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## Success in One High-Poverty, Urban Elementary School: A Case Study

Shavonna L. Holman

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, 1forashavonna@cox.net

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Success in One High-Poverty, Urban Elementary School:

A Case Study

By

Shavonna Leigh Holman

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Marilyn L. Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

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STUDENT SUCCESS IN ONE HIGH-POVERTY, URBAN ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL:

A CASE STUDY

Shavonna L. Holman, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2011

Advisor: Marilyn Grady

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the efforts implemented in a high-poverty, urban elementary school in order to increase academic achievement. The central research question was:

1. How do teachers and administrators in a high-poverty, urban school describe the strategies they use to achieve academic success?

The sub-questions were:

1. What are the aspects of the instructional program that assure student success for all students?
2. What changes occurred in the school to achieve its current status?
3. How have the changes been implemented to assure student success?
4. What resources have been instrumental to achieve student success in the school?

Interviews were conducted with 16 individuals and included the previous principal, the current principal, and the assistant principal, as well as teachers and specialists.

Five themes emerged from the analysis of the transcripts. The themes were Instructional Practices; Changes; Leadership Practices; Teachers, Parents, and Community Involvement; and Professional Development.

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter Lailah, whose birth inspired me to work harder to complete this process. While working through the late nights and long days on maternity leave, you rocked on my lap, slept on my shoulder, and nursed; all the while I pecked along the computer keys with a single hand. You taught me how to become a master multi-tasker. I hope that one day when you are old enough to understand, that you realize how you motivated me to dig deep inside to find the energy I needed to day after day non-stop and how you so graciously influenced me to stay up all night typing when you didn't sleep. I hope that you understand that your presence alone stimulated me in a way in which no one else could ever do. I am very fortunate to have you and I love you more than words could ever begin to explain.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

My experiences of growing up in a high-poverty community and attending a high-poverty school extend back to my earliest memories. I grew up in the inner-city of Omaha, NE, otherwise referred to as "North O." During my childhood, my experiences were mostly positive, and I never knew there could be more to life because this was the only life I knew. Although we didn't have everything we saw on television, we had what everyone else on the block had, so that was good enough. We had family; we had friends; we had fun, and, if we didn't have food, one of the neighbors did. It was nothing to go across the street and make a sandwich at the neighbor's house and then go back outside to play until the lights came on.

During this time period, there was mandatory busing. So even though there was a neighborhood school not too far away, it didn't mean that we attended that school. The neighborhood school housed grades kindergarten through first grade and fifth and sixth grade. For the in-between grades (second, third, and fourth), students were bused to another school. All the neighborhood kids walked to school together even if they were being bused because the bus stop

happened to be at the neighborhood school. Most of us were pretty close, so we always looked out for one another due to other negative things that were going on in the community.

School always seemed like a safe haven. I never felt scared, intimidated, nervous, or even worried. I knew school was a place I could come and enjoy me and learn at the same time. But it was also at school where I mostly learned there were differences between myself and the neighborhood kids in comparison to the other students where we were being bused. We didn't look the same. We didn't dress the same. We didn't even talk the same. As a child I wondered why we were different but at the same time never really cared about our differences.

Being bused across town (which really wasn't across town I only realized as an adult, but still a distance) was exciting to me because I loved going to the new school. It was bigger, there were more teachers, and the building just seemed brighter and more cheerful than my neighborhood school. We even had a school song that we sang at the assemblies that I still remember as an adult. There were two gyms and a huge library, and they had a Student Council. It seemed like the complete opposite of my neighborhood school. It was actually a place that I loved

going to each day. In this area, we didn't see any Block Home signs (a sign that informed kids that it was a safe place to go in case of any danger) in the windows of houses as we did in our neighborhood. So to me, this community and school seemed safe, especially since we had to ride a bus to get there.

I hated having to go back to my neighborhood school for fifth and sixth grade. I didn't want to go back to what seemed like a dingy, run-down building that didn't even have an office, or a school song, or bright lights. After seeing and experiencing what a non-poverty school was like, I truly understood that where we lived, how we dressed, and what our school symbolized that we were poor and they weren't. Even though I had some of my absolute best teachers at my neighborhood school (who actually influenced me to become an educator), I still felt like it was better to have than to not have.

#### *A Professional*

Having had these experiences of growing up in a poverty-stricken community, but also knowing there was something more in life, I knew that I had to become a teacher to influence and encourage children who would take part in the same scenario I did as mandatory busing was still in place. Ironically, it wasn't until my first year

of teaching that the Board of Education decided to do away with mandatory busing and implement 'neighborhood schools.' This meant that wherever a student lived, they would attend the school closest to their home and would receive busing to that school if they lived so many miles away from that school. A student would also have an option school as well that wasn't their neighborhood school. Ironically, my first and only teaching job happened to be at the neighborhood school I disliked as a child. It was a bittersweet moment because all the negative thoughts from my childhood resurfaced, but, at the same time, it was a good feeling because I did actually attend this school. To my surprise, the school was absolutely nothing like I remembered. It had been renovated. It was bright. There was an office and a huge library. It looked like a school that students would be proud and happy to attend. However, although the physical qualities were there and the perfect administration was there, it was still lacking the financial resources that other non-inner city schools had. On top of this, even though we grew up in an impoverished community, it was worse off than what I could remember. Businesses had closed and crime had increased. The children of the community suffered far more than we did as children. So the only thing left to do was to be the best teacher I



could, building relationships through connections and experiences, providing challenges for my students, building them up as individuals and giving them hope to hang onto, and using every single moment to teach them something.

As the money wasn't there, many resources weren't there. I, like many other educators, spent personal money on finding ways to teach and to connect to my students. I remember not having all the textbooks I needed for social studies, but because I was somewhat savvy with technology, I incorporated it into my lessons and used multiple resources from the public library. As time passed, our school was still in dire need of financial support. Many of our counterparts had whatever they needed and wanted in order to effectively teach a classroom of students, while we struggled to keep up with the bare minimum of technology. Although the financial situation was truly unfair from school to school, we realized that our students needed it just as bad as other students, and we had to do what we could to support and teach our students to the best of our ability. Despite the money issues and the school inequities, we had supportive parents. With a Free/Reduced Lunch student population of 92%, we always had more than 90% parent participation at all Parent/Teacher Conferences

and school events. This didn't solve all the problems, but having that parent/school connection helped tremendously.

Educating students was our primary focus no matter what the situation. Money or no money, we found ways to reach and teach our students. From the administration to the custodians in the building, everyone was on the same page and had the same goal in mind. Our students would not become another statistic or stereotype of an impoverished community. With staff and students on board with the same vision and mission in mind, our students surpassed most schools in the district on assessments. We rose from the bottom to the very top in a matter of a few years.

Although financial support wasn't prevalent, the desire, passion, and support from parents, students, and staff were. Needless to say, after teaching for six years at my old neighborhood school, then becoming the Assistant Principal there, I would choose this school any day over being bused somewhere else.

### *Background*

Although there was a happy ending to this story and the school is still making strides and continues to be a model for other inner city schools in the district, there are many other high-poverty schools nationwide that continue to have multiple struggles. Accountability in

education, brought to the forefront of education reform by the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), relies on a common goal, increased student achievement for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Stone, 1998). Although this brand of reform was supposed to become a 21<sup>st</sup> Century formula for changing American public schools, the change has been minimal. However, research has confirmed that effective educators can improve the academic outcomes of low-income students and provide them with hope and promise for the future (Banks, 2001).

The primary purpose of a good education is to ensure that every child has a chance to be successful in school and in life. Yet, from the start, the odds are stacked against children from high-poverty environments achieving their fullest potential (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.). Critics of public schools have evoked images of failure from horror stories about schools in Boston, New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Their perception, fed by numerous reports and observations, is that urban students achieve less in school, attain less education, and encounter less success in the labor market later in life (Cuban, 2001).

A majority of our nation's classrooms are in urban, poor and diverse communities (Galley, 2003). At first glance, some educators see the traditional image that characterizes urban students as underachieving, unmotivated, and at risk. Their perception, as well as many in the public, suggests that these students will put forth nothing when it comes to education, therefore amounting to nothing in the future. However, what many fail to realize is that the students attending schools with both an urban location and a high poverty concentration are faced with many extraneous factors that the majority of their counterparts do not have to worry about on a daily basis. Problems outside the classroom which affect students learning tend to have a great impact in the classroom in urban schools (Leland, 2005). These problems directly affect student's motivation which then has an unequivocal effect on their achievement. Therefore, unlike suburban students who attend schools in a safe and pleasant environment, where learning is the only priority; learning is not the primary concern for urban students. Hence, it is our responsibility as educators to do all we can in order to reach, teach, and promote success of all students.

Hilliard (1998) stated:

1. When children don't learn, systems are deficient.
2. The race of the child does not tell us anything about the child's mental capacity to succeed in school.
3. Socioeconomic status is not a barrier to learning, if the student is exposed to good teaching.
4. Racism and bigotry are negative factors in teaching and learning.
5. Our children are not succeeding mainly because the masses of them have been abandoned.
6. The courts can mandate physical desegregation, but not an educational environment that is high quality and nurturing. (pp. 74-75)

#### *Importance of the Study*

Although there have been many studies about academic achievement in high-poverty schools in regards to specific subject areas, especially in middle and high school, there has been a limited amount of research

conducted on academic achievement as a whole at the elementary level. However, Douglas B. Reeves, president of the Center for Performance Assessment, conducted research of high poverty schools that demonstrated high academic performance based on the 90/90/90 technique which signifies that 90% or more of the students are eligible for free/reduced lunch, 90% or more of the students are members of an ethnic minority group, and 90% or more of the students met the district or state academic standards in reading or another area.

The movement to reform education in the U.S. is fundamentally about improving urban public schools. Every debate about standards, testing, governance, busing, vouchers, charter schools, social promotions, class size, and accountability are discussions – at their core – about public education in the cities (Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy 2002). In the 1980's, researchers began to document the attributes of successful schools (then called "effective schools") serving high-poverty populations. More recent research shows that many more schools in poor communities than previously believed perform well as measured by state accountability plans (Center for Public Education, n.d.). Never before has there been a time when our nation's schools, especially urban schools, have been

under much scrutiny. Although there might be an overwhelming lack of student achievement in urban schools, there are still a significant number of students, who despite the circumstances, overcome the obstacles and manage to succeed.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

Educators working in densely populated urban districts are always seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students, establishing programs that will be educationally beneficial for students, and trying to provide the most valuable professional development opportunities to ensure teacher and administrator effectiveness. Although all of these efforts are in place, there are still many "inner-city" schools in the district that are not academically on level with their counterparts. However, there are a few that have risen far above expectations to surpass common perceptions of what an urban school is and how it performs.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the efforts implemented in one high-poverty, urban elementary school to increase academic achievement. The results of the study indicated practices and strategies that were most successful in increasing academic achievement within the selected elementary school.

### *Research Questions*

The following questions guided the study.

#### *Central Research Question*

How do teachers and administrators in a high-poverty, urban school describe the strategies they used to achieve academic success?

#### *Sub-Questions*

1. What aspects of the instructional program assure student success for all students?
2. What changes occurred in the school to achieve its current status?
3. How have the changes been implemented to assure student success?
4. What resources have been instrumental in the current student success at the school?

#### *Definition of Terms*

*Minority student*- a student who is part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment.

*Poverty*- is a state of condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support; also known as being poor.



*Urban*- A term used to describe most anything that derives from low-income communities that typically have a high saturation of minorities, high crime rate, high unemployment rate, high drug use rate, and low real estate value.

*Urban Schools*-schools having a higher concentration of low-income or students in poverty, higher concentrations of special education students, higher percentage of minority students, higher percentage of discipline issues; with many having limited financial or physical resources to properly accommodate and/or educate the students.

*Professional Development*-a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement.

*Effective Teacher*-one who is committed to students and learning, knows the subject matter, is responsible for managing students, can think systematically about their own practice, is a member of the learning community (Clark, p. 11).

*Success*- growth, development, improvement, or achievement of something desired, planned, or attempted.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

There has been much research about minority students dubbed at-risk and schools that are severely underfunded with few resources to support the staff and students. However, some of these schools manage to succeed with high academic achievement rates. This review will focus on four aspects of school success in high-poverty urban elementary schools identified in the literature. These aspects are: Standards, Effective Leaders and Leadership Practices, Quality, Valuable, and Effective Teachers, and Professional Development.

The effort to close the achievement gap that exists in schools in the U.S. is fundamentally about improving urban public schools. Every debate about standards, testing, governance, busing, vouchers, charter schools, social promotions, class size, and accountability are discussions – at their core – about public education in the cities (Snipes, 2002). In the 1980's, researchers began to document the attributes of successful schools (then called "effective schools") serving high-poverty populations. Recent research shows that more schools in poor communities than previously believed perform well as measured by state

accountability plans (Center for Public Education, n.d.)

There are many factors that contribute to student success in high-poverty urban elementary schools. Most people agree that high-quality leadership and high-quality teachers are at the forefront.

### *Standards*

In an era of school accountability, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act 2002, which is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education, mandates that highly qualified teachers be placed in every classroom. This standards-based, curriculum-testing-accountability movement, originated as a critique of the low quality of academic content and skills offered to urban students who will be essential in filling entry-level jobs in a knowledge-based economy. Uniform standards, frequent testing to determine quality, and rewarded penalties are necessary, reformers claim, to ensure that no American child is "left behind." (Cuban, 2001). Although this brand of reform has become a 21<sup>st</sup> century formula for changing the public schools system, many reformers confuse setting standards with standardization.

Generally speaking, what exists in the United States is a three-tiered system of schooling. Nationwide, there is

a "first-tier" of schools-about one in 10-that already exceed the high academic standards and test-score thresholds set by their states. A second tier of schools - about four or five out of 10-either meet or come close to meeting their states' standards and cutoff scores on tests. The rest, the third tier of schools, do not. More of these latter schools are located in urban districts with high concentrations of poor and minority families, where struggling learners perform in the lowest quartiles of academic achievement and often drop out (Cuban, 2001).

Although many urban schools are still seeking the answer to how to reach their population of students, how to improve learning and meet state standards, and how to develop high-performance culture, there are some urban elementary schools that do. First and foremost, for students to achieve academically, they must have a safe and disciplined environment. High-performing schools' approach to achieving safety and discipline is also rooted in the culture of high expectations. In an atmosphere where teacher and student treat one another with respect, behavior that is respectful of people, property, and self is the norm (Center for Public Education, n.d.). Carter (2000) credits the focus on achievement as "the key to discipline," for it models for students the rewards of

"self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem." Reeves (2003) found noticeable and profound differences between the assessment and instructional practices of urban schools with high achievement and those of low achievement. The higher achieving schools had a laser-like focus on student achievement. Up and down each hallway, the casual observer would see a plethora of charts, graphs, and tables displaying student achievement information, as well as data about the continuous improvements students made.

Another foundation of high-performing schools is the culture of high expectations shared by the school's principal, teachers, staff, and students. Central to this culture is the conviction that all children can achieve and succeed academically (Center for Public Education, n.d.). Schools that establish high expectations for all students--and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations--have high rates of academic success. Conveying positive and high expectations to students can occur in several ways. Developing and fostering personal relationships with students in an urban school is the most powerful and the most obvious. Once those relationships are formed, it is much easier to find out the student's strengths and interests, and then use that as a starting point for learning. When principals establish a culture of

high expectations for themselves and their staffs, teachers set high expectations for themselves and their students, and students learn to have high expectations for themselves—and the adults around them (Center for Public Education, n.d.).

*Effective Leaders and Leadership Practices*

Effective leadership is at the core of every successful organization. The evolving nature of school environments has placed new demands on educational leaders. Where knowledge of school management, finance, legal issues and state mandates was once the primary focus for the preparation of school leaders, education reform has created an urgent need for a strong emphasis on development of instructional leadership skills to promote good teaching and high level learning. And for many school leaders, what is familiar is command and control procedures—define the problem, prescribe solutions, issue directives, monitor compliance, and use carrots and sticks to motivate performance, methods which are hardly the substance of a high-performance culture (Sparks, 2003). Moreover, educational leaders must recognize and assume a shared responsibility not only for students' intellectual and educational development, but also for their personal, social, emotional, and physical development. Carter (2000)

asserts that the presence of a strong principal who holds everyone to the highest standards is the most notable factor in creating a high-performing school. As stated by Sparks (2003), one of the most important responsibilities of a principal is the development of a high-performance culture in which productive relationships thrive. Because culture is the sum total of interactions among community members and the beliefs that they bring to those interactions, the creation of such a culture means establishing norms and practices that lead to trust and mutual respect, continuous improvement, and a team-focused collaboration. By building these relationships, effective leaders are able to develop the skills and talents of those around them while collaboratively creating a vision and establishing a climate for people to reach their highest level of achievement.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argue that the following three principles are necessary for school success:

- **Setting directions:** Leaders help to identify, articulate and develop shared goals that encourage a sense of common purpose among followers. To be successful, a leader must create high-performance expectations and then

communicate effectively those goals and expectations.

- **Developing people:** Leaders influence organizational members to strive toward the achievement of these shared goals by offering intellectual stimulation and providing individualized support. Successful leaders provide an appropriate role model, using their own practices and performance to demonstrate desired behaviors, i.e., they “walk their talk.”
- **Redesigning the organization:** Leaders strengthen school cultures, modify organizational structures, and build collaborative processes that match the changing nature of the improvement agenda.

In addition, research conducted by Jacobson et al. (2007) suggests that in order to be effective, one would need to be a building and instructional leader, who is both visible and vigilant on a daily basis. By having a very visible presence throughout the building during the day, especially during arrival and dismissal, is key in creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere. Effective leaders need to make it essential to personally greet staff, students, and parents, as well as making community members feel welcomed in the



school. As the building leader, there has to be a very clear tone for the school that children have the right to learn and it is their teachers' duty to teach them. There also have to be clearly defined rules and procedures for everyone to follow along with clearly defined and understood consequences. Leading by example and modeling expected behaviors by the school leader is a practice that sets the tone for everyone. In an urban school setting it is crucial for the leader to be focused and purposeful, and always attentive to being consistent with what they say and what they do. There are some successful classrooms in schools that lack leadership, but there are no successful schools for hard-to-teach children that lack strong leadership (Cunningham, 2007).

The principal is like the hub of a wheel with teachers at the end of each spoke. Communication moves back and forth along the spoke to the hub but not around the circumference of the wheel (Sparks, 2003). Effective school principals are able to provide school environments more conducive to learning and may be more successful than their less effective peers in attracting, supporting, and retaining high quality teachers (Leithwood et al, 2004).

*Quality, Valuable, and Effective Teachers*

Effective teaching is the most important school factor in a child's education. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) report, the definition of teacher effectiveness has been slowly evolving. Initially, effectiveness was defined by meeting a set of vague criteria associated with the effective schools movement. This evolved into the multiple strategies of methods and instruction. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is an example of a model that is considered to reflect effective teaching. The standards were created in 1987 after the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession released *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1986). The standards set forth a vision for accomplished teaching that include five core propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

5. Teachers are members of learning communities (Lemon-Smith, p. 915 as cited in Hilliard, 1991).

Never before has there been such a critical demand for quality teachers and instruction to meet and overcome the barriers and challenges of teaching in our nation's urban high-poverty schools. Because high-poverty schools are often challenging places to teach, they suffer disproportionately from small applicant pools and high teacher turnover- and, as a result, their teaching force often includes a disproportionate number of new and less-experienced teachers (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.).

According to the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future (2002), 50% of urban teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years of their career. Reasons reported for leaving include lack of support from school administrations, student behavior problems, classroom intrusions, and not being adequately prepared for the demand of urban teaching (Dill & Stafford-Johnson, 2003). In the face of an increasingly diverse school population, schools and districts must struggle to maintain standards for teacher quality while continuously recruiting bright new teachers and seeking to retain their most effective existing teachers. The dual goals of recruiting

and retaining effective teachers are often difficult to realize because of insufficient and sometimes dwindling resources (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006).

In addition to the lack of experience of most of the teachers in high-poverty schools, there also exists a mismatch between the backgrounds of most of the teachers and the students for whom they are responsible. Zeichner (2003) suggests that demographic changes and the increase in the diversity of learners, including the area related to social class, have led to an increasing gap between the backgrounds of students and teachers. Although the federal government attempts to address teacher equity more directly, it is unquestionably still a major issue:

The federal government, through the Title I program, sends billions of dollars a year to districts specifically to ensure that students from low-income families get extra services and support. Title I presumes that there are equal educational opportunities for all students *before* federal funds are applied, and that the federal money provides "extras" for students growing up in poverty. But the way that teachers are assigned to schools makes the presumption patently untrue. The schools that have the most low-income children get the most federal Title I

money, but they also get the least in terms of teacher talent. High-poverty schools are more likely to have inexperienced teachers and under-qualified teachers. These teachers are paid less than veteran and fully credentialed teachers who are concentrated in more affluent schools. Consequently, school districts actually often spend less money in Title I schools and other high-poverty schools than in other schools, even after the addition of Title I funds. Title I is supposed to prohibit this kind of inequality, but the law contains a massive loophole. The law ostensibly demands "comparability" in the educational opportunities provided in Title I schools and non-Title I schools. But the law allows districts to ignore disparities in teacher qualifications across different schools, and the resulting disparities in teacher salaries. Any district that has a single-salary schedule - that is, that pays all teachers according to the same criteria - is deemed to have established comparability, despite the fact that a single-salary schedule does nothing to ensure equality in how teachers are assigned to schools. (Peske & Haycock, 2006).

It is well documented that teacher quality is the single most accurate indicator of students' academic success and achievement rates (Haberman, 1995). Also according to research, it has been confirmed that effective educators can improve the academic outcome of low-income students and provide them with hope and promise for the future (Haberman, 1995). Wenglinsky (2000) believed that the classroom practices are important to learning. In his research, he found that what happens in the classroom is critical and that how a teacher teaches is important. Practices that promote higher order thinking and active participation are most successful. "Teachers are the mediators who provide or fail to provide the essential experiences that permit students to release their awesome potential" (Hilliard, 1991). While there is no magic potion to deliver improved student achievement, there are several efforts and factors which help to produce successful high-poverty urban schools.

#### *Professional Development*

High quality professional learning by all teachers is critically important if high quality teaching is to occur in every classroom (Sparks, 2003). Nearly every teacher across the country participates in some form of professional development every year. Traditional

professional development programs have been described as "one-shot" deals because typically it calls for the district or school to bring in an expert in a certain area to provide a one-time training or workshop. Many researchers, experts, administrators, and even teachers find this method not practical and wasteful of time and resources. This method very seldom allows for any versatility in meeting the needs of teachers, therefore many teachers become uninterested and tune out the expert. According to Lieberman, this classic model utilizes a "one-size fits all" approach and does not recognize the many levels of skills, practice, and needs of the teachers that attend. There is no continuity, cohesion, or follow-through with this type of professional development model, therefore being highly ineffective. Survey data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that in 2000, teachers typically spent about a day or less in professional development on any one content area. (NCES, 2001). Even though most teachers participate in some form of professional development, participation does not always render effective results.

Professional development generally refers to ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers, and other education personnel, through their schools and districts.

Effective professional development is seen as increasingly vital to school success and teacher satisfaction. With schools today facing an array of complex challenges—from working with an increasingly diverse population of students, to integrating new technology in the classroom, to meeting rigorous academic standards and goals—observers have stressed the need for teachers to be able to enhance and build on their instructional knowledge (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996).

In 2010, there has been much research on how to improve professional development so that it becomes a more meaningful experience while providing staff with strategies that best fit them. In a diverse urban district, there are students with various learning abilities, students who speak different languages, students with behavioral issues, and students who are on level and gifted. The teachers who educate students in non-urban schools do not face the same challenges as teachers who teach in urban schools. This is why professional development has to be streamlined to meet the needs of the specific teacher.

The goal of professional development is to move all teachers toward expertise in their particular field. In order to do this, urban districts must adhere to the advice of the National Council of Staff Development by working to



create sustained, result-driven professional development that incorporates traditional methods with 21<sup>st</sup> century methodologies. Most importantly, these opportunities have to be embedded in the everyday work life of teachers so that they can continuously grow. Numerous experts have studied what constitutes effective professional development. The characteristics that influence the effectiveness of professional development, however, are multiple and highly complex (Guskey, 2003). Of the many characteristics that have been examined, the ones most commonly supported by educational experts as improving the quality and effectiveness of professional development include:

- Enhances teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge
- Based on the best available research evidence
- Incorporates principles of adult learners
- Relevant and focused (i.e., results-driven)
- Standards-based
- Ongoing and continuous
- Embedded in day-to-day responsibilities
- Aligned with school-wide improvement goals
- Collaborative and collegial

- Provides opportunities for discussion, reflection, and follow-up (Guskey, 2003).

The emphasis on teacher professional development and training should be an effort that is ever-changing and designed to support teachers according to their needs. It should engage, challenge and meet each teacher so that there is a successful snowball effect from the teachers to the students. The focus needs to be on building a culture of professional learning instead of building a culture of compliance.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methods

A qualitative research approach was used to study the success of one high-poverty, urban elementary school. Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. It allows the researcher to study in natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Through this type of research, individuals' reality is based on their perceptions. These perceptions allow the researcher to emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry and tell individualized stories that are full of real, rich, and deep data. This design includes "the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). The design is emergent to allow the researcher to make changes to better address the research (Creswell, 2007).

Hatch (2002) states that the objects of study in qualitative research are "The lived experiences of real people in real settings." The knower and known are interactive and inseparable (Miller, 2000). Relationships are formed and there is a form of trust developed between the participants and the researcher as there is social interaction between the two. The qualitative researcher seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it (Hatch, 2002). As stated by Shope (2009), the qualitative researcher is not objective yet tries to report as neutrally as possible. Because the qualitative researcher is part of the process, his or her primary interest lies in the process. The researcher collaborates and sometimes participates with the culture or participants because the experiences are important in data collection. As an observer of the human condition, it is also important for the researcher to participate in order to understand particular phenomenon completely or so they do not miss any important details. The qualitative researcher observes what is going on and does not try to prove a hypothesis.

### *Case Study*

A case study design was used to address and understand how a high-poverty, urban elementary school succeeds. Case study research, according to Creswell (2007), is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case), or multiple bounded systems (cases), over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based-themes (p.73). The types of qualitative case studies are distinguished by the size of the bounded case, such as whether the case involves one individual, several individuals, a group, an entire program, or an activity. They also may be distinguished in terms of the intent of the case analysis.

Creswell (2007) identified three variations in terms of intent: the single instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case studies, and the intrinsic case study. In a single instrumental case study (Stake 1995), the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue. For the purposes of my study, I used a single instrumental case

study because as the researcher I wanted to provide insight into an issue or theme.

Qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. When the approach is applied correctly, it becomes a valuable method for health science research to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Merriam (1988) stated that research focused on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education. Qualitative case study research approaches a problem of practice from a holistic perspective in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than in conformation. Such insights into aspects of educational practice can have a direct influence on policy, practice and future research. One of the advantages of this approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant while enabling participants to tell their stories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Through these stories

the participants describe their views of reality, and this enables the researcher to better understand the participants' actions (Lather, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993). Case study research is more than simply conducting research on a single individual or situation. This approach has the potential to deal with simple through complex situations. It enables the researcher to answer "how" and "why" type questions, while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated. A case study is an excellent opportunity to gain tremendous insight into a case. It enables the researcher to gather data from a variety of sources and to converge the data to illuminate the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

#### *Purposeful Sampling*

Purposeful sampling for qualitative research has been described as "selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth" (Schmacher & McMillan, 1993). The intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth understanding of a central phenomenon. Participants in qualitative research are chosen specifically for the information they can provide to help the researcher explore the central phenomenon more deeply—there is nothing random about the sample in qualitative research. According to Creswell, purposeful sampling can help you develop a

detailed understanding of the central phenomenon that can provide useful information, help people learn about the phenomenon, or give a voice to silenced people. Purposeful sampling intends to find a sample population that best represents or helps to understand the central phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007). Although it is argued that no direct relationship exists between the number of participants and the quality of the study, I had 16 participants for the study. The former principal, the current principal, and the assistant principal were chosen because as previously learned, they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem. The 13 other individuals were teachers and specialists in the school.

#### *Permissions*

I obtained approval from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board to conduct this study (see Appendix A). I also obtained permission from the school district to conduct the study with their assistance, including having the right to contact several staff members at one of the elementary schools (see Appendix B).



### *Data Collection*

Qualitative interviews are special kinds of conversations or speech events that are used by researchers to explore informants' experiences and interpretations (Mishler, 1986; Spradley, 1979). Patton (1990) explains that the central strength of interviewing is that it provides a means for doing what is very difficult or impossible to do any other way—finding out “what is in and on someone else’s mind.”

Conducting personal interviews was my primary data collection strategy. Through this interview process, I was able to find out what specific views each individual held while hearing their story. Each interview began with background questions that allowed the participants to talk about familiar information, got them used to the interview context and recorder, and eased their concerns about what the interview would be like (Hatch, 2002 p. 103). As a qualitative researcher, I sought to capture participant perspectives by asking open-ended questions designed to get informants talking about their experiences and understandings (Hatch, 2002 p. 102). I used probing questions in order to elicit in-depth information and encourage elaboration from the participants. The emphasis was on understanding participant points of view, not getting through the questions (Bogden & Biklen, 1992).

Interview protocols (see Appendix C) were used to guide the interviews for the administrators and the teachers. I visited with the assistant principal to determine the potential interviewees based on who she perceived to be the most articulate spokespersons for the successes of the school. Even though the assistant principal suggested potential interviewees, she had no knowledge of who actually decided to participate.

After subjects were identified, they were invited to participate through a letter of invitation (see Appendix D). Once they agreed to participate, I introduced my research project and shared with them the informed consent letter (see Appendix E). For confidentiality, the selected individuals were identified with fictitious names. All information concerning participants was kept confidential and identities were not revealed. All personal information, phone numbers and addresses obtained were also kept confidential. All interviews were conducted in a location convenient for the interviewees. All interviews took approximately one hour to complete.

I began each interview by introducing my research project and reading a short disclaimer. I allowed time for each participant to read and sign the informed consent form. Each interview consisted of asking the participants

open-ended questions regarding my research topic and their experiences describing it. Each interview was audio-taped using a digital recorder and the recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist (see Appendix F). All recorded interviews were erased after being transcribed and a copy of the transcription was given to each participant for further clarifications or corrections.

#### *Data Analysis*

After the interviews were transcribed, I explored all the data by rereading all the information. I personally coded the transcriptions. Coding for any purposes requires that you are familiar with the data and ensures that you get closer to the data (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). I used an open coding format. Coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data. The object of the coding process is to make sense out of the text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into specific themes (Creswell, 2007).

#### *Verification Procedures*

Several researchers have addressed the idea of a qualitative practice of validating the findings.

Validating findings means that the researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of the findings through strategies... (Creswell, 2007). To maintain validity, it was important as a researcher to be an unbiased listener, to record accurately, be candid, be reflexive, and to seek feedback when needed. In order to demonstrate the credibility of my research project and increase the accuracy of the findings, three forms of verification procedures were implemented: thick, rich descriptions, researcher reflexivity, and peer debriefing.

The method of thick, rich descriptions allows readers to envision and share experiences based on the deep and detailed descriptions. Denzin (1989) explained that the process of writing using thick description is to provide as much detail as possible. It may involve describing a small slice of interaction, experience, or action; locating individuals in specific situations; bringing a relationship or an interaction alive between two or more persons; or providing a detailed rendering of how people feel. Creswell mentioned that by using vivid details, the readers will understand that the account is credible, therefore allowing them to make decisions about the applicability of the findings.

Researcher reflexivity is from the standpoint of the researcher. This method is important because I created a separate section as the role of the researcher and then incorporated personal experiences and findings expressed through a narrative account. This method was beneficial because I attended and worked for six years in an urban school.

My last form of verification was peer debriefing. Peer debriefing was a process that involved having an external person (who is familiar with the topic) review the research project while providing support, yet challenging me as a researcher. This option was very useful to me as my peer (advisor) pushed me to the maximum, making sure to cover all aspects of the topic and delivering useful feedback.

## Chapter 4

## Vignettes

The day I walked into this school, I knew in my heart that I made a good decision in selecting it for my study. I was immediately greeted at the door with a friendly smile, "hello," and "welcome" from a delightful student safety patrol member who was monitoring the entrance. I greeted him back with a smile, "hello," and "thank you" and walked to the office which was to the right of the entrance. There were three people in the office: two women and one man. The secretary introduced herself and welcomed me to the school, then asked how she could help me. Immediately I knew this was unlike any school I was used to. I told her who I was and the secretary smiled even wider and welcomed me again. The gentleman, who happened to be the principal, greeted me by saying, "Well, welcome Miss Nebraska, you finally made it." The two ladies in the office seemed very interested in me, especially since I was from Nebraska. Several questions emerged since they were curious about my purpose for being at their school and what it was like living in Nebraska. Everyone seemed especially friendly, and I felt very comfortable being there. The

principal introduced me to the Assistant Principal, who was in charge of my visit and my welcome wagon.

After chatting with the assistant principal, she gave me a tour of the building and provided me the history of the school. I noticed as we walked around, how quiet the hallways were. When we peeked into different classrooms, learning was consistently the focus. I could tell that this was a school of high expectations and that the whole school's environment was conducive to learning.

I became more and more excited after meeting different teachers and receiving hugs from students. It felt so incredibly good to be around students after leaving my own. They were just as inquisitive as the secretaries about my living in Nebraska and coming all the way to Virginia to learn about their school. I could tell that students and staff took great pride in their school and what their school stood for. Having been in a school system myself for more than ten years, it just seemed like the students at this school walked around with their heads a little higher, wore their uniforms with integrity, and were proud to be a part of their school's culture. The staff was just as friendly, making sure to invite me to all the different festivities that were taking place as it happened to be Teachers' Appreciation Week. I felt like I hit the

jackpot...not only was I at an amazing school; I also "lucked out" being there during the best week!

I conducted interviews with 16 individuals were conducted during the week of May 1-5' 2011. The following vignettes introduce the 16 participants.

### **Administration**

Donna Wilson is currently a principal at an Early Childhood Center. Prior to this position, she was the principal and driving force behind this successful, urban elementary school for 11 years. Donna's whole purpose for this urban, elementary school was to get her inner-city students prepared socially, physically, emotionally, and educationally by exposing them to programs, academics and other opportunities they otherwise would not have had. Although Donna's interview was conducted by phone, I could still feel her passion for this project and how dear it was and still is to her heart.

Steven is currently the principal at this successful, urban elementary school. He has been a principal for 10 years; however, this is his first year at this school. He describes himself as one who uses a coaching style...one who cheers on success and looks good only because of the talent that he hires. Although this is Steven's first year



at this school, it is apparent that he is very well-respected by all and is a role model for the young men who work at and attend the school. From my observations, Steven is extremely visible throughout the school and rarely in his office. His presence around the building says a lot about his leadership style.

Dr. Powers is the assistant principal at this elementary school and has been an assistant principal for nine years. She has been at this school for five years. She described herself as a supportive administrator; one who assisted the principal in maintaining all aspects of the building operations. After meeting Dr. Powers, I could tell that she had a very gentle, pure, and caring heart. I felt an immediate professional connection with Dr. Powers. She seemed well-liked and respected by staff members and went out of her way to accommodate my visit professionally and personally. During the interview, I could tell that Dr. Powers was very knowledgeable about the ins and outs of this school and was very open about sharing pertinent information. It was very clear that she appreciated my interest in her school and telling their story.

**Staff**

Dexter originally retired from the school district in 2006 with 33 plus years of service, but he came back as a part-time remediation teacher and long-term substitute at the school. He worked at this school for almost 20 years before retiring, and it was clear that he was proud to once again be a part of this family. During his interview, I could tell that he genuinely cared about the students and wanted them to learn. His passion for student learning was definitely evident. I could see in his eyes the gratification he received from working with students and seeing them learn.

Kendra, 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, has been teaching for 11 years. She began her career at this school, worked at a couple of other schools, then was hired back to this school. Kendra seemed a little shy and hesitant during the beginning of the interview but soon warmed up. Fortunately, I was able to conduct Kendra's interview in her classroom and was able to see her in action with the students. Students seemed to have a great rapport with her and she seemed to enjoy them just as much. Although she looked a little timid, she by no means was. She was quick with redirection and was firm in doing so.

Courtney is a K-12 Special Education teacher who has been in this position for nine years. She has a military background; however her calling for teaching came to her one day by means of an autistic child who would come and sit next to her at church and play with her fingers and try to communicate with her, as he was non-verbal. Courtney seemed extremely proud to be a Special Education teacher and appreciated every opportunity to work with special needs students. Through her conversation, it was very apparent that she is a true advocate for special needs students and works hard to celebrate their efforts and successes.

Denise was the very first person I interviewed at the school. She presented herself in a very organized and professional manner and made sure to make me feel welcomed in the building. She willingly offered her office as my temporary office and just had a very pleasant and take charge attitude. She was the Instructional Specialist at the school and had been for three years. She described herself as being one who wears many hats. However she primarily worked with organizing professional development for teachers, being a resource, providing resources for

teachers when needed, as well as working with small groups. Currently Denise is working towards her Doctorate and was quite interested in my educational path and study. She seemed very level-headed and knowledgeable of educational standards and protocol. I could tell that she took her job seriously and that she would make an amazing administrator if her career path took her in that direction.

Alice was a Communication Skills Specialist at the school and part of the Instructional Team. She had been in this position for four years, but had been working at the school for eight years. Alice was passionate about reading and helping below grade level students develop their reading skills. She also provided staff development to teachers to increase their knowledge of reading and how to actually teach reading. Although Alice answered my questions during the interview, she seemed to somehow tie reading into her answers. She began her interview speaking about the importance of reading and also ended it the same way. It was so pleasing to see her interests were truly for the child's education.

Larry was easy to interview and had a pleasant disposition. He had a shorter interview because he didn't really engage

in a lot of extra conversation as he openly just answered the questions. As a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, he described himself as being one who wore many hats other than classroom teacher. He has been a teacher for 13 years and has worked in this school for nine of the years. Larry seemed like the type of teacher who cared about the whole child, developed strong relationships with them, got them to believe in themselves as he made clear that he believed in them.

"...Children have changed due to circumstances, but their willingness to learn has not. We have to help our students become more open-minded to change and not have tunnel vision about new ideas. Help them to not be afraid to share their opinions with others, but be willing to listen to all viewpoints." Although his interview was short, I enjoyed listening to him and learning about his philosophy of education.

Richard's interview was by far the most interesting. I was especially interested in hearing what he had to say about the school and his position because he had a very unique teaching situation as the English Avant-Garde teacher. The English Avant-Garde program served as an instructional pullout for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who were reading and writing in the top 25% of students in their grade level

(gifted and non-gifted students included). During each grade level's 2 1/2 hour communication skills block, selected students explored various themes, genres, and author studies with a heavy emphasis on (a) higher cognitive levels of thinking, (b) critical/interpretative reading & writing, (c) multiple intelligence experiences, (d) vocabulary development, (e) a wide exposure to literature, (f) productive & imaginative thinking, (g) visualization, (h) exploration of values & social standards, and (i) a global knowledge approach in a non-traditional learning environment.

From the time he sat down to speak with me, Richard seemed reluctant to participate. I literally spent 25 minutes trying to persuade him to share with me his name, to sign the recording waiver, and to explain to him why I came all the way to Virginia to do my study. The next 15 minutes I spent sharing with Richard the racial make-up of Omaha as he seemed to be completely in awe at the fact that there are black people living in Nebraska. Richard wanted no part in giving me his name, but did give me the first initial of his name. However, he still did not give me permission to audio record him. At this point the interview never even began because it was almost dismissal time and

Richard had to go, but he did reschedule for the next day. When my opportunity arose again, I delved right into my questions. His job seemed so fascinating and just as intriguing as he was. His class catered toward the gifted side where he was able to take on a facilitator role while involving the students in a plethora of higher level performance-based activities such as Shakespeare, different monologues, writing scripts, and performing around the city at different venues. He explained that students (grades four and five) had to first academically qualify for the class, followed by an interview process, and they also had to recite a monologue by heart in front of the panel. Even though Richard's interview was far from the norm, I actually really enjoyed it. At the end of the interview, I again had to reassure him that I was not going to use his name and explain to him again why I came all the way from Nebraska to conduct my study. He vocally left the interview still surprised at the fact that I was actually from Nebraska, that I lived in a city, and especially that there are black people living there.

Lisha is most memorable because she was the first person to agree to assist me with my study. She was a novice

teacher, yet from her conversation she appeared to have the skills and talents of a master teacher. She was full of energy and ambition and seemed to be on top of her responsibilities. She had much interest in inquiry-based learning and finding ways to get her kindergarteners to ask questions and wanting to learn more.

Jackson presented himself as an individual full of life and down to earth; characteristics that are especially helpful when being a guidance counselor. He had been in this position for four years and pursued this route because he found himself being a role model; someone who had a lot of love and care to give. I felt a sense of safety with Jackson as I'm sure his students do as well. Every morning he greeted students and parents by opening their car doors and welcoming students to school. It was evident that Jackson was an asset at the building.

Shonda had more than 13 years of experience in education and was a second grade teacher as well as the grade level chair. She described herself as being very patient, flexible, and kind and one who was proud of the job she was doing on a daily basis. During the interview, I could tell that Shonda was one who cared about relationships,



especially with her students. She took the time to get to know them all so that she could make informed decisions about how she could meet their academic and personal needs. From my observation, I believe that Shonda truly loved her job.

The very last interview I conducted was with a math coach named Angie. From the beginning of the interview, Angie seemed all about business, especially when it came to math. She gave me the impression that she was extremely confident in her abilities as a math coach and being able to differentiate the way she presented information and strategies to teachers so that they could effectively deliver instruction to their students. Angie also worked closely with students. She enjoyed teaching students because she was able to help them understand that there were multiple ways to get an answer and found great fulfillment and enjoyment when they were able to do this and explain it. Angie's passion for math helped increase math scores. She stated, "...the teachers are getting better, and as a result the students are getting better."

Julie was a kind-hearted person who really cared about the Special Education population. Although she was not a

certified teacher, she took her job and responsibilities very seriously. She had been a Special Education assistant for four years, but had been at the school for 15 years. One thing I gathered from Julie was that she enjoyed working with this population of students because the least bit of academic growth was always evident.

Kijah was an early literacy teacher who worked mainly with kindergarten through third grade struggling readers. However, she also modeled lessons for teachers and assisted around the building wherever she was needed. One thing I remember about Kijah was that she was insistent upon me eating during the Teacher's Appreciation Luncheon. She loaded my plate with several different kinds of foods and then checked to see if I wanted seconds. Kijah had a positive spirit that was wonderful to be around--the type of personality that would brighten anyone's day.

### **School**

The setting for the study was an elite school for lower-income students that created a unique culture which encouraged and emphasized academic achievement, civic awareness, self-development, character development and career awareness and preparation through different programs

like Character Education and Enrichment classes. This was a place that focused on building strong relationships between the school, parents, and community while fostering a sense of family and cohesiveness so that students could have a strong foundation to rely upon. This was a place where students felt safe coming, where businesses wanted to partner, and where parents wanted to send their children. The school made students aware of their potential and encouraged them to dream big by exposing them to a multitude of atypical experiences and opportunities.

## Chapter 5

### Instructional Practices

Five themes emerged from an analysis of the interview transcripts. These themes were: Instructional Practices, Changes, Leadership Practices, Teachers, Parents, and Community Involvement, and Professional Development. In the following sections, each of the five themes is presented.

The first theme is Instructional Practices and the theme has nine sub themes. The sub themes are: Field Trips, Teacher Instruction, Small Grouping, Technology, Team Planning, Co-Teaching/Inclusion, Positive Classroom Management, Teacher Mentors and Vertical Alignment.

#### *Field Trips*

There were 36 comments by the participants about the importance of field trips. Nine individuals mentioned the importance of the field trips providing exposure and experience for the students. Alice remarked, "I think they are great, especially for our children because they don't get exposed to a lot of things at home. They just need that exposure all around." Courtney pointed out,

Field trips are one of the better things we could do, because some of these children don't see

things on a normal day to day basis. Like a trip to the museum, for some of these children they've never seen or will never see if we didn't take them.

Shonda said, "Field trips are very instrumental. It's one thing to read something, but it's another thing to experience it. It takes it to another level." Julie stated, "With some of the field trips, some students wouldn't be able to go to otherwise." Five of them spoke about how meaningful they were, and three said that field trips were real-life. Dexter mentioned,

I think field trips are very important especially when you're working with students who are of low socioeconomic status and they are not prone to go outside of their neighborhood or be exposed to many things. So field trips will get right to real life. If a child can actually see, touch, feel, and hear what's going on, it becomes more relative to them.

Denise stressed, "It's important that field trips are tied to grade level standards so that students can connect real life and to what they are learning in class."

Lisha believed,

Field trips give the student a chance to get out of the building and experience the real world. It gives them a chance to get out there to see what the world has to offer and bring that back into the classroom to make meaningful connections.

Kendra stated, "Experiences are very important for learning and enhancing student achievement. Experiences are very instrumental. It is one thing to read about something, but it is another thing to actually experience it. It takes it to another level." Larry commented on how field trips are very instrumental because they give the children exposure that they need. He stated,

It's good to be in school every day, but I also think it is very important for children who may not have these opportunities to get out to do stuff ... It's always good to know how other people are living as opposed to how you are living. You just can't have tunnel vision about one way of life. You have to have different avenues and just see different things.

#### *Teacher Instruction*

There were 29 participants who made a remark about different elements of teacher instruction. Dr. Powers

noted the importance of teaching to the standards. "A critical step in raising student achievement would be to make sure that what is being taught is aligned to the standards and that you track your progress often. Four participants discussed rigor and knowledge of content, while five participants spoke about differentiation. Along these lines, Dr. Powers also mentioned,

Knowledge of content is very important, high expectations, and rigor. Teachers need to be skilled in planning lessons that are rigorous, that address the content that students need, but also differentiate to account for some of the background knowledge that they may be lacking.

Although Jackson stressed the importance of differentiation, it was a challenge for him. "As a classroom teacher, I always had my principal either give me all of the high students or all of the low students because differentiating was so stressful."

Four participants talked about incorporating hands-on learning activities into their instruction. Alice said, "We try to do a lot of hands-on, class participation things to get their [students] interests and to keep their interests. A lot of our children are kinesthetic learners, so they like moving around and doing things." Lisha said, "We have

inquiry based things in the students' stations that they can play with or manipulate. We see most of this in science and social studies where they get to play with things. Of course, math manipulatives as well."

Teaching outside the box was another area under teacher instruction in which multiple (four) participants spoke of. Angie stated,

My biggest responsibility is to build the capacity of my colleagues by getting them to understand that one size does not fit all in education. They have to differentiate their instructions to meet the needs of their students. I teach the teachers that there are multiple ways of teaching a skill. It's not always about teaching procedural, but teaching for conceptual understanding.

Instead of the normal English class, Dexter spoke about the English Avant-Garde class. "Kids learn Shakespeare and do poetry. They participate in drama, dramatizations, and public speaking. They go out into the community to perform."

Another area under this subgroup is high expectations. As a special education teacher, Courtney considers her students as her own personal children. "That's why I hold



them to a high standard. I demand the best out of them. I do not believe in I can't." Kendra states, "I'm tough. I don't accept a lot of foolishness from the students. So I stay on them because I don't settle for mediocrity. I have high expectations for them." Larry spoke about how high expectations impact student achievement.

I start off the year with high expectations.

Because I set the bar very high from the beginning, achievements are pretty much the norm for my kids. All it takes is hard work and determination. So anything I ask of them, they already feel they can achieve it.

### *Small Grouping*

Twenty-one comments were made regarding different aspects of small grouping. Although Richard teaches and facilitates the gifted students, he too utilizes small groups during his instruction. "Even though I have the gifted students, someone can always build higher. I use my data to focus on specific areas and also use it to determine my groups." Alice, who works specifically in the area of reading said, "I do a lot of small group instruction with students who are reading below grade level. I use this opportunity to try and bring them up to where they should be." Julie noted, "In a small group, I am

able to focus on their [student] needs, their academic needs, as well as their intellectual and personal needs." Kijah made mention of how her groups are ever-changing. "My groups are very dynamically changed throughout the year. I move the students to where they need to be challenged, but the skills are attainable. Shonda spoke about how she used small groups for reading. "During guided reading time, I have small group instruction. During this time I am able to provide more of a guided practice and work with them [students] more.

Four participants agreed that they sometimes use small grouping as a means to provide peer teaching and cooperative learning opportunities. Shonda also said, "During small groups, we have stations. I strategically place multiple levels in stations so that I can have the cooperative learning part going on. For example, if one student is very strong with letters or sounds of reading, they are able to work with the other students and help them." Courtney cited "With small groups, the children are allowed to model to each other how they got an answer. Then depending upon what answer each student got, we allow them to teach their peers because they may do it a different way. Larry said, "I may have one student that may be a little bit more academically ahead of the others in the

group. They'll assist by reiterating what I've taught in order to have that group stay focused."

### *Technology*

Technology is a significant piece to student learning. Twenty-one participants made reference to this and spoke specifically about Smartboards and computers and plethora of it. Richard reveals, "We have technology galore. We have Smartboards and computers in all the classrooms. We have Turning Point technology. The biggest resource here is technology." According to Denise,

We have technology resources and all of the classrooms have Smartboards in them so they are able to access online information and students are able to be interactive as a class. The teacher can demonstrate the lesson and have students come up to the board and be interactive. We also have computers in all the classrooms, whereas if you needed to do individual interaction with computers then you can do that too.

Larry commented on how fortunate their school was to have so much technology. "Other schools do not have the luxury of having Smartboards in every classroom and that's a very

good tool that I like to use. There's so much technology that we can use to help our students learn." Alice stated,

We have a lot of resources. We have technology.

We have laptops, Smartboards, and computers."

Lisha also discloses the fact that technology is

important at their school. "We have Smartboards

which we use all the time. I personally have six

student desktop computers in my room that the

children are on rotating throughout the day.

We've got math and reading programs. We also have

Turning Point technology.

#### *Team Planning*

There were 11 comments in the area of team planning.

Four participants mentioned lesson planning as a part of team planning and four others mentioned GAPP (Grade Level Assessment Planning Protocol) lessons. Dr. Wilson remarked, "GAPP lessons were created so that best practices and research were enhanced through rigorous teaching and activities. This GAPP model was a school wide initiative to make teachers accountable according to results of weekly standards." Dr. Powers also commented,

We have a system called GAPP, where each week

teachers would develop a common lesson, hands on

lesson, on a particular Tier 2 objective. They

would teach, assess it, and then in a data team meeting we would have a vertical review of the assessment data. They had to include Marzano strategies in the lessons and they had to be at the highest level of Blooms.

Denise spoke about individual grade level team planning.

We have meetings once a week, which are team planning meetings. During the team planning time, I sit there with my grade level and different specialists and we look at the data based off our quarterly reports to determine what we need to review for the year.

Larry said, "There's a lot of planning. We plan and meet as a team weekly." Jackson was short and to the point regarding planning... "Planning is the key thing."

Courtney, a special education teacher, stressed the importance of being able to team plan with the regular education teacher.

I've been truly blessed because the teacher I've co-taught with, usually works with me to do our lesson plans. We work on lesson plans together, we do the data together for planning, and we do the grading together. So we always make it a

Thursday afternoon and we stay late and that's what we do.

### *Positive Classroom Management*

In order for positive classroom management to take place, there are many things that must be in place and enforced. 11 participants referenced: positive behavior reinforcement, consistency, and a disciplined learning environment as a few implementations that must be in place for this to occur. Steven believed, "Teacher experience is important, but classroom management is a must. Positive classroom management, I mean to say, is a must." Dr. Powers commented,

Well, I think that first of all, you have to have a disciplined learning environment. If you don't have a disciplined learning environment, students aren't going to be on task long enough to hear what is that you are saying.

Dexter pointed out, "When students are being good and earning points according to their accountability checklist, they earn Dream Dollars to spend in the school store."

Kendra speaks about the importance of consistency. "I have to be consistent in whatever I do in my class and be consistent with the parents about behavior. I guess the main thing is just consistency. In the past I was

inconsistent and that didn't work. Whatever you do, you have to be consistent."

*Co-Teaching/Inclusion*

There were 10 participants who spoke about co-teaching and inclusion. Most participants agreed that co-teaching and inclusion went hand in hand. Julie mentioned, "Inclusion and co-teaching go hand in hand to me. They give an extra reinforcement on the academics and not only does it work for special education students; it also works with the slower learners." Along the same lines, Courtney said,

I think co-teaching and inclusion is probably the best way for special education and regular education kids to meet on and merge on a solid and equal ground. With inclusion and co-teaching, the students are meshed together and you cannot really tell who has the disability and who doesn't.

Two participants agreed that inclusion was beneficial because special education students weren't being isolated.

Angie stated,

I think that inclusion benefits a lot of students because I believe that students do learn best from each other's. With inclusion, they are not being separated. They feel a part of the class.

They get to see that non-special education students also struggle and need help.

Kijah also remarked, "I think inclusion is great because they [special education students] see a regular classroom and they are not isolated. They see what happens in the 'normal' classroom and they are not isolated. They are still able to learn." Lisha talked about inclusion and diversity. She said, "It [inclusion] helps give a variety and diversity to the classroom. Differentiation and inclusion helps those lower students because it gives them an idea of where other students are." One participant, Dexter spoke about inclusion being a community of learning. "The children who are of special needs gain more from children just by listening, by hearing, by becoming involved with the 'regular' kids."

There were five participants who spoke about double-dose learning. Kijah stated, "We have an obligation to get children up to where they need to be or higher than what they were at the beginning of the year. We are asked to double dose and triple dose those students who are below." Kendra said, "...So they [students] would see me and then they would rotate to the co-teacher. This was a big help because the students got a double-dose." Courtney also mentioned, "I see all the kids, high, medium, and low and



the regular education teacher does the same. The students round robin all the way through both of us, so there's a double dose."

#### *Teacher and Student Mentors*

Two participants talked about mentoring. Shonda noted, "Certain teachers are mentors. So if you need some assistance, and let's say you're a new teacher, you have an assigned mentor that you can go to that is on your grade level." Jackson, the school counselor spoke about the student mentoring program. "Teachers and staff mentor maybe 1-3 students. We have activities like once a month where we can either do in-house activities or an outside excursion."

#### *Vertical Alignment*

Dr. Powers spoke about the purpose of vertical alignment and how they utilize this strategy in their building to increase student achievement.

Every Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students focuses on the Tier 2 objectives that we are weak in, in the testing grades. So teachers in these grade levels differentiate of course for their grade so that by the time the kids get into that particular testing grade, they are familiar with those Tier 2 skills. We introduce this concept to our

students at each grade level so that we can scaffold that knowledge so that by the time they get to 5<sup>th</sup> grade; it's not their first time seeing it.

## Chapter 6

### Changes

The second theme is Change and the theme has nine sub themes. The sub themes are: New School-New Rules, Remediation Program, Name Change, Focus on Well-Rounded Students, Accountability Action Plan, Shared Vision, Private School in Public Setting, Staff Accountability, and Building Closing.

#### *New School-New Rules*

When the school was reorganized, many changes were implemented. There were 50 comments regarding the different changes that took place at the school. One of the major changes that took place was the implementation of an extended learning day, that included Character Education and an after school enrichment program. All 16 participants mentioned the after-school enrichment program, 14 individuals mentioned the Character Education program, and 10 individuals mentioned the extended day. The extended day added an extra hour to the beginning of the day dedicated specifically to Character Education and an hour at the end of the day for enrichments. Dexter said, "The school offered an afternoon enrichment area program that involved many of the activities that the kids wanted to be involved

in." Kendra noted, "I think the kids really benefited from the enrichments. They had many classes to choose from. They looked forward to going. They had one enrichment per quarter and then it would change the next quarter." Denise added an element regarding the teachers in the enrichment program.

Every teacher that was hired had to decide what they could do extra for the school because in the last hour we had enrichments. So whatever your particular hobby was, then you had the opportunity to share something that you couldn't share in a regular academic setting. So if I just loved poetry, then I might have the poetry club. Or if I knew how to play the guitar or piano, then that's what I'd teach. Teachers had to have an idea of what else they could do to further extend the students' learning in an enriching way. Richard added, "With enrichments, we were able to do things that most schools wouldn't, like karate, golf, and tennis. The list goes on and on." Dr. Wilson said,

The Character Education (10 Pillars) was put in place so that every morning before core subjects, students could experience positive lessons daily. Teachers just don't have enough time to teach life skills during the school day, so it was

important to me that our students had the opportunity to still learn life skills and had enough time to do so.

Dexter exclaimed, "One of the new components of the school was Character Education to help develop personal character." Courtney said, "Students recite those pillars during Character Education to the point where it's rote. If you ingest it long enough, you become it." Shonda added, "Each classroom teacher will have a lesson on a character trait each day. We would have a week of one character trait and they would teach a lesson for an hour. Every day we would say the 10 Pillars of Character Education."

Another change that took place when the school was revamped was the staff. Dr. Powers remarked, "I was able to re-interview current staff members that were interested in staying and interview new teachers that were interested in teaching at the newly changed school that didn't mind the extended day." Dexter commented,

At the inception of the 'new school,' it was all re-staffing. So the teachers that were here originally under the old school name, everybody had to reapply if they wanted to be a part of the new school. Many teachers did opt out because it was long hours, so people had to think of their

personal situations and if you wanted to be a part of the program.

One more change was the uniform policy. Julie commented, "I love the uniforms because the uniforms make the students feel as one. Everybody is alike." Shonda said, "Our district does not have a uniform policy. The school has to elect to do it and a certain amount of parents have to vote and say yes. However, with our program, that was part of the program. So if you did not want to adhere to the uniform policy, then you couldn't come here."

#### *Remediation Program*

There were 19 comments centered around the remediation program. For this program, data is used to reteach reading and math skills. Kendra explained, "We have our remediation program that is after school. It is math and reading remediation. We select students based off their test scores. It's an hour long and one teacher would teach reading and another teacher would teach math and they would flip-flop students." Shonda said, "Students go through remediation three days a week and then they would go to enrichment one day because we didn't want to isolate those students and say they could never go because they are below

grade level. The groups are kept small and they focus on reading and math." Alice stated,

The data helps us to see where we need to focus in on. Whether we need to reteach or remediate, and exactly which students need the remediation. So instead of doing a general re-teaching of everything, we focus in on the students that need that remediation.

#### *Name Change*

Changing the name was a significant piece to the school's transformation. Six participants spoke about the new name and the meaning behind it. Dexter said, "Although we went through several names, we decided upon the final name because we wanted our kids to keep the dream alive." Courtney stated, "Our name is significant in more than one way, but it means to dream. We keep the dreams alive from our forefathers and we push them into an academic setting where our children are taught." Denise spoke about the name having a multiple meaning.

The name is a pride factor now. In the beginning it was meant to show the parents that we can change and we can dream. That the children can be whatever they want to be. After they pass that

stage, that's when it turns to pride. Children are proud to say they are from the school or that they graduated from this school.

Shonda and Jackson both mentioned how the name change signified a culture change. Shonda stated, "To me, it motivated the students. It was not only a name change, but it changed the concept and the community around it and how they viewed the school. It brought a positive light to it and with the positive light, and then everybody wanted to come." Jackson said,

With the program, kids from out of the district were able to apply. Then the system would provide transportation. So the name said everything to parents, like they should look into it. The culture changed, parent thinking changed, parent involvement changed. It was positive. The name change gave the school a whole new outlook. The community saw and they wanted to come and see the difference.

Alice added,

The name change just puts things into a whole new light. Sometimes calling something a different name helps you to understand or make the kids know that this stuff is going to be different.



Things are going to change. With the name change, the environment changed.

*Focus on Well-Rounded Students*

Ten participants made different remarks concerning focusing on and creating the well-rounded student. Four of them mentioned social development, while one participant each mentioned academic development, growth, and making a difference. Dr. Powers said,

Our focus is not just on testing. Our focus is on producing well-rounded students. So by instilling character education in our students, it creates an innate desire to learn. Then we have the culture of achievement. So the test is the floor and we encourage our children to aim for the ceiling and beyond. We attempt to provide more vigorous and more challenging opportunities for our students.

Julie said, "Dr. Wilson was not just concerned about the academic level, she was also concerned about the social level. She wanted to prepare students for the future; let them be aware of what's out there in the world and what they have to do to reach their goals; making the students well-rounded." Denise pointed out, "Education has been a top priority, character education, individualizing for a

student and not just looking at the student as a number, but more of a person so that they can become well-rounded students.”

#### *Accountability Action Plan*

Six participants spoke about the accountability action plan and how there must be focus in order to achieve academic goals. Dr. Perkins stated, “We use our accountability plan to look at our data and to develop our Tier 2 indicators for each content area. We compare data. We say these are the goals, and we focus on them.” Denise remarked,

Teachers also make what we call an action plan.

The action plan basically pinpoints the Standards of Learning and which students fall below in specific areas so that you know which students need to be remediated. Instead of just having general remediation, it’s more specific.

Kendra added, “We look at the data and then we come up with action plans. Then we use our action plans to remediate students. We create new action plans every quarter.”

#### *Shared Vision*

There were five participants who talked about the importance of having “buy-in.” Dr. Wilson stated,

Buy-in plays a huge role when trying to implement a vision. If the staff doesn't believe, it won't be successful. You have to bring your ideas (vision) to the leadership team and tweak as necessary. Then you can present it. Otherwise, if the staff doesn't feel as though they had any say, there won't be any buy-in. It was also important for me to get buy-in from the parents and community to sustain success.

Steven commented,

If your staff is not on board, then your vision is not going to work. It is vital that the staff understand my vision, but it is also vital to share with them and then get input from them so we can have a shared vision. I have to have total buy-in.

Dr. Perkins said, "If everybody is not on the same page, and if people are not focused on what they should be teaching, then you're not likely to get good results."

Angie mentioned,

If you don't have good leadership, often times a school doesn't survive. You have to believe in that person's vision. Dr. Wilson had a big vision. She had a vision to make African-American

students believe in themselves. Her vision was for our students to be competitive and to be exposed to things where typically they probably would not have been.

#### *Private School in Public Setting*

When the school's make-over was complete and all the changes were implemented, many individuals boasted about how wonderful, yet positively different the school was. The program implemented at the school was unlike anything that had been done before in the district, let alone the city. Four participants commented on how the school operated. Julie stated, "The school was now more like a private school, but in a public setting. You had Character Education in the morning and then you had different programs in the afternoon. There were different partnerships and money coming in." Kijah added, "We wanted to be an elite school, we wanted to teach the child in a different way." Dr. Powers confirmed,

Our school was once surrounded by a local housing project. It was a school with probably the lowest test scores in the state. Single digits. So with the proposed revitalization of the community, the housing projects were torn down and Dr. Wilson was charged by the superintendent with creating

an 'elite' school that would pull from around the district. This elite school would have components such as: an extended day; two additional hours, four days a week, (character education and enrichment), a focus on challenging gifted learners (English Avant-Garde), Spanish instruction, a community service component, a huge parental involvement piece in which there was a family learning night held every Thursday, and a huge community involvement piece. We also had professional dress day on Fridays for the students. The students wore uniforms through Thursday, and then on Fridays they'd dress up. We found that when some people think of dressing up, they don't understand the corporate culture of wearing a shirt and tie, or suit, or a nice dress. Dr. Wilson instituted this so that children would have that opportunity.

Dr. Wilson acknowledged,

The superintendent visited with me about the future transformation of the community. He put me in charge of creating a school that would be desirable and would increase enrollment. I was given a lot of creative leeway and was fortunate

enough to have many community partnerships and other funding to afford the different elements of the program. I wanted to create a strong triad between the parents, teachers, and the community to create and sustain success in the school. I had a Principal Chew and Chat, which were monthly parent workshops to discuss challenges, provide activities based off goals and benchmarks for them to use at home. I wanted to transform the whole community to buying into education.

#### *Staff Accountability*

Four participants spoke about staff being held accountable for themselves and their responsibilities. The following comments are from an administrator's standpoint. Dr. Wilson said, "Teachers are held accountable to provide rigorous instruction. There is ongoing accountability monitored weekly through GAPP lesson plans as well as classroom visits." Steve mentioned, "A teacher's responsibility is to ensure that they are teaching the standard, using data, and being accountable for student achievement." Dr. Powers noted, "This building runs like a well-oiled machine. Staff is very accountable. They take the initiative and work together. Everyone is responsible

for the success of their children and everyone has something to contribute.”

## Chapter 7

### Leadership Practices

The third theme is Leadership Practices and it has six sub themes. The sub themes are: Principal Observations, Principal as an Instructional and Data Driven Leader, Principal as Data Driven Leader, Principal Visibility, High Standards/Expectations and Principal as Instructional Leader.

#### *Principal Observations*

Participants made 19 comments about principal observations. Dr. Wilson remarked, "The evaluation process plays a major role. It is a reflective tool. It should be used as a tool for teachers to see their strengths and weaknesses. It is a non-threatening tool of reflective needs." Dr. Powers commented, "The appraisal process allows you to get a glimpse of what teachers are doing and to provide them with feedback. It helps you get a pulse of what's going on in the building, where the needs are, and what conversations you need to have about performance." Nine comments were made by participants regarding snippets (pop-ins) and walk-throughs. Courtney said, "They come in and observe, but more importantly, they'll come in just whenever. They pop in so they know you're on task and



everything." Alice said, "They are always doing walk-throughs. They have so many observations they have to do each year." Lisha confirmed, "They do a lot of walk-bys. They come into our classrooms, check our lesson plans and make sure the students are engaged. They are just always present so they are always constantly looking around to see what everybody is doing. They are excited about the students learning as well." Kijah added, "Both principals do numerous evaluations. They do quick checks, they just pop in and make sure that lesson plans are available and that teachers are on schedule and doing what they are supposed to do."

Two participants spoke about feedback. Angie stated, "They make sure to give us immediate feedback. If they see something is not right, they bring in the instructional team so they can go in and give them that intervention." Shonda commented, "He [principal] gives observations and feedback. He lets us know immediately how we're doing; and constant communication, which I love."

#### *Principal as an Instructional and Data Driven Leader*

There were 15 comments from participants regarding the principal as being both an instructional leader and a data driven leader. Two participants mentioned the principal has to be everything in one. Dexter said, "To me, they need a

balance. Data will gear you as to where your school is going and what needs are reinforced and what materials are needed to reinforce whatever skills or areas your school may encounter. From the data, you get your instruction as to where you need to go." Kendra stated,

I think it's a middle ground. I think that the principal has to be an instructional leader because the teacher needs to be led by instruction or they need role models. The principal leads by example. Then he has to be data driven because he has to look at test scores to see that the teachers are doing what they are supposed to—to find if there are weak areas and strong areas and to give us feedback.

Kijah remarked,

Honestly, I think it's a combination of both. You have to be driven by your data because you want your students to do well and that's how they are compared to other schools, the data. Then you want your teachers to teach beyond textbooks also and be creative and out of the box.

Denise pointed out, "You have to have a balance of both. Data drives instruction and then you have to be an instructional leader after you know the data. The principal

has to be everything in one, but he can't be an expert of everything." Steven noted, "Everything we do is focused on the accountability plan. So everything I do should drive instruction. Because you have to be an instructional leader, you also have to be data driven. As a principal, you have to combine the two." Dr. Wilson said, "A principal needs both characteristics. They have to know instruction to monitor teachers and they have to know data to make sure proper instruction is taking place. You can't do one without the other."

#### *Principal Visibility*

From the interviews, it is clear from the participants that they are impressed with their principal's visibility, as 12 of them spoke to this topic. Jackson stated,

Well my administrator, he is visible. He's always walking around. I would say, to me, his main goal is visibility. He's not one that is in his office shutting the door. He's always around. He meets with staff on a regular basis. As far as his open door policy, if anybody has a concern, they don't have to fill out a form to meet with him. If he's available, knock on the door.

Alice's comment was short and to the point. "They are in and out of the classes a lot. You see them everywhere; they just don't sit in their offices." Shonda also notes,

He [principal] is constantly visible. He is constantly walking around, taking interest, talking to other teachers and the students. One minute you are doing something and you look up and there he is. He might be walking down the hall and if something comes up, he's able to address it and it won't become an escalated issue.

Courtney commented,

Our principal is always so visible. He's always out and about. He's probably more of a father figure for most of these children than anything. He's the principal and they understand that but he epitomizes what a lot of these kids don't see in a male. So they really work hard to reach his expectations and he asks them to work hard to get there. They love seeing him every day.

#### *High Standards/Expectations*

There were several comments regarding the high standards expected from staff. Dr. Powers remarked, "Our principal was very demanding. She required a lot because

she wanted the best life for the children. So you can't come here complacent and not have your lesson plans done. That's not acceptable. You will always present your best to our children." Larry stated,

Administrators have high expectations just like we do. We start the year off being on the same page so everyone knows what is expected of them. By us being on the same page, we have one goal and that is the students' success, not just academically, but also through life. We are trying to plant a seed at an early state.

Richard added,

The principal expects the best out of all the teachers. She made it known what she wanted, so the teachers were on board. It makes it easier when everyone is on board. It was and is a lot of work, but to achieve the success that this school is noted for, it's the only way.

#### *Principal as an Instructional Leader*

There were 5 participants who agreed that the principal just needed to be an instructional leader versus being this and a data-driven leader. Alice stated, "I would prefer an instructional leader because it's all about the

teaching. However I do understand the data portion of it to see where you are." Lisha mentioned,

I've seen both, but I would say I'd prefer an instructional leader. I feel that our current principal is an instructional leader and that my prior principal was more data driven. Before I felt that we tested our kids more than we taught them. Our current principal is more concerned with learning as testing is not his main focus.

Dr. Powers also agreed that the administrator needs to be an instructional leader. "If you are an instructional leader, then you're familiar with instruction and data. But if you're just familiar with data, then you don't know instruction. However, you need some aspects of both."

#### *Principal as Data Driven*

Four participants agreed that the principal just needed to be a data-driven leader. Courtney said,

He should be a data driven leader because data is vital. Without data, we can't really see where we're having problems. We take the data and we go through it and we break it apart by strands. With the data, we are able to see what the kids are missing and go from there.

Shonda stated, "It's important for the principal to use the data to look for trends and to see exactly what type of staff development we may need or what resources or materials he can provide us so then we can go back and do what we need to do with our instruction." Julie remarked, "As a data leader, he uses the data to lets us know what we should enhance on and it also let us know what we shouldn't do. What I mean by enhance on, is to improve what we are doing--if something isn't working, to eliminate that."

## Chapter 8

### Teachers, Parents, and Community Involvement

The fourth theme is Teachers, Parents, and Community Involvement. There are three sub themes in this category. They are: Parent Support/Involvement, Community Support/Partnerships, and Relationships.

#### *Parent Support/Involvement*

Under Dr. Wilson's leadership, one of her main goals was to get parents involved and to keep them involved. The participants described how parents were supported and how they were involved. They spoke of Family Learning Nights, Parent Workshops, Parent Communication, and Parent Liaisons. Dr. Powers said,

There was a huge parental involvement component. Family learning night was held every Thursday so parents could come out and participate in activities that would help them, help their children with homework and do 'make-it, take-it' activities. They could see what the children are learning, what expectations are and how they could support the school.



Jackson added,

To me, you have to hook the parents. For example, doing a student performance and then after that, discuss academics. We did family learning nights where the families would come in and go to different stations, whether it is science, technology, or math. Of course, we provided food as well. So you had to entice parents. Just don't invite them in to come and talk, that's not going to work. You have to make it unique. That's why family learning nights were awesome; good turnout every time we had them.

Angie stated,

We do a lot of parent workshops. Our parent liaison would get the parents involved a lot, whether it was Grandfather Breakfast Day or make-it take-it day. During this fun time, however, the instructional team was brought in to teach them some easy activities to do at home with their children. During that time too, we also talked about how they could help their child stay on task and what they could do to help teachers.

Dr. Wilson noted,

I used the school marquee to recognize parental involvement. I would put their names up and then other parents wanted to know what they had to do to get their name on the marquee. This was an easy way to recognize parents and also draw parents in for their support.

Richard discussed initial meetings with parents.

Teachers have to call to set up meetings with parents. They usually do that at the beginning of the year. Teachers have to have one-on-one with parents. Of course, anytime you need to call a parent, just call them anytime. We have a parent liaison and different events going on in the school for parents and to get them out to the school to see what's going on. Once you get them there, then you can get things you need, ask questions you need, and get information. You can let them know exactly what's going on with their child.

Denise spoke a little about the different ways they communicate with parents.

Teachers have frequent contact with the parents. Teachers send home a weekly progress report and basically the progress report is in triplicate.

This is the first wave of communication they have weekly. The PTA communicates with the parents and we also have a phone program that sends messages out to everyone on the school list.

Along these lines, Lisha added,

There's constant communication every week; we send home progress reports that let the parent know for each subject how their students are doing. There's also a section on the report about the student's' character. So the report informs parents about academics and social skills.

#### *Community Support/Partnerships*

Participants spoke about how each of the following elements helped to sustain the sub theme. Dr. Powers mentioned,

The community is vested in this building because it provides services to the community and the community is a part of it. Some of the partners included different churches that would come every year to do a school makeover. They did all of the lighting of the school, they put the playground outside in the back, they did the beautifications, and they painted. Another partner funded the school store, which was a part

of the economics and banking program. We also had a partnership with a local bank that allowed our children to open a savings account, to teach parents to let them start saving now. Every week the bank would come and take the children's deposits. So lots of community support lots of things that made this school special.

Jackson said,

With the program, the principal invited a lot of communities, community people and organizations. They would provide the time and financial support which helped greatly. So when she needed something, she would just get on the phone and say it and they were there to provide it.

Dr. Wilson said, "A large part of the success of our school was because of our business partnerships." Alice commented,

We had a lot of partners who were willing to come out and work, help, work with students, give money, and give their time. Each summer before school started, we'll have a school makeover and this church would come and redo the school every summer. They would come out on buses, that's how many people would come out. It was a good thing happening in the community.

*Relationships*

Participants made 13 comments about relationships. Steve said, "Relationships are the most critical step in raising student achievement." Three participants spoke about rapport. Julie stated,

First you have to have a good rapport with the parents. I am a firm believer that if you contact your parents on bad things, you should also contact them when the student is doing well. You have to be truthful, fair, and firm. When I talk to a parent, I talk to them as a teacher and not a friend. I have had plenty of parents that didn't like me, but they respected me and respected what I did.

Alice said, "When I was in the classroom, I used to just call the parents at the beginning of the year to establish rapport with them and to establish a special relationship with them."

Julie and Courtney both spoke about the staff and students being a family. Courtney said,

The kids here are pretty much sheltered because we love them in such a way and it's like home for them. They can come in the door hungry, and it's not a question of if they have money, we feed them. If they

don't have shoes or uniforms, we make sure they get them. If they need their hair cleaned, washed, and combed or braided, we do it. We always make them feel secure. We are pretty much a family.

Julie said,

We are together. I mean, we pitch in and help one another. It's just like when you are mad at your sister or brother, but you don't want anyone else to say anything bad about them. Even if you are mad at them, when they are in trouble, you help them out. That's what I notice about this place. It is a family.

## Chapter 9

### Professional Development

There were 43 comments regarding Professional Development (PD) at the school. The comments ranged from how professional development was decided upon, the topic it would be, to the various ways they received it. All 16 participants mentioned that they received professional development every Tuesday, while three participants talked about getting PD on early release days. Seven of the participants talked about the PD being based on the building needs and data. Seven participants spoke of utilizing PD 360 as a means of personal professional development and four spoke of going to professional conferences. Five participants mentioned getting PD notices by email.

Dr. Wilson said, "Professional development is in place weekly. We find the needs of the building based off data and/or referrals and we use staff members' experience to provide it in-house." Dr. Powers added,

Teachers are assigned either by grade level or by content to receive professional development in a certain area. Each school is required to provide staff development for all teachers one day a

week, for 45 minutes. That is usually scheduled at the building level. So the staff development that's provided generally has to do with what the data shows. We also have our faculty meetings in which we use some of that time for professional development, and on some early release days.

Steven noted,

Within the school, staff development actually comes from the teachers. We look at our data and our weaknesses and put together a plan. So the teachers are part of making the schedule, so the buy-in was never an issue. We as a group write it up and then we go on what is called a nine-week staff development plan and we train once a week.

Alice stated,

One day out of the week on Tuesdays, we have professional development down in the computer lab and everyone is kind of responsible for presenting in their area of study. It's all pretty much in-house now. We do have some people that come in from downtown to present also.

Julie commented,

We have a schedule and we have professional development every Tuesday. They are helpful



because they give different insights. I'm old school, so I have to know the new ways of doing math or the new way of doing reading. So it helps me in preparing how to teach different ways or the new ways of doing things.

Richard made the comment, "Every week we have something for the teachers. Sometimes the instructional team sends out emails to the teachers letting them know of different things going on. The district also sends things out by email. Then the teachers know." Along these lines, Kendra remarked, "We get professional development for all the subjects. We always get emails for professional development. Most of them come through emails. Some of them are in-house or some of them are after school somewhere else."

Lisha commented,

We have a district all staff development day. That is for the entire district, one day a year. They offer it for all of the different subject areas. We also have professional development once a week here in the building. Sometimes they will bring somebody in from the outside. We also have PD 360. It's a website of professional development.

Kijah added,

Professional development is offered at our school and all the schools normally once a week, if not more. We are mandated to go. That is our professional development day. There are extra ones that we're allowed to sign up for and also certain ones we can earn college credits. There are conferences that are emailed to all of us in the district about any other professional development they may need or like. We also have the PD 360, which is an online program that teachers can also use for various videos on different topics and earn professional development points that way.

## Chapter 10

## Summary

Spending time at this school helped to put many things in perspective and made me want, even more, to share this story of success. What was once a school floundering in the depths of low test scores, public ridicule, and humiliation became a nationwide success story, receiving positive public attention with multiple state and national honors and awards through its endeavors in becoming one of the best. Although this success story stemmed from a personal dream of the principal, it took teamwork to develop, implement, and run the program.

What I learned from the interviews is that the school is a family. They take care of one another and rely on each other for personal and professional expertise. They provide a home away from home for their students, making sure to show empathy while not lowering standards in any case. The friendly, welcoming, smiles and attitudes from staff and students are an indication that respect, rapport, and relationships have a meaningful significance and goes hand-in-hand with the other expectations that have assisted in this school's success.

Although this school tells a story of success, unfortunately it has a sad ending. Due to budget cuts and restraints, the school closed its doors for good in June 2011. Funding from the district and other sources were no longer available and what was once a dream for many students, parents, teachers, and community members, is now a nightmare come true. When the new school year began in 2011, students would enroll in different schools and staff members would relocate to different schools as well.

During the interviews, I could see the pain in the participants' eyes and hear the pain in their voices when they spoke of the school closing. Some of them described this unfortunate circumstance as "disastrous," "heart-breaking," and "down right shameful." One participant said,

This program and the entire setup was excellent. It was striving, thriving, and doing real great. Everybody just loved it and it had a great reputation. People wanted to come here to teach and to send their children here. We see how money or the lack of money can just wipe out a whole program and school that was really good for public education.

## Chapter 11

### Implications

#### *Principals*

As I think about this study and what evolved from the research and interviews, I am biased because of my own personal experiences of working in a successful high-poverty school. Principals who clearly communicate what is expected of teachers, are supportive and encouraging of staff, obtain resources for the school, enforce rules for student conduct, talk with teachers regarding instructional practices, have confidence in the expertise of the teachers, and take a personal interest in the professional development of teachers are the leaders who are able to beat the odds and emerge successful.

A principal has to be an instructional leader as well as data driven, being aware of each grade level curriculum and grade specific assessment data in order to implement necessary strategies to meet goals and standards. It is imperative that the building principal provide achievement data to teachers. Principals must break down the data to an understandable level so the teachers can use it to diagnose areas of weakness and then in turn help teachers to develop an instructional response that will improve instructional

practice and increase student achievement. There has to be time set aside to provide extensive, focused professional development that is organized around the delivery of a specific curriculum instead of too many unsustained, unrelated improvement programs. Most importantly, in order for change to be successful and a vision to be fulfilled, staff "buy-in" plays a major role. Principals must understand that in order to attain these goals and emerge successful, one must have buy-in from the staff and encourage team-work and collegiality among staff members. Principals must help teachers realize that student and building success is a result of a team effort, which only thrives if everyone has the same goal in mind. A principal's leadership must be productive and proactive.

#### *Teachers*

Most teachers share the belief that they want to make a positive difference in their students' lives, they want to help the students learn, and want to be a teacher who will always be fondly remembered by their former students. Although these beliefs seem idealistic and the reason for getting into the profession, they do not always pan out the way in which they were intended.

What I have learned from my experience and from the voices of the participants is that positive relationships

are key. Without positive relationships, there is no connection between the teacher and the student. Without positive relationships, learning does not take place as much as it should and as easy as it should. Positive relationships are absolutely necessary if a teacher is to reach the intended goal of learning.

It is also necessary as a teacher to utilize and implement lessons, methods, and/or skills presented during professional development opportunities. Although there may be many things which may not apply to your grade level or subject area, it is important as a growing educator to find a way to make the information applicable in your instruction. It is essential that an educator, something is taken away from the professional development in-service.

Teachers should also realize the importance of data and the implications it has on student achievement. Being able to use assessment data as a means to focus intense instruction is invaluable. The more knowledge a teacher has regarding deficits and weaknesses on assessments, the better prepared he or she can become in figuring out ways to get their students to master them. During this time, teachers should utilize any instructional support systems provided at the building level and the district level, to help accommodate students that may need additional support

or to help the teacher produce meaningful lessons that differentiate to meet the needs and abilities in the class.

Along these lines, collaboration is a must. For instance, if all but one class in a grade level is demonstrating a weakness in a particular area or skill, then that teacher can obviously assist the rest of the grade level in becoming proficient in that particular area. Teachers have to learn to share ideas and methods that work in their class so that everyone can share that same success. Teachers have to realize that high student achievement is the goal for everyone. To make one's self look good is acceptable, but bigger recognition follows when one is able to assist in making everyone look good.

#### *Preparation Programs*

Having taught and been an administrator in an urban school, I have had firsthand experience with novice teachers being blind-sided by the many challenges that can come with an urban school. University systems fail pre-service teachers when they are not being provided with proper real-life experiences in a classroom that they may teach. Pre-service teachers need the opportunity to experience the urban classroom so they can succeed as teachers in this setting. If teachers are not prepared to teach in a school where poverty is an issue, then they not



only fail themselves as educators, but fail our students and the system. During field experiences or student teaching experiences, it is crucial for future teachers to have experienced being in an urban school setting with high needs.

#### *Further Research*

There are cases where teachers and administrators are doing all the right things, and yet student achievement remains low. Even though this particular school and some researchers find that by having strong leadership and instructional practices, having a strong triad of teachers, parents, and community representatives and organizations, implementing change where change is needed, and consistently enforcing and utilizing professional development opportunities is indicative of raising student achievement, it still falls short of perfection because other strategies may be helpful in other high-poverty situations. However, these are necessary first steps when confronting similar issues. At the beginning of this research project, I had no idea exactly what the outcome would be or even how I would get there. Now that I am finished, I have found several ways I could improve this process in providing a more in-depth analysis and manifesting a deeper meaning of content being researched.

As an extension of my study, first, I would begin with implementing a quasi-experimental study that would allow me to demonstrate data through the use of charts and diagrams while focusing on particular areas and relationships pertinent to the study. Along these lines, I would have a larger number of participants to gain more information for cross-reference. I would like to be able to tell the story while supporting it with the necessary data. It would be necessary to have access to assessment data along with personal interviews.

After acquiring this information, I would then conduct a comparative study with another school with similar characteristics, demographics, and assessments, to see if the outcomes would be similar or if there would be significant differences in the level of success according to student achievement.

It would be pertinent to take the developed themes from both of the schools to determine whether or not any of the themes were identical. For the themes that were not the same, I would look to see what elements of those particular themes make them so different.

#### *Future Researchers*

This was a very positive experience for me and I am so elated that I had the opportunity to visit this school,

meet the staff, see the students, and be a part of the culture for a week. If I ever have this opportunity again, there are some things that I would do again, and some things that I would not.

First of all, I would definitely choose this exact school again, regardless of the future closing, simply because the program is outstanding and the program worked. I would like to add in the voices of the students so that I could gain their perspective on the program and the impacts it has made. However, it was very helpful and beneficial to have the opportunity to see the students in action, whether it is in the classroom during instruction, in the hallways performing their patrol duties, or in the cafeteria having lunch. Just seeing the students in action, strengthened my belief that strong leadership, high expectations, and solid relationships go a long way. Students will perform their best at any time if they believe in themselves and they feel that they are believed in.

Even though I only used 16 participants in my study, I actually interviewed 24 individuals. Once I got to the school, different staff members were so interested and enthused that I came all the way from Nebraska to learn about their school, that they all wanted to be interviewed. I even interviewed the building custodian, who had some

good information to share. However, he was also interested in knowing if I could help with getting the amount of homework reduced for his son, who attended a different school. It was good to see though, that even the building custodian's perspective was "right on" with the other participants' perspectives. This let me know that this program did work and that everyone played a part in getting it to this point.

Although my experience was extremely positive, there are a few things that I would do differently and change if I could. To start, I would extend my trip by a few days. Even though I was there for a week, I felt that the lack of time was a negative factor. It seemed as if I rushed some of my participants because the hour went by so quickly. Since the interviews were stacked "back-to-back," there was no opportunity to extend anyone's interview. I feel believe I could have gotten more in-depth answers from some of the participants if more time was available.

Another thing that I would do differently is to only have face-to-face interviews. Although this was my intention, one of the most important participants, the principal who implemented the program, was unable to participate in a face-to-face interview. Therefore I had to conduct a telephone interview with her. Granted, she did

provide me helpful information, but I still felt some disconnect, which did not allow me to get all the information I think I needed. The personal touch was not there, therefore I think the interview lacked in detail.

## Chapter 12

### Propositions

From the time we are young, we learn that any particular action causes a reaction, whether that reaction be positive or negative. What I have learned from my study and from the interviews with the participants is that this same cause and effect process is not limited to the walls of the school, but extends beyond. This method allows one to make decisions sometimes based on prior knowledge or experience, or sometimes based on nothing at all, which is what the administration and staff encountered at this school while implementing all the new practices and procedures.

It seemed as though this school had a similar initial mission in mind that closely mimicked a popular quote, "If we build it, then they will come." This is exactly what happened. Based on the finding of my study, I offer these propositions.

- If the administration is steadfast in creating a culture of high expectations, morals, rapport, and uniformity, then the community will see that not all poverty-stricken schools are out of control and ineffective.

- If the staff is mindful of individual student's situations and they demonstrate a sense of compassion, kindness and safety, then the students are more apt to want to succeed and do well for themselves and their teachers.
- If the principal is cognizant of breaking apart data, sharing it, and using the data in a way that is beneficial for the teachers and the students, then teachers will do more to utilize it to drive their instruction.
- If the school provides unique activities and engagements that welcome the parents in the building, then the parents are more susceptible of being supportive of the school and the school's efforts.
- If the community and neighborhood businesses see all the encouraging efforts like community service, theatrical monologues, national and state-wide publicity due to rising test scores, then they will want to be attached financially, socially, and academically to something so great and so positive.
- If the staff feels a part of developing the vision of the school, then they will believe in it.

- If proper professional development occurs, then best practices and good teaching take place.
- If teachers are held accountable for themselves and their responsibilities, then the building thrives.
- If students are held accountable for themselves and their responsibilities, then they grow and learn.
- If parents are held accountable for themselves and their children, then they take responsibility.



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## Appendix A

April 15, 2011

Shavonna Holman  
Department of Educational Administration  
8269 GIRARD ST. OMAHA, NE 68122

Marilyn Grady  
Department of Educational Administration  
128 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number:  
Project ID: 10464  
Project Title: Student Success in a High-Poverty, Urban  
Elementary School: A Case Study

Dear Shavonna:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the Request for Change in Protocol submitted to the IRB.

1. It has been approved to increase the number of participants from 15 to 16.
2. It has been approved to work with the assistant principal to find potential participants.
3. It has been approved to invite participants to participate via a letter emailed by the assistant principal. Once the message is sent, the assistant principal will have no further involvement. Those interested will contact the investigator.
4. The revised letter of invitation has been approved.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

\* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems)

which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;

\* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;

\* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;

\* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or

\* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This letter constitutes official notification of the approval of the protocol change. You are therefore authorized to implement this change accordingly.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

*Becky R. Freeman*

Becky R. Freeman, CIP  
for the IRB



## Appendix B

Dear Ms. Shavonna Holman,

Your doctoral research designed to case-study success in one high-poverty urban elementary school is approved for [REDACTED] Public Schools.

The approval includes the following stipulations:

Obtain extension for IRB approval. The study may not begin until copy of the IRB extension is received by Dr. Flanagan/SEAS.

Confirm school for case-study.

Participation is voluntary (not mandated), and allows each individual to decide whether to participate. Individuals, including students, may withdraw at any time, without question or consequence.

Schools and individuals--administrator, teacher, staff, student or parent names will remain anonymous and not identified in reporting results. Identifiable characteristics or linkage to the identity of any individual or school in the report is prohibited.

Approval does not constitute commitment of resources, endorsement of the study, or its findings by the school district or the School Board.

Research records must be locked in a secured location, and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Copy of the final paper approved by the university will be provided for the school district and sent to Dr. Flanagan (SEAS); email attachment preferred.

Let me know any questions, and we look forward to your findings and contribution to program services, instructional practice and student achievement.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gail Flanagan, PhD.

Senior Coordinator, Research & Evaluation

Dept Strategic Evaluation, Assessment & Support (SEAS)

[REDACTED] Public Schools

[gflanaga@nps.k12.va.us](mailto:gflanaga@nps.k12.va.us) Office # 757-628-3850x21151

## Appendix C

## Student Success in One High-Poverty, Urban Elementary School: A Case Study

**Interviewee** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location** \_\_\_\_\_

I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. The purpose of this study is to explore the efforts implemented in a high-poverty, urban elementary school to increase academic achievement. As we are talking, I will be recording what we say today. It is important that I reflect in my writing what you say.

I really would like to know your perspective regarding the questions I will be asking, so please feel free to discuss your personal ideas and thoughts.

-----  
**Administrator**

***Informational Questions:***

1. What is your title and how long have you worked in this position?
2. How would you describe yourself as a building administrator?
3. What are your responsibilities in this role?
4. How do these responsibilities affect achievement?
5. As a building principal, do you think that being an instructional leader or one who is more data driven results in more success?
6. Thinking in terms of budgeting and per student capita, how much money is allocated for both instructional and operational costs per student?



7. What are your feelings in regards to the money set aside to educate students and run a school building each year?
8. Describe your district's poverty percentage and how it compares to the state.
9. Describe free/reduced lunch rate.
10. How does free/reduced lunch rate impact learning?

***Research Question 1: What are the aspects of the instructional program that assure student success for all students?***

1. What are the names of the assessments that your district uses to assess student achievement and AYP?
2. If a school does not meet AYP, what are the responsibilities of the district, principal, and teachers?
3. Since the inception of NCLB, how would you describe your district's trend in data in regards to assessments (Math, Writing, and Reading)?
4. What role does staff alignment with your vision play in assuring student success?
5. What role does the teacher appraisal process play in ensuring teachers are following through with your expectations?
6. How do you think teacher experience impacts student academic success?
7. What are your thoughts on teacher experience, classroom management, and professional development when it comes to dealing with students of high-poverty needs?
8. In your opinion, what would be the most critical step in raising student achievement?

***Research Question 2: What changes have occurred in the school to achieve its current status?***

1. How is professional development presented to teachers within the district and within your school?
2. What is the process of selecting professional development goals?
3. Are there enough professional development opportunities offered?

4. How do you get the students and parents on board with building and academic expectations?

***Research Question 3: How have changes been implemented?***

1. What would be some challenges facing teachers/administrators in increasing academic achievement?
2. With it being a testing rich society, how do you emphasize and encourage learning before testing so that rising test scores reflect real improvements in authentic and productive learning?

***Research Question 4: What resources have been instrumental in the current student success of your school?***

1. What types of funding programs are available to help your school financially?
2. Describe how your school utilizes these funds to directly affect student achievement?

## Student Success in One High-Poverty, Urban Elementary School: A Case Study

**Interviewee** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location** \_\_\_\_\_

I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. The purpose of this study is to explore the efforts implemented in a high-poverty, urban elementary school to increase academic achievement. As we are talking, I will be recording what we say today. It is important that I reflect in my writing what you say.

I really would like to know your perspective regarding the questions I will be asking, so please feel free to discuss your personal ideas and thoughts.

---

**Teacher/Instructional Coach**

***Informational Questions:***

1. What is your title and how long have you worked in this position?
2. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
3. What are your responsibilities in this role?
4. How do these responsibilities affect achievement?
5. As a teacher, do you think it's more important for your principal to be an instructional leader or one who is more data driven in achieving results and success?

***Research Question 1: What are the aspects of the instructional program that assure student success for all students?***

1. How are you using data to inform your instruction?
2. Who is the person responsible for providing additional teaching support when needed?
3. What are the greatest instructional challenges you are facing?
4. How do you incorporate student-led lessons into your daily instruction?
5. How does inclusion and co-teaching assist in student achievement?

***Research Question 2: What changes have occurred in the school to achieve its current status?***

1. Why do you think your school is so successful?
2. What types of professional development opportunities are provided to you as a teacher?
3. How instrumental are field trips in enhancing student achievement?
4. How does your administrator assure teachers are meeting expectations?

***Research Question 3: How have changes been implemented?***

1. How are professional development opportunities presented to you as a teacher?
2. What changes have occurred in how the educational protocol is delivered currently as opposed to in the past?
3. What is the significance of your school name change?
4. How do you get students and parents on board with academic and behavior expectations?

***Research Question 4: What resources have been instrumental in the current student success of your school?***

1. What resources are available to you to assist in educating your students?
2. How are resources allotted to enhance curriculum through field trips?
3. What other types of programming have been designed and implemented to reach and teach students in your building?



## Appendix D

April 1, 2011

Dear (insert name),

I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as well as an Assistant Principal of an elementary school. I am conducting research designed to identify the efforts used in a high-poverty, urban elementary school to increase academic achievement. Because of the successes experienced at your school, I am seeking volunteers to participate in interviews about your work in your school.

I will be in Virginia during the week of May 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> to conduct interviews. The interviews will be conducted in person and with your permission, will be audio taped. The tapes will be erased after they have been transcribed. No personal identifying information will be used in any materials created from these interviews. The information obtained in this study will be published in my dissertation, professional journals, and presented at professional meetings.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting our relationship or your relationship with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

There will be no direct benefit to you if you participate in this research. However, you will be contributing to the understanding of the strategies, policies, and practices that are key to helping students in a high-poverty, urban school setting succeed.

I invite you to participate in this interview process, as it is voluntary and will take no longer than one hour to complete. If you would be willing to participate, please reply to this invitation and indicate times during the week of May 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> that would be convenient for the interview.

Thank you for considering my request. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Shavonna Holman, Doctoral Student  
 University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
 402-681-4931  
[shavonna.holman@ops.org](mailto:shavonna.holman@ops.org)

Dr. Marilyn Grady, Doctoral Advisor  
 University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
 402-472-0974  
[mgrady1@unl.edu](mailto:mgrady1@unl.edu)

### **Student Success in a High-Poverty, Urban Elementary School**

Please respond to the following questions and return in the enclosed, postage-paid envelope.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would be willing to participate in the interview.

During the week of May 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, the following times would be convenient for an interview:

(1<sup>st</sup> Choice) Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

(2<sup>nd</sup> Choice) Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your willingness to participate.

Please return this information to:

Shavonna Holman  
 Department of Educational Administration  
 141 Teachers College Hall  
 University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
 Lincoln, NE 68588-0360

Or

Use the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

**Please return by April 20, 2011**

Appendix E

April 1, 2011

Dear Participant:

As an educator in a highly populated urban school district, we are always seeking ways to improve the quality of education for students. We are interested in programs that will be educationally beneficial for students. We want to provide the most valuable professional development opportunities to ensure teacher and administrator effectiveness. In an effort to continuously meet the needs of the urban student learner, as well as meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals, I am asking that you provide your assistance in participating in this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the efforts implemented in a high-poverty, urban elementary school to increase academic achievement. The following information is being provided to assist you in deciding whether or not to participate in this research study. If you agree to participate, you maintain the right to withdraw at any time.

Participation in this study will require approximately an hour of your time. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted in a private, mutually decided upon location. All interviews will be audio taped to ensure accuracy. If there is a need for clarification, follow-ups will be conducted by telephone. You will be provided with a written copy of your interview transcripts and a summary of the findings so that you can verify the accuracy of the information. Interviews are strictly confidential and a pseudonym will be used in place of your name. Audio-recorded tapes will be kept for 2 years and then destroyed. The results of the study may be published in professional journals or presented at a professional conference. Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential as no identities will be revealed. You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, your school district, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Your questions about the interview are invited before or after the time of participation. If you have any additional questions that have not been answered, you may contact the primary researcher Shavonna Holman (402-681-4931), a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Dr. Marilyn Grady (402-472-0974), Doctoral Advisor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB Board (402-472-6965).



There are no known risks involved and there will be no direct benefits to you as a participant; however at the end of the study you will receive a copy of the final report. You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that the content and meaning of the information on this consent form have been fully explained to you and that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. Your signature also certifies that you have had all of your questions answered to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Your assistance with study is greatly appreciated.

I agree to be audio taped

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Shavonna Leigh Holman, Doctoral Student  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
402-681-4931  
shavonna.holman@ops.org

Dr. Marilyn Grady, Doctoral Advisor  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
402-472-0974  
mgrady1@unl.edu



## Appendix F

### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT-TRANSCRIPTIONIST

I \_\_\_\_\_, hereby agree that I will maintain Confidentiality of all data that  
(name of transcriptionist)

I have been contracted to transcribe for the following research project:

#### **Student Success in a High-Poverty, Urban Elementary School: A Case Study**

This means that I will not discuss nor share any tape-recorded nor transcribed data with any individuals other than the researcher, Shavonna Holman, or her supervisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady. When the transcription is complete, I will return all data to the researcher and will transfer all electronic files to the researcher. Upon confirmation of receipt of these files by the researcher, I will destroy the originals.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of transcriptionist)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix G

**Theme 1: Instructional Practices**

Field Trips	7
Meaningful	5
Exposure	9
Experience	9
Real-life	3
Teacher Instruction	1
Teaching to Standards (SOL's)	1
Teach outside the box	4
Hands on learning/activities	4
Individualized Instruction	1
One-on-One Instruction	3
Rigor	4
Differentiation	5
Knowledge of Content	4
High Expectations	2
Double-dose Learning	5
Small grouping	16
Peer teaching	2
Cooperative learning	2
Changing groups	1
Technology	11
Smartboards	6
Computers	4
Team Planning	3
Lesson planning	4
GAPP lessons	4
Positive Classroom Management	3
Positive behavior reinforcement	4
Consistency	3
Disciplined Learning Environment	1

Co-Teaching/ Inclusion	2
Resource Teachers	1
Co-planning	1
Collaborative approach	2
No isolation	2
Diversity to class	1

Teacher Mentors	3
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Vertical Alignment	1
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## **Theme 2: Changes**

New School-New Rules	2
Staff re-interviewed	2
Character Education (10 Pillars)	14
Enrichments (clubs)	16
Extended learning day	10
Uniform policy	2
Professional dress day	2
Saturday school	2

Remediation Program	5
Focused on reading/writing	2
Based off data	9
Re-teaching skills	3

Private school in Public Setting	1
Elite	1
Strong foundation	2

Name Change=Dreaming	5
=Keeping the dream alive	6
=Pride	1
=Culture change	3
=New outlook	1

Focus on Well-Rounded Student	4
Social development	1

Academic development	1
Whole child	1
Growth	2
Making a difference	1
Shared Vision (buy-in)	5
Accountability Action Plan	3
Focus	3
Staff Accountability	4
Building Closing	3
<b><u>Theme 3: Leadership Practices</u></b>	
Principal as Instructional Leader and Data Driven	13
Principal has to be everything in one	2
Principal as Instructional Leader	2
IL to have effective leadership	3
Principal as Data Driven	1
Principal breaks apart data	3
Data used to inform, enrich, and enhance	1
Principal Visibility	10
Open door policy	2
High Standards/Expectations	10
Principal Observations	6
Snippets (pop-ins)	8
Walk-Throughs	1
Discussions/Feedback	4

**Theme 4: Teachers, Parents, and Community Involvement**

Parent Support/Involvement	9
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Family learning nights	5
Parent Meet and Greet	5
Parent workshops	3
Parent communication	5
Parent contacts	5
Parent liaison	4
Weekly progress reports	4
Community Support/Partnerships	5
Time	1
Financial	3
Mentors	4
Tutoring	5
Retired Teachers	2
PTA	3
Relationships	2
Rapport	4
Family (students/staff are)	5
Respect	1
<b><u>Theme 5: Professional Development</u></b>	
Professional Development	2
PD based of building needs/data	7
PD every Tuesday (in-house)	16
PD notices by email	5
PD 360	7
PD on early release days	3
Professional conferences	4