-to-five point gain. We gave all department chairs their data, and told them that they had to set a 3%-to-5% range and to set goals to meet AYP. They could choose multiyear averages, confidence interval, safe harbor or direct comparison of student performance to annual measurable objectives (AMO). They could choose within the indicator to see where we could make AYP. Every department made decisions about what they wanted, and then they drafted a plan. We monitored the plan constantly to see the evidence that they said that they were going to do. Anytime we wrote anything in the school improvement plan, it was tied to the goals. If we had anything for staff development, it had to be tied to the goals. Our principal provided some type of monthly presentation that dealt with the goals of the school. Every meeting started with a specific PowerPoint tied to the goals. Our principal had everyone look at scores to see where they were. We set lofty goals based on

this data, such as a goal of 95% for writing. Every department had to come up with certain plans they were implementing to help reach those goals.

Assisting Low Achievers

In all cases, the leaders viewed low achievers as a constant focus of their school improvement plans. Furthermore, they believed that addressing the issue of low achievement in minorities could be the catalyst for change in achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP):

We established times and dates for each teacher to have tutorials. We also observed many classrooms for scaffolding. All of our faculty meetings were professional development to assist low achievers. A Second Chance program was implemented. This gave students who failed a course with a grade between a 65 and 69 an opportunity to retake a class for “X” number of Saturdays. When the course was completed, points were added to the overall failing course. This is supported by research where the key is in the extra time provided so that every kid can learn. In order to participate in the Second Chance program, the student must have good behavior. The student must have the conduct and good behavior as well as maintain grades.

We focused a lot on teachers providing effective instruction in the classroom. Teachers implemented CRISS strategies and were required to give tutorials. We identified students who needed additional help. Using pull out model and after school sessions, are extra pieces put in place to give extra incentive to achieve for students. We had additional after-school tutoring and during-school remediation. We employed pull out’s, where we removed them from their electives’ classes to get the help they needed as it pertained to the graduation test. The main thing we had to do was to be a team player

so that everyone could focus on goals. We pulled out low achievers and worked with them to make sure they would be able to pass the writing portion of GHSGT. We gave a lot of examples and support. Teachers were required to formulate three-to-four questions that are similar to the Georgia High School Graduation Test questions each week on their regular classroom test. They were to repeat the instruction, if necessary. Collaborative teachers in classrooms also pulled students out who needed additional help. We informed parent and students who were involved in remediation or credit recovery. We provided additional time and gave students additional resources by bringing them in for tutorials. We then assessed them to make certain that they were where they needed to be.

Involve Stakeholders in Achievement

Several of the high school leaders agreed that parents, teachers, students and community members are intricate parts of the educational process:

Often-times our parents seem to think that once the child reaches high school, they are all on their own, unlike elementary school. PTA, along with every stakeholder, is promoting parents helping their students to achieve. Before the start of the school year, we had a fish fry just to get parents involved to see what's going on in their children's school. We encouraged parents to come and sit inside of the classrooms. We also asked teachers to go over the curriculum with parents, to go over syllabus, and to share what is going on in the school.

Any high-achieving school, has a large percentage of volunteers who assist with the day-to-day operation of the school and we knew that to be the case, so we sought out parents. We made them aware of that fact, and we spoke about partnering with us. They monitored the halls and signed people in and out. We had parent conferences; we kept

them updated. They could come in and see where their students were. We updated them on progress. Open communication, not only with issues but good things that occurred, is key because parents love that. Parents become very comfortable with the school because of communication.

We have learned that a lot of parents just want to be asked to participate in the school. Sometimes we do call parents and they will respond. They will not volunteer, but if you ask, they will do it. We are getting better. Our parental involvement is very low, but Connect Ed has helped. Teachers are sending out more letters and are having different meetings for the parents to attend. We are trying, but it is very low. I think that kids get to high school, and then parents tend to forget about them.

We communicated with parents through flyers, emails, and phone voice recordings. We notified our parents of dates such as holiday, EOCT, Benchmarks, GHSGT, and other important dates. At the end of each grading period, we had a conference night where parents could come and meet their children's teachers. We also encouraged parents to visit their children in their classes. We strongly encouraged our parents to become part of our parent volunteer group to assist with getting kids in the classrooms on time, reporting suspicious behavior, and encouraging and providing motivational words to students who were recognized as being on task.

Monitoring Student Progress and Instruction

The following leaders offered their experiences and thoughts on the importance of monitoring students' progress and instructional practices of teachers as a means to effect change and to sustain continuous improvement in achievement of minority students:

We observed at individual teachers, we observed at individual classes, we observed departmentally at what could be changed. When we got certain teachers from a certain school, we noticed that some of our teachers came to us with the mentality of a high failure, therefore, we had to help them become accustomed to the culture here, which does not accept high failure rates. We want to see what one can do to help the student, but we also want the student to rise to the target level as well.

We did not make announcements during instructional time. We were not going to interrupt instruction. During observations, we walked in behind the last student and sat down. We tried to minimize disruptions. We tried to take time from every class instead of taking it all from 1st period. We expected bell-to-bell instruction from all teachers. Try to make sure students have minimal amount of distractions during instructional time. We minimize announcements to the end of the day. We tried to get every instructional minute out of the day.

We monitored how much time was spent on task, how the teacher started class, was the class directed to the board, and did they have a sponge or warm-up activity. Was the teacher actually involved in time-wasting activities, such as taking attendance or writing on the board? Were they walking around observing or were they passing out papers while students were working; were there smooth transitions? Administrators visited classes with checklists of needs of the teacher. We followed a checklist to make sure teachers are teaching bell-to-bell. Also are teachers teaching the curriculum? We want to see that teachers are teaching bell-to-bell, teaching the curriculum, and we gave feedback the same day. We were looking for certain components such as syllabus posted on wall, objectives and essential questions on dry erase board, and student engagement.

As an administrator if you do not walk around, you do not know what your teachers are doing. Administrators should know what teachers are doing and which ones need help.

Research Sub question 3: What strategies are used by the high school leaders to improve student achievement?

Implementing Strategies to Improve Student Achievement

It was revealed through the qualitative research design that high school leaders are aligned in their perspective about identifying strategies that could increase student success the, principal of Magnolia High School offered this strategy:

“One thing I would recommend is that the principal, assistant principal and teacher leaders attend a conference sponsored by Education Trust; this would focus on data. Once they leave that conference, I know they would feel empowered to make a change in what they are doing. Use the Southern Regional Education Board and High Schools that Work model, and look at the best practices that schools are implementing. Identify some research on 909090 schools. Last, I would ask staff members to draft a set of belief statements and make sure that those belief statements are supported by Education Trust, Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and 909090 schools. We do not need to fix the children; there are too many of them. However, you can fix yourself to meet the needs of the student. You can equip yourself with more knowledge and teaching strategies” (P-A, Magnolia High School).

Several leaders reported that they used the following strategies to improve student achievement.

We had our amnesty programs for students who were failing. We gave them extra opportunities to do assignments and to get to a point at which they could pass their

particular classes. When they started to experience that type of success, they began to feel good about themselves, and they started to believe in themselves and, when that started occurring, it just kind of took off. Our “State of the School Address” let parents know where we came from, where we are, where we want to go. This formal meeting gave parents an overview of standardized test data. We gave the plan to the parents to show how we are going to improve. We shared that information with staff and students as well. We had our annual “Slam Cram Jam” testing program. This test taking program is an all night event held at the school that helped students practice test taking skills, complete sample questions, and motivated students to do their best.

Saturday School, tutorials during the day, the additional help, the pull-out model, and all stakeholders working together, breed success. It is a mental shift for the students. You must promote achievement throughout the school. You must encourage and reward achievement in the school, whether it is in special education or in gifted and honors programs. For the Georgia high school graduation tests, we implemented a program entitled “Each One Teach One”. Each staff member was assigned three or four students to mentor. The staff member met with students weekly to encourage them to do their best in their courses and on test.

Using effective instruction, being optimistic, having high expectations, empowering, motivating, and looking at data to guide instruction are the components to improve achievement. Leaders must understand the culture of the school. Once you understand and have identified who your students are, you better serve their needs.

A teacher leader offered this strategy for improving student achievement:

“Once you have identified your problem, work with all stakeholders to draft and implement a plan to address these issues. No one person can do this job of improving student achievement solely. “A team effort is required to achieve goals and to ensure success” (TL-E, Magnolia High School).

To sustain continuous achievement in high schools, one must monitor ninth grade cohort groups; because this will ultimately affect graduation, participation, and dropout rates. We also use eighth grade trend data such as the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) to address deficiencies in ninth graders. We used instructional scheduling as a tool to improve student achievement by strategically scheduling the most experienced teachers with the students who need it the most, low achievers.

Summary

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University (see Appendix A) gave approval for the researcher to begin collecting data. The method of discovery used in this research project examined the leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools. The qualitative data was collected through the use of in-depth interviews from fifteen successful high school leaders. The demographic profile for the study represented a wide variety of diversity, experience, and educational backgrounds. Three high schools were selected based on the schools' successfully achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2005-2006 school years. The participants included one building-level principal, two assistant principals, and two department chairpersons from each of the selected high schools. The researcher scheduled interviews with each leader at his or her individual school. The

interview was audio taped using a digital voice recorder, then transcribed and coded by the researcher. Each leader answered the eight open-end questions. In order to maintain the anonymity of the leaders, all personnel and high schools names were withheld and identified by the following pseudonyms throughout the study: Magnolia High School, Oak High School and Dogwood High School. The researcher found nine common themes and patterns among all the leaders: (1) raising expectations, (2) building relationships, (3) identifying the right personnel, (4) using data to guide instruction and decision making, (5) setting achievement goals (6) assisting low achievers, (7) involving stakeholders in achievement, (8) monitoring student progress, and (9) implementing strategies to improve student achievement.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is a summary of the study, analysis, and research findings using the qualitative design. The data were derived from in-depth, semi-structured interviews of fifteen high school leaders in three Georgia high schools that achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) during the 2005-2006 school year. A discussion of findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusions of this study was presented.

Summary

This study was designed to examine the leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in three selected high schools in the State of Georgia. The overarching question is: What leadership behaviors impact student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools? The sub-questions include:

1. What is the leader's perception of his or her role in increasing student achievement?
2. What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impacted student achievement?
3. What strategies are used by the high school leader to improve student achievement?

The phenomenological qualitative research methodology was employed to elicit a deeper understanding of the work of leaders. The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews in three Georgia high schools. The researcher scheduled interviews with each leader at his or her individual school. The interviews were audio taped using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed by the researcher. Each leader answered eight open-ended questions. In order to maintain anonymity of the leaders, all names and high

schools were identified using the pseudonyms Magnolia High School, Oak High School and Dogwood High School throughout the study.

Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools. The qualitative data analysis offered an in-depth account of the experiences of school leaders regarding their perspectives and beliefs about their roles in improving student achievement.

Research Sub question 1: What is the leaders' perception of his or her role in increasing student achievement?

Discussion

The leaders believed overwhelmingly that having high expectations for students was vital to improving student achievement. The leaders emphasized that the school district assisted them in the process by instituting an equitable curriculum policy for students. This action gave any student the opportunity to enroll in honors and advanced placement courses without teachers or other school personnel being the “gatekeeper” of challenging courses. School leaders strongly encouraged students to take advantage of challenging courses and provided a venue for students who struggled in those courses. They provided tutorials and assistance through study groups for student’s needing extra help. The leaders pointed out that the students began to raise the bar by trying to achieve higher even though the course work was challenging.

The leaders also felt that building relationships was important in addressing the disconnect among students, teachers, administrators, and the community. They mentioned that they connected with students by finding out their interests and

encouraging them to become active participants in their schools. Teachers were strongly encouraged to participate in after school activities and to make a connection with students' families by calling and extending an invitation to come to the school. Teachers regularly reported progress and feedback to parents. All leaders agreed that community involvement was a challenge yet they were encouraged with the progress. The principal of Dogwood High School felt that his "State of the School Address" had proven to be an effective way to involve the community in student achievement by sharing student achievement data, school goals, and areas of opportunity. This effort prompted members of the community to volunteer and support the school monetarily.

The respondents spoke passionately about their personal beliefs regarding teaching and learning. Identifying the "right" personnel was a collective theme that leaders felt improved student achievement. Although a constant challenge, the leaders agreed that a competent, stable, teaching staff was imperative to bringing students back to the point of engagement and to making student feeling that the subject matter is worth learning. A critical component of any consistently high-achieving school the leaders emphasized, is surrounding themselves with as much talent as possible and employing teachers with various levels of talent.

Research Sub question 2: What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impact student achievement?

Discussion

The general consensus among all leaders was the necessity of using data to guide instruction and decision making. To guide instruction, the leaders used Georgia High Graduation Test (GHSGT), End of Course Test (EOCT), Advanced Placement (AP),

Benchmark Assessments and failure rates of teachers. This data, according to the leaders, were disaggregated by subgroups, subject area and by individual teachers to identify areas in which students struggled. The leaders all used data to develop plans to address student deficits and to establish targets. Teachers used data to re-teach certain units, to create a common set of test-taking skills, and to identify students who needed extra help. Several leaders stated that they used trend data such as Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) and Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) to identify where gaps might have developed, they used strategies such as differentiated instruction to address deficiencies in students. Also leaders receiving Title I funding stated that they used data to help decide how resources should be allocated for teachers, students, professional development, consultants, and teaching aides. Leaders also believed that setting achievement goals was a necessary action in improved student achievement. Several participants agreed that they set achievement goals based on disaggregated data. Some, however, chose to use the goals established by the school district and develop departmental goals to support the district goals. All school leaders established test participation goals, attendance goals, and percentage gains in content areas of the GHSGT. Goals were shared with parents, students, and community members. The leaders explained that the achievement goals were stated daily and posted throughout the schools to remind all stakeholders of the stated goal.

One of the greatest challenges in education today, the leaders felt, is “lifting as we climb”. There was a concerted effort in the school district to encourage high achievers to take challenging courses and to engage in dual enrollment with local colleges. The same concerted effort was being made, according to the leaders, to assist low achievers. The

school district provided district-wide remediation, before and after school, through zero period, seventh period, and virtual high school. There was a constant focus by leaders to provide teachers with effective teaching strategies such as CRISS strategies and components of High Schools That Works (HSTW) to assist low achievers. Several leaders stated that they pulled students from elective courses to prepare them for standardized measures. Leaders also shared that they used such measures as Saturday School, Second Chance, Each One Teach One, and the Slam Cram Jam as tools to provide students with extra time, motivation, and additional instruction to address deficits.

A constant struggle, according to many of the leaders is getting all stakeholders involved in the academic process. Open communication is key to bridging the gap between home school and the community. The leaders all took different approaches to getting stakeholders involved. Several leaders shared that sometimes parents just want to be asked to be a part or to participate in activities. Leaders used conference nights, PTSA, newsletters, Conned Ed, and the State of the School Address to involve stakeholders and to disseminate information. One leader stated that “all high achieving schools have a large percentage of parent and community volunteers to assist in the day to day operation of the school” (P-K, Dogwood High School).

In addition to involving stakeholders, all high school leaders agreed that monitoring student progress and instruction was a duty that they believed to be as important as the behaviors stated previously. Inspecting what you expect was a resounding theme by leaders as it relates to monitoring student progress. Leaders expressed that they make every effort to protect instructional time and expect teachers to

teach from bell to bell. Leaders also looked intently at individual teachers test data, failure rates, and teaching practices to assess if any support was needed by way of professional development.

Research Question 3: What strategies used by high school leadership to improve student achievement?

Discussion

All schools in this study have struggled to identify the right combination of strategies that are proven to improve student achievement. Based on the interviewees' responses and the findings, some school leaders were not sure whether or not the strategies used actually contributed to improved student achievement. However, a majority believed that leader behaviors and strategies applied directly contributed to improved student achievement in their respective schools. Successful strategies suggested include: (1) Hosted a State of the School Address; inviting all stakeholders, parents, teachers, student, and community leaders. Then share student achievement data, devise a plan for improvements, and ask for assistance in monitoring that plan. (2) Implement amnesty programs such as Second Chance and Saturday School so that students who are in need of extra time and assistance can achieve success. (3) To sustain continuous achievement in high schools, leaders monitored ninth-grade cohort groups; this action as stated by the leader will ultimately affect graduation, participation, and dropout rates. (4) Use eighth grade trend data such as the CRCT and ITBS to address deficiencies in ninth graders. (5) Use instructional scheduling as a tool to improve student achievement by strategically scheduling the most experienced teachers with the students who need help the most, the low achievers. (6) Implement an Each One Teach One program. This program used all school personnel to

mentor a group of students. The goal was to establish a relationship with students and motivate them to do their best. (7) Schools with a large concentration of minority and impoverished students should draft a set of belief statements that are deeply-rooted in the practices and ideologies of Education Trust, 90/90/90schools, and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

Overarching Research Question: What leadership behaviors impact student achievement in selected Georgia high schools?

Discussion

The researcher found that the responses of the high school leader varied based upon the position held in his or her respective schools. The researcher found that the teacher leaders in some instances had a limited scope of the overall “big picture” conveyed by the principal. Their responses focused primary on their individual departments as opposed to the school goal. In addition, data analyzed by the researcher yielded nine common leader behaviors, themes, and /or patterns. Data collected from interviews and data analysis revealed the following leader behavior, themes, and patterns: (1) high expectations, (2) building relationships, (3) identifying the right personnel, (4) using data to guide instruction and decision making, (5) setting achievement goals, (6) assisting low achievers, (7) involving all stakeholders, (8) monitoring student progress and instruction, and (9) implementing strategies to improve student achievement. The researcher’s findings are consistent with contemporary research studies on leadership behaviors, the achievement gap, and student achievement. The first section addressed the overarching research question: What leadership behaviors impact student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools? The second section addressed the three supporting

sub-questions of the guiding research question. Finally, the last section is the conclusion statement of the research findings.

The Overarching Research Question

This section addresses the overarching research question: What leadership behaviors impact student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools? The researcher found nine common leadership behaviors, themes, and/or patterns based on the data collection and analysis of this study: (1) high expectations, (2) building relationships, (3) identifying the right personnel, (4) using data to guide instruction and decision making, (5) setting achievement goals, (6) assisting low achievers, (7) involving all stakeholders, (8) monitoring student progress and instruction, and (9) implementing strategies to improve student achievement. The common behaviors and themes and related research studies are presented in the following sections:

High Expectations

Participants collectively agreed that raising expectations for students and staff is essential to improving student achievement. It was apparent to the researcher that the high school leaders interviewed were convinced that high expectations was one of the primary factors in improving student achievement. Hallinger (2003) confirmed this belief, as he emphasized that instructional leaders must establish school mission statements and goals, align those goals establish core beliefs, academic standards, and create a culture of high expectations among students, teachers, and administrators. The effective school researchers also identified high expectations as one of the seven correlates that are research-based characteristics linking leadership to improved student learning (Edmonds, 1979, Lezotte, 1994).

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and High Schools That Work strongly emphasize high expectations and accountability as vital parts of student achievement. Standards must be high with assessments rooted in what is taught and tied to national standards. A study conducted by McGee (2004) found that 90% of the high-poverty, high-performing schools had strong, active leaders who advocated high standards, high expectations, and created a successful school culture which fostered high achievement (McGee, 2004).

Building Relationships

Based on the researcher's findings, all school leaders agreed that building relationships is a vital part of establishing a culture of high expectations and meeting the needs of students. The research of Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), contends that building relationships is an identified leadership responsibility that is associated with student achievement. Neuman (2000) also suggested that there are some common leadership strategies and behaviors that improve student achievement: create a shared vision, establish clear priorities, promote professional learning, establish a strong accountability system, build a strong school-to-community relationship, and reorganize and use data to guide instruction.

The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) also outlined standards that will aid school leaders in the kind of professional development that fosters student achievement. One of the more prominent standards is establishing relationships with the broader community to improve learning.

Identifying the “Right” Personnel

The high school leaders unanimously agreed that the “right” personnel is critical in obtaining and sustaining adequate yearly progress (AYP). The principal of Dogwood High School (P-K) stated it this way: “Having a stable, competent faculty and staff is a critical component to having a school environment that obtains consistent high student achievement. It speaks to my philosophy of bringing people together and having everyone involved.” This ideology is also shared by Crowther and Olsen (1996). They contend that teacher leaders are significant in affecting organizational change because of their ability to build community and commitment within the entire school through the modeling the vision of and mission. Beachum and Dentith (2004) also suggest that school leaders should involve teachers in the decision-making process and work collaboratively to improve the educational climate.

Using Data to Guide Instruction and Decision Making

All school leaders acknowledge that they use data to guide instruction and decision making. They discussed the using of the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) data. This test was not used in isolation as the leaders added that trend data, such as, Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) and End of Course Test (EOCT) scores, were very useful in addressing the deficits in Math and English. The leaders also expressed that using data to guide instruction and decision making was a crucial element in the school leader quest to improve achievement and close the gap. Neuman (2000) confirms this belief, as one of the common leadership strategies and behaviors that will improve student achievement is reorganizing and addressing student achievement concerns by using data to guide instruction.

Prince (2004) also stated that under the No Child Left Behind Act, school districts are required to disaggregate student performance data separately by race, socioeconomic status, limited proficiency in English and students with disabilities. All subgroups must increase their test scores and show consistent academic advancement every year or risk losing federal funding.

Setting achievement goals

A majority priority of the leaders in this study was setting achievement goals. While some leaders expressed that most of the goals employed were outlined by the school district, most of the leaders also set target goals in addition to the system-level goals. These target goals were created to address other components of achievement, such as graduation and participation rates. Waters, Marzano, McNulty (2003) identified 21 leadership responsibilities that are associated with student achievement, thereby creating the Balanced Leadership Framework, which describes the tools and skills necessary to improve student achievement. They maintain that establishing clear goals and mission will keep those goals in the forefront of the school's attention.

Additionally, Marzano (2000, 2003) compared school-level factors of researchers and found that earlier his notion of the school-level factors evolved to a more comprehensive view of factors that impact student achievement. These factors are identified by researchers as factors that impact student achievement: guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parental and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism. School leaders must also set goals for closing the gap in achievement, with a goal of 100 percent proficiency in the next decade (Prince, 2004).

Assisting low achievers

Some of the research participants felt that the low achievers in their schools required a lot of attention. The school district suspended the requirement for Advanced Placement and Honors courses for any student who would like to take an advanced level course. This action by the school district has helped some of the low achievers by motivating them to aim high. It was evident throughout the discussion with high school leaders that there is a continued focus on identifying and implementing strategies that provide remediation and extra time for students to achieve. The results in this study established that the Illinois Public School system demonstrated that the achievement gap can be closed. Also, the education of low-income children can be improved through an emphasis on early literacy, hard-working teachers, time for instruction and parent involvement (McGee, 2004).

Involving all stakeholders

As expressed by many school leaders in this study, the challenge is getting parents and community leaders involved in the school to assist and to be a part of the culture of the school. While this is a daunting task, the leaders felt that constant communication and extending an invitation to parents and to the community to participate has helped tremendously in building relationships. One leader stated that, "Any high achieving school has large percentage of volunteers that assist with the day-to-day operation of school, and we knew that to be the case, so we sought out parents. We made them aware of that fact and we spoke about partnering with us" (P-K, Dogwood High School). Schlechy (1990) agrees that school leaders must understand that if America's schools are to meet the needs of the twenty-first century, they must be fundamentally restructured. As

a part of the leader's commitment to the craft of educating students, the leader must gain trust and respect of the stakeholders and continue to reflect on how to improve leadership and add to the culture of the school. The researchers of effective schools further establish the notion that home-to-school relationships are imperative in improving student achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1994).

Monitoring Student Progress and Instruction

Based on research findings of this study, all leaders agreed that a measure of evaluation and monitoring must be in place to affect change. Inspecting what one expects was a resounding theme as leaders highlighted the different methods used to ensure that students are achieving the expected outcome. Waters, Marzano, McNulty (2003) identified 21 leadership responsibilities that are associated with student achievement, thereby creating the Balanced Leadership Framework, which describes the tools and skills necessary to improve student achievement. They maintain that monitoring student progress is a necessary attribute to improving student achievement.

The effective school researchers were the initial key catalyst because they identified research-based characteristics that linked leadership to improved student learning. Accordingly, the following seven correlates identified for improving student achievement were established: clear school mission, high expectation of success, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and time students spend on task, safe and orderly environment, and home-school relations (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1994).

Implementing Strategies to Improve Student Achievement

All schools in this study agreed that there is a constant struggle to identify strategies that are proven to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. Based on the interview responses and the findings, some school leaders were not sure whether or not the strategies used contributed to an improvement in student achievement. However, a majority of leaders believed that the strategies employed may have contributed to improved student achievement in their respective schools. McGee (2004) established that the achievement gap can be closed and the education of low-income children can be improved through an emphasis on early literacy, hard working teachers, time devoted to instruction and parent involvement. In efforts to close the achievement gap and foster high standards teachers must identify students' weaknesses early in their education. That includes the physical and social problems that can prevent children from being ready to learn in school. According to the Southern Regional Education Board, states must find measures to deal with students that are lagging behind, by realizing that different children learn in different ways and at different rates (SREB).

Research Sub-Questions

The next three sub-sections address the supporting research sub question: (1) What is the leader's perception of his or her role in increasing student achievement? (2) What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impact student achievement and (3) what strategies are used by the high school leaders to improve student achievement?

What is the leader's perception of his or her role in increasing student achievement?

In response to sub question 1, the leaders perceived their role in increasing student achievement to be a challenge. While research confirmed that most of the identified behaviors and themes in this research are valid, school leaders still experience difficulty identifying the “right “ personnel, building relationships, and hiring staff with high expectations of students. The participating leaders strongly believed that as a result of the state of Georgia's requiring all teachers to become highly qualified, this task will be much easier. The challenge, as one leader shared, is making sure a teacher is the right fit for your school culture. Most all leaders agreed that what a teacher believes about students will reveal itself in the classroom. “Having high expectation is not just a slogan in education; it is an action that we expect our teachers to exercise as they educate students” (P-A, Magnolia High School). Data from the leader interviews deemed relationship-building as a major barrier in trying to educate this generation of students. Leaders agree that there is much work to be done to bridge the gap between home and school. Leaders also agree that building relationships between students and school personnel can be improved by establishing a trusting relationship built on mutual respect.

What are the behaviors of high school leaders that directly impact student achievement?

In response to sub question 2, the analysis of the research findings revealed that the leader behaviors that directly impact student achievement are as follows: (1) using data to guide instruction and decision-making, (2) setting achievement goals, (3) assisting low achievers, involving all stakeholders, and (4) monitoring student progress and instruction. The general consensus among all high school leaders was that they use Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) data, End of Course Test (EOCT) data,

and trend data to guide instruction and determine goals. They mentioned that this data was used primarily to identify school and departmental goals annually. Leader also used this data to establish benchmarks for students, to assist teachers with lesson plans, for re-teaching methods. The leaders further stated that each department developed a plan for improving core subject areas.

All leaders stated that providing the necessary assistance for low achievers was an arduous task, especially for Oak High School and Dogwood High School which were not Title I schools. Magnolia High School was able to use their Title I funds to secure a literacy and math coach. The leaders from Magnolia High School also mentioned that they were able to provide extra assistance to students in Saturday School and in their Second Chance program. Oak High School and Dogwood High School personnel expressed that they encourage teachers to devise activities and strategies to assist the low achievers, such as the Slam Cram Jam, which was an all night motivation and study session for students to prepare for the High School Graduation Test. The school district in which these schools are located provide Saturday study sessions for the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) and zero and seventh-period remediation. This remediation provided by the school district allows student's to make up courses failed in before and after school sessions.

The researcher found that the leaders at all of the high school were concerned about getting stakeholders involved. The leaders expressed that they involved stakeholders whenever possible, but they also stated that they would like parents and the community to take some ownership in the school and volunteer their time, money, and talents. Marzano (2002, 2003) compared school-level factors of researchers and found

that his earlier notion of the school-level factors evolved to a more comprehensive view of factors that impact student achievement. These factors are identified by researchers as factors that impact student achievement: guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parental and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism.

As previously mentioned by the leaders, continuous student improvement can not continue unless leaders monitor progress established through the use of data. All school leaders believed that monitoring students' progress and instruction was a way to see where they were headed and to see if they needed to make some adjustment to the plans. Davenport and Anderson (2002) confirm this belief, as they outlined an eight-step process to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. The practices are the following: (1) test score desegregation, (2) time-line development, (3) instructional focus, (4) assessment, (5) tutorials, (6) enrichment, (7) maintenance, and (8) monitoring. The instructional leader's role is vital in monitoring teacher and student progress through observations, meetings and evaluations of practices employed.

What strategies are used by high school leaders to reduce the achievement gap?

In response to sub question 3, the following strategies emerged from interviews with the leaders of Magnolia, Oak and Dogwood High Schools. The leaders believe these strategies were the catalyst for change in their school, thereby achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) during the 2005-2006 school year. While the techniques and strategies varied among leaders, many of the strategies employed were different and will confirm that the existing body of strategies on improving student achievement is working. The leaders believe that the following strategies were instrumental in improving student

achievement and closing of the achievement gap in their respective schools: (1) Host a State-of-the-School address annually, inviting all stakeholders, parents, teachers, students, and community leaders. Then share student achievement data, devise a plan for improvement, and ask for assistance in monitoring that plan from all stakeholders. (2) Implement amnesty programs such as Second Chance or Saturday School so that students who are in need of extra time and assistance can achieve some success. (3) To sustain continuous achievement in high school, leaders should monitor the achievement of the ninth-grade cohort groups; this will ultimately affect graduation, participation, and dropout rates. (4) Use eighth-grade trend data, such as the CRCT and ITBS, to address deficiencies in ninth-graders. (5) Use instructional scheduling as a tool to improve student achievement by strategically scheduling the most experienced teachers with the students who need help the most, the low achievers. (6) Implement an Each One Teach One program. This program used all school personnel to mentor a group of students. The goal was to establish a relationship with students and motivate them to do their best in school and on standardized measures. (7) Schools with a large concentration of minority and impoverished students should draft a set of belief statements that are deeply-rooted in the practices and ideologies of Education Trust, 90/90/90 schools, and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the onset of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has provided increased pressure to schools and school districts. The premise of this legislation requires school officials to be accountable for student achievement. The leader's role is an instrumental part in achieving proficiency by 2014. The mandates of

the *No Child Left Behind Legislation* (NCLB, 2001) have prompted school leaders to consider all facets of achievement including the achievement gap. Closing the gap requires standards based on accountability, comprehensive research strategies and intensive support for students.

Schools in the State of Georgia are obligated to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) as outlined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). School leaders are responsible for affecting change and sustaining adequate yearly progress (AYP) in subsequent years. The researcher's findings are consistent with almost all of the findings of various researchers on leadership behaviors, student achievement and the achievement gap.

The leadership behaviors, themes and patterns that emerged from the data collection and data analysis are as follows: (1) high expectations, (2) building relationships, (3) identifying the right personnel, (4) using data to guide instruction and decision-making, (5) setting achievement goals, (6) assisting low achievers, (7) involving all stakeholders, (8) monitoring student and teacher progress, and (9) implementing strategies to improve student achievement. According to this researcher's findings, the use or practice of the nine leadership behaviors, themes, and patterns are actions by school leaders that were instrumental in improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap.

Implications

The implications of this study of leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools include three components: educational practice, educational research, and educational policy. Based on the findings

of this research leaders in educational practice can be encouraged because it provide strategies, activities, and behaviors that are increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap. The respondents felt confident that the strategies and practices employed were the catalyst for change in their respective schools. Results of this study may further contribute to the development of theoretical framework suitable for implementation to be included in leadership training on improving student achievement and closing of the achievement gap in public education.

The researcher's findings will make a valuable contribution to the field of education research, effective school leadership and administration. Since a limited amount of research is yet to be completed in this area of school leadership and student achievement of high school students, this research will serve as a foundation to build a framework for other researchers that can be used to further identify the element of leadership behaviors that improve student achievement and that close the achievement gap.

In addition, implications for policy-makers include the used this research as an indicator for future legislation and funding regarding No Child Left Behind and other educational reforms that seek to improve student achievement. The researcher believes that this research will also contribute to educational policies in school districts across the State of Georgia as they seek to evaluate high school leaders on performance and student outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the review of literature and data collected from respondents in the study the results of this study suggest the following:

- 1.) High school leaders should examine behaviors, strategies and practices that are employed in their school and document what works. The researcher recommends that school leaders engage in reflective practices as they seek to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap.
- 2.) The researcher recommends that high school leaders visit and observe schools that are achieving and sustaining adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the State of Georgia and identify activities and strategies to employ at their respective schools.
- 3.) Future research and investigation could be conducted to include school districts with a larger number of high schools achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP), and with a larger sample of school leaders participating. The researcher would also recommend investigating urban high schools with similar demographics that are achieving success.
- 4.) The researcher recommends additional research on the nine leadership behaviors, themes and patterns of high school leaders that are improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap of high school students. The nine behaviors, themes, and patterns are as follows: (1) high expectations, (2) building relationships, (3) identifying the “right” personnel, (4) setting achievement goals (5) using data to guide instruction and decision-making, (6) assisting low achievers, (7) involving all stakeholders, (8) monitoring student and teacher progress, and (9) implementing strategies to improve student achievement. Additional research on the findings in this study will further validate other studies seeking to link leadership behavior to improved student achievement.

5.) In light of the knowledge gained from participants in this study, specific recommendations for addressing student achievement, particularly in the State of Georgia emerged. They are as follows:

- a) Host a State of the School address; invite all stakeholders, parents, teachers, student, and community leaders. Then share student achievement data, devise a plan for improvements, and ask for assistance in monitoring that plan from all stakeholders.
- b) Implement amnesty programs such as Second Chance and Saturday School so that students who are in need of extra time and assistance can achieve success.
- c) In an effort to sustain continuous achievement in high school, the researcher recommends that leaders monitor the achievement of the ninth grade cohort groups; this will ultimately affect graduation, participation, and dropout rates.
- d) Use eighth-grade trend data such, as the CRCT, to address deficiencies in ninth graders.
- e) Use instructional scheduling as a tool to improve student achievement by strategically scheduling the most experienced teachers with the students who need help the most, the low achievers.
- f) Implement an Each One Teach One program. This program used all school personnel to mentor a group of students. The goal was to establish a relationship with students and motivate them to do their best in school and on standardized measures.
- g) Schools with a large concentration of minorities and impoverished students should draft a set of belief statements that are deeply-rooted in the practices and ideologies of Education Trust, 90/90/90 schools, and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

Dissemination

It is the researcher's belief that the information found in this study would appeal to high school leaders who seek to address the demands as outlined by No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB). High school leaders may find a connection to this study as they seek to identify strategies and practices that are working to improve student achievement. This research presents some fundamental themes and patterns that could broaden the scope of leading educational reform as it relates to the achievement gap.

The researcher plans to present and to distribute findings from this study to high school leaders through professional development. Also, the researcher plans to make a presentation at Georgia's Youth At-Risk conference. The researcher will also conduct workshops, seminars, and open forums on the impact of leadership behaviors on closing the achievement gap between majority and minority high school students in the state of Georgia.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in three selected Georgia high schools. The qualitative research method revealed a rich, thick account of the experience and perception of fifteen high school leaders who demonstrated passion and commitment to identifying the best combination of strategies and practices to improve student achievement. The leaders in this study were eager to share their beliefs, insight, and experiences about the challenge to achieve and to maintain continuous improvements. Each leader who participated in this study overwhelmingly believed that the number one factor for improving student academic achievement is high expectations from the entire faculty and staff of the school.

The leaders also agreed that setting high achievement goals and involving stakeholder were instrumental in achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Phone: 912-

681-5465

Fax: 912-

681-0719

**Institutional Review Board
(IRB)**

Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

Administrative Annex P.O. Box 8005
Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Cynthia Freeman Smalls
2280 Telluride Drive
Douglasville, GA-30135

CC: Dr. Walter Polka
P.O. Box-8131

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: August 1, 2007

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H07235**, and titled "**Leadership Behaviors to Close the Achievement Gap in Selected High Schools in a Suburban School District**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether **or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

INFORMED CONSENT

As a part of the requirements of the doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Georgia Southern University, I am conducting a qualitative study for the purpose of examining the leadership behaviors that improved student achievement in three selected Georgia high school. The strategies and practice of your role as a leader will be the focus of this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study at anytime without penalty or consequence of any kind.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview session to answer questions related to leadership behaviors and practice as a part of a team focusing on: (1) student engagement, (2) parental involvement, (3) Instruction and academic support, and (4) expectations for student. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Your comments will be recorded on audiotape to accurately document your response for this research. After the interview has been completed, the audio tapes will be stored for one year, May 2007-May 2008. All audio tapes will be destroyed after one year.

Although studies have some degree of risk, there is no foreseeable risk in this study beyond those experienced in everyday living. All information is confidential. There will be no indication of names or schools to protect the identity of the participants. You may ask questions about the research. The principal investigator or the faculty advisor will answer any questions related to this study. Contact Cynthia Freeman Smalls at 770-942-5692 with additional questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or the process of IRB approval, contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.

The results of this study may assist leaders with strategies and practice that are improving student achievement. This research may also further validate that what leaders do make the difference in student achievement.

A copy of the results of this research may be obtained by contacting the investigator. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: Leadership Behaviors that Improved Student Achievement in Three Selected Georgia High Schools

Principal Investigator: Cynthia Freeman Smalls, 2280 Telluride Drive, Douglasville, GA 30135
770-942-5692, Cynthia_freemansmalls@georgiasouthern.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Walter Polka, Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development

P.O. Box 8131, Statesboro, GA 30460-8131, wpolka@georgiasouthern.edu

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

1. During the 2006 school year student achievement in your school was improved significantly. What activities employed by you and your staff to increase achievement?
2. Do you and your faculty set achievement goals, if so how do identify what those goals are?
3. What strategies are you currently using to assist low achievers?
4. To what extent do you involve parents in student achievement?
5. How do you ensure that instructional time is protected and teachers have the necessary resources and time needed to improve student achievement?
6. Do you use data GHS GT data to improve student achievement, and how do you use this data to improve student achievement?
7. What recommendations or suggestions would you give to leaders as they work to improve student achievement?

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH QUESTION AND INTERVIEW QUESTION MATRIX

Research Question & Interview Question Matrix

| Research Question | Leaders Interview Questions | Focus Strand | Primary & Secondary Research |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| 2,3 | 1 | Leadership & Student Achievement | Schmoker, 2001; www.ccsso.org ; Barton, 2004; Northouse, 2004; Hallinger, 2003; www.sreb.org ; Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2003; Bali & Alvarez, 2004 |
| 2,3 | 2 | Setting Achievement Goals | Schmoker, 2001; Popham, 2006; Ikpa, 2003; Davenport & Anderson, 2002; Bali & Alvarez, 2004 |
| 1,2,3 | 3 | Assisting Low Achievers | Popham, 2006; Aronson, 2004; Hendrie, 1998; McGee, 2004; Ikpa, 2003; Andrews and Soder, 1987 |
| 1,2,3 | 4 | Involving Stakeholders In Student Achievement | Popham, 2006, Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2003; Barton, 2004; Neuman, 2000; Edmonds, 1979 and Lezotte, 1994; McGee, 2004; www.ccsso.org ; Schlechy, 1990 |
| 1,2,3 | 5 | Monitoring Student Progress and Instruction | Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2003 Popham, 2006; Davenport & Anderson, 2002; Edmonds, 1979 and Lezotte, 1994 |

| | | | |
|-------|---|---|--|
| 1,2,3 | 6 | Using Data To Improve Achievement | Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2003; Neuman, 2000; Popham, 2006; Schmoker, 2001; Davenport & Anderson, 2002; www.nces.ed.gov ; O'Donnell & George, 2005 |
| 1,3 | 7 | Strategies to Improve Student Achievement | Popham, 2006; Barton, 2004; Aronson, 2004; Christie, 2002; Ikpa, 2003; Williams, 2003; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; www.nces.ed.gov ; www2.edtrust.org ; Rothstein, 2005; Williams, 2003; McGee, 2004; Davenport & Anderson, 2002; Bali & Alvarez, 2004 |