OPENING THE GATES TO FOSTER SCHOLARSHIP FOR URBAN STUDENTS:

ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES AND SYSTEMIC PRACTICES IN A HIGH

PERFORMING HIGH POVERTY URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

A DISSERTATION IN
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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by
REGINA ANDERSON ELLIS

B.A., University of Iowa, 1973
M.A., Creighton University, 1978
Education Specialist, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2000

Kansas City, Missouri
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Regina Anderson Ellis, Candidate for the Doctor of Education Degree

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ABSTRACT

The problem of underachievement seems to exist in school districts across the

country, particularly, where there are a significant percentage of students of color and low

socio-economic groups. The purpose of this qualitative case study, conducted with an ex post

facto approach, was to bring to light the organizational policies and systemic practices that

allowed a high poverty, high performing urban school with a large concentration of students

of color and low socio-economic students to succeed in a manner that can be translated into

effective practices for other schools with the same or similar classification. The traditions of

heuristic inquiry and symbolic interactionism assisted in the understanding of the

phenomenon of organizational policies and systemic practices. The goal of this study was to

illuminate policies and practices in one high performing urban college prep high school and to provide recommendations to improve educational practices in urban high schools.

The study constituted a single case with in-depth interviews, surveys and documents collected from students, teachers and administrators. The data were analyzed using the processes of heuristic and symbolic interaction, integrated with procedures for analyzing case study. Themes were identified in the data using thematic and enumerative coding.

Findings as depicted through the themes suggest that in order for the students in the school to achieve academic success, the organizational policies and systemic practices within the educational system would need to be re-cultured to reflect the original vision and mission of the school of high expectations and college readiness for all students. Re-culturing requires examining and changing beliefs and assumptions that influence teaching, practices, and interactions with culturally diverse students. Additionally an accountability system was needed to ensure that all students would meet the high expectations of a college prep environment.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies have examined a dissertation titled "Opening the Gates to Foster Scholarship for Urban Students: Organizational Policies and Systemic Practices in a High Performing High Poverty Urban High School" presented by Regina Anderson Ellis, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

<u>Supervisory Committee</u>

Dianne Smith, Ph.D., Committee Chair
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations

Loyce Caruthers, Ph.D.
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations

Jennifer Friend, Ph.D.
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations

Donna Davis, Ph.D.
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations

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PREFACE

REFLECTIONS OF THE URBAN EXPERIENCE AS A

STUDENT, PARENT AND EDUCATOR

The organizational structure of any school reflects the school system to which it belongs and the basic assumptions about how students learn and how they should be instructed. (Johnson, Johnson & Johnson, 2004). The structure may foster or hinder students' academic achievement. The reciprocal relationship between education and one's place in the social structure of society often affects the institutional structures of schooling and those structures in turn affect a student's social circumstance.

My decision to study the organizational structures and systemic practices in an urban school setting stems from the fact I have participated in the urban school experience as a student, a parent and an employee. As a student growing up in Chicago, I attended school every day, with the hopes and dreams of making something of myself. My high school in 1965 was still segregated, despite the Brown v Board of Education Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in schools. The neighborhood in which I grew up was also segregated and was considered lower middle class, as our parents were employed in blue-collar professions and they owned their own homes. In addition, our neighbors were cited as having children with some of the highest test scores in the city for African American students. I enjoyed school, participated in the most challenging classes offered by my school, maintained honor roll status throughout high school, was actively involved in a number of activities and had positive relationships with my instructors.

It was not until I graduated from high school and enrolled in the University of Iowa that I knew that my prior education was lacking in many respects. Having graduated with academic honors and earned a full scholarship to college, I was excited to take on the challenges of college life. During my first semester in college, I began to notice the vast disparity in my college preparation from that of my White college peers from various other schools and states. I can remember thinking, "how is it that my classmates seem to know so much more than me." The first sign of my under-education came when the University suggested that I enroll in a remedial reading class. I was outraged by the thought of being tracked into a low performing class when I had always been enrolled in double-honors classes in high school. I declined the offer and instead enrolled in a speed-reading class, where I would receive some supplemental help on reading comprehension, but also would learn to read faster as I was expected to read more books than I could imagine in college.

The second blow to my ego came when I received my first failing grade in Rhetoric 101 on a speech. When I reflected on my high school English classes, I had never given a speech or wrote a composition in four years of high school. During my 9th grade year, I had substitute teachers for an entire year in an honors English class. My 10th grade English teacher was outstanding and worked very hard instructing us on grammar. My 11th grade English teacher was intoxicated everyday and as teenagers, our class resorted to playtime each day. My 12th grade English teacher was the yearbook sponsor and spent most of her time working on layouts for the yearbook, thus our class spent most of our time either doing worksheets or talking. I can remember we began a term paper, but never finished it. Needless to say, I had not received the preparation needed in English to survive a freshman

college English class. Thus I sought out the help of my college professor, in an effort to pass the class.

This scenario played out over and over again throughout my college career. I recall feeling like Richard Geer in the movie, An Officer and A Gentleman, when asked why are you here (in the Navy), he responded, "I have no place else to go." On a number of occasions, I can remember professors telling me I was not prepared for college. While their words were very painful, I too had no place else to go. Because I was determined to graduate from college, I repeatedly reached out to teachers, tutors, my brother and anyone else capable of helping me survive the rigors of college life. At the conclusion of 4 years, I graduated from college and begun my teaching career. It would not be until I began the research for this dissertation that I became aware that I had been educated by what researchers described one of the worst school districts in the country, the Chicago Public Schools.

Upon beginning my teaching career, I was determined to save as many students as possible from the ills of an ineffective education, by working long hours every evening preparing quality lessons, staying after school to help students, buying rewards for students for good effort on my meager earnings, showing students that I thought they could learn and refusing to except anything less. I began my teaching career at Ezzard Charles Elementary Montessori School in Chicago, which proved to be an enlightening experience. Marie Montessori, founder of the Montessori schools, taught children in the ghettoes of Italy and proved that children regardless of their status in life were capable of learning. Her philosophy influenced me greatly and helped reinforce my educational mission.

My educational career has also allowed me the opportunity to work in junior high, middle and high schools in Omaha, Nebraska, Kansas City, Kansas, Kansas City, Missouri and currently North Kansas City, Missouri. I have been employed as a teacher, counselor, vice principal, principal, Director of Counseling and Executive Director of Elementary Principals. The schools in which I have worked can be considered urban schools as in most cases the major of the schools populations were from low to moderate income families, had large concentrations of students of color and struggled with poor performance as cited on standardized tests. It would require another dissertation to write about the dysfunctions that I have witnessed over the years of my career. However the most disheartening fact about working in the urban schools was that I saw students, much like me and students that did not look like me, struggling to get an education from school systems that blamed them for their failures. I was also outraged by the negative comments and put-downs that teachers made about the children they were getting paid to educate such as the following comments:

"These kids don't want to learn"
"These kids are not capable of learning"
"These kids just want to use school to socialize"
"These kids come from homes where the parents don't care"
"I could teach if the students had parents that were more supportive"

These comments forced me out of the teacher's lounge and I began to work in my classroom during my planning periods, either on lessons, grading papers or helping out in the office.

After a number of years in the school community, I became a parent of three children. Knowing the dysfunction of the urban schools in which I worked, I considered sending my children to parochial or private schools in Kansas City, Kansas. After visiting a number of schools, I was faced with the decision of either sending my children to majority White

populated schools or sending them to more integrated urban schools. I chose the latter of the two and sought out the highest performing urban public schools in Kansas City, Kansas.

I prepared my children with primary reading and math skills prior to them entering kindergarten. Once I sent my children to school, I saw many of the skills that they had prior to going to school fall by the wayside. When I questioned teachers on what they were doing in class, numerous reasons were provided as to why they had to teach at a lower level in their classes. While I could have pulled my children out of these situations, I was also concerned as to how suburban schools or private schools would treat my children of color. I also did not want my children to be isolated in environments where no one looked like them. Needless to say, I remained with the public school system and supplemented my children's education every evening at the dinner table, in the car while driving to various activities and through summer enrichment programs. There was never any doubt in my children's mind that education was important to me and that they would be successful in school.

As my children matriculated into high school, I began to see the sorting of students in higher and lower tracks with the assistance of guidance counselors. This tracking occurred based on teacher recommendations, which are known to be somewhat unreliable. I refused to accept the mediocrity of negative opinions of teachers and reinforced my children's learning deficits myself or with the help of tutors. I also was instrumental in working with the counselors to ensure that my children received the most qualified teachers. All in all, my children did receive a quality education; however this was not without encountering some teachers with low expectations. Teachers who attempted to make excuses as to why they

were not giving students the best educational experience possible or attempting to deny them access to certain classes also insulted me.

As a parent with several academic degrees at the time my children attended school, I have been able to navigate many of the pitfalls urban students face in schools from their teachers. I have often wondered how the parents of the other students would feel if they knew the authentic expectations teachers hold for their children. Parents did not know that in many cases their children were being under-educated and tracked into lower performing classes and teachers did not communicate with parents when students were not performing as expected. Traditionally schools claim to hold high expectations for all students. However, what is professed is not always practiced.

What I have observed during my forty years in education is that urban schools are immersed in school reform on a continuing basis. Oftentimes grant monies from sources outside the school system prompt the school reforms. Once the grant money is gone, so are the reform initiatives. The children's education has been interrupted by experiments that often do not produce the results that they promise to produce. Educators are forced nevertheless to participate in these trial runs of innovative educational strategies. Before they can complete one reform effort, another one is staring them in the face. Consequently, educators tire of the process, close their classroom doors and attempt to survive until retirement. As a result, children have fragmented learning experiences, which result in inadequate preparation for grade advancement, standardized testing and college or career endeavors. When the test scores decline due to multiple attempts at innovative reform efforts, rarely do schools acknowledge it. Almost consistently, low test scores in urban schools are reported as a direct

consequence of students not wanting to learn, discipline problems, their membership in a lower socio-economic and lack of parent involvement. During my career as a teacher, counselor and administrator in the urban public school setting, I have witnessed the notion that only some students can learn and should be taught. This phenomenon has deeply disturbed me as an educator and unnerved me as a parent of children attending the same urban public school system.

Over the years, the memories of my college experience have also resonated through my mind and I have been on a journey to uncover the reasons why the urban educational experience is so marginal. This qualitative case study will illuminate the academic disparities of the urban school system. It is important that I attempt to share the words and stories of other urban students, much like myself, wanting to escape the reigns of an inferior educational system to become productive members of society.

As a school administrator, I have been amazed by the numerous sophisticated avenues in which school systems camouflage the inequality of an urban education with school reform efforts. While government spending on improving urban education has varied over the years, the problem of under-educating urban children continues. Parents of urban school students pay their taxes to help ensure that their children get a good education. However these same parents have little, if no voice in the micro-dynamics of urban school bureaucracy.

My decision to study the organizational structures and systemic practices of the urban school is both professional and personal. I trusted those in charge of my education and had no reason to think that I was receiving anything less than a quality education until I arrived

on the college campus. I have seen that same trust being displayed by students and their parents today, only this time I am aware of the disparities from behind the scene as I now sit at the educational bureaucracy table. I have been on a mission for the past forty years to help raise the expectations of my academic colleagues in the urban school system, and challenge their belief systems on educating all students in an effort to give students a chance to get a quality education that prepares them to fulfill their idea of the American Dream.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historically in the United States, there has been a persistent problem of high poverty

students and students of color performing well below their middle and upper class White

counterparts on academic achievement tests, high school graduation rates, and acceptance

rates into institutions of higher learning (Conchas, 2006). Despite historical trends, research-

based organizational policies and systemic practices have been shown to contribute to high

student performance in high poverty urban schools (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Marzano,

2003; Washington Learns, 2006). This chapter is an overview of study. I began with a

discussion of organizational policies and systemic practices that play a positive role in

student achievement in high poverty, high performing urban schools with a large

concentration of students of color and other high poverty students. Secondly, I present the

problem and problem statement describing the broader context including evidence of the

problem conceptual framework and its causes. I began by situating the study within a context

of positive organizational policies and systemic practices. This discussion is followed by a

more specific discussion of the problem and problem statement that helped to structure my

inquiry. This discussion is followed by the purpose of the study, research questions,

theoretical framework and overview of the methodology and it significance.

Organizational structures may include school policies and procedures, school

funding, personnel policies, a viable and challenging curriculum and standards-based

instruction, school discipline and program regulations, such as those for the International

Baccalaureate and Advance Placement programs. Systemic practices refer to the means by

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which the school implements its organizational policies. Systemic practices may include school leadership, accountability, data collection, professional development, parental involvement, and a composite of beliefs that serve as the framework for teacher and staff expectations.

A great deal of research suggests what effective schools do in general to improve academic outcomes; however, less is known about the differences which may exist at those high schools which are exceeding expectations with the 'odds against them' (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Marzano, 2003; Washington Learns, 2006). With a more thorough understanding of urban high schools, which are outperforming their peers, we are more likely to pinpoint what needs to be altered at the school level and to suggest changes within the nation's neediest schools, so that these students can contribute to and compete within a global economy.

This study sought to illuminate organizational policies and systemic practices in one urban college prep high school that exceeded the expectations of a high poverty urban high school with a large concentration of students of color and provide recommendations to improve educational practices in urban high schools with similar populations. I looked at data over a three-year period and thus described this research as an ex post facto study. The purpose of ex post facto research is to investigate whether one or more pre-existing conditions have possibly caused subsequent differences in the groups of subjects (McMillan, 1997). In ex post facto research there is no manipulation of the conditions because the presumed cause has already occurred before the study was initiated (McMillan, 1997). Ex post facto research describes relationships between something that occurred in the past and

subsequent responses. Ex post facto studies are very common and useful when using human subjects in real-world situations and the investigator comes in after the fact (Diem, 2002).

I interviewed students, teachers and administrators about their experiences in the school. I surveyed the participants on their perceptions of what was going on in the school during the 2004-2007 school years. I gathered documents that were used in the school during these years. Preparing urban high school students for the challenges of a global economy can be accomplished by understanding what effective urban schools are doing and replicating those practices in other schools. In order to improve the educational system in urban schools, effective school practitioners recommend research-based data as the foundation for the development and implementation of organizational policies and systemic practices such as (1) effective leadership and accountability (2) a school culture of high expectations (3) data driven decision making (4) professional development (5) a challenging curriculum and standards-based instruction (6) effective teachers and (7) parent involvement (Reeves & Allison, 2010; Skrla, McKenzie, Scheurich & Johnson, 2009; Marzano 2006; Marzano, Waters & McNulkty, 2005; Thompson, 2004; and Lambert, 2003). These topics will serve as the scaffolding conceptual framework to under-pin this study.

Public school reform over the past thirty years has identified the quality and structure of effective leadership as one significant factor contributing to improving student achievement (Reeves & Allison, 2010; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Thompson, 2004; and Lambert, 2003). Marzano (2007) posits that effective leadership is vital to making sure the structures are employed at the school. Research also focuses on accountability as a top priority in the school settings that are promoting high academic achievement. In the

90/90/90 study, Reeves (2000) found that the most important aspect of a school's culture was the drive for accountability at all levels. High-performing high-poverty schools engage in consistent measurement and monitoring of student progress, which leads to improved program development and implementation (Skrla et al., 2009).

While advocating an achievement culture, high-poverty, high-performing schools create a school culture of high expectations conducive to learning (Marzano, 2007), as well as one that is culturally sensitive (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). High poverty, high-performing urban schools promote high teacher and staff expectations and promote a belief in the capabilities of all students. Data-driven instruction helps students increase learning, meet state and national content standards, achieve success on rigorous assessments and improve student achievement on a continuing basis throughout the school year (Reeves, 2009).

Researchers in the Washington Learns Study (2006) found that professional development was an essential element to the success of high-performing high poverty schools. High-quality professional development provides support to teachers in improving instruction, building professional relationships, and a shared instructional vision. Higher levels of student achievement were associated with teachers' opportunities to participate in sustained professional development grounded in content-specific pedagogy and linked to the curriculum they were teaching (Darling-Hammond & Hill-Lynch, 2006).

A challenging curriculum and standards-based instruction is this study will mean providing students with in-depth instruction of fundamental knowledge and essential skills to prepare students for college and careers. Various studies have found that the single most

effective way to eliminate the achievement gap and ensure college success is by providing a rigorous curriculum (Adelman, 1999; Kristin, 2005; Yin, 2003). The alignment between curriculum and state standards should guide the development of corresponding learning goals. Like the curriculum, the learning goals must be clearly communicated and should reflect expectations of school-wide academic success. To ensure that the goals are not compromised in the privacy of individual classrooms, every teacher must buy into the common goals (Carter, 2005).

Effective teachers in this research will be defined as teachers that hold uniformly high expectations for all students. They refuse to alter their attitudes or expectations for their students, regardless of the student's race or ethnicity, life experiences and interest, family wealth or stability (Lumsden, 1994). Marzano (2003) suggested that high performing schools employ effective teachers. Student achievement is higher in classes with teachers who utilize successful instructional strategies. Effective teachers also provide students with opportunities for more practice and provide students with feedback. Education researchers have consistently pointed out that an underlying cause of our nation's under achievement crisis is having under-qualified and ineffective teachers in classrooms.

All of the aforementioned organizational policies and systemic practices are consistent throughout the literature on high-poverty, high-performing schools. Their effectiveness works in concert as a result of strong leadership and serves as the foundation for the development of instructional practices.

In order to understand the significance of the success of high poverty, high performing schools it is essential to examine the extant problems in education. Stark

differences continue to exist between the education experiences of White students and students of color, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and students who speak limited English that attend high-poverty urban schools (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2006). This achievement gap signifying that students in high poverty urban schools fare worse than their White peers and students in suburban schools, has been documented in the literature over several decades (Darling-Hammond, 2005, Johnson, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this study the scope of the problematic issues in education encompassed factors surrounding disparities in academic achievement between high poverty students and students of color with their White peers.

The Problem

The educational aim of schools in the United States has been articulated as providing equal educational opportunities for *all* children attending public schools. Nevertheless, nearly half of low- income and/or students of color either drop out of school or do not graduate from high school in four years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Those who do graduate often leave their high schools with skill sets similar to those expected of middle school students (Haycock, 2005). The disparity also commonly referred to as the achievement gap was exemplified by the 2000 U.S. high schools study called "dropout factories," serving mainly youth of color, whose students stand only a 60 percent or less chance of graduating within four years (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). More than 1.2 million U.S. high school students drop out every year, which roughly equates to 7,000 students each school day (Editorial Projects in Education, 2007).

An historical examination of educational trends in the United States suggests that the development of the educational system was based on the dominant culture's belief that education was only for those of high socioeconomic status (Reeves & Allison, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Hill-Lynch, 2006; Marzano, 2005; DuFour & Eaker, 2005; and Thompson, 2003). DuFour and Eaker (2008) refer to the American educational system as a "system of sorting" between the haves and have-nots. In analyzing the historical development of urban schools, lower expectations and social hegemony have been reoccurring themes. These authors suggest that schools were never meant to serve all students; instead, they were formed as a complex system of contradictory rules, procedures, and norms that serve schooling for second-class citizenship.

The inequality of schools, as evidenced by limited funding, poor facilities and resources and unqualified teachers created a dual system of education. This institutional practice of segregation was legally sanctioned by the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896, which endorsed a doctrine of 'separate but equal'. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 overturned Plessy v. Ferguson, outlawing racially segregated schools and mandating desegregated education in the United States. Race-based educational inequality was thus recognized, which provided an important stimulus to the Civil Rights movement for African Americans and other marginalized and disenfranchised people of color (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). Access for equal educational opportunities was expanded through additional federal legislation and court decisions, including Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, Title IX

of the Educational Amendment Act in 1972, Lau v. Nichols in 1974, and No Child Left

Behind, 2000 (Education Trust, 2004).

The No Child Left Behind (2007) legislation concurred that there was a problem with

students in urban high schools performing academically lower than their White and suburban

counterparts, by noting these students often graduate with skill sets in reading and math

similar to middle school White and suburban students. Reform efforts to address the

continuous problem of inequality and underachievement in schools, such as No Child Left

Behind (NCLB), have mandated and are holding schools accountable for educating all

children regardless of color, socioeconomic status, or nationality to perform at grade level by

the year 2014. In spite of the NCLB legislation, many high schools, particularly urban high

schools are failing to 'make the grade'. National survey results confirm that the nation's high

school students are unprepared to meet the demands of college level work in reading, writing,

and math (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2005). The problem of

underachievement appears to be exacerbated in urban high school across the country where

there are a significant percentage of students of color (Little, 2004) and other low socio-

economic groups. The data regarding the percentage of students who either graduate or do

not graduate from urban high schools, the low percentage of those who graduate ready for

college and the workforce, and the persistent gaps in achievement among different ethnic and

low socio-economic status groups confirms the underachievement problem in urban schools

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Hammock and Desai (2006) ascertains that our economy has transitioned from one in

which most people earned their living with skilled labor to one in which employees need to

be intellectually skilled, if they want to make more than minimum wage. Due to the changes in the global economy, students need to be aware that employers now maintain that the same skills required in most workplaces directly correspond to those needed for success in college (Casbarro, 2005; Hammock & Desai, 2006). While all high schools are faced with preparing students for a global economy, urban schools face a unique set of circumstances. Issues such as inadequate funding, lack of resources, teachers with limited credentials, ineffective leadership and inconsistent district support have historically plagued urban schools. Often less is expected of the students from urban communities and as a result the instructors and the administrators place less significance on instructional leadership in the schools (Casbarro, 2005).

Problem Statement

The variance in academic achievement by high poverty students and students of color, produced within the educational system, has created differentiated pathways of access to education and has led to inequities in many areas of their lives, such as employment and the political, social, and economic structures of the nation (Morris, 2004; Weinstein et al., 2004). Equally, alarming is the dismal academic growth of high ability and gifted students of color and low economic status as they move through the urban public school system (Reardon, 2008). The organizational policies of any school reflects the school system to which it belongs and the basic assumptions about how students learn and how they should be instructed. (Johnson, Johnson & Johnson, 2004). The structure may foster or hinder students' academic achievement. The reciprocal relationship between education and one's place in the

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social structure of society often affects the institutional structures of schooling and those structures in turn affect a student's social circumstance.

The literature indicates that despite the disparaging historical trends of education for high poverty students and students of color, there have been a number of high poverty schools with large concentrations of students of color that have outperformed expectations and achieved significant gains (McGee, 2004; Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher, & DiBella, 2004; Washington Learns Study, 2006; Weinstein et al., 2004). Practitioners in schools have used research-based data as the foundation for the development and implementation of organizational policies and systemic practices that are correlated with increased urban student achievement. (Reeves & Allison, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Hill-Lynch, 2006; Marzano, 2005; Dufour & Eaker, 2005; & Thompson, 2003). Research suggests that the discrepancies in the academic performance of high poverty students and students of color can be reduced by effective policies and practices (Marzano, 2007). What currently is not clear is which of the organizational policies and systemic practices have the most impact on the academic achievement at high poverty urban high schools with high concentrations of students of color and how are these organizational policies and systemic practices implemented at the school site. Further inquiry into these unknown organizational policies and systemic practices led to the current study.

Purpose and Research Questions

This qualitative case study, conducted with ex post facto approach, was designed to bring to light the organizational policies and systemic practices that allowed a high poverty,

high performing urban school with large concentrations of low income students and students of color to succeed in a manner that can be translated into effective practices for other schools with the same or similar classification. The findings are intended to provide practitioners with an in-depth understanding of the organizational policies and systemic practices within the educational systems that are effective in decreasing or eliminating academic disparities and improving student achievement.

The theoretical traditions that were utilized in this study in this case study were heuristics inquiry and symbolic interaction. These theoretical tenets were used to understand the extent to which organizational policies and systemic practices contributed to high student performance in one high poverty urban school. Heuristics, according to Patton (2002), gives us the opportunity to answer the question, "What is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely?" (p.88) Thus as the researcher, I actively engaged in reflecting, discovering, and sharing my life experiences with the participants in the study. Patton (2002) states, "the researcher comes to understand the essence of the phenomenon through shared reflection and inquiry" (p. 108). Symbolic interaction allowed me to discover the common set of symbols and understandings that give meaning to people's interactions (Patton, 2002). Heuristic inquiry and symbolic interaction are all ways of knowing and understanding the human experience.

In addition to the aforementioned theoretical traditions, I also explored the four frames of effective organizations.

Research Questions

To pursue this inquiry, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the perceptions of students, teachers and administrators related to the organizational policies and systemic practices that contribute to high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

2. How are the organizational policies and systemic practices implemented to promote a school improvement plan for high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to uncover the role played by school organizational policies and systemic practices on student achievement in a high-performing, high-poverty urban school. Specifically, it examined the implementation of school-wide practices, resulting from those policies and practices, by focusing on a high-performing high-poverty urban school with large concentrations of students of color. While a vast amount of literature exists on the reasons for low achievement by high poverty students and students of color, there is a shortage of literature on what organizational policies and systemic practices are in place that leads to the high performance by urban students. Therefore, this study is significant in that it adds to the limited literature that contributes to the ongoing search for effective school practices as it pertains to promoting high performance among high poverty students and students of color. While urban populations are among the workforce of tomorrow, without a

superior education these students, as adults, will negatively impact the nation's economy, if the problems of an inferior education go unaddressed. A successful high school education is more important than ever, leads to increased opportunities for success and is essential for anyone wanting financial security. Rouse (2005) suggests that based on the historical trends in education in the United States our education system was never designed to deliver the kind of results we now need to equip students for the world of tomorrow.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework also called the conceptual context is the formulation of what you think is going on with the phenomena you are studying. The function of the theoretical framework is to inform the rest of the design of the study and to help assess the purpose of the study and develop and select realistic and relevant research questions and methods, and to identify potential validity threats to my conclusions in the study (Maxwell, 1996). Traditionally what one brings to the research from their background and identity has been treated as bias, something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component.

I became interested in studying urban schools after attending an urban high school, sending my children to an urban high school and working in an urban high school. The most disheartening fact about working in the urban schools was that I saw students, much like me and students that did not look like me, struggling to get an education from school systems that blamed them for their failures. I was also outraged by the negative comments and put-downs that teachers made about the children they were getting paid to educate. I have been

on a journey to uncover the reasons why the urban educational experience is so marginal.

This qualitative case study will illuminate the academic disparities of the urban school

system. It is important that I attempt to share the words and stories of other urban students,

much like myself, wanting to escape the reigns of an inferior educational system to become

productive members of society. My decision to study the organizational structures and

systemic practices of the urban school students is both professional and personal and stems

from the fact I have participated in the urban school experience as a student, a parent and an

employee. The organizational structure of any school reflects the school system to which it

belongs and the basic assumptions about how students learn and how they should be

instructed (Johnson et al., 2004). The structure may foster or hinder students' academic

achievement. The reciprocal relationship between education and one's place in the social

structure of society often affects the institutional structures of schooling and those structures

in turn affect a student's social circumstance. As a result of these experiences, I have been

on a mission for the past forty years to help raise the expectations of my academic colleagues

in the urban school system, and challenge their belief systems on educating all students in an

effort to give students a chance to get a quality education that prepares them to fulfill their

idea of the American Dream.

My study will serve to illuminate the disparities and contradictions in public

education that have denied poor children and children of color an equal opportunity to gain

an education that will serve them as a productive member of our global economy. In addition

it will highlight the dysfunctional systems of urban schools that counter a positive academic

experience for students and reflect how developing a school-wide culture of high

expectations can result in a high performing urban high school. The literature review that informed my research was gleaned from research-based data on effective school practitioners, which served as, the foundation for the development and implementation of organizational policies and systemic practices was as follows:

Historical Overview of the Achievement Gap

The achievement gap is defined as a consistent difference in scores on standardized achievement tests between certain groups of children and children in other groups (Ed Source, 2007). Singleton and Linton (2006) refer to the achievement gap as a racial gap due to the variance in performance between students of different skin colors. Despite the changes resulting from Brown v. Board of Education and the resources provided under ESEA that followed, there is a preponderance of statistical and anecdotal evidence that reflects glaring disparity in educational outcomes.

Tracking. American schools have developed a tracking system, based on the belief that "academic achievement is a function of inherited ability, and only a few are capable of serious learning and the American high school became the gate-keeper, the symbol, and the implementer of that system" (Codding et al., 1999). The practice of separating students by "ability" contributes to the poor academic performance of low-income and students of color, maintaining barriers that deny these students an equal opportunity to reach high standards (Kozol, 2006).

High ability students in urban schools. The cognitive, educational, and social and emotional developmental needs of high-ability students of color have been the subject of

much research during the last decade (e.g., Baldwin, 2004; Davis et al., 2004; Davis-Bond, 2004; Moore, Ford & Milner, 2005; Gandara, 2006; Geiser & Caspary, 2005; Gordon & Bridglall, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2002; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003; Reis & McCoach, 2002; Worrell, 2000). Skrla et al., (2009) present a well-known fact regarding the inequitable distribution of students of color in gifted and talented classrooms. Students from low-income homes and students of color are identified as gifted and talented at rates far lower than their proportional representation in the general student population. (Ford & Moore, 2004; Kunjufu, 2004; Moore, Ford & Milner, 2005).

Curriculum. According to ACT National Curriculum Survey (2010), high schools should shift their focus to providing in-depth instruction of fundamental knowledge and essential skills, to better prepare students for college and careers. The survey findings also suggested that high schools learning standards in the U.S. are still not sufficiently aligned with post-secondary expectations. Various studies have found that the single most effective way to eliminate the achievement gap and ensure college success is by providing a rigorous curriculum (Adelman, 1999; Kristin, 2005; Yin, 2003). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2004) found that not test scores, or high school GPAs, or even class rankings were as well correlated to a 4-year degree as student success in a solid high school academic curriculum, especially for African American and Hispanic students.

Teachers in urban schools. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2008), the single most important determinant of what students learn is what teachers know. Countless urban students throughout the nation are assigned to classrooms with teachers that are under-qualified or under-prepared to teach. Teacher qualifications, teachers' knowledge and skills

make more of a difference for student learning than any other factor. Their effectiveness

works in concert as a result of strong leadership and serves as the foundation for the

development of instructional practices. Ingersoll (2004) highlighted the significant disparity

in content knowledge between teachers in high-poverty, urban schools and those in affluent

schools. The U.S. Department of Education admitted "despite increased awareness of our

teacher-quality challenges and earnest efforts to address them, we as a nation are still far

from having a caring and competent teacher in every classroom" (U.S. Department of

Education, 2006).

Urban school funding. A large majority of urban high schools are located in the

most impoverished and disenfranchised areas of the nation, and no factor contributes more to

the academic failure of children than poverty (Vail, 2003). The mishandling of school

budgets by school district personnel often exacerbates the issue of poverty in urban schools.

Haberman (2007) maintains that the excessive number of failing schools in large urban

school districts does not occur by accident, but by design. Mismanagement of funding

allocated to urban school districts through ignorance and malfeasance is well documented in

Haberman's research. Haberman (2007) concludes that dysfunctional bureaucracy feeds on

the resources that should be given to the schools it serves.

High poverty high performing urban high schools. High-performing, high poverty

schools seem to exhibit a number of common traits that differ significantly from practices in

lower-performing, high-poverty schools. Trimble (2002) described three common elements

of high performing high poverty schools. First, the schools utilized a grant writer or a team of

writers to generate grants proposals to obtain additional funds to implement reform

initiatives. Second, the schools determine goals and then focus on strategies to reach the

goals. Finally, the schools utilize teams to do the work. Other practices in high-performing,

high-poverty schools include the following (Marzano, 2006): School-wide ethic of high

expectations, caring, respectful relationships with school staff, a strong academic and

instructional focus, regular assessment of individual students, collaborative decision-making

structures, effective leadership, strong faculty morale and work ethic, coordinated staffing

strategies.

 School organizational policies and systemic practices. Despite the historical trends

and the status of students of color in the majority of high-poverty schools, research has

identified organizational policies and systemic practices that are perceived to contribute to

high student performance in some high poverty urban schools. The research suggests that

discrepancies in the academic performance of high poverty students can be reduced by

effective policies and practices that address the needs of students at the school site (Marzano,

2007). School organizational policies are school funding, personnel policies, administrative

roles, teachers, professional development, accountability, standards-based curriculum and

instruction, and parent involvement. The school organizational policies may foster or hinder

students' academic achievement. Schools influence the academic and social development of

their students, in particular their academic achievement, through their policies, staffing,

organization, resources, and climate (Carbonaro, 2005; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

 Accountability. Leaders who implement high accountability have systems at every

level of the organization. The "90/90/90 Schools" study (Reeves, 2009) looked at schools

that were 90 percent students of color, 90 percent free and reduced lunch and in the 90th

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percentile or above in achievement. These schools show that through certain educational practice, schools can achieve at the highest levels. The core theme these schools shared was a high level of accountability in all aspects of the school. The schools focused on achievement; therefore they had highly structured and clear curriculum choices. The schools frequently assess students' knowledge, provided opportunities for improvement (Reeves, 2009).

Data analysis. In an educational system that measures change and holds everyone accountable for their roles, leaders need to implement systemic ways of collecting and analyzing data as proof of goal attainment (Patterson, 2007). Marzano (2007), points out that the importance of data collection and assessment is stressed to create an environment and culture that asks questions about where students are and how they can move to the next level. Having or creating a vision that focuses on the importance of planning and building toward the future, as well as being accountable by monitoring progress throughout the year rather than only at state test time infuses a strong sense of importance in regard to testing and accountability (Johnson, 2005).

Professional development. Professional development is important for ensuring that all teachers are implementing a viable curriculum grounded in standards based instruction as mandated by state regulations. The manner in which professional development is organized in a school reflects the school's culture of professional inquiry. According to Knipe and Speck (2002), the effective building administrator must consider five issues when attempting to improve student achievement through professional development of teachers: What professional development activities/strategies can be implemented to maintain a desire to learn among faculty members? What guarantees exist that the professional development

activities will be respected? How can the building principal develop learning systems/models that serve as a building's foundation for teaching? How can decisions regarding professional development by principals and teachers be aligned to be in the best interest of students? How can a professional development model ensure adequate opportunities to build a faculty's knowledge base?

Teacher quality. Education researchers have consistently pointed out that an underlying cause of our nation's under achievement crisis is having under-qualified and ineffective teachers in classrooms. In order for a sufficient supply of highly effective teachers to be created, attention must be paid to teacher preparation programs. Educational researchers have called the "inadequate training of teachers as the single most debilitating force in American high schools" and have commented on how unappealing the teaching profession is for highly intelligent and motivated individuals (Casey, 2000). It is important that proper attention be given to the admission requirements, curriculum, and graduation policies of the nation's teacher preparation programs. In addition to passing state licensure and subject matter exams, candidates in these programs must also show proficiency with effective teaching methods.

Teacher-student relationships. James Comer (1995) posits that no significant learning occurs without a significant relationship. Building a respectful relationship doesn't mean becoming the student's buddy. It means that teachers both insist on high quality work and offer support. When an individual is learning something new, learning should happen in a support context. Teachers should help all students feel part of a collaborative culture. Education can be a huge gift to student in urban schools. In many instances, education is the

tool that gives a student life choices. A teacher who establishes mutual respect, cares enough to make sure a student knows how to survive school, and gives that student the necessary skills is providing a gift that will keep affecting lives from one generation to the next.

School culture of high expectations for all students. High-performing high poverty urban schools promote a school culture of high expectations and promote a belief in the capabilities of all students. Studies related to influences on academic achievement show that teachers must demonstrate realistically high expectations if students are to achieve to their academic potential (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). A characteristic shared by most highly effective teachers is their adherence to uniformly high expectations. They refuse to alter their attitudes or expectations for students-regardless of the students' race or ethnicity, life experiences and interests, and family wealth or stability (Thompson, 2004).

Guaranteed and viable curriculum. Effective schools develop a sense of purpose and create a culture based upon student learning and achievement (Kitchen, DePree, Celedon-Pattichis & Brinkerhoff, 2004). They understand a guaranteed and viable curriculum is essential to success. To achieve their mission they enact a series of steps. Although this requires shifting school priorities and goals, they prioritize student success. Essential content is determined, instructional time is protected, and students are given ample time to learn the required content standards (Marzano, 2007). In a case study of nine high performing urban elementary schools, researchers concluded similar findings as Marzano (2007): leaders minimized distractions during instruction, teachers aligned standards and assessments to ensure students had the opportunity to learn them, and both leaders and teachers emphasized quality instruction (Skrla, et al., 2009).

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Safe, orderly environment. Effective schools foster a safe environment (Marzano, 2007). Feeling secure is essential for urban students as urban schools have higher incidences of criminal activity, gangs, and violence. Students cannot be expected to learn in an unsafe school. Hence, effective schools identify students predisposed to behavior problems, foster a protective environment by establishing procedures and rules and enforcing consequences for unwanted behaviors, and teach self-discipline and accountability to students (Marzano, 2007). Successful urban schools nurture the internal assets that help students regulate their own behavior and deal with the many social and academic challenges they face.

Parent and community involvement. Parent and community involvement have a major impact on student learning as well as school culture. Marzano (2007) states three ways community and parents contribute to the achievement of students, which are communication, participation and governance. When schools communicate with parents and the community about the instruction and curriculum their students are receiving, it shows the community that culturally relevant pedagogy is in use. It demonstrates that parents and the community are valuable to the school.

Overview of Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design conducted at one high performing urban high school in a Midwest urban community. While case study was the major approach, I also applied the theoretical traditions of heuristics inquiry and symbolic interactionism. Case study research, as described by Gall, Gall and Borg (2003) is "an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of

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the participants involved in the phenomenon" (p. 436). Discovery of some of the best phenomenon can only be achieved by interpreting data within context, according to Merriam (1998). Case study research can provide examples of broader phenomenon that exist in the real world (Gall et al., 2003). The challenge for the researcher is to identify themes, using vivid descriptions from the data collected throughout the study.

The main focus of the research design was to analyze the organizational policies and systemic practices in a high poverty, high performing school with a high concentration of students of color that may have contributed to high academic achievement. The research design was set up in a case study format to fully engage with and understand a single case of a high school (Patton, 2002). Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative case studies are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data known as triangulation, as a means to overcome the weaknesses or intrinsic biases and the problems that may come from single method, single-observer, single-theory studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In an attempt to uncover the factors for high performance at one urban high school, qualitative research was engaged through interviews, surveys and document analysis. Patton (2002) articulates that all three are necessary for sufficient analysis of the case to fully capture the nature of the environment to be studied and promote triangulation of the data. According to Gall et al. (2003), some case study research aims to provide explanations for the phenomenon that were studied. We referred to these explanations as patterns, meaning that one type of variation observed in a case study is systematically related to another observed variation. This

qualitative case study attempted to fulfill this purpose by exploring a high school that is higher achieving than other schools in a low-performing urban school district. Thomas and Brubaker (2000) stated "Case studies are intended to reveal the individualistic attributes of a particular person or institution…Case studies emphasize features that make one person or group different from others…" (p. 101-102).

The qualitative approach allowed the researcher the opportunity to delve deeply into school organizational policies and systemic practices that seemed to produce high academic achievement at the identified school. The rich and thick descriptions, encouraged through the qualitative research process, lend itself nicely to the kind of information that was collected throughout this case study. Several data collection instruments were used to answer the research questions: student, teacher, administrator interviews, surveys, field notes, school artifacts and documents.

The researcher served as the primary instrument in this study. According to Merriam (1998), "In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information" (p. 20). By conducting a case study, I sought, as the researcher, to uncover a particular phenomenon, specifically, the organizational policies and systemic practices in a high performing urban high school, which was exceeding expectations (Gall et al., 2003). As the primary instrument, I explored the processes, events, persons, and any other related factors related to high performance. Shavelson & Towne (2002) suggests the following: "If you want to know what's going on, you have to go out and look at what is going on. Such inquiries are descriptive and provide a

range of information, including rich descriptions of the complexities of educational practices" (p. 119).

No hypothesis was developed for the study. Instead, I attempted to discover a number of organizational policies and systemic practices associated with high performance in urban schools. An inductive design allowed the discovery of patterns without forming conjectures regarding the research outcomes (Patton, 2002).

The participants in the study, students, teachers, and administrators were selected through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). This qualitative methodology, as described by Patton, provides information-rich in-depth insight about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study. Also known as purposive or judgment sampling, this selection method provided an in-depth understanding of an issue rather than empirical generalizations.

It was felt that a qualitative case study research was the best type of design for this study due to the intrinsic interest of the researcher in identifying how school organizational policies and systemic practices might be able to impact student achievement. Case study research is defined by the interest in individual cases as opposed to particular methods of inquiry that are used (Gall et al., 2003, p. 435). This approach, not only allowed me to focus on individual cases, but provided a great deal of latitude with regard to the methods of inquiry that were utilized in the study. Unlike quantitative research where there are standard designs or sequential steps to follow in the investigation, qualitative research in general, and case study research in particular, does not follow a prescribed pattern for the investigation.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation was organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the study and includes the introduction, background of the problem, the problem statement, purpose and research questions, significance of the study, theoretical traditions, overview of methodology, and organization of study. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of the literature and research which includes a historical overview of the literature regarding factors associated with low student achievement and barriers that continue to impact achievement by low income students and students of color. It also includes a review of school organizational policies and systemic practices that led to improved student achievement. Chapter Three details the research methodology used to conduct this study. Chapter Four delineates how the data was analyzed and includes the findings of the study. The dissertation will conclude with Chapter Five, which will provide implications and recommendations that can be drawn from this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with an historical overview of the literature regarding factors associated with low student achievement. To understand the current gap in achievement, the historical reasons for low student achievement must first be explored. This historical overview will provide an examination of the resulting disparities in achievement. Second, the chapter will review literature on high poverty high performing urban high schools with large concentrations of low income students and students of color. Third, the review will examine school organizational policies and systemic practices that have led to improved student achievement. The review will explore how the implementation of specific school organizational policies and systemic practices may facilitate effective school-wide practices that lead to high performance in high-poverty schools.

While the students in urban schools face a plethora of problems that may compromise their educational potential, many of these same students are capable of learning far more than they are taught and can experience high academic achievement (Haycock, 2005). Unfortunately in the United States, urban schools have been plagued by a plethora of low expectations and as a result urban students are often taught less in the public schools. Haycock (2005) suggests that all too often, schools may be "actively manufacturing" the low performance of many students, resulting in an achievement gap among students (Haycock, 2005). Faced with a highly competitive and globalizing economy, these students, will negatively impact the nation's workforce and economy as adults if they are not provided with a superior education in our public schools. Not only will they be left behind in school, they

will be relegated to a life style of being left behind in employment and other benefits that accompany a quality education in the 21st Century.

Historical Overview of the Achievement Gap

The achievement gap is a multi-dimensional problem. The achievement gap is defined as a consistent difference in scores on standardized achievement tests between certain groups of children and children in other groups (*EdSource,* 2007). Singleton and Linton (2006) refer to the achievement gap as a racial gap due to the variance in performance between students of different skin colors. They purported that racialized external social, economic, and political factors are often blamed for the achievement gap. Since the achievement gap is normally analyzed according to race and ethnicity, achievement gaps reflect negative educational outcomes for poor children and children of color on a consistent basis (*Movement in the Village, NCDPI,* 2002). Whether intentional or unintentional, public schools in the United States have produced varying degrees of student achievement levels. While society points fingers at the numerous reasons for the demise of the public urban school systems, children are mandated to show up daily at the doors of these institutions to learn the basic skills needed to achieve the 'American Dream'. Unfortunately, students in urban school settings, regardless of their social and economic background, are plagued with conditions of inequality that date back to the 1890s.

According to Weinstein et al., 2004, the American educational system has always had a dual purpose for educating children of color and poverty in contrast with wealthier children. The first was socializing them into accepting the value system, history and culture

of the elite society. The second was education for economic productivity. Throughout history the overwhelming belief has been that education was for the elite and that the masses should be trained in vocational arenas. This belief system was reflected in and reinforced by an educational system that provided differentiated pathways of achievement for people of color and Whites (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Stornello (1998) concurs with Weinstein in his historical prospective of social reality in the economic and political relations relative to the public school system. According to Stornello (1998), the founding fathers in education system used mystification to cover up their true intentions for the education of the American public. Mystification is the distortion or omission of information regarding an issue, or in other words, what the educational historians wrote in their literature regardless of reality (Stornello, 1998). Mystification, according to Stornello (1998), empowered the rich and allowed for the establishment of the public school system as a hegemonic institution. The history of the public school system, as written by Horace Mann and Elbert Cubberley (1980) also purposely distorted significant information in an effort to mystify the ideological and social aims of the educational system in America. Mystification was used to legitimize the established educational policy initiatives in this country.

John Ogbu (1997) furthers Stornello's framework that the United States, like other societies, structured schools to prepare citizens to support the existing economic system as workers, producers, consumers, and to teach them to believe in the system. Ogbu (1997) suggests schools were structured to train the citizens to support other institutions. American schools attempted to accomplish their task of recruiting people into the workforce by (1)

teaching young people the beliefs, values, and attitudes that support the economic system; (2) teaching them some practical skills, like reading and computing, which make the system work; (3) enhancing the development of personal attributes compatible with the habits required at the workplace; and (4) credentialing young people to enter the work force (Ogbu, 1997).

At the onset of public education in the United States, African Americans and Indians were legally excluded from obtaining an education in the public school system by federal laws. In addition, for decades after the Civil War, Jim Crow laws promoted schools in the United States to be segregated institutions–separate and unequal. The inequality was evident in the limited funding, poor facilities and inadequate resources, and inadequate and inexperienced teachers. The Jim Crow laws were challenged in the Supreme Court case known as Plessy v. Ferguson by an African American, who decided to test the legality of these laws in light of the 14th Amendment. The Supreme Court upheld the Jim Crow Laws by reasoning that the 14th Amendment could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based on color. Thus, the institutional practice of segregation was legally sanctioned by the Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896, which validated a separate but equal doctrine (Weinstein et al., 2004). Of course nothing was ever equal for African American and Whites during this era in history. Throughout the following decades, the schools in the United States operated as segregated institutions-separate and unequal.

In 1954, another group of concerned citizens challenged the "separate but equal" decision in Plessy v. Ferguson. In this case, known as Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court decided on the side of the plaintiffs and overturned the Plessy v. Ferguson

Supreme Court decision, disallowing racially segregated schools and mandating desegregated education. This decision ruled that the very notion of separate but equal was in and of itself inherently unequal. The law stated that "separate but equal" could never truly provide African Americans and other students of color with facilities of the same standards as were available to White Americans. More than a half-century has lapsed since the Brown v. Board of Education decision set the stage for our country to legally desegregate its schools. The integration of public schools after the Brown v. Board of Education was also dismantled through mystification in many schools by re-segregation, a social hegemonic practice employed by educators to mystify the continued practice of segregation in integrated schools. Re-segregation within integrated schools is rampant today and maintains a status quo that continues to contribute to the achievement gap (Frey & Fielding, 1995). Schools continue to prepare students of color to stay at the bottom of the American economic system through alienation and mis-education. As a result, the educational performance of urban students, specifically African American, Latino and American Indian children, continues to lag behind those of White students.

Today a connection between racial separation and the concentration of poverty children is easily apparent in public schools (Kozol, 2006). A segregated inner-city school is six times more likely to have large concentrations of students living in poverty than a largely white school population (Kozol, 2006). The re-segregation of schools is a trend that has escalated slowly over the past 20 years. African Americans saw the largest regression in the 1990's. Now Hispanic American students are the most segregated of all ethnic groups (Nieto, 2003). According to Nieto (2003), progress made to integrate our nation's public schools

over the past century has been lost in the past two decades. In a number of the larger urban school districts, school-zones are being realigned into neighborhood schools due to reductions in school funding. While funding is the rationale for returning students to their neighborhood schools, urban neighborhoods are often segregated, thus the neighborhood schools are becoming re-segregated through mystification despite the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision. Despite landmark decisions by the Supreme Court of the United States, the attitudes that underline the American public school system have not necessarily changed (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). The resistance to attitude change continues to be at the heart of the achievement gap.

Despite the changes resulting from Brown v. Board of Education and the resources provided under ESEA that followed, there is a preponderance of statistical and anecdotal evidence that reflects glaring disparity in educational outcomes. In terms of academic measures, an achievement gap exists between White students and students of color (African American, Hispanic and Native American students) and students with high and low socioeconomic status. White students score higher than students of color on criterion and norm-referenced standardized test and students with a higher socioeconomic standing perform higher than students with a lower socioeconomic status (The Council of the Great City Schools, 2006). This is exemplified by the fact that nationally only 30 percent of high school freshmen can read at grade level (Lee, Grigg & Donahue, 2007).

Additional research has shown that more than 8 million students in grades 4-12 read below grade level (National Center of Educational Statics, 2004). The statistics for poor performance are even higher for African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native

Americans. In a typical high-poverty urban high school, approximately half of incoming 9th grade students read at the 6th and 7th grade level (National Center of Educational Statics, 2004). During the 2005-2006 school year, 42 percent of 8th graders in urban school districts scored proficient on state tests in reading and 46 percent of 8th graders scored proficient in math (Council of the Great City Schools, 2008). Statistics show that by the completion of high school, African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans have skill sets in reading and mathematics comparable to those of White students at the 8th grade level (National Center of Educational Statics, 2004). The same assessment instrument reveals significant demographics in the teaching staff. The data revealed that 1 in 4 of all secondary classrooms were taught by a teacher lacking either a major or minor in his/her subject area. The data also revealed that long-term substitute teachers covered some classrooms for the entire year (Education Watch, 2004).

Growing diversity in school populations has also exerted pressures on urban schools. These changes, set against an unfortunate historical backdrop of racial and income polarization, have had a significant impact on learning opportunities for students in urban schools. Although educators have endeavored to keep abreast with the differing needs of their increasingly diverse student population, a report released by the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (2005) suggested that this quest has been largely unsuccessful, concluding that "our nation's K–12 education system remains unequal and increasingly segregated by race and income" (p. 6). There are pronounced differences in educational opportunities for rich versus poor students; many children of color must attend classes taught by under-qualified teachers in classrooms that lack access to adequate resources (Oakes, 2004).

Addressing these inequalities is particularly important given the critical link between quality instruction and academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Singleton and Linton (2006) have suggested that the rapid change in the racial composition of the nation's student population is inverse to the population of educators. In other words, the majority of educators are White and middle class while the majority of students are of color and lower income status. These teachers often categorize students of color as being at-risk, having behavior problems, or being un-teachable. Ladson-Billings (2006) indicates that teachers who define students in such terms create a classroom environment that is no longer a place of learning and high expectations, but rather a place rooted in control and management.

The disparity in the school performance of urban students shows up in grades, test scores, course selection, and college completion (Skrla et al., 2009; Marzano, 2007, Ed Source, 2006; & Thompson, 2004). The historical trends of education for these students have exhibited a roller coaster of rhetoric, reforms, and reasons why urban students are not being successful in school. The literature posits that today's American urban high schools continue to make excuses as to why they are unable or unwilling to prepare students of color and low-income students for a successful future within the global economy.

According to the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2010), the majority of both high school and college instructors believe that the readiness for college and readiness for workforce training programs require a comparable level of knowledge skills. Contrary to that belief, virtually all high school teachers (94 percent) in this study said that secondary teachers lower expectations for students who are not college bound. More than four in ten

teachers reported that academic expectations are reduced either completely or a great deal" for students who teachers perceive are not headed to college. This is a commonly held belief for low income students and students of color.

The ACT survey (2010) also reported that the current U.S. high school learning standards are not sufficiently aligned with postsecondary expectations. One example of this problem is reading readiness for college. According to two-thirds of high school teachers, the majority of their students are ready to read at the level needed for college work in their content area, but only a third of college instructors said the same of their incoming students (ACT, 2010). In a second national survey (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2005), results also confirmed that the nation's high school students are unprepared to meet the demands of college level requirements in reading, writing, and math. The HSSSE survey reported that 42% of freshmen in community colleges and 20% of freshmen in public four-year institutions require remedial courses in reading, writing, or math to handle college-level work.

In a third national survey, the Public Agenda Foundation (2007) found that 67 percent of high school parents and 78 percent of high school teachers believe that public school graduates have the skills needed to succeed in the work world. However only 41 percent of employers in the same survey thought that these graduates had what was needed to do well in the workplace. In survey after survey, employers expressed disappointment in the skills of high school graduates. For example, in 2005, 60 percent of U.S. manufacturing companies surveyed said that high school graduates were poorly prepared for entry-level jobs (National Association of Manufacturers, 2005). The authors of these surveys concur that the need has

never been greater for high schools to prepare all students for success in college and the work force.

Additionally, research conducted by Public Agenda (2006) reports that students of color indicate that low academic standards and expectations are still a serious problem in their school systems. Fifty percent of African American students and 43 percent of Hispanic students report, "too many students get passed through the system without learning" (p.4). In a Public Agenda poll, approximately 40% of graduates reported key gaps in their academic preparation. An overwhelming majority noted that if they could do high school over again, they would work harder and take more challenging courses (Public Agenda, 2006). The problem of underachievement is also articulated through state standardized test and college entrance exams, namely the ACT and SAT test.

Tracking

American schools have developed a tracking system, based on the belief that "academic achievement is a function of inherited ability, and only a few are capable of serious learning and the American high school became the gate-keeper, the symbol, and the implementer of that system" (Codding et al., 1999). Ability grouping or tracking began in the early 20th century (Hallinan, 2004). In response to an influx of immigrant children into U.S. schools, school administrators decided to place students in different groups on tracks primarily on the basis of test results or their past performance in school. By the middle of the 20th century, a majority of U.S. schools used some form of ability grouping or tracking. Today, almost all schools are still implicitly defined by this curriculum paradigm, which

often starts in primary school and continues through high school. The practice of separating students by "ability" contributes to the poor academic performance of low-income and students of color, maintaining barriers that deny these students an equal opportunity to reach high standards (Kozol, 2006). Further agitation of this idea may also mean that many American students, who have not performed well on standardized test, are believed by their teachers and ultimately themselves, to have lesser ability. This inferior ability becomes fixed in the minds of teachers and students alike. Regardless of hard work, continued development, and additional professional support services, this idea remains fixed.

Researchers increasingly recognize that students who take challenging high school courses are more prepared for college study and thus more likely to earn a degree (Alderman, 2006). Unfortunately, many high schools limit enrollment in these courses to the school's highest achieving students. Some leaders believe that allowing lower-achieving students to take rigorous courses will force teachers to water down their curriculum (Klopfenstein, 2003).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2005) has reported that African American students comprise approximately 17% of the U.S. public school population. Yet, studies also indicate that African American students are overrepresented in special education referrals and school suspensions, comprising 41% and 32% of these populations, respectively. To achieve the goal of high-quality education for all, we must seriously examine the tracking and ability grouping paradigm that has defined our education system for almost a century especially the pervasive inequalities, whether intentional or unintentional, that are linked to it. Of course, we should still address the diverse learning

styles, needs, and interests of our students. We need to transform the system to guarantee that all students are given equal opportunities to develop to their fullest potential. To have any hope of closing the achievement gap, we must first close the opportunity gap.

High Ability Students in Urban Schools

Although the United States' lowest–achieving students (urban students) made rapid gains from 2000 to 2007, the performance of top students was languid. The bottom 10 percent of students showed solid progress in 4th grade reading and math and 8th grade math since 2000, but the top 10 percent have made minimal gains (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2008). Sean F. Reardon (2008) conducted a study of what happens to high achieving students of different groups as they moved through the public school system. The study revealed that the black-white achievement gap in both math and reading appears to grow the most quickly among students who enter kindergarten with above-average math and reading scores. The gap grows twice as quickly for students who begin school with scores one standard deviation above the mean as for those who begin one standard deviation below the mean. He concluded that it is possible that schools contribute to a pattern of differentiated success (Reardon, 2008).

The cognitive, educational, and social and emotional developmental needs of high-ability students of color have been the subject of much research during the last decade (e.g., Baldwin, 2004; Davis et al., 2004; Davis-Bond, 2004; Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005; Gandara, 2006; Geiser & Caspary, 2005; Gordon & Bridglall, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2002; Ndura et al., 2003; Reis & McCoach, 2002; Worrell, 2000). Skrla et al., (2009) present a

well-known fact regarding the inequitable distribution of students of color in gifted and talented classrooms. Students from low-income homes and students of color are identified as gifted and talented at rates far lower than their proportional representation in the general student population. Sadly, African Americans are grossly underrepresented in gifted and talented programs, representing only 3% of students in these programs (Ford & Moore, 2004; Kunjufu, 2004; Moore, Ford & Milner, 2005). In addition, accountability legislation such as No Child Left Behind has led to an emphasis on addressing the needs of struggling learners. Because both human and material resources are limited, the focus on lifting the bottom quartile of students leaves teachers with little time and energy for appropriate education for high-ability students. This pattern is prevalent in schools and school districts across the United States.

In elementary school, the problems and challenges that high-ability youth experience with academic achievement and motivation depend in large measure on the educational environments they experience. If they are placed in educational environments that are adapted to low- or average-ability same-age learners, they are likely to experience boredom, frustration, and decreased motivation (Robinson, 2002). For example, high-ability students in unchallenging educational environments may look problem-free because they are performing above grade level, when, in fact, they are developing maladaptive motivational beliefs that will sabotage their resilience when they encounter more challenging coursework in the future (Gallagher, 1991). If, on the other hand, high-ability students are fortunate enough to experience an appropriate educational environment that provides developmentally appropriate challenges and encourages them to fully develop their academic talents, the

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likelihood of problems and challenges related to their high ability during their school years is lessened.

At the secondary level, high-ability students face the same dilemmas as elementary students if they do not experience appropriate challenges. However, the nature of the secondary curriculum, especially in the latter years of high school, is such that the content of secondary courses is challenging for many high ability students. However, at this level, new problems tend to surface, and the nature of those problems tends to be shaped by the interaction of the school environment and the talent profile of the students. This issue is especially acute in low-resource environments such as rural schools and high-poverty schools. Other highly able students face new problems because of the competing demands of our global society.

In addition, there are several other schools of thought on why high-ability students face problems and challenges in developing their talents. They are plagued by the myth that high-ability students do not face problems and challenges. As long as teachers, principals, and superintendents rely on this myth, they will have no responsibility to recognize the existence of this special population of students or to attempt to address their needs. Another factor that contributes to this myth is that many high-ability students enjoy school, have high self-efficacy for school tasks, and appear to find it quite easy to achieve at levels beyond most of their chronological peers. The success of these students may mystify the problems and challenges they face.

For example, numerous studies document problems of highly intellectually gifted students in finding educational and social environments that foster appropriate academic

development. High-ability students of color and gifted females face stereotype threats to talent development, which arise from the social context in which students live and can have negative effects on academic achievement. For example, stereotype threats can lower performance on standardized tests, truncate career options, and cause high-ability students to drop out of challenging classes. Both groups also face anti-achievement peer pressure and may choose to resolve that pressure by failing to develop their academic potential so that they can fit in with their less academically motivated friends. Their school performance may be hindered further by disruptive or anti-social behavior; these same behaviors reduce their opportunities to participate in accelerated options for high-ability students (Robinson, 2002).

In summary, high-ability youth do face problems and challenges in developing their academic potential, but many of their challenges can be addressed if policy makers and school personnel ensure that they receive appropriately challenging instruction and experience supportive educational climates throughout their P-16 experience. In addition, they need an educational climate that supports high-level academic achievement, actively eliminates stereotypes that limit aspirations, and includes peers that applaud academic achievements (Robinson, 2002).

Curriculum

Researchers recognize that students who take challenging high school courses are more prepared for college study and thus more likely to earn a degree (e.g., Alderman, 2006). Izumi (2002) asserts that it is "no exaggeration to say that a well-implemented research-proven curriculum is likely the key factor in determining student performance"

(p. 47). At the core of curricular considerations is the selection of the actual material that is to be taught. The material should be chosen based on standards and assessments required by the state and school district. The material should furthermore be clearly communicated by school leadership so that all teachers and students know what is expected of them (Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Johnson & Asera, 1999). The alignment between curriculum and state standards should guide the development of corresponding learning goals. Like the curriculum, the learning goals must be clearly communicated and should reflect expectations of school-wide academic success. To ensure that the goals are not compromised in the privacy of individual classrooms, every teacher must buy into the common goals (Carter, 2005).

According to ACT National Curriculum Survey (2010), high schools should shift their focus to providing in-depth instruction of fundamental knowledge and essential skills, to better prepare students for college and careers. The survey findings also suggested that high schools learning standards in the U.S. are still not sufficiently aligned with post-secondary expectations. The report urges high schools to promote the common expectation of college and career readiness for all students. Much more important for student success are traditional content-area knowledge and skills in English/writing, math, reading and science. In addition, the Educational Testing Service (2003) highlighted additional skills that business leaders will be looking for in the employees they hire for the jobs of tomorrow as follows:

1) Foundation skills: Knowing How to Learn

2) Communication skills: Listening and Oral Communication

3) Adaptability: Creative Thinking and Problem Solving

4) Group Effectiveness: Interpersonal Skills, Negotiation, and Teamwork

5) Influence: Organizational Effectiveness and Leadership

6) Personal Management: Self-Esteem and Motivation/Goal Setting

7) Attitude: Positive Cognitive Style

8) Applied Skills: Occupational and Professional Competencies

Various studies have found that the single most effective way to eliminate the achievement gap and ensure college success is by providing a rigorous curriculum (Adelman, 1999; Kristin, 2005; Yin, 2003). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2004) found that not test scores, or high school GPAs, or even class rankings were as well correlated to a 4-year degree as student success in a solid high school academic curriculum, especially for African American and Hispanic students. They also concluded that the probability of obtaining a bachelors degree doubled if a student continued taking math courses beyond Algebra 2. Kristin (2005) found that the level of academic rigor in the curriculum also was a much stronger predictor of obtaining a bachelor's degree than the level of the student's parental education, family income, or ethnic group. She suggests that educators provide support structures such as intervention programs and additional learning opportunities for students of color and low-income students to increase their chance for academic success in college-prep coursework.

The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress High School Transcript Study underlines the importance of rigorous curriculum, particularly with higher-level math and science courses, as a key to greater achievement in high school (Marsh, 2011). The average

grade point average increased to 3.0 in 2009 from 2.68 in 1990, but appeared to be leveling

out. The average number of credits representing 120 hours of class time increased to 27.2

credits in 2009 from 26.8 in 2005. Since 1990 when the study was first conducted, students

have steadily increased the number of credits in core academic courses (English,

mathematics, science, and social studies) and other academic courses such as foreign

languages, fine arts, and computer related studies. More graduates than ever, 59 percent, are

graduating with mid-level and rigorous curricula which means they have at least four credits

of English; three credits of social studies; three or four mathematics courses including at least

Geometry, Algebra I or II or Pre-Calculus; three credits of science including Biology,

Chemistry, and Physics; and one to three years of foreign language (Marsh, 2011).

Evidence also suggests that taking more rigorous math earlier yields higher

performance. Students who took Algebra I before high school and started their secondary

education with Geometry scored 31 points higher on the math assessment than those who

took Algebra I in their first year of high school. Ethnic and gender disparities persist,

particularly in science, but they are diminishing. All racial and ethnic groups are completing

more challenging courses (Marsh, 2011).

In urban schools across the United States, there has been an increase in the number of

students enrolling in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses

(ACT, 2010). AP and IB classes are increasingly being used as challenging curriculums in

these high schools and as pathway to college. AP and IB courses provide a greater level of

academic challenge and more favorable learning environments than other traditional high

school courses. Federal and state government initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind, have

directed funding toward increasing students of color participation in programs such as AP and IB as means for closing the achievement gap and developing America's talent (U.S. Department of Education Press Releases, 2005, 2006). A major perceived benefit of taking college-prep courses in high school is the belief that one will develop study skills necessary to successfully complete college, especially for students who might become the first family member to attend college (Paige & Marcus, 2004). According to the U.S. Department of Education, "College entrance exams reveal that young people who take challenging classes, such as AP and IB courses, perform better than their peers regardless of their family or financial background" (2001, p. 1).

Historically, AP and IB courses in urban high schools have had limited enrollment of traditionally underserved populations, including students of color. As a group, urban students have low representation in such college preparation courses (Bridgeland, Dilulio & Balfanz, 2009). It is essential to recognize the possibility that factors within the educational experiences of urban students may be different, thus hindering successful college preparation and completion of high school requirements. However, some urban students do participate in college preparatory courses and matriculate to post-secondary institutions of higher learning.

Teachers in Urban Schools

According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2008), the single most important determinant of what students learn is what teachers know. Countless urban students throughout the nation are assigned to classrooms with teachers that are under-qualified or under-prepared to teach. Prior to the 1970's, educators embraced the belief that school really made little difference in

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the achievement of students. The *Equality of Educational Opportunity Report* published in 1966 (Coleman et al., 1966), commonly referred to as the "Coleman Report," concluded that the quality of schooling a student receives accounts for only about 10 percent of the variance in student achievement. For many years the "Coleman Report," became the backdrop for educators and researchers and the public that attributed the underachievement of African American students to the parents and the students, while disregarding the fact that these students tend to have teachers that are under-qualified and under-prepared. Despite these findings, educators professed to parents that their children would learn what he or she needed to learn from any teacher in the school. Well, this turns out to be a lie that educators have used on other people's children, while seeking out the most qualified teachers and best schools for their own children. There are big differences in the amount and kinds of learning that different teachers help produce.

Teacher qualifications, teachers' knowledge and skills make more of a difference for student learning than any other factor. Their effectiveness works in concert as a result of strong leadership and serves as the foundation for the development of instructional practices. Many school districts across the country are facing the challenge of recruiting, placing and retaining high quality teachers in the classrooms ("No Child Left Behind," 2001; Paige, 2002; Ramirez, 2003). Students in high-poverty and high student of color areas are far more likely than students from more affluent and White backgrounds to be taught by teachers out of their field of expertise (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2007). As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, one of the U.S. Department of Education's most pressing goals is to ensure that every child has a "highly qualified teacher"(Smith, Desimone, & Ueno, 2005).

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According to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a "highly qualified teacher" is defined as an individual with a bachelor's degree, a state certification of licensure, and who can prove they know their subject area by passing a state examination. In "Meeting the Highly Qualified Teacher Challenge," a report by the U.S. Secretary of Education in 2002, "Nationwide six percent of teachers lack full certification, but the share of uncertified teachers is higher in high poverty schools and certain fields like special education, math and science (Paige, 2002). Students of color and poor students are taught by significantly more than their fair shares of unlicensed, out of field, and inexperienced teachers who often didn't have records of strong academic performance themselves (Paige, 2002).

Ingersoll (2004) highlighted the significant disparity in content knowledge between teachers in high-poverty, urban schools and those in affluent schools. His research identified significant comparison gaps in the areas of math, science, English, and social studies. Further, teachers in the urban schools lacked a major or a minor in their teaching fields. For example, 43 percent of teachers in urban schools lacked a major or minor compared to only 27 percent of teachers in more affluent schools. Among the consequences of the out-of-field teaching that has been common in urban schools that Ingersoll listed was a negative learning environment, low achievement, and a lack of critical thinking instruction. Coupled with Ingersoll's research, the National Center for Education Statistics (2000) reported that 20 percent of teachers in urban schools have three or fewer years of teaching experience than teachers in more affluent school districts.

A study (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006) in Los Angeles showed, students taught by teachers in the top quartile of effectiveness advance, on average, approximately five

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percentile points each year relative to their peers, whereas those taught by teachers in the bottom quartile of effectiveness lose, on average, five percentile points relative to their peers. Moreover, these effects are cumulative. The same study suggested that if all African American students and other students of color were assigned to four highly effective teachers in a row, this would be sufficient to close the average ethnic achievement gap. Similar findings were produced in an earlier study by Sanders (1998) which showed that students assigned to effective teachers' [deep academic content] for three years in a row scored an average of 49 percentile points higher on standardized tests than those assigned to ineffective teachers three years in a row.

An additional problem that plagues the quality of teachers in urban schools is the practice of transferring poor teachers from one school to another. In 2004, the New Teacher Project pointed to a serious problem with "must hire" teachers—teachers who been removed from one school (often for performance reasons) and who were then forced on another school (often one with a high poverty population) (New Teacher Project, 2007). Ultimately, schools assign teachers with the least credentials and least experience to the students that are already showing a deficit in their academics (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Education Watch, 2004). Even teachers in urban areas with the appropriate experience and credentials are often not adequately prepared and supported to handle the increasingly difficult instructional challenges embedded within these environments.

Haycock and Crawford (2008), posit that in addition to between-school differences in teacher quality, there are often even bigger within-school differences. At the high school level, for example, 9th graders –actually the most vulnerable of students—are more likely to

be taught by out-of-field and inexperienced teachers than 12th graders. At every level, low achieving students who most need strong teachers—are the least likely to be assigned to them. Rather than organizing our system to ameliorate that problem, we exacerbate it by assigning them disproportionately to our least effective teachers.

Teachers are often not responsible for their out-of-field placement, as it is usually a result of principals and school board members facing budgetary constraints and not being able to hire another teacher, or not having an adequate pool of highly qualified teachers in a certain subject area. Research shows that high school teachers with demonstrated knowledge of their subject are more likely to produce stronger achievement results, particularly in math and science (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2007). Closing the achievement gap and producing well-educated high school graduates all hinge on the availability of highly effective teachers.

In conclusion, the U.S. Department of Education admitted "despite increased awareness of our teacher-quality challenges and earnest efforts to address them, we as a nation are still far from having a caring and competent teacher in every classroom" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The concentration of unqualified teachers in urban school districts serving low-income students of color leaves the least-experience teachers to work with the children who are most in need of experience, credentialed teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The reality of placing a highly effective teacher in every classroom cannot be realized without assuring that each of those teachers is teaching a subject for which he or she is trained or licensed.

Urban School Funding

In addition to inadequately qualified teachers, students of color continue to be concentrated into urban public schools, many of which have become majority African American or Hispanic over the past decade, while their funding has fallen further behind that of the suburban schools. As of 2004, students of color comprised 69% of those served by the 100 largest school districts (Sable & Hoffman, 2005). A large majority of urban high schools are located in the most impoverished and disenfranchised areas of the nation, and no factor contributes more to the academic failure of children than poverty (Vail, 2003). Scholars have documented that low "socioeconomic status," whether measured by family income, parent education, or parent occupation, is usually one of the most powerful predictors of academic achievement and test score performance, sometimes swamping all other known contributing factors (Krashen, 2005). According to a recent study on child poverty in the United States, it is estimated that 11.7 million children are living in poverty, with most living in urban communities (Anderson-Moore & Redd, 2002). The U.S. Department of Education (2004) confirms that roughly 64% of students in urban cities are students of color, 56% participate in the free and reduced lunch program, and 40% receive services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (federal funds earmarked for poor children).

The mishandling of school budgets by school district personnel often exacerbates the issue of poverty in urban schools. Haberman (2007) maintains that the excessive number of failing schools in large urban school districts does not occur by accident, but by design. In his research of urban school districts, Haberman suggests that the dysfunctional bureaucracy

feeds on the funds needed for schools to succeed. Federal, state, and local funds are allocated to districts not to schools (Haberman, 2007). Mismanagement of funding allocated to urban school districts through ignorance and malfeasance is well documented in Haberman's research. Dysfunctional bureaucracy in urban school districts tends to consume financial resources for their own enhancement, before allocating a significantly diminished portion down to the schools. Haberman (2007) concludes that dysfunctional bureaucracy feeds on the resources that should be given to the schools it serves. Haberman further states, "Failing urban school districts are so interwoven into the fabric of our social, economic and political institutions that to transform them would require changing every level of government and since public education is the biggest business in America, simply stopping the mis-education would impact every facet of our economy" (p. 182).

According to the 2004 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data, although state and federal programs reduce the size of disparities in urban schools, these schools continue to suffer from limited resources available to students and teachers. SASS (2004) data indicates that, on average, urban schools generally allocate $7,812 for per pupil expenditures, while suburban public schools spend on average $17,000-$19,000 per pupil. Many urban school districts must contend with an eroding tax base, which makes them increasingly dependent on state and federal funding. The wealthiest 10% of school districts in the U.S. spend nearly ten times more than the poorest 10%, and spending ratios of 3 to 1 are common within states (Kozol, 2005). Futernick (2007) states, "In schools with high concentrations of underprivileged students, teachers were more likely to encounter shortages of instructional materials, unsupportive principals, poor support for special education students, disruptive

bureaucracies, and unclean and unsafe work environments" (p.viii). School buildings are frequently dilapidated and nonfunctioning, and provide no opportunities for recreation.

These conditions make it difficult to establish trust, respect for authority, and the kinds of relationships in the school community among students, teachers, staff, and parents that are needed for students to develop and achieve to their potential. These disparities reinforce the wide inequalities in income among families, with the most resources being spent on children from the wealthiest communities and the fewest on the children of the poor, especially in communities with high concentrations of students of color.

Low-income status cannot be used alone to explain the entire achievement gap because grade and test score disparities also appear in middle-class integrated schools. Dr. John Ogbu (2003) added to this research on the underachievement of urban students when he conducted a study, in Shaker Heights, Ohio to determine the cause of the achievement gap in the racially integrated upscale school district where resources were relatively abundant and the schools were reputedly excellent. Ogbu (2003) concluded that black students were not only disengaged from academic work, but the disengagement stems from factors such as school race relations, internalized white beliefs, levels of discipline, collective identity, culture, language and peer pressure.

Conclusion

Examining the history of education for students of color and poverty demonstrates how inequities have contributed to the present state of education for urban students. Researchers acknowledge that, in spite of efforts to diminish disparities in education between

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students of color and their White counterparts through school reform, organizational policies and systemic practices continue to present barriers that impede achievement and equity in education (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Mitchell & Mitchell, 2005). In schools pervaded by a culture of defeat and hopelessness, research has found that school personnel overwhelmingly blame students, their families, and their communities for their achievement gap. Thus educators need assistance in recognizing that there are persistent patterns of inequity internal to schools. Not only do such patterns of inequity result in differential experiences for students who differ along race, social class, gender, and disability lines but the systemic inequity present in schools may actually create differences among students (McDermott, 1997). The racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic diversity within urban areas necessitates the creation of scholastic environments that are responsive to the varying academic and social needs of the student population. In our global, knowledge-based economy, all students-regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic background, or future aspirations - require a high quality secondary school education. While education has been traditionally viewed as the best route for social mobility, for urban youth, this route is challenged by a number of obstacles both inside and outside of the school.

High Poverty High Performing Urban High Schools

The old adage "If you keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting" is nowhere truer than in U.S. high schools. But many high schools across the country even in some of the most challenging educational environments are not doing what they've always been doing. Effective schools have altered how they do business

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so that all students graduate prepared for life. Four key overall approaches have been proposed from successful schools' experiences:

1. A growing body of research suggests that the skills needed for work readiness increasingly mirror those needed for college readiness (ACT, 2006). This collective standard is the new bar that all students need to reach. We need to set common, high expectations for every student that match the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in college, at the workplace, and as a citizen. Schools, districts, and states need to align their systems-including curriculums, assessments, teacher preparation, and accountability-to such benchmarks (ACT, 2010).

2. Schools must take an individualized approach to supporting student achievement. School leaders are using many strategies to personalize the learning environment, including creating smaller learning communities, developing student advisories, keeping teachers with the same students for multiple years, and helping each student develop a personal graduation plan. Many schools offer multiple pathways to a high school diploma. These include alternative programs for over age students, early college and dual-enrollment programs, and high-quality career and technical education. Effective schools arm struggling students with individualized supports to get them back on track (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse 2007).

3. Education happens through interactions between students and teachers. To help ensure that these interactions lead to the most productive, engaging instruction possible, educators must be armed with essential training and tools. One common element of successful high school instruction is teachers' use of rich data on student performance to make informed decisions about practice. Schools need to develop comprehensive data systems, a balanced set of formative and summative assessments, and a culture of data use (Marzano, 2007).

4. Teachers also need support to use digital technology systemically and thoughtfully in the classroom. The key to using technology effectively is providing significant, ongoing professional development to maximize the opportunities that technology-based projects offer. Teachers often lag behind their students in familiarity with such tools. By creating a team of teachers and administrators to support classroom instruction, sharing best practices throughout the school, and making the most of personalized instruction, the school uses technology as a lever for reform. As many markets go global, the skills of U.S. workers-and the standards of education must meet new international benchmarks (Marzano, 2007).

Jorgenson and Smith studied two successful schools that previously had been designated as low performing. In one school studied, the district administrator implemented inquiry-centered learning in the area of science. Inquiry-centered learning utilizes hands on experimentation in lieu of passive observation of demonstrations. After four years of inquiry-

centered learning in science, the school showed, not only significant gains in science test scores, but also dramatic improvement in SAT 9 mathematics and reading scores and scores averaging 90% on the district's writing proficiency exam. While the new instructional methods played a pivotal role in the improvement of scores, the district administrator's ability to convince principals and teachers that new instructional strategies were needed were key to the school's success

In conclusion, high-performing, high poverty schools seem to exhibit a number of common traits that differ significantly from practices in lower-performing, high-poverty schools. Trimble (2002) described three common elements of high performing high poverty schools. First, the schools utilized a grant writer or a team of writers. These individuals know how to generate grant proposals to obtain additional funds to implement reform initiatives. Second, the schools determine goals and then focus on strategies to reach the goals. Finally, the schools utilize teams to do the work. According to Trimble, the use of teams maximizes individuals' talents and provides a more efficient means of utilizing time and other resources. Teambuilding works best when there is an interdependence among team members, established team leadership, common agreement among members to participate equally, and equal influence among members.

Other practices in high-performing, high-poverty schools include the following (Marzano, 2006):

1. School-wide ethic of high expectations
2. Caring, respectful relationships with school staff
3. A strong academic and instructional focus
4. Regular assessment of individual students
5. Collaborative decision-making structures

6. Effective leadership
7. Strong faculty morale and work ethic
8. Coordinated staffing strategies

Leadership

The factor that appears most in the literature that makes a school successful is effective leadership. Leadership is a process by which individuals, working together, create relationships to attempt to accomplish a shared vision (Northouse, 2004). Successful educational leaders are those who are relentless in their effort to identify areas of needed improvement. Gergen (2007) states, "the fundamental definition of a leader is a person who has the ability to motivate people to work together to accomplish great things. A person who beyond their credentials, has a commitment to public service, to nurturing new leaders, and to making a lasting contribution to the public good." (p. 42).

In schools that "work," leaders pay very close attention to the quality of the workplace environment and work tirelessly to communicate a clear mission and vision; foster collaboration among teachers; encourage teachers' involvement in decision making; set high expectations for teachers and students; develop a sense of teamwork and trust; and stimulate thinking and reflection on teaching (Gordon, 2006, p. 219). Leaders in high performing, high-poverty urban schools believe that students are capable, operate on that belief (Carter, 2005), and are able to perpetuate that belief system through buy-in by all stakeholders. They insist on a rigorous curriculum, emphasize personal relations, and bring about change through abandonment of deficit thinking about students' abilities (Lyman & Villani, 2004).

Thompson (2003) identified critical factors in place in a high-performing school system. In implementing these factors, Thompson described two types of leadership that must be in place, strategic leadership and authentic leadership. Strategic leaders are described as vision builders. They are skilled in balancing pressure and support. A strategic leader's success depends largely on "his or her ability to mobilize the system in such a way that the distance between current reality and a powerful future is significant.

In a study investigating high-poverty schools in California designated as high-performing schools (Izumi, 2002), researchers interviewed the schools' principals and asked them a series of questions related to areas such as curriculum, teaching methods, and professional development. Results of the interviews pointed to strong leadership. The schools profiled in this report have beaten the odds and performed at a high level, not because of luck or the presence of a unique miracle-worker principal, but because they have had the courage to buck fashionable trends in favor of practical, effective, and proven methods of improving student achievement. Brownson, Kahlert, Picucci, and Sobel (2004) identified additional characteristics in high-poverty, high-performing schools. These characteristics included a common purpose, thoughtful school structures, and attention to individual students. Staff and students alike shared a common purpose.

In a study of 59 urban schools in Illinois, leadership was paramount in the findings. Principals held high expectations for all, lead by example, and they were visible and actively involved with instruction (McGee, 2003). In short, strong leaders are the driving force behind effective schools; however, teachers are a critical piece of the puzzle too.

Marzano et al. (2003) stated "effective leadership means more than simply knowing what to do-it's knowing when, how, and why to do it" (p. 2). Through analysis of 70 studies, Marzano et al. (2003) identified several leadership responsibilities that correspond with effective leadership. Effective leaders:

- Develop a sense of community within the school by developing with the staff a shared vision.
- Solicit teacher feedback and emphasize shared decision-making.
- Are flexible and open to change,
- Are aware of implicit cultures within the school, informal groups, and dissension.
- They ensure the staff has opportunities to develop professionally.

Lambert (2003) concurs with Marzano that effective leadership begins with a period of school organization to establish norms, teams, visions, use of data, shared expectations, and ways of working together. Lambert (2003) lists six characteristics that contribute to high leadership capacity that sustains improvement:

1. Understanding of self and clarity of values;
2. A strong belief in equity and the democratic process;
3. Strategic thought about the evolution of school improvement
4. A vulnerable persona
5. Knowledge of the work of teaching and learning; and
6. The ability to develop capacity in colleagues and in the organization

Schools that have developed high leadership capacity, according Lambert (2003), are able to share responsibility for the effectiveness of the school. By addressing shared responsibility, the human resource and political frame are being utilized (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Lambert (2003) posits that the staff commitment can survive changes in school leadership, which is often the case in urban schools, and continue to contribute to lasting school improvement.

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Leadership development for school improvement takes place within learning organizations, where "learning is the work" (Fullan, 2008, p.75). This means that successful organizations organize themselves to learn and problem solve all the time. Their main focus is on improving the organization and its culture as well as developing better individual leaders.

Marzano (2005) supports Fullan's assertions with a five-step plan for effective leadership. The first step involves developing a school leadership team based on the foundation of a purposeful community. The building principal executes the responsibility of optimizer. The second step involves distributing some responsibilities throughout the leadership team. The third step involves considering 39 action steps from the *What Works in Schools* (Marzano, 2007) structural framework to identify the "right work" for the school. The fourth step involves analyzing the related work and identifying the magnitude of change for a given initiative. In other words the team must come to some type of consensus before beginning the work to be done. The fifth step matches the appropriate leadership style to the order of the change implied by the selected work. By addressing organizational issues, the structural frame is being utilized (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In addition, part of the change process is to distribute leadership to address the political frame of Bolman and Deal (2003).

Sergiovanni (2004) reminds us that the belief of collective efficacy must be backed up by fact—evidence that it works. Bolman and Deal (2003) presented leadership as viewed through the lens of human resource. According to Bolman and Deal, the organization exists to serve the individual's needs. The quality of fit between the organization and the individual will determine the success of both. According to Marzano (2005), the school leader can

accomplish this by executing the responsibility of affirmation—recognizing and celebrating the legitimate successes of individuals within the school and the school as a whole. To do this, the principal might develop structures that regularly celebrate accomplishments; take time in staff meetings to share and celebrate individual and school-wide learning; and communicate student successes to parents and the community. By building school traditions and rituals, the principal can create a sense of belonging and empowerment to teachers, students and parents. The principal, being a symbolic leader can positively impact the culture and climate of the school to fulfill the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Leadership is seen throughout the literature on effective schools (Izumi, 2002; Marzano, 2007; Morris, 2004; Pressley et al., 2004). It is necessary for effective reform at all levels: school, teacher, and student. Leaders are visionaries for change, able to communicate effectively, support staff and guide them through instruction of curriculum, and facilitate monitoring of student progress.

School Organizational Policies and Systemic Practices

Despite the historical trends and the status of students of color in the majority of high-poverty schools, research has identified organizational policies and systemic practices that are perceived to contribute to high student performance in some high poverty urban schools. The research suggests that discrepancies in the academic performance of high poverty students can be reduced by effective policies and practices that address the needs of students at the school site (Marzano, 2007). School organizational policies are school funding, personnel policies, administrative roles, teachers, professional development, accountability,

standards-based curriculum and instruction, and parent involvement. The school

organizational policies may foster or hinder students' academic achievement. Schools

influence the academic and social development of their students, in particular their academic

achievement, through their policies, staffing, organization, resources, and climate

(Carbonaro, 2005; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Organizational policies refer to how schools

arrange the resources of time, space and personnel for maximum effect on student learning.

The school's organizational plan address those issues that affect the school as a whole, such

as the master schedule, the location of staff in different rooms, and the assignment of aides to

teachers or teams (Danielson, 2002). Through a school's organizational patterns, the staff can

convey to both students and their parents that learning is important, that the business of

school is learning, and that the different elements of the school's organization are structured

to support learning (Danielson, 2002). A good school organization will offer students the

optimal degree of challenge, stretching them while at the same time ensuring that they can

succeed if they exert the necessary effort.

A school's policies can go a long way toward promoting student learning. At all

instructional levels, the school practices can affect the manner in which students and teachers

interact. All of these school-wide practices should be designed to maximize teacher and

student flexibility, encourage in-depth teaching and learning, and integrate as many different

resources as possible (Danielson, 2002). Systemic practices refer to the means by which the

school implements the organizational policies. Research indicates that high performing high

poverty high schools have the ability to set up practices within the school organization to

create the most advantageous learning environments for students and have a school culture of high expectations for all students (Marzano, 2006).

Marzano (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of the different factors that lead to high student achievement. He suggests that there are school level, teacher level, student level, and implementation factors that contribute to the success of an organization. However the theme throughout his book is the role of the leadership team in facilitating all of these factors in integrated coherent systems. The school-level factors that he suggests are the most important are:

- Effective Leadership
- Student opportunities to learn
- Time allocated for learning
- Monitoring what is being learned
- Pressure to achieve
- Parental involvement
- The school's climate
- Cooperation

Leadership should guide all factors. The leadership team must implement and ensure that there is a high level of accountability for all stakeholders to overcome the historical racism and segregation that still affects schools (Marzano, 2007).

Because school's organizational policies and systemic practices have not served students of color well, schools need successful models or systems correlating to Bolman and Deal's structural frame. In order for an urban school to begin to change and improve the academic standing of students of color and high poverty student, many change elements need to be in effect. Patterson (2006) lists five leadership strengths that need to be adhered to

when a school is going through radical change. First he says to understand that there will be difficulties but to stay positive in spite of those negatives. Second he points to staying focused and not creating too many goals, which may become unattainable in the attempt to implement them all. Then he stresses flexibility because there are many ways to tackle problems, not just one. Fourth, he explains that action is better than reaction. Being pro-active and causing change by taking risks and inventing new approaches will get a school further than just allowing daily activities to take their course. Last, he says to use resilience-conserving strategies so that time is not wasted in trying every good idea. Focus on a few areas that will make more people satisfied and create more detailed results rather than changing things that make selected groups of people content.

Creating and focusing on a small set of goals is critical in changing a school site of high poverty students and students of color that have become entrenched in mediocrity and underachievement (Patterson 2006). These are exemplary of both the structural and human resource frames. Leadership ensures the mission of the school is being carried out in an integrated system of professional development, classroom visits, and in-depth observation of the school and school data. Leadership teams make themselves accountable to the community by communicating the successes and failures of the school (Goldberg, 2003).

Accountability

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has encouraged the establishment of higher standards of student achievement on standardized tests each year. Because of NCLB legislation, student achievement in public schools can be tied to funding and sanctions of

public schools. With this comes an increased emphasis on administrator accountability. Hill (2008) suggests a successful school has its focus on accountability. Schools whose leaders focus on sharing roles and responsibilities have higher standards of accountability based on both distributed leadership and the political framework. Hill makes a case that for all schools to be more successful; they must stop focusing on money issues and focuses on the school's performance. The only way tangible change will occur is if schools create systems for paying close attention to the performance of students and ways to improve it (Hill, 2008).

Leaders who implement high accountability have systems at every level of the organization. This practice requires the human resource frame in order to put the tight people in the right places to carry out their roles effectively (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The "90/90/90 Schools" study (Reeves, 2009) looked at schools that were 90 percent students of color, 90 percent free and reduced lunch and in the 90th percentile or above in achievement. These schools show that through certain educational practice, schools can achieve at the highest levels. The core theme these schools shared was a high level of accountability in all aspects of the school. The schools focused on achievement; therefore they had highly structured and clear curriculum choices. The schools frequently assess students' knowledge, provided opportunities for improvement, emphasize writing, created ceremonies to reward student achievement, and the schools did not rely on internal scoring of assignments to attain the highest level of assurance that students' achievement was comparable to achievement at other schools sites (Reeves, 2009).

According to Reeves (2009), in "90/90/90" schools implemented accountability through an easily observable focus on goals for educational success. The schools were rich in

data that showed not only leadership teams and teachers the outcomes of tests, but most importantly the students and any observer to the schools, how well they were doing. It is important for the schools to only tackle a few goals at a time in order to provide the highest level of focus on those goals rather than trying to achieve several at one time, which may lead to blurred distinction, is important. Keeping the goals simple allows for more focus and attention to those priorities, which lead to high ability to ensure accountability for the goals. These goals are used to raise teachers' expectations for student of color in high poverty schools.

By focusing on a few goals, despite the fact urban schools seem to have many needs to be reformed, school and individuals can be more accountable for outcomes. This political frame of shared leadership and accountability takes on the nature of a systemic approach to change. When an organization in general is blamed, very few people in the organization may make changes. When identification of where the gap is occurring can be stated, the individuals themselves can access where their gap existed and try to make changes (Patterson, 2007). The "90/90/90 Schools" proudly display student achievement throughout the schools, they show all members of the schools what is important and identify how each person is making improvements, and every individual making improvement was the target (Reeves, 2009). Maintaining this focus requires structural, human resource, political and symbolic frames of leadership.

Data Analysis

In an educational system that measures change and holds everyone accountable for their roles, leaders need to implement systemic ways of collecting and analyzing data as proof of goal attainment (Patterson, 2007). This is the behavior of a leader operating in the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2003). NCLB holds schools and students accountable through their test scores on state standards test. State standards test, usually occur at the end of the school year and results are given the following year, making follow up difficult. Johnson (2005) looks at the importance of data analysis and states that far too often students are given assessment and after the assessment is given, all is forgotten with no mention of the test taking place or discussion of its importance. Johnson (2005) suggest that a strong leadership team is important to ensure that schools institute more accountability in disseminating information regarding testing and that data should be used to guide instruction.

Marzano (2007) points out that the importance of data collection and assessment is stressed to create an environment and culture that asks questions about where students are and how they can move to the next level. Having or creating a vision that focuses on the importance of planning and building toward the future, as well as being accountable by monitoring progress throughout the year rather than only at state test time infuses a strong sense of importance in regard to testing and accountability (Johnson, 2005). To ensure student learning and progress are being made, frequent in-class evaluations and assessments need to be in place. Professional development is essential in helping teachers understand the value of assessment and understanding the need to follow up lessons and other assessments.

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Professional Development

Professional development is a broad term that applies to teacher participation in programs designed to expand teachers' knowledge and promote higher levels of student learning in school. It can include such things as seminars and workshops, collaborative work with colleagues, mentoring, and supervision of student teachers. Most professional development concerns instruction and student learning. Professional development is important for ensuring that all teachers are implementing a viable curriculum grounded in standards based instruction as mandated by state regulations.

The manner in which professional development is organized in a school reflects the school's culture of professional inquiry. Professional development in schools with high concentrations of high poverty students and students of color must include an emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogy for students to make connections. Students in urban schools often question learning materials for more in-depth understanding. Teachers that are able put the learning material in terms that students are familiar with allow students to grasp the material at a higher level. Analyzing data is the next step for ensuring that curriculum and instruction have been implemented appropriately. It is through constructive professional development that teachers learn how to use data and understand its importance in framing the lessons that guide their ability to instruct students of color (Johnson, 2005).

Opportunities for professional learning are widely dispersed throughout the school and should not be interpreted to suggest that a teacher is not performing adequately. Rather, all teachers should regard participating in professional learning as integral to the work of

teaching (Marzano, 2007). It is important for professional development offerings to serve the following purpose:

- Engage teachers in professional conversation
- Permit teachers to use new approaches in their classrooms
- Encourage teachers to learn from one another
- Include follow-up and coaching
- Be embedded in the work of the school
- Contribute to the intellectual capital of the school

According to Knipe and Speck (2002), the effective building administrator must consider five issues when attempting to improve student achievement through professional development of teachers. First, what professional development activities/strategies can be implemented to maintain a desire to learn among faculty members? Second, what guarantees exist that the professional development activities will be respected? Third, considering various constraints (schedules, district priorities, etc.), how can the building principal develop learning systems/models that serve as a building's foundation for teaching? Fourth, how can decisions regarding professional development by principals and teachers be aligned to be in the best interest of students? Fifth, how can a professional development model ensure adequate opportunities to build a faculty's knowledge base?

Effective schools emphasize the personal growth and collaborative learning among staff (Marzano, 2005). Professional development opportunities are meaningful and authentic but most importantly they are centered on student achievement. Another professional development dimension is that it must be collaborative where teachers respect and support each other. They work together to solve student issues (Kitchen et al., 2004). In sum,

effective schools provide frequent, intensive, content-driven, relevant, and comprehensive professional development opportunities (Marzano, 2005).

Teacher Quality

Education researchers have consistently pointed out that an underlying cause of our nation's under achievement crisis is having under-qualified and ineffective teachers in classrooms. In order for a sufficient supply of highly effective teachers to be created, attention must be paid to teacher preparation programs. Educational researchers have called the "inadequate training of teachers as the single most debilitating force in American high schools" and have commented on how unappealing the teaching profession is for highly intelligent and motivated individuals (Casey, 2000). It is important that proper attention be given to the admission requirements, curriculum, and graduation policies of the nation's teacher preparation programs. In addition to passing state licensure and subject matter exams, candidates in these programs must also show proficiency with effective teaching methods.

Teachers must have strong backgrounds knowledge of their subject matter and allow them to be more enthusiastically and more confidently relay that knowledge onto their students. A highly qualified teacher, who is knowledgeable and engaging, provides a great advantage to students and can raise their academic potential. To support teachers going into the classrooms, many districts have implemented teacher induction programs to mentor new teachers. A 2006 American Association of State College and Universities report estimates that 80% of teachers receive some version of these supports. While mentoring usually involves "one-to-one" interaction between veteran and beginning teachers, often times,

induction programs are poorly managed and merely exist to help novice teachers survive their first year in the classroom. Research has shown that comprehensive induction programs reduce the time it takes for novice teachers to perform at the same level as an experienced teacher and cuts teacher turnover in half (Berry, 2004).

Marzano (2007) suggested that high performing schools employ effective teachers. Student achievement is higher in classes with teachers who utilize successful instructional strategies. Teachers who encourage their students to compare and contrast information, summarize information, use graphic organizers, generate and test hypothesis, and work cooperatively have higher levels of student achievement. Effective teachers also provide students with opportunities for more practice and provide students with feedback. Teachers with successful classroom management, use a combination of reinforcement and punishment impact student achievement outcomes. Teacher student relationships are also significant. Effective teachers are able to balance appropriate levels of control and support (Marzano, 2007).

Teacher-Student Relationships

James Comer (1995) posits that no significant learning occurs without a significant relationship. Building a respectful relationship doesn't mean becoming the student's buddy. It means that teachers both insist on high quality work and offer support. When an individual is learning something new, learning should happen in a support context. Teachers should help all students feel part of a collaborative culture. Education can be a huge gift to student in urban schools. In many instances, education is the tool that gives a student life choices. A

teacher who establishes mutual respect, cares enough to make sure a student knows how to survive school, and gives that student the necessary skills is providing a gift that will keep affecting lives from one generation to the next.

The nonverbal signals a teacher sends are a key part of showing respect. I have found that when students feel a teacher has put them down, they almost always point to nonverbal, rather than words, as the sign of disrespect. Nonverbal signals communicate judgment, and students can sense when a teacher's intent is to judge them rather than to offer support. Although it's hard to be conscious of nonverbal signals at times, one way to sense how you're coming across is to question your intent. Your gestures and tone will likely reflect that intent.

Positive teacher-student relationships based on caring, respect, and trust, facilitate learning (Bennett, 2007). Positive student-teacher relationships have been described as relationships that are "mutually respectful and supportive."(Pendergast & Bahr, 2006). These relationships have also been identified as a relationship as one with "empathy, warmth, and genuineness."(Motshinig-Pitrik, Cornelius-White, Hoey, & Cornelius-White, 2004) Positive student-teacher relationships have also been "characterized by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation" (Leitão & Waugh, 2007).

Teachers who take the time to develop positive relationships with their students will see improvement in their students academically, behaviorally, and emotionally. Students who have positive relationships with their teachers tend to put forth more effort in class and as a result improve their academic achievement. Teachers also see improvement in their student's

behavior when they take the time to develop positive relationships with their students. Positive relationships between students and teachers have positive academic affects. Stipek (2006), reports that adolescents "work harder for teachers who treat them as individuals and express interest in their personal lives outside school" (p. 37). By building positive relationships with students, educators can provide the motivation, initiative, and engagement, which are essential for success (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002).

School Culture of High Expectations for All Students

High-performing high poverty urban schools promote a school culture of high expectations and promote a belief in the capabilities of all students. Studies related to influences on academic achievement show that teachers must demonstrate realistically high expectations if students are to achieve to their academic potential (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). A characteristic shared by most highly effective teachers is their adherence to uniformly high expectations. They refuse to alter their attitudes or expectations for students-regardless of the students' race or ethnicity, life experiences and interests, and family wealth or stability (Thompson, 2004).

In high performing high poverty school, building positive relationships with students and educators can provide the motivation, initiative, and engagement which translate into a school culture of high expectations (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002). I have found that students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Like anything else, when you know someone cares about you and how you succeed, you will put more effort into pleasing him or her, you will turn to them when you are having a problem, and

you will value their opinion. These relationships also benefit the teacher by making teaching more enjoyable.

Effective schools employ leaders and teachers who believe in students' ability to excel but also they set high expectations for students and give students timely feedback. This practice is especially important for urban students as most of them have unsuccessful school experiences from the past (The Education Trust, 2005). Effective schools set and communicate challenging academic goals for all students (Cotton, 2001; Marzano, 2007). At the same time, students are held responsible for their learning. Feedback is critical for both processes. Two factors coincide with feedback; it must be frequent, appropriate to the content learned, and specific (Marzano, 2007).

Marzano's (2007) research is exemplified in a case study of nine low-income racially and ethnically diverse high schools. In these schools students readily recognized their teachers' high expectations of them. Students not only described their teacher's willingness to help them after school and for as long as students needed help, but also they acknowledged the work as challenging and that they had to work harder to earn a B. Teachers concurred, citing their students were encouraged to take four years of math when only three years where required (Kitchen et al., 2004).

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

Effective schools develop a sense of purpose and create a culture based upon student learning and achievement (Kitchen et al., 2004). They understand a guaranteed and viable curriculum is essential to success. To achieve their mission they enact a series of steps.

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Although this requires shifting school priorities and goals, they prioritize student success. Essential content is determined, instructional time is protected, and students are given ample time to learn the required content standards (Marzano, 2007). In a case study of nine high performing urban elementary schools, researchers concluded similar findings as Marzano (2007): leaders minimized distractions during instruction, teachers aligned standards and assessments to ensure students had the opportunity to learn them, and both leaders and teachers emphasized quality instruction (Skrla, et al., 2009). Other urban schools have chosen to prioritize basic math and reading skills (Council of the Great City Schools, 2002). Regardless of the obstacles, effective schools understand the significance of the curriculum as a vehicle for maximizing student learning.

Advance Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs are increasingly being used as the pathway to college. It is widely believed that these programs open doors of higher education to the diverse students found in contemporary classrooms. The AP courses were introduced in the 1950's as a means to retain bright students in their high schools (Callahan, 2003). The IB, in contrast to the AP's collection of individual courses, is a pre-university program of study. Originating in Europe, its goal was to standardize secondary programs across the international school settings producing a set of examinations and qualifications that could be taken, and would be recognized, in any part of the world. This more holistic approach to secondary studies includes an emphasis on more meta-cognitive aspects of learning such as "learning how to learn, how to analyze, and how to reach considered conclusions about people, their languages and literature, their ways in

society, and the scientific forces of the environment" (International Baccalaureate North America, 1986, p.1).

Both the AP and IB programs offer readily available curricula. The curricular frameworks are accomplished by opportunities for teacher training in implementation. The appeal of the AP and IB classes is further enhanced by the lack of other curricular and programming options offering equally high levels of challenge for high school students. Another perceived benefit of taking AP and IB classes is the belief that one will develop study skills necessary to successfully complete college, especially for students who might become the first family member to attend college or among peer groups who do not consider education a promising option for the future (Paige & Marcus, 2004). Both programs are endorsed by federal and state education policy and are often recommended by state officials for school leaders.

Safe, Orderly Environment

Effective schools foster a safe environment (Marzano, 2007). Feeling secure is essential for urban students as urban schools have higher incidences of criminal activity, gangs, and violence. Students cannot be expected to learn in an unsafe school. Hence, effective schools identify students predisposed to behavior problems, foster a protective environment by establishing procedures and rules and enforcing consequences for unwanted behaviors, and teach self-discipline and accountability to students (Marzano, 2007).

Successful urban schools nurture the internal assets that help students regulate their own behavior and deal with the many social and academic challenges they face. Teaching

students social and emotional skills, such as relationship building, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making, can prevent problem behavior and promote academic success. Students who develop those skills are less likely to participate in high-risk behavior and are more able to persevere through academic challenges (Solomon, et al, 2000).

Research suggests that discipline referrals in urban schools tend to reflect a culture of control and punishment. Harsh discipline works against connection; instead of reducing behavior, excessive discipline actually promotes problems in school (McNeely et al., 2002). Punishment approaches also hinder achievement. When students are being punished, isolated, or suspended, they are not learning. Behavioral research suggests that environmental changes – for example, being explicit about behavior, providing support to help students meet expectations, monitoring individual and school-wide behavior, and providing frequent positive reinforcement – can reduce discipline problems and help teachers and students recover instructional tome (Sugai et al., 2000).

To promote positive discipline, urban schools need to be clear about expectations, state them positively, post them visibly, train students to meet these expectations and recognize student when they do (McNeeley et al., 2002). Teachers should intervene early to prevent small conflicts from becoming problematic events and use infractions as an opportunity to teach rather than to punish. Schools can also improve school-wide discipline by collecting and using data to develop and monitor individual class and school interventions. Such data can help school staff identify aspects of the school's environment that should be changed to prevent problem behavior. For example, school teams can look at data on disciplinary infractions to determine common times and locations of the most

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frequent problems, analyze the causes, and develop strategies to deal with those infractions (Sugai et al., 2000).

Parent and Community Involvement

Parent and community involvement have a major impact on student learning as well as school culture. Research has shown that parental involvement can significantly improve student achievement, with students of engaged parents having a higher likelihood of attending class, having fewer behavior problems, excelling in school and successfully graduating with a diploma (Brideland, Dilulio & Morrison, 2006). Marzano (2007) states three ways community and parents contribute to the achievement of students, which are communication, participation and governance. When schools communicate with parents and the community about the instruction and curriculum their students are receiving, it shows the community that culturally relevant pedagogy is in use. It demonstrates that parents and the community are valuable to the school. The symbolic frame from Bolman and Deal (2003) describes how it is important to share success and or failures.

Gonzalez, Mill and Amanti (2005) support Marzano (2007) with regard to parent engagement. They suggest that by understanding students and familial values, schools can garner more home support from families and the community. Not only does engagement with parents get the community involved in the school, but it also shows students that the knowledge their parents and community have is valued at the school site and that there is transferability between what is learn at home and what is necessary for success at school (Gonzalez, Mill & Amanti, 2005).

Conclusion

Historical data shows the presence and persistence of racial and economic inequalities throughout urban schools in the United States. However through the implementation and dedication of organizational structures and systemic practice, schools can go beyond what historically have been low expectations for students of color and other high poverty groups.

Extensive research finds that implementing a system of accountability that permeates the schools' culture and instituting proven methods of culturally relevant pedagogy implemented by a strong symbolic leadership team in a collaborative manner will increase the performance of schools that do not want to continually achieve below state and national requirements.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

There are some urban schools that seem to transcend the barriers of low student

academic achievement, despite the historical trends and obstacles facing the schools

(Darling-Hammond, 2008; Kozol, 2006). A great deal of the research regarding student

academic achievement in urban schools focuses on the student's membership in a racial

group, socioeconomic status, and level of parental education. In order to gain a better

understanding of the current state of urban education, it is important to explore the everyday

experiences of students in urban school settings and how these experiences affect their

academic performance. In addition, it is important to determine whether the educators and

the school organization have an effect on the educational experiences of these students.

Studies now suggest that administrators and teachers need to consider schools in a much

broader context by asking themselves what factors in society enable some groups to develop

their abilities, as measured by standardized tests, to a greater extent than others (Darling-

Hammond, 2008; Kozol, 2006). Additionally, in order for urban schools to have an

opportunity to operate more successfully, Ogbu (2007), posits that school officials need to

examine the gaps found in course level enrollment, performance in specific subjects, rates of

participation in gifted programs and special education and the school practices that tend to be

counterproductive to the academic achievement of many urban students. Recognizing that

these factors could be excuses for low expectations or poor performance, school researchers

could broaden their conversations regarding the achievement gap to identify and apply

research-based organizational policies, systemic practices and successful instructional

methods in urban schools that have shown to contribute to high student performance in high poverty urban schools (Sadowski, 2007; Washington Learns, 2006 Marzano, 2007; Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

This case study was designed using an ex post factor approach to illuminate the organizational policies and systemic practices in place in one urban college preparatory high school from 2004-2007 that supported the school in overcoming the historical achievement gap to become a high performing urban high school. Moreover, the study used heuristic inquiry and symbolic interaction to examine the causes of the disparities in achievement among students of color and other high poverty students, common factors and experiences that contributed to the success of the high ability students, and how educators and stakeholders assisted in establishing and implementing school-wide practices to improve academic achievement for all students. The study also researched the school's history, the establishment and shifting of the school's policies and practices and drew attention to how school policies were played out for students of color and White students in the school.

To conduct the overarching inquiry of the study, two research questions were addressed:

1. What are the perceptions of students, teachers and administrators related to the organizational policies and systemic practices that contribute to high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

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2. How are the organizational policies and systemic practices implemented to promote a school improvement plan for high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

Answers to these questions were the focus of my work with one high-performing high- poverty high school, Urban College Prep High School (UCPHS) as they brought to light the organizational policies and systemic practices at work in the school that were perceived to foster high academic achievement for urban students. While the literature review included various topics related to the phenomenon of urban schools, the following areas served as the scaffolding to understand research related to high performing urban schools:

1. Effective leadership and accountability
2. Effective teachers
3. Data driven decision making
4. Professional development
5. A school culture of high expectations
6. Teacher-student relationships
7. A challenging curriculum and standards-based instruction, and
8. Parent involvement

(Lambert, 2003; Marzano, 2006; Marzano, Waters & McNulkty, 2005; Reeves & Allison, 2010; Skrla et al., 2009; Thompson, 2004).

This conceptual framework guided the literature review and contributed to the understanding of layers of data that address these phenomena.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and articulate the methodology for the study. First, I provide a rationale for the use of qualitative research and the theoretical traditions used to guide the research process. Secondly, I describe the design of the study, including the research site, the historical context of the site, and sampling of participants.

Techniques for gathering and managing the data sources of in-depth interviews, surveys and

documents are discussed followed by the processes used to analyze, interpret, and make

meaning of findings. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of limitations and ethical

considerations, including ways to ensure trust, as well as validity and reliability of results.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative inquiry was a likely selection for this study because the research questions

for this study focused on understanding the perspectives of individuals in a particular setting,

Urban College Preparatory High School. Qualitative researchers "study things in their

natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the

meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.3). Qualitative researchers "are

interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make

sense of their world and the experiences that they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6).

Patton (2002), adds that qualitative inquiry is often used inductively and holistically to

provide understanding of human experiences as well as to construct meaning in context-

specific settings. This research was intended to look into the Urban College Preparatory

High School and to determine what was happening at the school that exceeded the academic

expectations for most urban high schools. Qualitative research methods can be used to better

understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain

new perspectives on things, about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth

information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative study involves having close personal contact with the participants of the study

and the situation (Patton, 2002). To that end, I engaged four students, four teachers and two administrators over a four-week period to collect data through in-depth interviews, surveys and school documents and sought to maintain the authenticity and integrity of the study. The selection process for the participants will be discussed in detail in the sample section of this study.

"Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4). The high school can be viewed as a dynamic organization, full of people, students, and learners and through looking at what was taking place in the school, I acquired a more critical perspective of urban schools (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Looking for meaning and seeking understanding in everyday life, the qualitative researcher is transformed by the experience and "the other can be understood only as part of a relationship with self" (Vidich & Lyman, 1994, p.24). When one takes this approach and adds the social and cultural contexts, this form of research was a natural fit, which supported asking questions for which I wanted answers. In this way, the critical questions that need to be asked to gain new meaning or to understand what is occurring, gives the research value.

In a qualitative study, one does not begin with a theory to test or verify, as the researcher is seeking understanding. The research is conducted with informal theory -based experiences and the search for their meaning. Merriam (1998) emphasizes that qualitative research is more concerned with the building of theory than the testing of it. Consistent with the inductive model of thinking, a theory may be named during the data collection and

analysis phase of the research or be used relatively late in the research process for comparison with other theories (Creswell, 1994). Rather than the deductive form found in quantitative studies, these pattern theories represent a "pattern" of interconnected thoughts or parts linked to a whole. "Pattern theories are systems of ideas that inform. The concepts and relations within them form a mutually reinforcing, closed system that specify a sequence of phrases or link parts to a whole" (Neuman, 1991, p.38).

Conducting qualitative research also becomes a journey to change oneself. "Not only do workers as researchers attempt to change the demeaning reality of work, but they also endeavor to change themselves" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 280). As the desired outcome of this research was to find out how organizational policies and systemic practices improve student achievement in urban schools, qualitative research was necessary to get into the hearts and minds of the participants in the study. As the researcher, I made a choice to look through different lenses. Qualitative researchers choose lenses according to how they feel in relation to the contexts of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). I created occasions to discuss with participants what was happening in the school, attempting to see the other side of the door or the opposite side of the same door. This is important when one is doing research in a familiar location. I had to be careful about treating people in the study as objects, marginalizing them. Therefore, I had to keep in mind that the participants were people telling stories in answer to my questions. Because of my prior experiences with urban schools, I had to be careful about labeling various phenomenon. Also, I had to be aware that the there was an unequal level of power at work between myself, as the researcher, and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

In conclusion, qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term qualitative research. The foundation for the qualitative research design used in this study was expressed through Creswell's (1998) definition of qualitative research. Creswell stated that:

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Furthermore, "qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance; that data collection need not be constrained by predetermined analytical categories contributes to the potential breadth of qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 226). There are a variety of philosophical and theoretical perspectives that researchers can choose from to guide their inquiries; I used the major approach of case study, coupled with the theoretical traditions of heuristic inquiry and symbolic interaction.

Case Study

Guba & Lincoln (1994) refer to case history as the interaction between the inquirer and the phenomenon that is being studied. According to Stake (2003), case studies are a common way to do qualitative inquiry; they are not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. In other words, case study is defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used. The researcher "explores a single entity or phenomenon ('the case') bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures

during a sustained period of time" (Creswell, 1994, p. 12). I explored the phenomenon of Urban College Preparatory High School from 2004 to 2007 and illuminated the perceptions of the students, teachers and administrators, as they sought to understand the role played by organizational policies and systemic practices in advancing student achievement. Shavelson & Towne (2002) stated the following to this regard: "if you want to know what's going on, you have to go out and look at what is going on. Such inquiries are descriptive; "They are intended to provide a range of information...to rich descriptions of the complexities of educational practice" (p. 101-102).

Descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation are sought (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The organizational policies and systemic practices were considered as the catalysts for changes in schools that will lead to student learning; and if change occurs, what happened that may or may not have improved student achievement. If successful, the case history becomes an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Case studies can also be bounded through the use of research questions (Creswell, 1994). I used two research questions, previously stated, to bound this case study. To answer the research questions, the unit of analysis was the perceptions of the students and staff of the organizational policies and systemic practices employed by the urban high school that led to a high performing high poverty school with a large concentration of students of color and low income students. Additionally the number of participants in the study, namely four graduates, four teachers, and two administrators, also bound the study.

Stake (2003) describes three types of case studies—intrinsic, instrumental and multiple. Intrinsic case study is undertaken when one wants a better understanding of a particular case. Instrumental case study provides insight into an issue or redraws a generalization. The case is of secondary interest and plays a supportive role to facilitate the understanding of something else. Multiple case studies occur when a number of cases are studied to research a phenomenon, population or general condition (Stake, 2003). An intrinsic case design was chosen precisely because I was interested in insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam, 1998). After experiencing urban education through various roles over a fifty-year period, the reasons for the success of an urban high school were critically important to me. As the researcher I had a profound intrinsic interest in what was happening at the UCPHS that may have been perceived as promoting or hindering student achievement.

Case study also draws attention to the question of what especially can be learned about a single case. A case study has some form of conceptual structure. The issues or themes are complex, situated, problematic relationships (Stake, 2003). Qualitative case researchers orient their work to complexities, connecting ordinary practice in natural habitats to a few abstractions and concerns of the academic disciplines. Starting with a topical concern, researchers pose foreshadowed problems, concentrate on issue-related observations, interpret patterns of data, and reform the issues as assertions. The selection of issues is crucial for the researcher of an intrinsic case study in order to maximize understanding the case. I wanted to know what could be learned from the phenomenon (Stake, 2003). By concentrating on a single case, I was able to uncover the interaction of significant factors

characteristic of the organizational policies and systemic practices at work in the urban high school.

Furthermore, the four characteristics of qualitative case study, particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive espoused by Merriam (1998), informed my selection of this approach. Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). "Case study can be descriptive in that the end product is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study" (Wilson, 1979, p.448). The intent of heuristics is to examine my experience with the phenomenon and the essential experience of others who experience the phenomenon intensely (Patton, 2002). And lastly Merriam (1998) describes inductive case study as one that relies on inductive reasoning. Generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses are generated from an examination of data grounded in the context itself. This single case study was heuristic in that I have had extensive experience with the phenomena of urban schools, which was used to make meaning of the experiences of students, teachers, and administrators.

In summary, qualitative case study can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative case study research is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena (Merriam, 1998). Case study is a basic design that can accommodate a variety of disciplinary perspectives, as well as philosophical perspectives on the nature of research itself. I chose this paradigm because the research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied and offered the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education. In this

qualitative intrinsic case study, I was the researcher or instrument that attempted to make sense of the situation. Therefore, I was present throughout the process; attempting to understand the phenomenon with increasing depth, growth in self-awareness and self-knowledge (Moustaka, 1990). In the next section I will describe the qualitative traditions of heuristic inquiry and symbolic interactionism used to bring to the fore my personal experiences as the researcher and to make meaning of the school experiences of students of color and other high poverty students, teachers and administrators in one high performing, high poverty urban high school.

Heuristic Inquiry

Heuristics is a form of phenomenology inquiry that brings to the forefront the personal experience and insights of the researchers. Heuristic inquiry, according to Patton (2002), gives us the opportunity to answer the question, "What is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely" (p.88)? The goal of heuristic inquiry is to come to a deeper understanding of whatever is calling out from the inside of the self to be understood. To do this, the researcher must maintain "an unwavering and steady gaze" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13).

This qualitative case study represents in-depth descriptions and analyses of a specific group of students, teachers and administrators from one high performing urban high school. It is heuristic because (a) It seeks to understand the phenomenon of organizational policies and systemic practices through the lens of students, teachers and administrators, (b) it brings to the forefront my personal experience and insights as a student, parent, teacher,

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administrator and researcher, (c) it refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis, and (d) it includes in-depth interview transcripts, life narratives, historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction to illuminate the voices of the students, teachers and administrators from one high performing urban high school (Moustakas, 1994). Thus as the researcher, I actively engaged in reflecting, discovering, and sharing my life experiences with the participants in the study. Patton (2002) states, "the researcher comes to understand the essence of the phenomenon through shared reflection and inquiry" (p. 108) for the participants in the study.

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction is the second theoretical tradition I used in this study. The symbolic interactionist asks: "What common set of symbols and understandings have emerged to give meaning to peoples' interactions" (Patton, 2002, p. 75). This theoretical tradition places great emphasis on the importance of meaning and interpretation as essential human processes in reaction against behaviorism and mechanical stimulus-response psychology. People create shared meanings through their interactions, and those meanings become their reality (Patton, 2002). This theory focuses attention on the way that people interact through symbols: words, gestures, rules and roles. Symbolic interaction's unique contribution to school studies are (1) the view of schools as social groups and (2) individuals develop both a concept of self and their identities through social interaction. In this study, symbolic interaction theory describes the urban high school as a unity of interacting

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personalities. I examined how the students developed their self-concept as a result of their interactions with the staff at UCPHS.

According to Blumer (1969), the importance of symbolic interaction to qualitative inquiry is its distinct emphasis on the importance of symbols and the interpretative processes that undergird interactions as fundamental to understanding human behavior. Blumer (1969) posits three major premises as fundamental to symbolic interactionism:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of things arises out of the social interaction one has with one's fellows.
3. The meanings of things handled in and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he [the person] encounters. (p.76)

Shared meanings related to schooling can shed light on what is important to people, what is most resistant to change, and what is necessary to change if the organizations are to move in new directions. Thus symbolic interaction assisted me in understand what was important to the students and staff, the attitudes that were resistant to change and the modifications needed for an effective urban high school.

Eisner supports the theoretical tradition of symbolic interaction as the interpretive character of qualitative study which occurs in the explication phase of heuristic inquiry, through focusing, self-dialogue, and reflection, the experience is depicted and further delineated (Moustakas, 1990). The term interpretative has two meanings in this context: to explain why something is taking place and to explain the meaning of the experience for participants (Van Maanen, 1990). The importance of symbolic interaction to qualitative inquiry is paying attention to how particular interactions give rise to symbolic understandings

when one is engaged in changing symbols as part of a program improvement or organizational development process (Patton, 2002). The goal is to bridge from the abstract to the concrete by making the words from the students, teachers and administrators in the urban high school real and meaningful.

In summary, Eisner (1998) illuminated features of qualitative inquiry that aligned with the theoretical traditions of heuristics and symbolic interactionism. They are as follows: field focused, researcher as instrument, interpretative character, expressive language, attention to particulars, and criteria for judging success. Fieldwork is at the center of qualitative research and offers the most information-rich and relevant data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Eisner, 1998). In this case, the urban college preparatory high school was the organization; the units of analysis were the perceptions of the students, teachers and administrators about the phenomenon of organizational policies and systemic practices in a high performing urban high school.

Design of the Study

Using the qualitative case study design recommended by Gall et al. (2003), I sought to uncover a particular phenomenon, specifically organizational policies and systemic practices in a high performing urban high school over three academic years. This section describes the design of the study. I begin with an in-depth discussion of the research site, including demographic data and test scores. I provide a historical view of the setting, which was essential to understanding the transitions in the population and the operation of the school. This holistic view of the setting illuminates the occurrences in the urban high school

as it evolved from a historically segregated to a college preparatory magnet school. I also portray achievement patterns throughout the inclusion of ACT scores and college attendance rates for students as compared with district, state, and national data. This is followed by sampling techniques, selection of the participants, data collection and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitation and ethical considerations, including the validity and reliability of the study.

In descriptive designs it is almost always the case that causal relationships are not studied. However there are certain non-experimental designs that are used to investigate causal relationships. These are termed ex post facto designs. The purpose of ex post facto designs is to investigate whether one or more pre-existing conditions have possibly caused subsequent differences in the groups of subjects. In order words, the researcher looks for conditions that have already occurred (after the fact) and then collects data to investigate the relationship of these varying conditions to subsequent behavior. In ex post facto research there is no manipulation of conditions because the presumed cause has already occurred before the study is initiated (McMillan & Schmacher, 1997). This design was a natural fit for the study as it allowed me to elucidate the shifts in school organizational policies and systemic practices as the school evolved from a historically segregated school to a college preparatory magnet school established to curtail the flight of White families from the declining urban school district to the current state of affairs in the urban school.
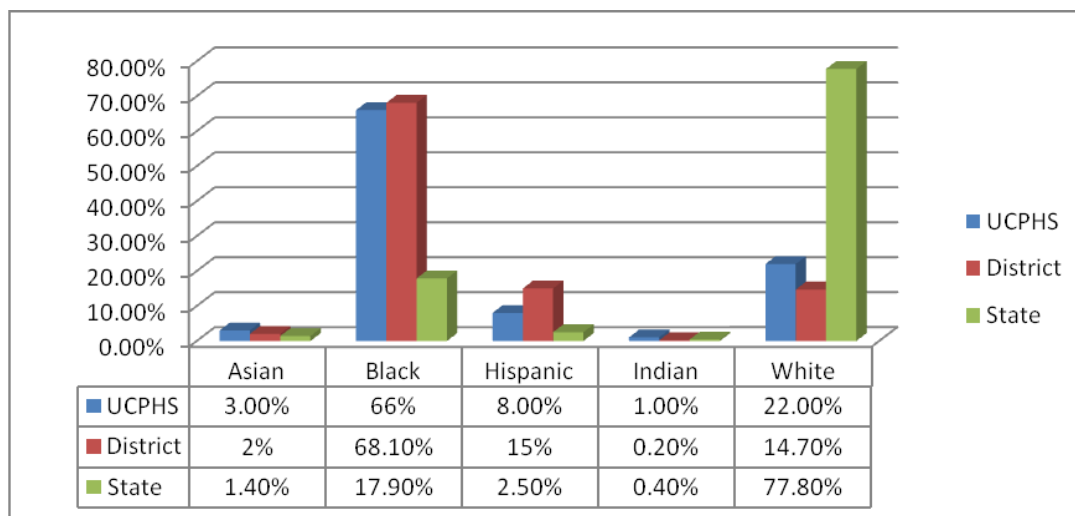
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Research Site

The setting for this study was one high performing high school, Urban College Prep High School (UCPHS), which exceeded the odds in a low-performing school district despite the historical trends of low performance of students in the district. To conduct the research a qualitative intrinsic case study of a school that met pre-selected criteria was conducted; the school had a majority population of students of color with a large percentage of the students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. Other factors considered in the selection of this case were a designation by the Midwestern State Department of Education as a Gold Star School and its Blue Ribbon status. A Gold Star School is a highly successful school that meets one of two assessment criteria established by the U.S. Department of Education (2007):

- The school must be dramatically improving and have forty percent or more of its students from low SES backgrounds. Such schools must show dramatic improvement over the past three years in communication arts (reading) and mathematics to high levels (at or above the 60th percentile) on state assessments.

- The school must be performing in the top ten percent of all schools in the state on state assessments. Schools are nominated in this category regardless of their demographics. All schools must meet adequate yearly progress requirements (AYP).

To achieve Blue Ribbon status as designed by the U.S. Department of Education (2007), the school must have met dramatic academic gains over a three-year period.

At the time of this study, the school population was 66% African American, 22% White, 8% Hispanic, 3 % Asian and 1% Pacific Islanders (see Figure 1). The chart below illustrates a comparison of student demographics at UCPHS to student demographics in the district and state. Although the White population in the school district had declined to

slightly over 15% of the students, UCPHS maintained a White population of 22%, which

satisfies the original racial composition goals of the magnet school.

	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Indian	White
■ UCPHS	3.00%	66%	8.00%	1.00%	22.00%
■ District	2%	68.10%	15%	0.20%	14.70%
■ State	1.40%	17.90%	2.50%	0.40%	77.80%

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), 2007

Figure 1. *2004-2007 Student Demographic Averages*

Of the 600 students that attended the school, 318 or 53% participated in the free and

reduced lunch program (See Figure 2). The rate of participation in the free-reduced lunch

program is lower than the district average of 79%, but higher than the state average of 41%.

The school was designated as a high poverty school by the federal government and received

Title I funding for academic support in reading, math and science (DESE, 2007).
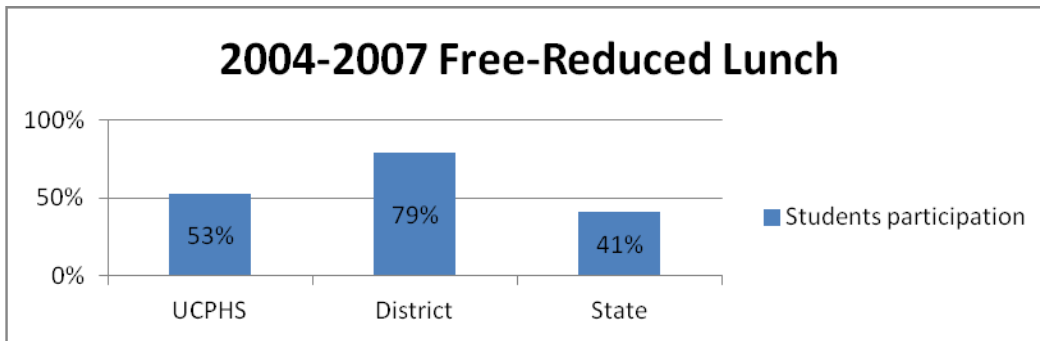
Source: DESE, 2007

Figure 2. *2004-2007 Free-Reduced Lunch Student Participation*

While the school site selected for the research met the aforementioned criteria, UCPHS also earned the highest math test scores on the standardized end-of-year exam in the Midwestern state for two years, 2006 and 2007 respectively (see Figure 3) and the highest communication arts test scores on standardized end-of year exam in 2006 (see Figure 4).

	State Goals	All School	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Am Ind	White
2004	10.3%	13.8%	26.7%	6.8%	12%		33.8%
2005	17.5%	21.9%	43.50%	11%	28.0%		42.2%
2006	26.6%	67.4%	87.9%	62.5%	64.1%		78.9%
2007	35.8%	76.1%	77.8%	70%	82.1%		89.6%
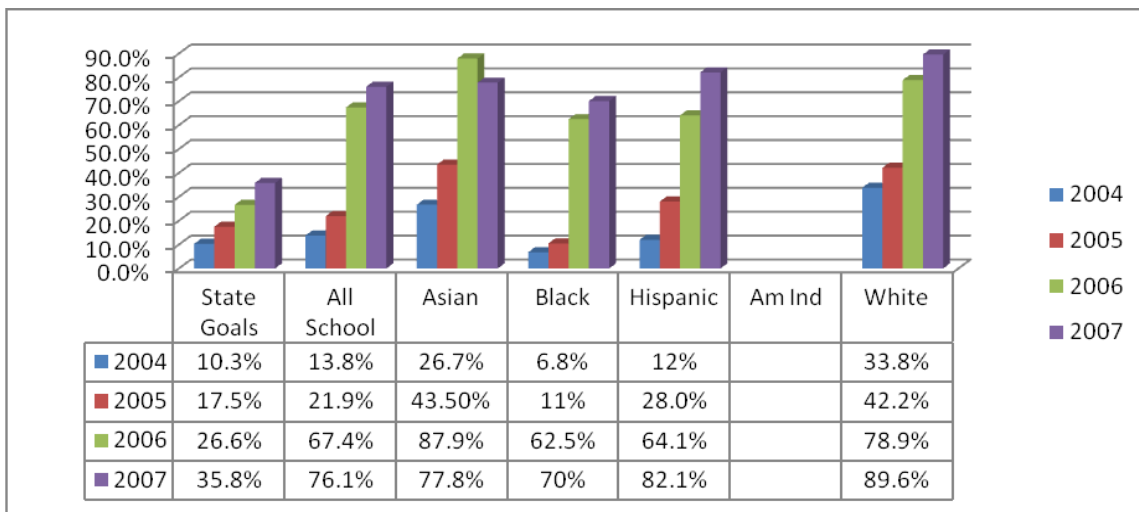
Source: DESE, 2007

Figure 3. *UCPHS Mathematics Scores 2004-2007*

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	State Goals	All School	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Am Ind	White
2004	20.4%	48.6%	73.3%	38.2%	45%		72.7%
2005	26.6%	45.4%	31.20%	39%	38.9%		66.2%
2006	34.7%	77.5%	84.8%	73.2%	73.3%		90.3%
2007	42.9%	77.1%	83.9%	73%	77.4%		87.7%
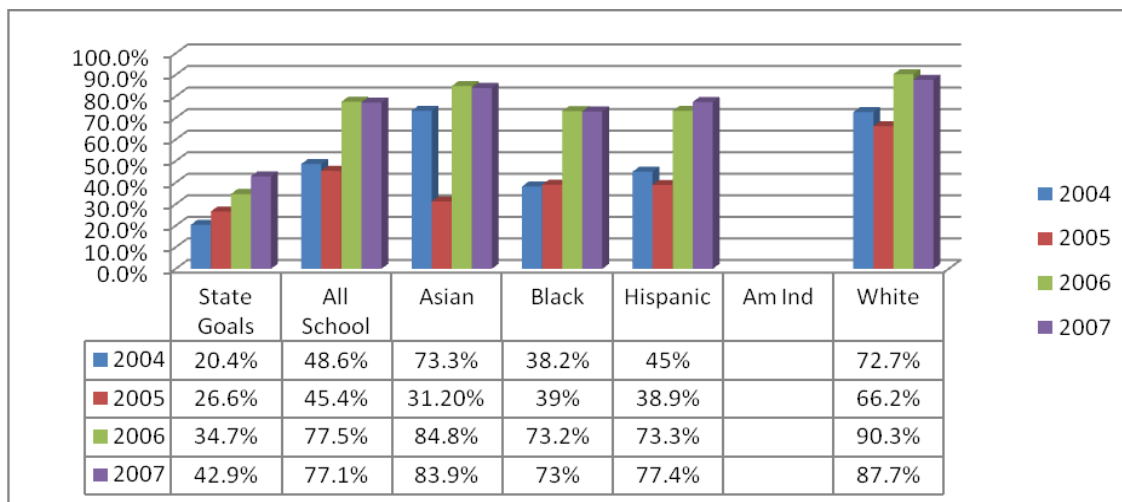
Source: DESE, 2007

Figure 4. *UCPHS Communication Arts Scores 2004-2007*

The dramatic gains in both mathematics and communication arts over a three year period created by a school-wide culture of high expectations will be discussed further in Chapter 4 which reports on the findings of the study. The school exceeded the state goals established in conjunction with the NCLB legislation. UCPHS also demonstrated that the achievement gap between students of color and their white counterparts could be narrowed and in some cases closed.

Historical context. UCPHS is located in a building that is over 75 years old and has the official designation as a historical school site in the Midwestern city. Prior to the school site becoming a magnet school, it had been designated as the historically segregated school for African American students attending middle and high school within this Midwestern urban school district. The school also housed a junior college program as colleges in the Midwestern city were also segregated. While the building has many historical artifacts,

trophies and awards displayed throughout the school, the building is in great need of repair. Crumbling ceilings throughout building, cracked paint on the walls of the classrooms, broken lockers in the hallways, an antiquated lunchroom facility, and a decaying auditorium provide a dismal appearance to the historic building. An additional wing was added to the school to accommodate a middle school for students in grades 6 to 8. The goal in adding a middle school component was to have a seamless educational experience for students from grade 6 through 12. As the high school and middle school populations increased, the district added a middle school building to house students in grades 6 through 8 that would matriculate to the college prep high school. While a new building was added for middle school students, very few improvements were made to the declining state of the high school building.

After the landmark case of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision of 1954, the school became integrated. While segregation in schools was declared unconstitutional, the school remained segregated as a result of residential segregation in 1955. The school enjoyed many years of success, graduating many of the leaders of color in this Midwestern city and also nationally recognized leaders. In an historical account of the school, Johnson (1999) reported that the segregated school operated with fewer resources than other district schools and was often assigned ineffective personnel. With the acquisition of federal funding, the high school was reorganized in 1978 as a magnet college prep high school as part of a desegregation plan mandated by the United States Office for Civil Rights (Johnson, 1999) for the historically segregated school district.

Admission criteria, for the magnet school was established by the school district in an effort to attract the brightest students in the district as defined by high test scores on a

standardized test. While the school district indicated that the school would attract the brightest students in the district, mystification tells us that the school was really established to retain the White students, as they were viewed as being the brightest students in the urban school district according to their high test scores. Thus, the district designed a re-segregated school with a majority White population and dispersed the students of color (with lower test scores) to their neighborhood schools. As a result, the population of the high school changed from predominantly African American to predominantly White. The re-established UCPHS housed a population of 600 students in the Midwestern urban school district of 17,000 students and the feeder middle school also had a population of 600 students destined to matriculate to the high school.

The members of the African American community were outraged that their children would be moved to other schools due to the change in the school's criteria for admission. Despite the fact the school was established as a segregated school, the African American families that had attended the school for several generations were very proud of the successful legacy of the school and looked forward to their children also attending the school. Needless to say their voices were silenced at school board meetings, and the plans for the magnet school continued regardless of their disagreement with it. In addition, teachers had to reapply for their positions in the school and if unsuccessful were dispersed among the other five high schools in the Midwestern school district.

The following directives were put in place at the school under the direction of the desegregation plan that incorporated the implementation of the magnet school concept in an effort to integrate the school population effective September, 1988 (Brooks, 1988):

1. White students enrolled at UCPHS would be no less than 15% or more than 30% of the student body. The district could assign students to UCPHS using the "magnet" school devise or such other plan or combination of plans selected by the Board provided only that the target percentage of White students was achieved (Brooks, 1988).
2. Students must score at or above the 65th percentile in the reading and math on a standardized test.
3. Students must maintain a 2.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale each semester.
4. Students unable to maintain the 2.5 GPA would be demitted from the school and must return to their neighborhood traditional high school.

The goals of the magnet school were:

- UCPHS provide an extremely challenging college preparatory curriculum with high expectations for all students participating that included the International Baccalaureate, Advance Placement and Dual Credit programs.
- Provide appropriate services to allow every student maximum opportunity to succeed in all college readiness areas.
- 85% to 100% of the graduating seniors would be prepared to enter a college degree program.
- Teachers in the school would be highly qualified by holding a Master's Degree in their respective academic discipline.

The college prep curriculum established for the magnet school incorporated the International Baccalaureate (IB), Advance Placement (AP) and Dual Credit Programs. The IB Diploma Program was designed as an academically challenging and balanced program of education with final examinations that prepares students, normally aged 16 to 19, for success at university and life beyond. Much like the IB Program, AP courses allowed high school students to earn college credit while still in high school. Students taking AP classes, which are a part of the College Board Program, take a prescribed college curriculum. Dual Credit courses awarded students high school and college credits simultaneously in academic courses. Thus students had three programs to select from for a challenging college prep

curriculum. Teachers of the aforementioned classes were expected to receive specific

training to enable them to teach the college preparatory curriculums.

The instructional program goals for the school included:
- Challenging critical thinking skills
- Problem solving processes
- Creative writing skills
- Comprehension and cognition skills

The re-established magnet school did flourish as indicated by its' high test scores.

However as the years went by, White families continued to flee this urban Midwestern

school district for various reasons and the overall test scores of both the UCPHS and the

district declined. As the demographics of the school district began to change from a

predominately White population to a more diverse population, primarily African American,

school district officials sought measures to hold onto the White students and also gain access

to federal funding for magnet schools (Johnson, 1999).

Students of color attending the school became victims of gate-keeping practices in

challenging classes and a school culture of low-expectations evolved over time as evident in

course enrollment and discipline records at the school. Standardized test scores have

fluctuated; primarily for students of color, and an achievement gap between the students of

color and White students was documented at the school in 2004 (DESE, 2005). Within 20

years of the school becoming a magnet high school, the population underwent another major

demographic conversion from being a majority White school to a majority African American

school again.

Despite the declining test scores that the school faced, many students have demonstrated resilience in graduating with honors, earning scholarships and going on to major college and universities. The percentage of high school graduates at UCPHS has been on average 21% higher than the other schools in the Midwestern District as a whole during the 2005-2007 school years. Students at UCPHS graduate within 4 years of enrolling in high school. The dropout rate at the school is not calculated as in other schools (See Figure 5) as the students that fall short of the required school mandated GPA of 2.5 are demitted and transferred to their neighborhood schools to complete high school. Thus it appears as if the school does not have a dropout concern. Nevertheless UCPHS demission statistics suggest that on average 25% of the students that enter the program do not complete high school at UCPHS (UCPHS Demission Documents, 2007). There were no statistics available on whether transferred students actually graduated from other high schools.

	2005	2006	2007
UCPHS	98%	98.3%	98.7%
District	77%	75.8%	75.7%
State	86%	85.9%	86.3%
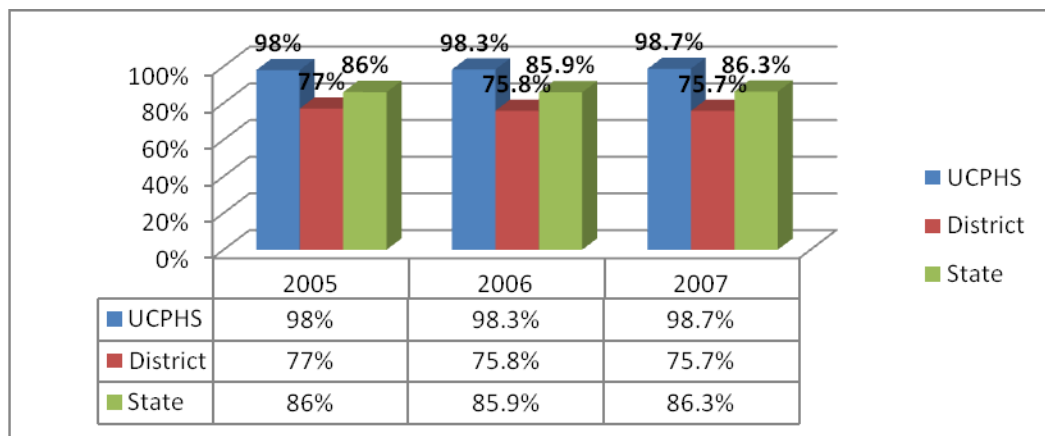
Source: DESE, 2008

Figure 5. *Graduation Rates*

ACT scores. Each year juniors and seniors take the ACT college entrance examination. While the percentage of students taking the ACT increased from 2005 to 2007, the average ACT scores for the total population were at or above the National Average for each respective year (See Table 1). The average ACT score increased by 1 percentage from 21.5 to 22.6 over a three-year span from 2005-2007. In addition the entire senior class in 2006 and 2007 took one to two ACT tests in preparation for college.

Table 1

UCPHS ACT Scores 2005-2007

	2005	2006	2007
Number of Graduates Taking ACT	140	141	149
Percentage of Graduates Taking ACT	95.6%	100%	100%
Composite Scores	21.5	21.7	22.6

Source: DESE 2008

The percentage of students scoring at or above the national average on ACT is significantly higher at UCPHS than the district and is in alignment with the state and national data (See Figure 6). UCPSH ACT test scores are included in the District ACT average scores. Despite the higher ACT average at UCPHS being included in the District average; the overall ACT average percentile has decreased slightly from 16.9 in 2005 to 16.3 in 2007. State scores remained constant at 21.6 from school years 2005 to 2007.

	2005	2006	2007
■ UCPHS	21.5	21.7	22.6
■ District	16.9	17.1	16.3
■ State	21.6	21.6	21.6
■ Nation	20.9	21.1	21.2
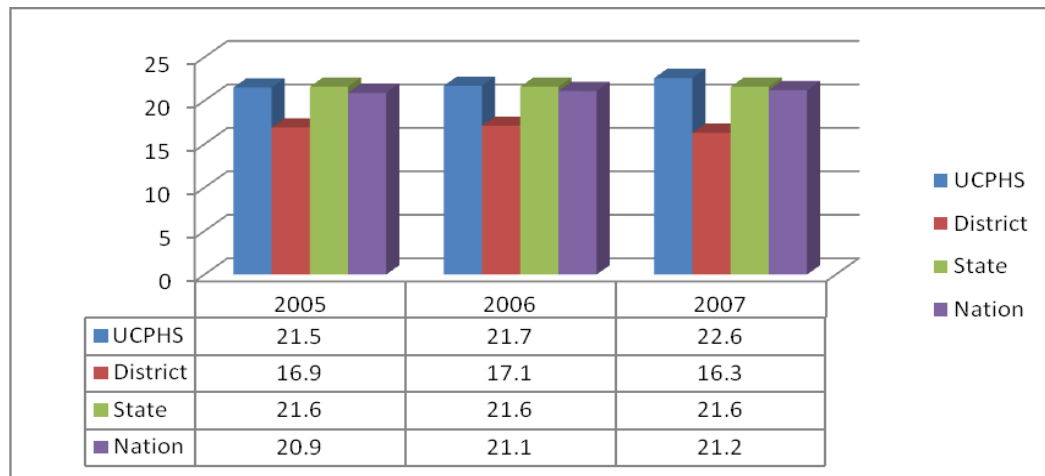
Source: DESE, 2008

Figure 6. *Students Scoring At or Above National Average on ACT*

College attendance. According to the results of the 180 day graduate follow up survey conducted in December 2007 and January 2008, 97% of the students of color, primarily African American graduates and 96% of the White graduates who participated in the survey were enrolled in either a 2 year or 4 year college degree program (See Table 2). It should be noted that the Midwestern District was not able to contact all graduates, nor did all graduates who were contacted chose to participate in the survey. Of the 140 UCPHS graduates, 126 were contacted and agreed to participate (90%). All of the 2007 graduates who were attending post-secondary schools were either enrolled in 2-year or 4-year college/universities. As can be seen in Table 2, UCPHS has a considerably higher college attendance rate than the other schools in the district.

Table 2

SY Graduate Follow Up Survey 2005-2007

2007			2006			2005		
UCPHS		Dist	UCPHS		Dist	UCPHS		Dist
Min	Non		Min	Non		Min	Non	
97%	96%	57%	89%	93%	55%	92%	73%	61%
3%	5%	31%	9%	4%	31%	5%	18%	29%
0%	0%	9%	2%	4%	12%	0%	9%	7%
0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	2%	3%	0%	2%

Key: Min = minority students, Non= non-minority students and Dist = District

The school being situated within a low performing school district with numerous political issues has seen a variety of problems that have challenged its' existence as a high performing college prep high school. Leadership at the school has been a revolving door, with an average tenure of 2 years for administrators. Rival parent groups, primarily White and African American, vying for power in the management of the school have created tensions that have influenced the ongoing turnover of leadership in the school. Teachers with less than desirable qualifications have been added to the staff through a system of district mandated personnel appointments. As a result the majority of the teachers in the school are no longer highly qualified. Mishandling of school funds as denoted by Haberman's (2003) depiction of dysfunctional urban school bureaucracy has also plagued the school. Thus, inadequate school resources have been an unending issue in the school.

Sampling of Participants

The study sample was selected using purposeful sampling. I utilized purposeful sampling to identify four 2007 high school graduates, four teachers, and two administrators as the primary respondents in my study. According to Patton (2002), information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. In addition, purposeful sampling is useful when one wants to understand something about those cases without needing or desiring to generalize to all such cases. These samples were chosen because the respondents were likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon that I was investigating.

Within purposeful sampling, I utilized typical case sampling, in which cases are selected because they highlight what is typical or normal, and criterion sampling, in which cases are selected because they meet some criterion necessary for the study (Patton, 2002). The typicality of the sample was that all of the respondents were in attendance at the urban college prep high school during the school years 2004-2007. The criterion was that all of the respondents had either attended or been employed at the school for four years, and diverse in race, ethnicity, and gender.

In the following section, I discuss the nature of in-depth interviews, which served as the primary method in my examination of the phenomenon. Surveys and documents served as additional methods to confirm and illuminate the research findings. Multiple data sources of administrators, teachers and students contributed to the depth and breadth of the study.

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Data Collection Methods

Case study, according to Merriam (1998) is defined and described from the perspective of the qualitative or naturalistic research paradigm, which defines the methods and techniques most suitable for collecting and analyzing data. Thick, rich descriptions, as the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting take the reader into the setting being described in such a way that they can understand the phenomenon being studied and draw their own interpretations about meanings and significance. Through in-depth case study descriptions, I explored the perceptions of students, teachers and administrators of the organizational policies and systemic practices that are related to building a high performing high school. Finding the answers came from asking respondents the right questions. "Qualitative inquiry, which focuses on meaning in context, requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to the underlying meaning, when gathering and interpreting data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 1).

In-depth interviews. Interviews are one of the "most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human being" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 645). The interviews in my study were semi-structured. In qualitative investigation these types of interview questions are more flexibly worded or use a mixture of more or less structured inquiry (Merriam, 1998). A list of questions and issues were composed to "allow the researcher [me] to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 74). Throughout my study, all in-depth interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist within five days of the actual interview.

An interview plan was developed as part of qualitative methodology to serve as a sequential guide for inquiry during the course of the interview (see Appendices E, F, G and H). The teachers and administrators had one set of interview questions, while the students in the study had a different set of interview questions. The plan was meant to ensure that the same basic line of inquiry was used with each interviewee (Patton, 2002). Questions were asked in a manner designed to encourage spontaneity and to engage the interviewees in conversation while remaining focused on the topic. I took extra care to develop a protocol that would not resemble an evaluation of performance when presented to the teachers and administrators.

Surveys. Surveys are used in education for a wide variety of purposes. In quantitative methods, surveys are used for data collection with the intent of generalizing from a sample to a population (Babbie, 1990). Quantitative surveys provide a numeric description of some fraction of the sample population through asking closed-ended questions (Fowler, 1998). In qualitative methods, surveys are used to gain information about people's attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, desires, ideas and other types of information (McMillan, 1997). The intent of qualitative surveys is to not generalize from a sample to a population but to describe and establish meaningful variation within a population. "The qualitative survey does not aim at describing frequencies, means, or other parameters but at determining the diversity of some topic of interest within a population" (Jansen, 2010).

In addition to using in-depth interviews two types of surveys were administered with different participant groups in this study. The survey designed for administrators and teachers consisted of quantitative elements that involved descriptive statistics and several

qualitative questions (See Appendix H). Descriptive statistics transform a set of numbers or observations into indices that describe or characterize the data and are used to summarize, organize, and reduce large numbers of observations and focus on what is with respect to the sample data. The use of descriptive statistics is the most fundamental way to summarize data, and it is indispensable in interpreting the results of quantitative research.

The quantitative section of the survey administered to teachers and administrators involved 24 items, using the following response scales: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The 24 items were used to gain information on the curriculum, rigor and relevance, relationships and leadership in the school. The use of quantitative data in qualitative study does not determine the major research paradigm used; the analysis determines whether a study is quantitative or qualitative (Jansen, 2010). In this sense, my intent was to use quantitative data to determine the diversity of interests related to the areas of curriculum, rigor and relevance, relationships and leadership, which align with a qualitative perspective.

The second section of the survey consisted of four open-ended questions:

1. Describe the policies and practices at your school site that you believe contribute to high student performance.

2. How would you describe the leadership at your school from 2004-2007?

3. How would you describe professional development at your school?

4. How would you describe the school culture at your school?

An interview protocol for a second interview with the teachers and administrators was designed using the four open-ended questions (see Appendix H). This allowed me to ask follow-up and probing questions, which supported the flexibility to pursue all leads.

A qualitative survey was used with the student participants in the study (see Appendix G). The questions were open-ended and inductive, which enabled me to ask each student what was his or her understanding of the organizational policies and systemic practices in the school. In the open/inductive survey, relevant objects/topics, dimensions and categories are identified through the interpretation of raw data (e.g. interview transcripts) (Jansen, 2010). The survey questions were aligned with the research questions with the intention of uncovering factors related to the school's high performance and significant organizational policies and systemic practices.

Documents. School documents and artifacts were constituted as part of the repertoire of resources for this study because they were a rich source of information regarding the practices at the school. The documents and artifacts provided direct information, and also served as a stimulus for further inquiry (Patton, 2002). "For documents, it is helpful to note whether the information represents primary material (such as information directly from the people or situation under study or secondary material, such as secondhand accounts of the people or situation written by others" (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). I determined that the documents and artifacts to be used in this study would include student records, lesson plans, assessment results, attendance records, class rosters, discipline records and professional development agendas. Professional development agendas, which are plans that denote professional training or resources needed for the year, included comprehensive school

improvement plans, aligned to the district plan and often suggest the five-year direction of the school district. Artifacts consist of rich sources of data that reveal equities and inequities within school systems (Johnson, 2002; Merriam, 1998). Artifacts are reflective of the school culture and the systems in place. Information taken from the collected artifacts in the current study, provided insight into how students were graded, disciplined, and recognized throughout the school.

Data Analysis

I incorporated heuristic inquiry to analyze the data. There are two focusing elements of heuristic inquiry within the larger framework of phenomenology. First the researcher must have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study. Second, others who are part of the study must share an intensity of experience with the phenomenon (Maxwell, 1996). "Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behavior" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 42). In order words, heuristic analysis seeks to elucidate the essence of a phenomenon for an individual or group. As the researcher in the current study, I looked for emerging patterns or themes and interrelationships between organizational policies, systemic practices, and their implementation. These interrelationships formed the inductive analysis strategy. I examined the interdependence of systems and their relationship to student performance. Context sensitivity was addressed through a socio-cultural and historical perspective, guided by an historical overview of factors leading to the academic disparities between students of color and the White and Asian students.

Data analysis is an interactive process that continues throughout the research study. The process involves memoing, data entry, storage, coding, and developing a system of categorization. Memoing throughout the process involved recording reflective notes regarding meanings gleaned from the data. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. I attempted to clearly capture the participants' demeanor, tone, and body language in the event of equipment failure. The notes also reflected information about artifacts, such as documents, or other materials, as well as key ideas in the documents (Creswell, 2003). Artifacts were maintained in a coded notebook to facilitate access for analysis. The six phases of heuristic inquiry served as the overarching framework for analyzing the data with coding of the data for themes and patterns in the illumination phase and symbolic interaction conducted in the explication phase.

Heuristic analysis is a highly personal process of heuristic inquiry that encompasses six phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. Thus the purpose of this kind of discipline analysis is to elucidate the essence of experience of a phenomenon for an individual or group. The analytical vocabulary of heuristic analysis is initially alien and potentially, alienating, until the researcher becomes immersed in the holistic perspective, rigorous discipline, and paradigmatic parameter of heuristics.

1. Initial engagement invites the researcher to engage in self-dialogue, to begin an inner search to discover the question or the topic (Moustakas, 1990). My interest in this study was derived from my experiences as an urban student, an urban student's parent, and as an urban education practitioner. I had always held a high regard for the value of education in one's life; however, I had witnessed many disparities in the urban education arena.

2. Immersion was the second stage of analysis and is the stage of steeping oneself in all that is, contacting the texture, tone, mood, range and content of the experience (Moustakas, 1990). During this phase my total life and being were centered in the students', teachers' and administrators' experiences of the phenomenon. The in-depth interviews allowed me to listen to perceptions that participants shared about the urban high school. I listened to both positive and negative feelings associated with the school. I also paid particular attention to their body language and facial cues as their mood and emotions changed when they discussed issues that caused them frustration.

3. During the third stage of incubation or quiet contemplation, I waited, allowing space for awareness, intuitive or tacit insight, and understanding regarding the phenomena (Moustakas, 1990).

4. Expanding awareness and deepening meaning to bring new clarity characterize the fourth stage or the illumination phase (Moustakas, 1990). During this important phase, critical textures and structures are revealed so that the experience is known in all of its essential parameters. The experience takes on vividness and understanding increases, therefore parameters. In this phase, I began to understand the lived experiences of the participants, which brought clarity to their voices and, also helped to accentuate the themes or pattern codes apprehended in the data. As I reflected on the participants' experiences, a full unfolding of the phenomenon was revealed.

5. In the explication phase, other dimensions of meaning are added. Through self-dialogue, and reflection, the experience was depicted and further delineated (Moustakas, 1990) through symbolic interaction. As I reflected on the meaning of symbolic interaction, I could not help but think of my own urban high school experience. Like the students at UCPHS, I too was once a college prep student in an urban high school and held high expectations for myself, similar to the students in UCPHS. As I entered college, I found the education I had received in the high school had not prepared me for the rigors of college. Thus I became somewhat disturbed as being viewed as an at-risk student instead of a student ready for college, by my professors. Thus throughout the explication process, I attended to my own awareness, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments as a prelude to the understanding that can happen in conversations and dialogues with others (Moustakas, 1990).

6. As all of the pieces are brought together or creatively synthesized, this final phase points the way for new perspectives and meaning, a new vision of the experience (Moustakas, 1990). Creative synthesis helps to illuminate the fundamental richness of the experience, and the experiences of participants are captured and communicated in a personal and creative way. In this study creative synthesis provided an overt opportunity for me to bring together the voices of the 10 participants as all of the

pieces converged into a total experience, reflecting patterns and relationships that illuminate new perspectives and meanings.

I devised a conceptual framework consisting of concepts and bins (Miles & Huberman, 1994) gleaned from the literature review, research questions, and my own knowledge and experiences to reveal critical textures and structures related to the phenomenon. The conceptual framework was expanded as I interacted with the data. In the illumination phase, I utilized inductive analysis (McMillan, 2000; Patton, 2002, Ryan & Bernard, 2000) to uncover and discover meaning in the data which involved coding the data, (Miles & Huberman, 1994). "To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact is the stuff of analysis" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 56). During analysis, three types of codes were used: descriptive, interpretative, and pattern codes or themes. Descriptive codes require little interpretation and the researcher often uses descriptive coding in the early stages of analysis. Interpretative coding requires the researcher to examine the data more closely and begin thinking about the complexities of the codes and its relationship to other descriptive codes. The process of descriptive and interpretative coding, which occur simultaneously, gave me an overall understanding of the data I collected and allowed me flexibility to either collect more data until no new codes appeared or to modify my interview guide to explore something that a respondent brought up.

The third type of coding that I engaged was pattern coding. The purpose of pattern coding, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is to "identify an emergent theme, configuration or explanation" (p.69). As this type of coding progressed, it was important for

me to "qualify" the code. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest a code is qualified when "the conditions under which it holds are specified" (p.71). Under such a condition, a series of "if-then" questions about the data were asked, and if the pattern held, the code was qualified. If the pattern failed to hold, more explanations were examined.

As previously mentioned, I also employed memo writing during the coding process. Miles and Huberman (1984) used Glaser's (1982) definition of memo: "the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (p.72). Memo writing is one of the most useful tools available to the researchers. Memoing is a way for the researcher to sketch ideas about what direction the analysis might take, reflect on the coding process, explain why certain codes were used, and provide an overall structure to the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984). For me, memos were a way to remember important points or to try to understand the meaning of the codes. Maxwell (2005) proposed that there should always be a way to break categories apart and put them back together in order to produce a story of the research findings. This was achieved through the final phase of the heuristic analysis, creative synthesis.

Convergence of data, the final stage of analysis, occurred as I combined the analysis of the in-depth interview, surveys and documents. Each piece of the data and its analysis is essential in itself as I sought to describe the participants' feelings and perceptions as they related to the organizational policies and systemic practices in UCPHS. Through convergence, I also sought to converge or bring together all pieces of the puzzle to determine which pieces or themes were recurrent throughout the study and which themes were most illuminative (Patton, 2002). For each research question, I examined my Excel data tables and

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noted the recurrent themes. I then looked for themes that could provide voice to the students, teachers and administrators experience of the phenomenon under study.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The major limitation of this study was researcher bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). As a former building administrator in a high school, I had to acknowledge my own opinions regarding school organizational policies and systemic practices. A qualitative researcher, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) needs to be "open to being shaped by the research experience and to having [ones'] thinking be informed by the data" (p. 34). Although researcher bias is a potential limitation, it cannot and should not be eliminated. As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) further stated,

> Some researchers and writers are so concerned about controlling their personal biases that it immobilizes them…Acknowledges that no matter how much you try you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to become more reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it (p. 34).

To offset the effects of bias, I incorporated field notes; a "written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 107-108). I was conscience of the role of reflexity in qualitative projects. It is impossible to eliminate the researcher's theories, preconceptions or values. I was particularly concerned with how my values influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study. In a real sense, Richards (2005) contents that data are "…collaborative constructs, between you and the 'subjects' of your study" (p. 51).

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A second limitation is the transferability of qualitative intrinsic case studies. Such studies are undertaken when one wants a better understanding of a particular case and the researcher has a deep or personal interest in the phenomena. Because the qualitative case is of intrinsic interest to the researcher, there is little to no emphasis on transferability. The emphasis of this type of study is on how well the data, categories, analyses and patterns are described and how well other researchers can understand the findings so that they can be considered for use in other settings. While other researchers may have an interest in the same topic as the researcher in the original study, changes are they will not have the same intrinsic interest in the phenomenon (Stake, 2003).

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative researchers have no single stance or consensus on addressing traditional topics such of validity and reliability. Early qualitative researchers felt compelled to relate traditional notions of validity and reliability to the procedures in quantitative research (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Later qualitative writers developed their own language to distance themselves from the positivist paradigms. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and more recently Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) discuss establishing quality criteria such as "trustworthiness" and "authenticity." These are all viable stances on the question of validity and reliability.

On the other hand, Patton (2002) stated that validity and reliability are two factors that any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use "dependability" in

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qualitative research, which closely corresponds to the notion of "reliability" in quantitative

research. To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is

crucial. To widen the spectrum of conceptualization of reliability and to reveal the

congruence of reliability and validity in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985)

suggested that: "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of validity

is sufficient to establish reliability" (p. 316).

To address the issue of trustworthiness and authenticity, Lincoln and Guba (as cited

in Patton, 2002) noted the need for the researcher to be "balance, fair, and conscientious in

taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities" (p. 575). I

used the concept triangulation, including multiple sources and multiple perspectives to

provide coherent justification for themes as noted in the data collection procedures in-depth

interviews, surveys and documents were incorporated in the study and data sources included

administrators, teachers and students. Member checking helped to determine the truth of the

findings. Participants were written transcripts of all interviews to review for accuracy. I also

allowed checking for accuracy of the surveys and making additional comments by soliciting

feedback about my data I was able to rule out the possibilities of misinterpretations of what

they said and participants' perspective about what was going on in the high school. I also

used peer debriefing to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of findings which

involved contacting three colleagues from other urban high schools regarding the meaning

gleaned from the data. Thick descriptions helped to communicate the findings, transporting

readers to the setting of the high school; this made the telling of the story realistic and

prolific. I depicted themes located in the data through direct quotes from the participants and

provided a heuristic account of my experiences in relationship to experiences of the informants. I listen carefully to the participants in order to understand the language and symbols used in their narratives.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was granted from the SSIRB (Appendix A) to conduct the study, *Opening the Gates to Foster Scholarship for Urban Students: Organizational Policies and Systemic Practices in a High Performing High Poverty Urban High School.* I gained entry in to the school by requesting permission from the superintendent of the school district (Appendix B) and the principal of the school (Appendix C). Students and staff participants selected through purposeful sampling were contacted via mail with the Informed Consent Agreement requesting their participation in the study. A postcard (Appendix D) was enclosed for students and staff to return giving their agreement to participate in the study. Upon receiving the postcard indicating interest in the study, I contacted each selected participant by phone or e-mail (Appendix D) to inform them of their selection to participate in this study. During my contact with each participant, we agreed on a time and location of their choice to meet to discuss the nature of the study and its contributions to the field of urban education. Throughout the study, I employed every effort to maintain confidentiality by using pseudonyms in place of each respondent's name (Christians, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 2000).

All respondents were aware of the study and its purposes. During our first meeting together, each participant was given an opportunity to ask any questions they might have about the study prior to signing the written informed consent form. The consent form

described for participants the purpose of the study and the potential use of information derived from the study (Blank & Berg, 2006). The consent form also notified participants that the study had been reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences Institutional Review Board, explicitly stating that research procedures adequately safeguarded the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. To further protect the subjects from harm, the consent form stated: (a) that participation was completely voluntary and that subjects were allowed to cease participation at any point without penalty, (b) subjects needed not answer all questions, and (c) subjects' answers to questions remained confidential. The form also informed participants of the duration of their participation. Throughout the study, I made every attempt to maintain the confidentiality of all participants in the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

Many students in public schools in the United States are not receiving an adequate

education that will allow them to compete successfully in the global economy of the 21st

Century. Research on urban school indicates that these schools face issues complicated by

social, economic and institutional barriers (Valencia, 2002). These issues may be evident in

the organizational policies and systemic practices operating in the school and in the low

expectations that the school may hold for urban students. What actions can transform a

struggling school into a place where students learn the concepts, values, and skills they will

need to succeed in life? I faced this question many times throughout my career as an educator

in urban school settings. A great deal of research suggests what effective schools do in

general to improve academic outcomes; however, less is known about the differences which

may exist at those high schools which are exceeding expectations with the 'odds against

them' (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Marzano, 2003; Washington Learns, 2006).

The purpose of the case study, that incorporated the traditions of heuristic inquiry and

symbolic interaction, was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions among students

and staff at one urban college preparatory high school regarding practices that are effective in

decreasing or eliminating academic disparities and improving student achievement.

The research questions for this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of students, teachers and administrators related to the organizational policies and systemic practices that contribute to high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

2. How are the organizational policies and systemic practices implemented to promote a school improvement plan for high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

The purpose of the study did not change during the fieldwork phase of the inquiry. As the study unfolded, I remained true to the goal of hearing the voices of the students, teachers and administrators as they attempted to respond to the influences of policies and practices within the school.

A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select a diverse group of participants that also met criteria of being present in the school during the school years 2004 to 2007. In this case, four students, four teachers and two administrators were selected from the school. Data collected included in-depth interviews, surveys and documents. Two sessions, 45 minute each, were scheduled with each participant to conduct the in-depth interviews and surveys. Participants were given written transcripts of their interviews for the purpose of clarifying responses to ensure validity. Additional information could also be added to the interviews. The documents were reviewed to understand the context of the setting, which helped to make meaning of the interview and survey responses.

The six phases of heuristic inquiry were used as a framework for data analysis with coding of the data performed in the illumination phase and symbolic interaction incorporated in the explication phase. The coding of the data included enumerative and thematic coding with theoretical memoing taking place throughout the data analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, I indentified common themes in the data sources of in-depth interviews of students, teachers, and administrators, surveys from students, teachers, and administrators, and documents. I engaged in validation procedures: triangulation, member checking, and peer de-debriefing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002). Through reflexivity, I became more self-aware in an attempt to control my bias; constantly questioning my intentions and examining reactions to the participants' data. I reflected on the experiences I brought to the study, seeking to understand what I know and how I know it, "to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment" (Hertz, 1997). As I sought to illuminate the voices of the students, teachers and administrators regarding the phenomenon, I had to be attentive to the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origin of my own perspective and voice as well as the perspectives and voices of the participants in the study (Hertz, 1997).

Data were collected over an eight-week period, from the end of December 2011 through the end of February 2012. Establishing credibility and rapport with the respondents were highly personal and interpersonal because the in-depth interviews opened up what was inside of the individual being questioned (Patton, 2002). The phenomenological inquiry helped me explore people's feelings, perceptions, experiences, and opinions. I endeavored to

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experience the situation from the minds and emotions of the study participants (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Having worked in urban schools for my entire career, I reflected on the strengths and weakness of the schools where I had been employed. Although I had witnessed many inequities in school practices and the low expectations held for many urban students, I also had observed the resiliency of students as they navigated the urban school experience. While the students in this study faced many outside of school obstacles that challenged their successful acquisition of an education, they were determined to improve their place in the world by obtaining a high school diploma and eventually a college degree. Equally as important was the sharing of my experiences of being a teacher and administrator with the teachers and administrators of the study. By opening our initial meetings with my own stories, these participants became more comfortable with me, because we shared a common bond, the urban experience. These interactions further developed rapport between the participants and me, and they became eager to share their own life experiences and ways to enhance the educational opportunities for urban schools.

I met individually with each participant to further develop rapport and to discuss the rationale for the study and its contributions to the field of urban education. Rapport was also established at the beginning of the interviews by asking former students and staff to share funny and memorable stories about their high school experiences. Students felt comfortable talking about old friends from high school, teachers enjoyed talking about the positive highlights of their academic careers, and administrators shared their goals on improving education for all students.

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Additionally, participants were advised that I would be the only person aware of their identities in the study; pseudonyms were established to protect their identities. Before the interviews, participants were told that they did not have to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Transcribed interviews were also labeled with the pseudonyms and given back to the respondents for verification of accuracy after each interview.

With a more thorough understanding of policies and practices that contribute to high performing urban high schools, educators are more likely to understand what needs to be changed or modified within the nation's most deprived schools. The remaining of this chapter will describe the findings of the study. I begin with the participants' profiles, which helped to illuminate individual characteristics, areas of responsibilities for teachers and administrators, student courses of study and post-secondary goals, and years of association with the school for students, teachers and administrators. Findings related to the in-depth interviews and surveys for students, teachers and administrators are presented with thick descriptions that communicate the configuration of themes. I analyzed documents such as School Improvement Plans, staff meeting agendas, professional development plans, assessment data and class rosters to explore organizational policies and practices. Cross-case analysis of the data was conducted to identify common themes and to more explicitly answer the research questions. I conclude with a summary of the findings aligned to the research questions.

Participant's Profiles

Student A

Student A is an African American male who attended UCPHS for four years and also attended the UCPHS feeder middle school for three years. He participated in the International Baccalaureate Program. Students completing the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program must earn a specific number of points on the seven exams in order to successfully complete the Diploma Program. While he did pass six out of seven International Baccalaureate Diploma exams, he did not pass the science section of the exam, thus he did not receive the International Diploma. Nevertheless, his college did award him credit in each subject for the IB exams he passed successfully. He graduated with a 4.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) from UCPHS in 2007 with a full scholarship to a four-year college. He also earned a 30 on the ACT. He is the first person in his immediate family to attend college and graduated in May 2012 with a degree in Biology. He has been accepted into medical school and is awaiting the results of the scholarships for which he has applied.

Student B

Student B is a white female that attended UCPHS for four years and participated in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. She did not attend the feeder middle school for the high school. She received the International Baccalaureate Diploma by passing the seven exit exams. Her lowest score on the exam was in the area of mathematics. She graduated with a 4.7 GPA in 2007, earned a 32 on the ACT and is attending an Ivy League college. She was able to opt out of her freshmen classes and begin college with enough

credits to be a sophomore. She received an academic scholarship from the college that covers three-fourths of her tuition. She also received a variety of other scholarships that allowed her to completely finance her college education for four years. She is the first person in her family to finish high school and attend college. Student B will complete her six-year college program with a doctorate degree in pharmacy. She plans to return to this area to help support her family that struggles financially.

Student C

Student C is an African American female who attended the UCPHS for four years. She attended the feeder school for two of the three years. She participated in the International Baccalaureate as a Certificate Candidate in four subject areas. Certificate Candidates opt not to take all seven classes required for the International Baccalaureate Program; thus, they are only required to take exams in the subject areas that they are enrolled. She successfully completed Certificates in Language A (English), Language B (Foreign Language-Spanish), and Humanities, but did not pass the science exam. She earned a score of 27 on the ACT and $50,000 in college scholarships. Student C received college credit for the IB and AP exams that she passed. She graduated from a four-year college and is currently enrolled in a graduate program for School Leadership. She plans to teach school and pursue a career in school administration. She is the second person in her family to attend college.

Student D

Student D is a Hispanic American male who attended UCPHS for four years. He also attended the feeder school for three years. He participated in both International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advance Placement (AP) classes. He enrolled in IB Language A and AP history and math courses. He successfully completed the exit exams in each subject area, which earned him 9 college credits before attending college. He graduated in 2007 with honors and a 4.0 GPA. He received a military scholarship to college after earning a 27 on the ACT. He participated in the ROTC program while attending high school and plans to become an officer in the United States Navy. His specific area of concentration will be in aeronautics. He is the first person in his family to attend college.

Teacher A

Teacher A retired from UCPHS in 2011. He is a European American male from the Midwestern city in which UCPHS is located and worked at the school for 20 years teaching in the History Department. He taught International Baccalaureate classes for 12 years and served on a number of school improvement committees. He has worked under seven different administrators and witnessed many changes in the school during his tenure.

Teacher B

Teacher B retired from UCPHS in 2010. She is an African American female from a large metropolitan city. She was employed at the school for 10 years, teaching English and history. She participated as a teacher in the International Baccalaureate Program for five

years teaching Language A (English). She was a class sponsor for seven years and often volunteered to work after school with struggling students in various subject matters. Teacher B worked with the School Improvement Plan and provided professional development to staff needing support on engaging reluctant student learners. She has worked under three different administrators.

Teacher C

Teacher C currently teaches math at UCPHS. She is a European American from a rural community. She has been employed at the school for seven years, and teaches in the International Baccalaureate Program, and formerly taught Advance Placement classes. Teacher C does not participate on any committees at the school. She is planning to retire at the end of the school year and return to her home community to open a business. She has worked under three different administrators.

Teacher D

Teacher D is an eight-year veteran at the school. He is an African American male from an adjoining suburban community in the Midwestern city. He teaches science in traditional classes, and in International Baccalaureate and Advance Placement classes. He works with the athletic department coaching two sports. He has served as a union representative for the school.

Administrator A

Administrator A is an African American female who worked at the school for five years. She was recently transferred to another high school in the district. Her major responsibilities were while working at UCPHS was Professional Development and Coordinating the International Baccalaureate Program. She also worked closely with families of students struggling in their academics. In addition, Administrator A assisted the administration team with school data. She provided teachers with information on analyzing student data to drive instruction and was the driving force behind the school implementation of Professional Learning Communities.

Administrator B

Administrator B is a European American male that worked at the school for 3 years before being promoted to a school principal in another school district. His major responsibilities while working at the school were overseeing the school attendance, discipline and assessments. He worked in a support role with Professional Development and also provided instructional assistance to classroom teachers. He worked in concert with the school principal and helped implement school-wide strategies to improve student achievement for all students through the use of data-driven Professional Learning Communities.

Findings of In-Depth Interviews: Students, Teachers, and Administrators

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in the study using a set of guiding questions prepared from the research questions. The four students participated

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in two 45-minute audiotaped, in-depth interviews using an interview guide of eighteen questions. Students were given an opportunity to review the written transcripts from the first interview for accuracy and provide additional information before the second interview. The second interview was conducted with the unanswered questions from the first interview guide. Each participant was given the opportunity to examine their transcripts to make sure that their thoughts were interpreted accurately. The teachers and administrators were given a different interview. The procedure for conducting the interviews was the same: two forty-five minute interviews employing an interview guide. During the first interview, teachers and administrators were given the interview questions based on the questions from the study. During the second interview, teachers and administrators were given unanswered questions from the first interview guide and responded to the qualitative questions from the survey, which are reported in the survey section.

Student Interviews

The thematic categories identified in the interviews with the students were (a) teacher-student relationship, (b) leadership, and (c) school culture.

(a) Teacher-student relationships. For purposes of this study teacher-student relationships are described as the interactions between students and teachers that may be supportive or unhelpful and likely to influence curricular choices, academic achievement, and treatment of students. Teacher-student relationships were formed from the interpretive codes: hidden curriculum, low expectations, fearful of students, unfair treatment, and supportive relationships.

According to Brophy and Good (1974), teachers form expectations of students based on such characteristics as body build, gender, race, ethnicity, name, attractiveness, dialect, and socio-economic status. These expectations result in differential treatments of students and are grounded in the relationships they form with students. These relationships also facilitate learning in schools (Bennett, 2007).

Levine and Lowe, (1995) noted the hidden curriculum is a deliberate communication to the learner those cultural aspects which will reflect the dominant culture of the society; moreover it consists of structures of power and authority, teacher expectations of how students will behave and achieve, and student tracking designed to maintain the status quo.

Student A mentioned the following regarding the hidden curriculum:

I had one teacher that was always telling the class to stop acting ghetto when they got loud. I was offended by the comment. Sometimes we were loud because we were excited not ghetto. Just because we didn't always speak softly did not mean we were ghetto.

Student B gave the following account of the hidden curriculum:

Some of my teachers said we didn't know how to act in school when the students talked too much in class or were falling asleep. Perhaps those teachers needed to check themselves. If they were not so boring and acted like they knew how to teach, we would pay attention. When something goes wrong in class, the teachers always blame the students. Maybe they need to look at the man or woman in the mirror and see that part of the problem lied within them. We acted like teenagers and needed more hands-on activities in class and fewer lectures.

The literature on effective urban schools reflects that teachers are aware of differences in cultures but do not always address maturation of students. It would behoove teachers to develop a better understanding of teenagers, what works and what does not work with them. By doing so, they could design more engaging lessons for students and eliminate

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boredom and behavior issues in classes. However this is not generally the case in urban

schools where teachers believe that students don't care about their education. I found this

particularly daunting in a college prep school where students had academic strengths.

Unfortunately when students do not reflect the behavior expected by the dominant culture,

teachers, through the lens of a hidden curriculum form low expectations of students and treat

them accordingly. Student C indicated that the teachers had low expectations for the

students:

> Some of my teachers did not belong in a college prep school in the (urban) city. They often made negative comments about the students in our district doing so poorly in school because they thought we didn't care about school. In looking around the classroom, I could tell that other students were also offended by some of the comments they made about students. I thought to myself, if the situation is so bad here, why don't they go somewhere else to teach.

> Student D reported that his teachers had low expectations for them and tried to

worksheet them to death. He would like to have seen more activities that allowed them to

work in groups.

> The teachers, according to Student A, acted like they are fearful of the students.

He said:

> Students could misbehave in class and teachers acted like they were afraid to tell them to stop clowning around. If students didn't want to work, some teachers would let them just sit there and talk to each other. But our English teacher was not having it. She was not afraid of students and she let you know it. We learned a lot in her class and behavior was not a problem in her class. Believe it or not, most students liked her. She was cool

> Student B also recounted incidents related to teachers being fearful of students:

> Some students punk teachers in class and teachers don't say or do anything. Sometimes other students have to stop their classmates from doing this. Most of the

time the students will stop acting out, if someone says something to them. We want to learn and don't want disruptions all the time in class.

Student A pointed out that some teachers treated students unfairly:

Some of my teacher had a tendency to get smart with students in class. If the student returns a negative comment to the teacher and the rest of the class started laughing, the student was sent to the office on a discipline referral.

Student C commented on unfair treatment by a teacher:

I could not stand one of my teachers. He always blamed me for talking in class even when it wasn't me. If he heard talking from my side of the room, it was always me he looked at first. Sometimes I didn't realize what was going on until my friends started laughing at me.

Student B had positive relationships with her teachers and stated:

My teachers for the most part have been nice to me. They worked hard to teach us and we had good classes. One teacher, in particular was liked by most students because she always went the extra mile to help us in class. Students could also go to her with personal problems and she was willing to listen and help out if she could. She even gave us her phone number to call if we had trouble with our homework.

Student D spoke about the positive relationship that the Physical Education (P.E.)

teacher had with students. He said:

I really liked the P.E. teacher. He was always around after school; making sure students were taken care of. If you needed a ride to an event, he was there. If you needed a snack, he would give you one or some change to buy one. If you were having problems, he was there to listen. He acted like a father figure to many of the students.

(b) Leadership. For the purposes of this study, leadership is defined as the ability of adults within the school to create a culture of high academic and behavior expectations and identify opportunities for student leadership within the school. The interpretive codes that supported the theme of leadership in the student interviews were high expectations, college readiness and collaborative voice. The role of principal is pivotal in ensuring that the shared

vision and mission of the organization are being followed. As I conducted the interviews,

each student was eager to share their perceptions of the principal, and her effect on the school

culture. Leaders in high performing, high-poverty urban schools believe that students are

capable, operate on that belief (Carter, 2000), and are able to perpetuate that belief system

through buy-in by all stakeholders.

Student D expressed an instance of low expectations by teachers and how the

principal expressed high expectations:

> Some of my teachers were quack. They played around too much with students.
> Some could not even teach. Other thought we were the problem, but with principals
> coming and going all the time, it was crazy at the school sometimes. The new
> principal checked that. She told us that we were college prep students and the
> nonsense that was going on around the school did not reflect highly on us. She
> started having activities for students when they were good, such as Movie Fridays
> after school, a carnival at the end of the school year, donuts for the classes with the
> best attendance and she gave away books and book gift cards and motivational
> speakers. We also had more dances. But if you were in trouble, you would go to
> study hall instead of the school fun activities. Students actually started acting better
> so they could participate in the good things.

Student C and Student A shared similar comments related to high expectations

communicated by the principal:

> The principal reminded us during an all school assembly that we were college prep
> students and that attending UCPHS was a privilege not to be taken lightly. She
> wanted us to do our best in everything we did. The principal provided us with
> monthly meeting after that to make sure we were on track to complete our classes.

> The principal wanted all students to take IB and AP classes. Many students were
> concerned about this because they did not think they would pass the final exam for
> the class. The principal called all of the juniors into the cafeteria at the end of the
> school year and told us to rest up over the summer, as we would be taking at least one
> IB or AP class in the fall. The principal told us we were college prep students and
> that we could do well in the classes if we worked hard and sought academic help
> outside of class. She also told us that each of us would be assigned a mentor during

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our senior year to oversee our progress in school and to keep us on a college prep track in preparation for college.

Several students made comments regarding college readiness and expressed that the principal wanted them be prepared to go to college:

Each month the principal would hold assemblies to tell us what we should be doing to get ready for college. She also wanted all seniors to take the ACT test and she paid for us to take the test two times. The principal also held ACT prep classes on Saturday mornings for students to get extra help.

Kaplan was hired to teach a class on the ACT for rising juniors and seniors. The principal also hired a retired counselor to work with us on scholarships. At graduation, every student was listed in the program as having received a scholarship. I think the year I graduated, my class earned over six million dollars in scholarships.

Steps were taken to provide students a greater voice in school decisions as indicated through the interpretative code of collaborative voice. Student A believed they have a voice in trivial things with leadership, but "When it comes to something important, we are left out". Students interviewed described the principal as being strict and but open to listening to their concerns. Student B commented on collaborative voice:

A principal's advisory group was started which allowed students to tell our side of the story of what goes on in the school. We met monthly to discuss whatever was on our minds about school rules and things we would like to have in the school. We are smart students and want a good education. We also want activities to have fun in school. School should not just be about work. We should have memorable experiences in high school. As a result of starting the advisory group, student input made us feel that the principal wanted what was best for us.

Student C described the open door policy the principal provided for students to express their concerns:

The principal has an open door policy, which I like. I can go in her office and tell her my ideas and she listens very carefully to them and sometimes she agrees with my ideas and sometimes she does not. What I like about the principal is that she does not always side with the adults. She tries to understand my point and where I'm coming

from. She also helps me see things from a different point of view. She treats me like a person that matters to her.

Student D served on the UCPHS school advisory council, which included, teachers, parents, community members and district representation. He shared that he had a voice in what went on at the school. He said:

> Serving on the school advisory council was a great honor for me. I don't know why I was chosen to serve, but I was happy. For the first time in my life, I was able to share my ideas with adults that were willing to listen. I looked forward to attending the meetings and we made important decisions to improve the school. One of the major things we were able to do was to work with an organization called PE 4 Life to build another gym with exercise equipment and TV's. It was cool having the new gym and more students were excited to workout every day at school. We also got the cafeteria to start serving more salads and healthy foods and not so much grease to compliment the new gym program.

Students revealed that the principal was open to their concerns and ideas regarding the school climate and culture. The principal allowed the students to become leaders in the school through the student advisory group and the UCPHS Advisory Group. Students from the advisory groups were also assigned to report their findings to various committees in the school to allow input on school-wide decisions.

(c) School culture. School culture was defined as beliefs, expectations, and assumptions that guide the actions of the school. It also encompasses the character, customs, and habits that distinguish the school community. The interpretative codes were caring, unfair treatment, low expectations, barriers to learning, and gate-keeping practices.

Practices in the school often reflected that students of color and low-socio-economic students were not always welcome in higher-level classes. While some teachers were able to demonstrate that they cared for students, others tended to treat students unfairly. These

students were also faced with a disproportionate amount of office referrals. Teacher conversations often referred to the students as being lazy and not really wanting to obtain an education. Students had mixed feelings about the extent they perceived teachers as caring and supportive them. Student C conveyed that she had some teachers that cared and others that did not:

> Most of my teachers were cool with the students, but some were not. I remember a student that was acting out on a regular basis in class and causing the class to be interrupted on a daily basis. Many of the students knew this student had been a problem for a long time. Our English teacher got to know the student and began to treat him with more dignity and respect. She also helped him to focus in class by giving him positive attention instead of negative attention. I don't know how she did it, but the student started acting better in class.
>
> In another class this same student continued to act out and the teacher put him down in front of the class on a regular basis. I could not believe some of the things that were said to the student by the teacher. The student was also kicked out of class so much, I don't know if he learned anything.

Student B revealed that she felt that some teachers cared about the progress she was making in class, but some teachers were indifferent toward her. She pointed out that one teacher was aware that she worked in the evening because she was trying to help pay the bills at home. Student B expressed the following frustrations regarding teacher's demonstrations of caring behaviors:

> I was under so much pressure to go to school, go to work and help take care of my younger sisters, I could hardly breathe. When I told the teacher that I would like her to help me out on an assignment that was unclear to me, she responded that my attendance needed to better so that I could do better in school. It was if she was suggesting that I did not come to school because I just did not want too. While I was angry about the way the teacher responded to me, I did not give up. I went to another teacher for help and completed the assignment. The other teacher wanted to know why I was behind and when I explained to her my situation, she just told me to stay encouraged and we would get through this class together. I really appreciated her willingness to help me. I was determined to graduate despite my personal situation.

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Because life experiences of the some teachers and the urban students are so different, it is sometimes difficult for teachers to believe that students are telling the truth and not making excuses for not getting their work done in a timely fashion.

The school culture of UCPHS was inundated with unfair practices by teachers toward students. Thus, if a teacher or administrator has a deficit view, she or he may treat students indifferently. Student A thought that the school had a culture of disciplining African American students unfairly, but the principal listened to them and treated them fairly. He gave the following account of unfair treatment by a teacher and how the principal intervened:

> It just seems to me that the Black students get in trouble more than the white students around the school. Sometimes, we would get in trouble for things and White students would not. For example, if I were to come into class late, I needed a pass, but the White student could just walk in class late and sit down and nothing happened.

> One day a teacher got in my friends face about being loud in the hallway. When the student just ignored the teacher and walked away, the teacher followed him down the hallway, barking more comments at him. The student went to the principal and told her what had happened and said another teacher had witnessed the hold thing. Then the teacher went to the principal and said she felt threatened by the student because he ignored her. The principal told my friend he should have not ignored the teacher and followed her request. The principal investigated the situation, by speaking to the other teacher. He confirmed the story my friend told and he did not get any discipline put on him because he had not threatened her. I was happy for my friend because this teacher was always messing with us boys in the hallway. I heard the principal had asked the teacher that was following my friend, that if she felt threatened, why was she following the student. Why didn't she call for security? When this story got around school, students knew the principal would hear their voices and they would be treated fairly.

The golden rule at UCPHS under the new principal in 2004 became "Treat others as you would have them treat you." Expectations were clearly defined in the school's new motto, the UCPHS way. Posters were hung around the building stating the expectations of a

college prep high school. Students also had input in developing the expectations. While the

school culture was improving, expectations in the classrooms were not changing as rapidly.

Students expressed concerns about the education they were receiving. Student A reported on

low academic expectations:

> I thought that some teachers had low academic expectations for us. In these classrooms, students were often given worksheets to do while the teacher set behind their computers working on something else. "It was almost like we were expected to teach ourselves. When we asked for help, the teachers would tell us just to read more and figure things out." Each time we arrived in class, the teacher has us do a worksheet and watch a video. The class is boring and the students talk a lot and the teacher gets angry with us and this occurs so often that I hate to go to the class.

> Student B disclosed similar sentiments about the low academic expectations teachers

had for students:

> Teachers gave us worksheets and packets to do a lot at UCPHS. It was almost like taking independent study classes. There was little interaction with some teachers. Some teachers just lectured all the time and their classes were extremely boring. I had some teachers that never turned our work back to us. Consequently we never knew our grade until the grade reports were given to us once each semester.

> Student C recalled low academic expectations and stated:

> I have always been smart and thought going to a college prep school would make me smarter, the worksheets were out of control in high school. Now that I have attended college I can say, I helped myself learn more than my teachers did. My teachers in high seemed to just want to keep the classes quite. Keeping students quite does not constitute and education. In college we needed more writing and discussion skills that were not always given to us in high school.

> Student D divulged an interesting account of low academic expectations. He was

especially concerned with the teacher's interactions with White female students. The teacher

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tended to call on these students more and gave them more attention He shared the following

account:

> One of my teachers often faced one side of the class when he spoke. Mainly White
> girls sat on that side of the room. It was if he was only teaching to them. When
> students would ask questions from the other side of the room, it was if he did not hear
> them on a regular basis. He also smiled more at the White girls than the other
> students in the class. I thought his behavior was odd.

In addition to urban school holding low academic expectations for students, they are

often not assigned quality teachers, which become a barrier to getting a good education.

Student D commented on barriers to learning for students of color. The student indicated that

White students were considered smart and were given opportunities to learn, while students

of color were assigned poor teachers or teachers that did not enjoy teaching their curriculum

or their students. Student D said:

> I decided to take a college prep class and experienced an uncomfortable feeling every
> time I responded in class. The teacher rarely called upon me and had limited
> conversations with me in class. When I asked for help with work, the teacher
> suggested that I read the book again and just try harder.

He revealed the following barrier to learning:

> At the end of taking my IB and AP classes, I felt unprepared for the exit AP exam,
> because of the numerous issues in class. The teacher's instruction was hampered by
> his foreign accent and it was hard to follow him during class. He also indicated that
> he did not always focus in class because of the teacher's language. As a result, the
> class was disruptive and the teacher struggled with classroom management.

The aforementioned barriers to learning were in direct conflict with the mission of the

college prep high school. According to the mission of the school, all students were to be

given an opportunity to learn and quality teachers. An additional barrier to learning included

students being unprepared for the college prep environment, which would, indeed, jeopardize

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their enrollment in the school. Urban students may be analytical and higher-order thinking skills during their elementary and middle school experiences or they are generally not taught using cooperative learning assignments, which have been noted to contribute to higher achievement (Daggett, 2010).

Student C felt that their prior education had not prepared them for the rigor of a college prep, which became a barrier to being successful. She stated:

> I was very sad when my two best friends were demitted from the school for poor grades. They had been good students in middle school but struggled in the high school. They often complained of being unprepared for the work and did not feel that teachers were trying to help them.

Student A reported that he struggled in his science class because he was unprepared for a challenging curriculum and did not receive help from the teacher. He commented:

> My science class was really hard. I worked every day on my assignments, but felt the teacher should have helped me more. The teacher just said that I should know this stuff. He catered to the smart students. But the struggling students just struggled and did the best they could in the class.

Student D also reported that he was unprepared for classes due to a background of poor teaching and lack of exposure to a challenging curriculum. His sentiments are expressed as follows:

> I thought I was smart until I went to the UCPHS. I struggled with classes because my background had been full of classes where we did not do a much work, mainly worksheets. I enrolled in the challenging classes anyway because I wanted to go to college, but it was a struggle for me most of the time.

Enrollment patterns in higher-level classes indicate that teachers are not happy to take all students into college prep classes, as they often perceive urban students as not prepared to take the rigorous courses. Schools that hold high expectations for students do not blame the

students for the deficits in their academic background, but provide academic interventions. Students were selected to attend UCPHS, based on their high tests scores. However, once they arrived at the school, it was noticed that they lacked a number of the skills needed to be successful in a college prep environment. The students' attendance at the school was based on their academic performance as denoted by their GPA. A number of students were demitted from the school because they were not prepared to take the challenging classes.

Gate-keeping practices were directly linked to curriculum and instruction, as teachers were primarily interested in teaching college ready students. In this study, gate-keeping practices are defined as the denial of student access to a challenging curriculum or college readiness courses such as IB and AP, which stems from low academic expectations of some teachers. Students that can demonstrate that they are college ready are welcomed into the challenging curriculums of IB and AP classes at UCPHS. Unfortunately, many high schools limit enrollment in these courses believing that allowing lower-achieving students to take rigorous courses will force teachers to water down their curriculum (Klopfenstein, 2003). According to ACT (2010), students that take challenging classes in high school have a greater chance of graduating from college.

The interviews with students indicated that some of them felt prepared for the college prep environment. Student C reported that she felt prepared for a challenging curriculum:

> My teachers in school had always made me work hard. My mother was always making me study. I also had been in enrichment classes during the summer to help me in school. My teachers generally were good in high school, so when it came time to take test I felt prepared.

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Student B stated that she was prepared a challenging curriculum. "I was an 'A' all through school. I guess I was just smart. I was able to figure out most things in the class and get A's and B's. I really enjoyed the IB classes, in particular." Student B commented on the challenging curriculum and instruction in the college prep environment:

> I enjoyed taking the IB classes. The IB coordinator discussed the program with the students at the beginning of the year and the classes seem like something I could handle. Once in the classes, I thought they were challenging and I had a lot of work to do, but I did not mind because the classes were preparing me for college. My teachers were very helpful.

Student A stated he thought the IB curriculum was challenging and the teachers provided good instruction." I took the classes because I wanted to go to college and have credits from high school. The instruction was good and I felt I had made the right choice by taking the classes."

Student C was also glad she had taken the challenging classes also. She knew she had good teachers and the instruction given to her, helped her to be successful in the classes. After attending college classes, she knew taking the challenging classes had been the right thing to do.

Student D reported that the classes were also challenging for him, but the instruction varied from teacher to teacher. He stated:

> I thought all students going to a college prep school took challenging classes. I was excited about being accepted into the school, so I was willing to do my part and take the challenging classes. I had good instruction in the classes that helped me pass the exit exams. I was able to test out of some of my college classes as a result of taking the challenging classes with good instructors.

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Student A experience gate keeping practices when he decided to pursue the IB

Diploma and gave this account:

> One IB teacher discouraged me from pursuing the IB program by telling me that I
> was not ready for such a challenging class. I was disappointed in the comments made
> by the teacher and discussed it with my mother, who told me to go ahead and take the
> class and work hard.

Student C reported on gate keeping practices with the same teacher that Student A

encountered IB coursework. She said:

> I always knew I would go to college one day. However the word around school was
> that one particular teacher was an A-hole and did not encourage all students to be in
> his class. If you were cute, white and a female, you would be welcome. I was white,
> but had a larger built, dark hair and my clothes were often out-dated, because of my
> financial situation. When I spoke to him about being in his class, you would have
> thought I had asked him for a million dollars or that I was made of dirt. He responded
> by giving me all the reasons that I should not be in the class. He said I probably
> would have a hard time in the class. How did he know that; when he didn't even
> know me?

Once the principal got involved in the situation, the teacher attempted to make

excuses for not enrolling the students. The principal created another section of the class and

encouraged the two students and others to enroll in the class with a different teacher. The

principal knew that the gate-keeping practices of the teacher might impact fair treatment of

the student in the class. The following year, that teacher was denied the opportunity to teach

the class after a number of other students and their parents expressed similar concerns.

A number of studies have investigated the positive relationship between a rigorous

curriculum in high school and college readiness. Nevertheless, lack of access to challenging

high school courses for some students can become a part of the urban school's culture (Chait

& Venesia, 2009). Students at UCPHS that participated in the college prep classes revealed

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that their skills for college had been enhanced in some cases, however the classes where teacher were poorly prepared presented barriers to learning.

Summary of student interview findings. Interviews revealed that students had both supportive and unhelpful interactions with teachers. They were well aware of the expectations teachers had for them, when teachers were afraid of them and when students were being treated unfairly. The students described two teachers in the school that were caring and helpful. The students were also able to share comments on teachers that had positive relationships with them.

Their narratives exhibited the high expectations that the principal had for students. In this case study, not only did the principal promote high expectations, she also provided support for them in meeting the high expectations of a college readiness environment by giving them access to ACT preparation courses. Opportunities for increasing their involvement in the governance of the school were provided by the principal. Students perceived that their voices were valued and heard. While it was clear the principal encouraged the development of leadership for students, they did not describe instances of teachers perceiving them in the same manner.

While the mission clearly stated that all students were to take IB and/or AP classes, the school culture had evolved into one where only some students, often-White students, were encouraged and welcomed into the classes. As a result, a self-fulfilling prophecy occurred for students of color and low-income students. They were not expected to learn as much as White students, thus their enrollment in college prep classes had declined up to 2004 through a hidden curriculum of gate-keeping practices. When the UCPHS Advisory Group

questioned this state of affairs, it became the work of the professional development committee to explore means to change the school culture.

Teacher Interviews

The thematic categories identified in the interviews with the teachers were (a) leadership, (b) teacher-student relationships, and (c) school funding.

(a) Leadership. For purposes of this study, leadership is defined as the ability of the principal to advance the vision of the school through collaboration and accountability in an urban school that had experienced a significant number of changes in the leadership position. Lack of stability, vision, collaboration, and teacher accountability were apparent interpretative codes gleaned from the teacher interviews. The role of principal is pivotal in ensuring that the shared vision of the organization is being implemented.

According to Teacher A the school had experienced a number of changes in the leadership of the school during his tenure. He spoke about the 2003-2004 school years with great sadness. Teacher A recounted the following scenario of the lack of stability at UCPHS:

> Our former school principal was removed from the school in February. After that we had a series of temporary leaders in the building. Moral in the building began to take a nosedive due to the fact that no one knew what was going on. It was very hush, hush about the removal of the principal. As a result, everyone was trying to make the best of the situation at school. The students were also upset and made their concerns known to the teachers. School became somewhat chaotic most days, without the presence of an officially assigned principal. On any given day, you did not know who was in charge of the building.

Teacher B described how the lack of stability affected the school and expressed several concerns:

> On most days when I came to school, it was all that I could do to stay on top of the students' behavior, let alone teach. Students were doing whatever they felt like, as there was no one to keep them in line. The students roamed the halls and when confronted they would sometimes talk down to you. In addition to the behavior problems with students, the staff appeared to be doing their own thing. The climate of the school declined with each passing day. I could not wait until the school year was over. It was probably the worst year of my career in school.

Teacher D's comments regarding the lack stability at the school also reflected hope and possibilities for the new leader during the 2004 year. She articulated the following:

> Leadership is very important to the stability of any school. However, we have not had much stability here at UCPHS. Under the principal assigned to the school in 2004, we began to see immediate improvements because she appeared to have a vision of what worked effectively in college prep environments and was willing to collaborate with teachers on improving the culture of the school.

Leadership in urban schools is often plagued by a high turnover, by either the choice of the principal to leave the school or by the decision of the district personnel department to have them removed. This was particularly true of UCPHS, where the average tenure of the principal was two years. Paramount to my beliefs on the role of the principal within the organizational culture of the school is the notion of leadership capacity. It is imperative that leaders in urban schools empower their staff to work collectively together to maintain a respectable academic environment in the school despite changes that may occur in the leadership.

As I conducted the interviews, without exception, each teacher described the leader as having a vision for the school of high expectations, compassionate and caring, and courageous. She was willing to question ineffective school practices and encouraged a vision

of reform based on practical, effective, and research-based methods of improving student achievement.

Teacher B described the vision the principal had for the school and emphasized her strong interpersonal and communication skills. She stated:

> The principal came from a college prep background and talked to us like we were professionals. Although she was very concerned with the reasons the school was not making the Average Yearly Progress (AYP), she was willing to listen attentively to our accounts of the occurrences in the school during the previous administration. The principal shared her concerns that the historical backdrop of the school may have victimized the students, but was encouraged that we could turn the school around if we worked together as a team to resolve problems. She talked to us about what a healthy school looked like and challenged us to tackle the unhealthy practices at the school.

Teacher C revealed that the principal had a vision for a college readiness environment for the school as depicted in the following:

> The principal believed that we as teachers could rise to the occasion of effectively preparing students with college readiness skills. While most of the teachers in the school thought they were already doing this, it was apparent that there was a problem between what we were teaching and what the students were learning. The principal made one suggestion to the teachers that hit home with most of us. How would you teach your class if your own child were sitting in the room? To that end, common themes for a college readiness environment were discussed during professional development.

The influence of the leader determines leader effectiveness and the "power…not only for influencing subordinates but also for influencing peers, superiors, and people outside the organization" (Yukl, 2002, p. 12). Principals that hold high expectations for all, lead by example, and are visible and actively involved with instruction (McGee, 2003).

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Teacher A described experiences with previous principals over the past 20 years at

the school and remarked on the nature of the new principal's collaborative leadership style.

He responded:

> I have worked under a number of principals throughout my 20 years at the school. Each principal was very different in their approach to running the school. I was not always impressed by the leadership because of their short tenure at the school. Just as I began to understand what it was that the principal expected of me as a teacher, they were replaced by another principal. The principal that came to the school between the 2004 asked us about concerns we had regarding the school opinions. She listened to our stories regarding the policies and practices at play in the school. That was different for me, as none of the other principals before her had ever bothered to ask my opinion on anything.

Teacher B also enjoyed the collaborative decision making environment the principal

established for the school. He retorted:

> The new principal has a unique way of doing things. She is not a top-down manager of the school. She allows teachers to have input in a number of decisions in the school. By doing so we were more inclined to follow her leadership. While some people are not happy with some of the changes that have occurred in the school, we feel that we now have more input in decisions that affect us.

Teachers C and D highlighted through their interviews that they noticed more

requests for teacher accountability from the principal and reported on benefits for both

teachers and students during the principal. Teacher C said:

> The principal provided professional development to the staff to help support the accountability that she expected of us. We were given specific planning periods to work with the instructional coach on disaggregating assessment data, discuss the implications of the data and refine our instructional practices. This was very helpful. For the first time in my teaching career, I had substantiated reasons for the performance of my students and a plan to address these problems effectively.

Teacher D concurred with Teacher C on the deployment of accountability for teachers. He

stated:

I found myself wanting to go home rather than attend professional development meeting to hear more about accountability, but I attended the meeting anyway. At first I thought the information was requiring us to do more work, but over time I saw there was a rationale for what was being required of us as teachers. We were asked to provide lessons plans, analyze our assessments, prevent strategies for improvement and follow a standard operating procedure on conducting classes for high expectations. I did not want more work, but with the analyzing of the data and following prescribed procedures, I found myself becoming more organized and insightful regarding the progress of my students.

(b) Teacher-student relationships. In this inquiry, teacher-student relationships are described as positive interactions between teachers and students that would transform a school culture of low expectations to a college ready environment for all students. The interpretative codes for teacher-student relationships were low academic expectations and college readiness. While some research conducted in American schools has examined how school-level factors affect the achievement of students of color and low-income students, other research has focused on the role that individual teachers can play to encourage student academic success.

Teacher D acknowledged that a school culture of low academic expectations that influence teacher-students relationship may be due to the lack of interest students showed in classes. He felt it was difficult to engage students who were lazy and had a poor work ethics. He went on to express the following: "I believe that the boring part of school is partly the student's fault because I think that a lot of kids are just spoiled now by having video games and everything has to be so entertaining."

Teacher C noted low expectations regarding students at the school by implying that students did not come to school ready to learn. Her sentiments were similar to several of the

students that acknowledge they were unprepared college readiness due to poor and less

challenging curriculum during their elementary and middle school years. She stated:

> College prep students should not have so many behavior problems. They should come to school ready to learn. But some of our students have been going downhill for a long time and now we are expected to catch them up and get them ready for college. I don't know if the students will be ready for the new things we want to teach them, which requires more skills than many of them have.

Teacher A spoke about how his low expectations for students were transformed

during a class assignment. He thought the students at UCPHS for the most part were not

living up to the expectations of a college prep school as depicted in their work ethics in class

He responded:

> I presented a lesson on World War II to my12[th] graders that to my surprise, appeared to interest them. I had students taking me aside and asking questions for the first time in the class. I had the students bring in stories of family members who had served in the war or from someone else that had served in the war. Students also invited speakers to class to give first and secondary accounts of the war. Several of the speakers brought in artifacts from the war. One student even brought in a medallion that had belonged to an uncle who had served as a Tuskegee Airman during the war. Students were interested in the assignment as the stories brought the reality of war to life. When it came time for the students to write essays on the project, they were excited that they would do a good job. My opinion of the students was transformed during this assignment as I recognized that when students are interested in something they can rise above the original expectations held for them. This being said, I challenged myself to provide students with more interactive and stimulating assignments as I now knew that they were indeed capable of doing higher level work in class.

Teacher B believed that her students were capable of doing college ready

assignments. She expressed high academic expectations of students by stating:

> I knew that the students were smart; however many of them had large gaps in their academic backgrounds. I did not let that get in the way of the work we needed to do in class. When I gave an assignment, I expected all of the students to master the assignment. Some students complained that I was mean, but I knew they could do the work with the appropriate instructional strategies and assistance. Most of my

students have passed the IB exams. Many of my students come back to school and thank me for the work I did with them in high school. I generally just smile and tell them that I knew they had it in them to be successful and I was proud of them.

According to Noddings (1992), a positive teacher-student relationship is one in which both parties feel mutually understood, respected and recognized. In today's schools, this is particularly important as students in urban schools often come from different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds than the teachers who serve them, which can present tensions among teachers and students. When students think teachers care they tend to work harder for them and when they feel teachers don't care, they tend to live up to that expectation. The influence of symbols and shared meanings can shed light on what is important to people, what will be most resistant to change, and what will be most necessary to change if the school is to move in a new direction. Symbolic interaction supported the discovery of a common set of symbols and understandings that gave meaning to interactions of the teachers and students surrounding academic success.

(c) School funding. School funding involved financial supports put in place to accommodate a college readiness high school through shared decision-making for and access to instructional materials and supplies as well as professional development focused on effective instructional strategies to meet the goals of a challenging curriculum. The interpretative codes for school funding were collaborative decision-making, challenging curriculum, and resources for training and instructional materials. The principal, during the 2004 school year, established a budget committee to review spending practices and to identify needed instructional materials to support learning at UCPHS.

Teacher B commented on the change in school practices regarding the top-down facilitation of the budget by the administration in the school to a more collaborative management of school funding by a school budget committee. She reported:

> The budget for the school has always been protected by the administrators of the school. According to the teacher's handbook, the budget for the school was to be overseen by the administrator of the building, but teachers were to be given input on the allocation of the budget through the school budget committee. This had not been a practice at the school. The principal gave each department representation on the newly established budget committee, in an effort to ensure that all department teachers were given a voice in the equitable distribution of school resources needed for a college preparatory high school.

Teacher C concurred with Teacher B on the collaboration of the budget and stated:

Each department presented a budget to the budget committee on supplies needed for their department. We would then send a representative to the budget meetings to explain why we needed certain supplies or trainings. Our concerns were listened to and then a decision was made by the committee. Each representative also had a vote on the budget committee. This was great because now we had a voice in what our departments received in financial support.

The budget committee supported collaborative decision-making regarding the school finances. While the school had the appropriate finances to support the college prep curriculums, in the past monies had not been distributed effectively to provide for adequate instructional materials and the required IB and AP teacher trainings in the past. Through the work of the budget committee, teachers began to receive needed supplies and instructional training. The new principal did an audit of the supplies needed for each department, by reviewing what was being used and what needed to be replaced. She also compiled a list of teachers that had received training for their subjects and teachers that needed to be trained.

Having adequate supplies and materials was essential to support the curriculum and instruction of IB and AP classes.

Both the IB and AP programs have established policies and procedures for school implementation of their respective curriculums. The curriculums require program participation fees for the school and students, formal training for teachers, a prescribed and challenging curriculum with external monitoring of student final exams. Research on urban schools suggests that students taking challenging high school courses are better prepared for college (Adelman, 2006). According to the teachers interviewed, the IB and AP classes presented a challenging curriculum for some urban students.

Teacher C reported on the challenging curriculum by stating:

The IB program was a good fit for our diverse population because it uses curriculum and assessments that are less culturally biased than most national standardized test. IB classes emphasize assessments that eliminate norms and expectations that may exclude students raised in urban communities.

Teacher D agreed with Teacher C that many of their students struggled with IB and AP program. He reported:

I am glad we had IB and AP classes at UCPHS. The classes are not easy to teach, but they have clear objectives that we are expected to teach our students. Students can enhance their critical thinking skills in the IB classes. The IB classes also allow students to earn college credit for classes successfully completed in high school. I am not a huge fan of the AP classes because the curriculum is difficult to accomplish in conjunction with the state standards of the same subject matter, however the IB classes allow students to become conceptual learners.

Providing a challenging curriculum for students has been shown to have a positive effect on keeping students engaged in school. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan posits its importance during his confirmation hearing when he said, "We have to increase rigor in high

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schools to prepare young people for the next stage of life (2009). Research shows that a

challenging high school curriculum is the best pre-college indicator of one successfully

attaining a bachelor's degree (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

The IB and AP classes require teachers to take formal training in preparation to teach

the challenging curriculum. Teachers attend three-day trainings along with other teachers

across the country to harness instructional information and teaching strategies to navigate the

respective programs.

Teacher D thought the principal had the right idea in providing resources for teacher

training. He responded:

> I was excited to be given a chance to attend training that would allow me to become a
> better teacher. In the past, only the favorites of the principal got to go to training for
> IB and AP. Now if a teacher wanted to attend a specific training or conference to help
> improve their teaching, they submitted a request to the school budget committee for
> approval. Just amount every teacher's request was approved. The conferences were
> very helpful to my instructional practices.

Teacher A, who had taught at the school for 20 years, felt he was well prepared to

teach his subject matter. His training for his subject was outdated and he did not want to take

the updated training needed to teach the IB class. His students did not do well on the exit

exams and he immediately blamed the students for the poor outcomes. During a professional

development training Teacher A was provided creative ways to present his curriculum.

Teacher A quoted:

> I learned new ways of presenting my subject to the diverse group of learners I had in
> class. I had relied on lectures as the major mode of instruction, because that what
> colleges use and I was preparing student for college. The professional development
> training helped me develop skills to work with students in collaborative groups and
> have Socratic seminars to analyze the subject information. When I employed some of
> the new teaching strategies that I had been provided during training, students became

more interested in learning and were willing to work harder as they were gaining a better understanding of the subject matter.

While Teacher A implied that he did not need additional training for his subject matter, it was noted that the standards to teach an AP class were updated periodically with changes by the College Board, the overseer of the AP curriculum. The standards were updated based on national studies performed by the College Board that looked at the performance trends in AP classes. The updated standards needed to be reviewed by teachers in official AP training courses every five years (College Board, 2007). With that being said, teachers were required by the principal and provided the resources to enroll in classes that would ensure that they were properly trained to teach their classes. Educational researchers have called the inadequate training of teachers as the single most debilitating force in American high schools (Casey, 2000).

Teacher D understood the value of learning and teaching. He suggested that his teaching skills were improved by learning new instructional strategies through collaborating with colleagues in professional development training. Doing a good job and reaching students was very important to him. He stated:

> I knew that students were capable, but felt I had a difficult time relating information to them. I felt more prepared for class after participating in instructional strategies that motivated students. I also wanted to get away from the lecture mode of teaching and make his class relevant to the students.

Teacher C was excited to have an opportunity to attend conferences for IB and AP training. She reported:

> I attended a wonderful IB conference during the summer in Washington, D.C. It helped clarify many things for me. I also enjoyed meeting people from other IB schools. We shared stories about our schools, our challenges, our successes and

became a support network to each other. When I returned to school, I thanked the principal for giving me the opportunity to be better prepared to teach my classes.

Teacher A commented on support for instructional materials to enhance student learning. He stated:

It was like Christmas at UCPHS with the new principal. We actually got everything we asked for in the way of supplies and books. We also were able to take our students out into their community on fieldtrips that helped to enhance our academic work. We had enough paper for making copies all year round. It was great! We also got the opportunity to attend much needed trainings for the IB program. At first I thought this was the new principal's way of being nice and getting in good with the staff, but she actually followed the same protocol to allocating school funds each year. Finally we could function better in class with the needed resources and trainings.

Teacher B commented on instructional materials provided for her classes. She said:

Not having to worry about having the appropriate resources to engage my students was a beautiful thing. There were a number of instructional activities I wanted to conduct with my students but I never had the money to buy. Students in urban schools should not be denied the opportunity to learn new material due to a lack of supplies. I saw money being wasted at the school on athletics while academics suffered. What was more important to our college readiness environment?

Teacher C shared a similar response on having adequate instructional materials for her classes. She stated the following:

I always questioned what was more important in our school, sports and activities or academics. It appeared that academics came last when it came to school funding. In my opinion that was a major flaw in our school. An education was going to be more helpful to the futures of our students.

Summary of teacher interview findings. Leaders in high performing, high-poverty urban schools believe that students are capable, operate on that belief (Carter, 2000), and are able to perpetuate that belief system through buy-in by all stakeholders. The results of the teacher interviews indicated despite the history of leadership turnover in the school, the

principal was astute at gaining buy-in from the staff; in a relatively short period of time, she worked collaboratively with teachers to transform practices that negatively influenced student achievement at UCPHS. The leader's vision for success was reflected changed policies and practices in the school and she encouraged teachers to reflect on their relationships with students.

The interviews with teachers revealed a dominant school culture of low academic expectations. Three of the four teachers interviewed expressed this sentiment. One of these three teachers did have a transformation in his way of thinking after seeing students perform to a higher standard on one class assignment. One of the four teachers interviewed had high expectations for all students regardless of their backgrounds. This was a positive attribute for the school community. She believed in the power of teaching and did not demonstrate low academic expectations in her interactions with students. She viewed the students as being capable of rising to the occasion of college readiness if she supported them and stood by her beliefs. She did not adhere to the old adage often held in urban schools of "I taught it, but they just did not learn it".

The school suffered from the poor handling of school funds, as evident in the fact that the required trainings for teachers had not been adhered to nor were instructional materials provided on a consistent basis. Having a collaborative budget committee allowed the teachers to view the situation differently. Through their input budgets were shared with more equitably across departments.

Teachers were excited about the decision the principal had made to provide the resources needed to implement the college prep environment. They were eager to new

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techniques learned from attending conferences and official IB and AP trainings. By having

clarification on the current expectations for their classes, they had more direction in

preparing students for the exit exams.

Administrator Interviews

The thematic categories identified in the interviews with the administrators were (a)

leadership, (b) school funding, and (c) school culture. Two of the themes from the student

interviews, leadership and school culture, were identified in the administrators interviews;

and three of the themes from the teacher interviews, -- leadership, school funding, and school

culture, -- were reflected in the administrative interviews. Similarly, as in the data sources of

students and teachers, the tradition of symbolic interaction was used to illuminate the

different ways these three groups interacted through symbols.

(a) Leadership. Leadership within UCPHS was affected by a constant change in the

district administration. Each time the superintendent change, the principal was reassigned.

Within this environment, leadership was defined as the ability to collaboratively work with

teachers and others to create a positive school culture, make resources available for a

challenging curriculum, and hold teachers accountable for student learning. The definition of

this theme is aligned to the interruptive codes of collaboration and accountability. The role of

leader at the school site is pivotal in ensuring the shared vision and mission of the

organization are being followed. The interpretative codes for leadership were collaboration,

accountability.

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Administrator A indicated that she was given more opportunities to collaborate in the

leadership of the school. She state:

> The 2004-2007 principal visited with each assistant administrator to develop a list of
> their strengths before assigning responsibilities. This was the first time in my career
> that I felt that my opinions mattered. I was happy to take on my assignments and
> work on school improvement as a team member. I did not feel over-burdened by my
> responsibilities, as they were things I felt competent doing. The principal had an
> open-door policy and was willing to brainstorm ideas with our team for improvement.
> She did not just tell us what to do. She wanted us to research and validate our
> decisions before putting them into practice.

Administrator B concurred with Administrator A by replying:

> The new principal listened to their opinions and we collaborated on the
> responsibilities that I would be assigned. It was like getting a breath of fresh air
> working with the 2004-2007 principal. "I found myself less stressed even though I
> was doing much more work. I felt less pressured to just get the job done. I really
> enjoyed collaborating with the Administrative team when it came time to making
> important decisions.

Yukl, 2002 provides a framework for administrators that suggest that in order to

ensure stakeholder participation, the leader should encourage stakeholders to express their

concerns.

Administrator A commented that she recommended specific areas in which they

would be held accountable by verbalizing the following:

> The new principal handed everyone on the staff a job description and asked them to
> rate themselves in terms of their performance. She also gave us a list of expectations
> for a college prep school and we discussed our opinions of the list. We talked a
> healthy school and an unhealthy school. We then compiled a list of things we would
> do to be more effective and signed our names to the To-Do List. By signing our
> names to the list of things to do we were agreeing that we would be held accountable
> for improving our school and ourselves.

Administrator B knew that accountability was important to the success of the building

she articulated the following:

> I was glad that we had specific things that we would be held accountable for. As I reviewed my list I was certain that I could live up to the expectations of an administrator in a college prep environment. Holding teachers accountable was the second thing on my list after holding me accountable. Through professional development, I worked teachers on improving their instructional skills and data disaggregation. I also made more visits to classrooms to see if teachers were living up to their accountability.

Administrator B commented that:

> The principal provided researched based data on the importance of school accountability to the leadership team. After discussing how data could be used to drive instruction, the group developed a multi-year improvement plan with recommended processes for sustained improvement. We began with a short-tem list of practices that all staff should be held accountable such as standards based instruction, differentiating instruction based on student needs, giving formative and summative assessments to assess student academic growth. We also developed a plan to improve teacher's skills and knowledge of curriculum and instructional strategies.

Most jobs hold employees accountable for specific responsibilities. Accountability is an

easier pill to swallow when there is collaboration. The principal appeared to have a good

grasp of this concept and as a result a strong administrative team developed in the school.

(b) School funding. School funding is defined as monies allocated to the school for

personnel and operations. The interpretative codes for school funding from the interviews

with the administrators were adequate supplies and curriculum training for IB and AP

courses.

Administrator A indicated that supplies became readily available to teachers through

the allocation of funding from the budget committee. She said:

> Supplies were available to everyone that needed it. Teachers were also given a stipend to buy supplies specific to their classroom, other than the general supplies for

the school. The budget committee reviewed teacher requests for specific funds and made recommendations to the principal. After a discussion on whether the funds should be allocated, teachers were notified of the decision of the committee. This way no got their feeling hurt or accused the principal of micro-managing the monies. The principal however, reviewed with great detail the spending of the committee to ascertain that the monies were being distributed equitably.

Administrator B pointed out that school funding became more transparent and analysis of the school funding indicated that a projection plan would be beneficial to the school. He commented:

> School funding was no longer a big secret with the new principal. We (administrators) were involved with school spending at every opportunity. The new principal believed in hearing what we thought about spending before final decisions were made. We did a financial projection for the year to determine how the school funding would be implemented. We also reviewed the budget to determine which monies would be used to impact student achievement.

The administrators interviewed indicated that school funding was no longer secretive at the school and became a collaborative process working through the efforts of a school budget committee. By allowing representation from various departments to have a voice on the budget committee, a more equitable distribution of school funds occurred. As a result, teachers were more likely to receive funding for instructional materials needed to promote a college going curriculum.

(c) School culture. In this study school culture was defined as positive beliefs, expectations, and assumptions of staff that guide the actions of the school. The interpretative code for school culture was leadership for changing the culture and college readiness.

Sociologists recognized the importance of school culture as early as the 1930's, but it was not until the late 1970's that educational researchers began to draw direct links between the quality of a school's culture and its educational outcomes. Yet despite its importance,

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many school stakeholders in urban schools see organizational culture as something beyond

their control. In highly effective schools, staff members attempt to gain a deeper

understanding of what a strong positive organizational culture looks like and how it can

guide the actions of the school.

During the interview with Administrator A, she made several references to 2004-2007

principal encouraged them to examine the culture of the school with emphasis on using data-

driven decision-making. She said:

> During the administrative team meetings the principal often referred to the culture of
> the school. The principal had met several times with the teaching staff to hear their
> concerns and then administered a survey to get specific data on school expectations.
> Once the data was analyzed much about the culture of the school was revealed. I was
> surprised that the staff felt so disturbed about the situations at the school. The school
> according to the principal was unhealthy and needed immediate attention if things
> were to get better at the school. There were a number of problems that needed to be
> addressed. We shared the data with the staff and took a vote on which two situations
> we wanted to address first. There was an overall consensus that student behavior was
> at the top of the list and student attendance was second.

Administrator B commented on staff development sessions that helped the staff

identify what need to be done to change culture of the school:

> The school culture was rapidly changing right before my eyes. Through things that
> were learned during staff development, we gained a clear conceptual understanding of
> a healthy school versus an unhealthy school. The principal presented numerous
> activities for us on improving school culture and held accountable to the standard
> operating procedures of the building. While we had a great deal of work to do to
> improve the culture of the school, we began by exploring how the school had evolved
> into a failing high school with smart students that had been selected to attend the
> school based on high test scores.

The original mission of the school was to provide every student with an opportunity

to become prepared for college. The school culture of gate keeping that had evolved over

time did not allow the mission of the school to become a reality for all students.

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Administrator B expressed the following regarding college readiness:

> While we listen to complaints from teachers on the lack of skills the students had to address a college prep environment, we also noticed the lack of preparation teachers provided students. College prep students need college prep teachers. A number of the teachers were not properly trained to teach college prep class; nor did they hold a master's degree in their subject matter. In addition to the IB and AP training provided teachers, teachers were encouraged to return to school to obtain a master's degree. In addition, a local college collaborated with the school and offered to discount college fees by 50% for teachers. Several teachers took advantage of this opportunity. Unfortunately, due to the personnel regulations in the district, unqualified teachers remained on the staff.

Administrator A noted that the principal was in touch with the reality of academically gifted students being underserved within the school. To address this concern, Administrator A described the actions taken by the principal:

> The principal recognized that many of the students were smart, but were not being challenged in their classes. Even though they were enrolled in college prep classes, instructional practices and materials were not in alignment with the expectations of colleges. Teachers were provided with professional development to improve their understanding of college readiness. Through our standard operating procedures, students were provided with higher quality instruction and provided the necessary skills for college and the workforce. Our teachers were required to followed college readiness guidelines provided by the ACT.

Summary of findings for administrative interviews. Leaders in high-performing, high-poverty urban schools leaders pay very close attention to the quality of the workplace environment and work tirelessly to communicate a clear mission and vision; foster collaboration among teachers; encourage teachers' involvement in decision making; set high expectations for teachers and students; develop a sense of teamwork and trust; and stimulate thinking and reflection on teaching (Gordon, 2006, p. 219). They insist on a rigorous curriculum, emphasize personal relations, and bring about change through abandonment of deficit thinking about students' abilities (Lyman & Villani, 2004).

The interviews with the administrators reflected that they had a collaborative working relationship with the principal. As evident in the interviews with the administrators, the principal believed in collaboration to promote the vision of the school. Administrators indicated that they collaborated with the principal on the job responsibilities. The principal visited with each assistant administrator to develop a list of their strengths before assigning responsibilities. The principal believed using the strengths of the administrators would help promote a productive leadership team. The administrators indicated that the principal treated them professionally by inviting shared decision making and giving them a voice in developing a school for high achievement.

Findings also indicated that the administrators perceived that the principal envisioned a school culture of high expectations for students, provided needed supports, and held teachers accountable for a college readiness environment. Upon her arrival in the school, the principal took notice of the lack of accountability and worked collaboratively with the administrators and teachers to develop guidelines for holding all staff accountable. .

Shared decision-making was also evident under the leadership through school funding where a budget committee was formed to oversee the equitable distribution of school funds. . According to the administrators, a budget committee composed of representatives from the various departments enabled staff to collaboratively make decisions on the equitable distribution of school funds. By doing so, teachers were given the resources and training needed to promote a high performing, college ready high school.

The principal promoted a school culture of high expectations for students and staff. If the school were to operate as a college prep school, students and teachers would be held

accountable for doing their part to make this a reality. Teachers were provided with rationales and resources for working effectively with students in the urban environment to promote high achievement. All students were to be provided the academic tools to successfully navigate a college prep environment. Moreover, negative interactions between students and teachers, according to administrators, were discouraged by the principal...

Survey Findings: Students, Teachers, and Administrators

Student Surveys

The student surveys consisted of seven open-ended and inductive questions, which enabled me to ask each student about his or her understanding of the preparation students received for IB and AP tests. In the open/inductive survey, relevant objects/topics, dimensions and categories were identified through the interpretation of raw data. The survey questions were aligned with the research questions with the intention of uncovering factors related to what was happening in the classrooms at the college prep that may be considered as helping or hindering high student performance. While the questions reflected what the student's perspectives of what supported their preparation for exit exams, the theme that became evident from the interviews was instructional practices. For purposes of this study instructional practices are defined as educational opportunities provided students to navigate the IB and AP curriculum to successfully pass the exit exams. The interpretative codes were lack of preparation for exams and college readiness.

According to the ACT National Curriculum Survey (2010), virtually all high school teachers (94 percent) in this study said that secondary teachers tend to lower expectations for

students who they feel are not college bound, which is a commonly held belief for students of color and low income students. For example, teacher expectations may affect the learning opportunities teachers provide, academic learning time, curriculum coverage, and students' expectations of themselves.

(a) Lack of preparation for exams. The surveys from the students revealed which subjects had adequately prepared them for the exit exams in the IB and AP classes.

Student C emphasized that poor teaching and less engaging instruction contributed to her lack of preparation for the science IB exams:

> I was not surprised when I was not prepared for the IB exams in science. We worked on worksheets most of the time in class, which we graded in class. Class discussions were rare and the teacher expected us to be quite. The teacher hardly talked to us. The teacher was always working on his after school activity, Robotics.

Student B described a curriculum that provided limited exposure to knowledge and skills needed to pass exams:

> I felt unprepared for AP exams. I was unfamiliar with a great deal of the information on the test because we had not covered it in class. I barely passed the test. The school needs to replace our teacher, because she can't teach.

Student D expressed anger about the lack of coverage of content in class and was surprised that he passed the class:

> During the AP test, I began to get angry about the information that was not covered in class. I don't know how I successfully passed the test.

Student A reflected on lack of preparation for his science IB exam and not being able to receive the IB Diploma. :

> Failing the science exam prevented me from receiving the IB Diploma. While I was upset that I did not pass the test, I think I learned a lot in the class, but not enough to pass the test. My teacher taught everyday and we all paid attention. What I found out

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after taking the test from another science teacher was that the teacher was not teaching the appropriate level of the science curriculum. We were enrolled in the higher-level course, but the teacher was teaching the standard level for the course. Consequently we were held accountable for a mistake the teacher made in teaching us.

This reflection by Student A is a prime example why teachers need to participate in the required training for their college prep curriculum as noted by the program guidelines. Materials covered in higher-level class cover the subject matter in more depth and breadth. If a teacher is not aware of this and teaches from the wrong guidelines, the students face not covering their subject matter adequately. Looking at this situation through the lens of accountability, suggests that teaching practices in the college prep classes be closely monitored by the administrative team, which includes an Instructional Coach.

While three of the four students indicated on the survey that they had a lack of preparation for the AP exams, due to poor teaching practices in the classroom, the remaining student did not take any AP tests. Although, e these teaching practices may have been the result of the low expectations some teachers hold for urban students, they may have also been a reflection of the teachers being unprepared to present the material effectively. As reflected in the interviews with the teachers, there had not been consistent opportunities to be involved in the required training for teaching AP. One student didn't pass the IB exam, due to a lack of instruction. Students appeared to be more prepared for the IB exams than the AP exams. This may be contributed to the nature of both exams.

(b) College readiness. Student A stated he felt prepared for the IB exams in most subjects. "I had a dynamic English teacher. She really cared about the students and created

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great learning experiences for us. I was well prepared for the exam at the end of year. My

writing skills were great."

Student B felt ready for the IB exams in all subjects and was familiar with the

effectiveness of Socratic seminars. He attributed critical thinking and analysis skills to his

success, and explained:

> My teachers were very good and help us get ready for the exams. My best class was English and we really learned a lot in class. My other teachers were also helpful in preparing us for the exams. We were taught critical thinking skills and analyzing skills in most classes through Socratic seminars. This helped quite a bit on the test.

Student C who was taking four IB classes also felt prepared for the exams, and

explained why:

> I felt the work we the IB classes was helpful. I passed all of my tests, but did very well on the English exam. The teacher had covered almost everything and I was very comfortable with the exams. I did well on the other test also.

Student D indicated the same sentiment on being prepared for the exit exams and

perceived the IB English teacher as helpful. He stated:

> My IB English teacher was wonderful. She worked us hard, but it was worth all the hard work when we took the exam. The exam was two hours long, but I was able to manage my time well as I had been well prepared for the exam.

Summary of findings from the student surveys. Analysis of the information from

the student survey data provided validity to what was discovered in the interviews with the

students. Student conversely in the AP classes did not feel as strongly about their preparation

in their subject areas. From the survey, students indicated certain teachers had poor

classroom management and as a result playtime occurred more often than academic time.

Although the students felt they could have done a better job of cooperating in class, they also

felt that teachers with poor management skills were a hindered their acquisition of a challenging curriculum. Students nevertheless, indicated if they had to take the class over again, they would be more focused and cooperation. Overall the students in both IB and AP classes indicated that they were happy they had taken classes to prepare for college, according to the student survey.

The open-access to IB and AP programs are two facets of organizational policy of the UCPHS that aims to increase opportunities for all students. While a numbers of teachers worried that the IB scores would go down with the advent of open access to classes, the principal encouraged the teachers to keep standards high and meet with the IB coordinator to discuss strategies to meet all student's needs. Student enrollment in IB and AP classes increased exponentially from 2004-2007 as a result of open-access to the class and the evolving school expectation of preparing all students for the rigors of college and the workplace. Despite dramatic increases in the number of students taking IB courses, the mean IB scores remained stable and similar to the mean scores around the world. The number of students enrolling in IB Certificate classes more than doubled from school year 2004 to 2007. Ninety percent of students that took the IB Certificate exit exams passed and 80.5% of the students earned college credits as a result of successfully passing the exams. The scores on AP exams were not as impressive as predicted by the students. Students indicated that they were not prepared and the scores reflected the same sentiment.

Teacher and Administrative Surveys

Teachers and administrators were given the same quantitative survey consisting of twenty-four questions divided into four sections: (a) curriculum, (b) rigor and relevance, (c) relationships, and (d) leadership and four open-ended qualitative questions to probe for a deeper understanding of perceptions of the staff (See Appendix H: Teacher and Administrators' Survey).

(a) Curriculum. The curriculum is the prescribed courses offered at the college preparatory school, International Baccalaureate and Advance Placement courses. Seventy-five percent of the teachers strongly agreed that the school had challenging curriculum, however only 50% of administrators survey agreed with the statement. On the survey, 50% of teachers and 50% of administrators agreed that teachers were prepared to teach college prep courses. Seventy-five percent of teachers strongly agreed and 100% of administrators strongly agreed that the school provided them with professional development activities related to aligning the curriculum to college and career readiness expectations.

(b) Rigor and relevance. Rigor means that critical thinking takes place on a regular basis; relevance enables students to connect what they are learning to their experiences. The survey responses indicated that 75% of the teachers agreed that t their curriculum guides provided ways to measure whether students had attained each objective, while 100% of administrators that had reviewed various curriculum guides agreed that guides provided measurement guidelines. Learning objectives were clearly spelled out by both the IB and AP curriculums. Seventy-five percent of teachers strongly agreed that studying the achievement levels of subgroups of students could help drive classroom instruction. One hundred percent

of the administrators agreed that class instruction could be enhance through studying ethnic group performance data. Fifty percent of the agreed believed that the school provided additional resources to students who were challenged by academically rigorous work, while only 50% of administrators strongly agreed with this statement. Seventy- five percent of teachers surveyed strongly agreed and 100% of administrators agreed that professional development activities provided a variety of instructional strategies to help students learn.

(c) Relationships. Strong relationships are developed through a culture of respect, caring, and concern for one another. In UCPHS, the staff indicated that they had a genuine concern for the academic needs of all students, as well as personal needs. Through staff development, teachers and administrators engaged in discussions where high expectations and encouragement to succeed were the priorities. All or 100% of teachers and 100% of administrators strongly agreed that all staff held high expectations for student learning. This finding was in conflict with a document reviewed from the Graduate Survey of 2007. In the survey given to students, only 65% of students felt teachers had high expectations for them. However only 75% of teachers surveyed agreed that all teachers cared about all students. Fifty percent of administrators agreed with the aforementioned statement. Seventy-five percent of the teachers and 100% of administrators strongly agreed that there was good communication in the school between the students and the staff.

(d) Leadership. Leadership means that establishing and communicating a clearly defined set of beliefs about teaching and learning is a collaborative effort. The instructional staff has ownership of and believes in the direction that school must take. Leadership must involve the instructional staff and have a clear direction focused on curriculum, rigor and

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relevance and relationships. According to the staff survey, 76%of teachers surveyed believed the school administration clearly communicated the goals of the school to the staff. The administrators thought they could do a better job with staff communicating, resulting in only 50% of them agreeing, seventy- five percent of teachers and 100% of administrators surveyed strongly agreed that the leadership in the school encouraged collaboration from staff and students in site based decision making. Eighty percent of the participants surveyed denoted that the leadership of the school had good communication with teachers and students.

In response to the qualitative questions on the surveys the following themes were highlighted: (a) accountability, (b) collaborative leadership, (c) professional development and (d) school culture. (a) Accountability is a mechanism by which students, schools, and districts are held responsible for the academic progress of students; (b) Collaboration refers to staff members working together to achieve a common goal; (c) Professional development refers to opportunities for teachers to participate in training grounded in content-specific pedagogy linked to the curriculum in the school; and (d) school culture was defined as beliefs, expectations, and assumptions that guide the actions of the school. It also encompasses the character, customs, and habits that distinguish the school community.

I report on the themes and interpretive codes that were identified in each of the open-ended questions for both teachers and administrators. It was important to this study to use symbolic interaction to apprehend the meanings that teachers and administrators had about this phenomena.

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1. Describe the policies and practices at your school site that you believe contribute to high student performance.

The theme that was evident in this question was accountability. The interpretative code that supported accountability was standard operating procedures, which refers to a consistent undertaking of actions in the school. Teacher A thought the standard operating procedures helped improve the academic achievement of the students. He stated:

> I believe that the principal was responsible for seeing that the school followed the policies and practices that were outlined in the staff handbook. Because we had not had a visionary leader that was adept at leading a college prep school, many of the standard operating procedures of the school had fallen by the wayside. We reviewed the handbook during several staff meeting to re-focus our goals for the school. I am not sure how the policies and practices will impact student achievement.

Teacher B indicated the standard operating procedures were well overdue in our school. She remarked about changes that occurred in the school due to increase accountability:

> Chaos was normal at the school. Because all teachers were held accountable for the procedures, classes improved and students appeared to be learning more in classes. Teachers were requested to followed basic classroom procedures in class, such as taking attendance, writing daily learning objectives on the board, displaying school expectations in their classes.

Administrator A thought the standard operating procedures helped the school run more like a business, with specific goals and objectives. She said:

> The school handbook, which contained the policies and practices to be implemented in the school, had not been updated in five years. However the practices in the school had to be addresses if student achievement was to improve in the school. There should be specific guidelines to help teachers and administrators learn in order for the students to learn. If the adults are not educated on what works best for students, how can we teach students.

Administrator B liked the standard operating procedures and stated: "We needed direction and the principal helped the school get refocused to the original mission of the school to educate all students in a way that would improve their chances of getting into college." The standard operating procedures presented through professional development required teachers to receive instructional training that would t high academic expectations and improve learning in college readiness environment. .

2. How would you describe the leadership at your school from 2004-2007?

The theme that is evident in this question and the responses is collaborative leadership. For purposes of this study leadership is defined as the principal of the school working collectively together with staff to promote a college readiness environment. Effective leaders establish and communicate clearly defined the beliefs about the school to all stakeholders. The interpretive codes gleaned from the themes of leadership were vision and collaboration.

Administrator B spoke about vision the leader had for the school by saying the principal developed a motto for the school "The UCPHS Way." A school leadership committee developed common expectations for the school at large and the staff were held accountable for living up to the expectations.

Teacher D responded the leader had a vision for the college prep school and held everyone accountable for student achievement. She also held herself accountable for leading the staff in the appropriate direction for moving the school's academic achievement.

Administrator B said the leadership in school reflected a collaborative foundation.

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Teachers were encouraged to take part in important decisions pertaining to school funding, hiring staff, professional development and various other areas.

Teacher C saw the principal as being collaborative leader. She stated:

Our new principal has one agenda, college readiness for all students. She supported this agenda with teachers through collaboration. She wanted all teachers to learn to be the best that they could be in order to make the students high achievers. She invited teachers to collaborate with the leadership team on quite a few decisions that affected our performance in a college prep environment. She also invited us to help make decisions on school practices and managing the instructional budget for the school

3. How would you describe professional development at your school?

The theme that was apparent in this question was professional development. The interpretive code derived from this theme was strategies to improve student achievement

Teacher B responded:

Accountability was a major catalyst in the changes made at the school. Student achievement was highlighted through professional development and administrators provided support to teachers in improving instruction and building professional relationships. We began to see student achievement improve with opportunities to participate in sustained professional development grounded in instructional pedagogy.

Teacher A stated:

I was not a big fan of professional development. I had been through so many professional development meetings in the pass that I thought attending these sessions would be a repeat of what I already had learned. Much to my surprise, I did learn some things that help me in the area of instruction for a diverse population.

Administrator B responded:

I was responsible for organizing professional development with a group of teachers. Analyzing data during our meetings helped teachers see the benefits of having specific things to address in school. If also helped teachers realize that low achievement scores could improve over time, if we had specific goals to strive for.

4. How would you describe the school culture at your school?

The theme that was lifted from the survey on question four was school culture. The interpretative codes illuminated were transforming, student achievement, and collaboration

Teacher B responded:

The culture of the school evolved during the three years under the new principal. The school had been somewhat chaotic prior to her arrival as we had been without a principal for almost half of the previous school year. Working together to identify areas for improvement, discussing our mental models of urban students and being open to change, all came together to improve the school for both students and staff.

Administrator A stated:

I was ashamed of our school culture at first. Everyone was blaming the students for their low achievement on the state standardized exams. We had not made AYP in five years. Working through professional development to help teachers understand how we had transitioned into a low performing school was not easy. Once we worked through various data on student achievement, we were able to address patterns of achievement more effectively. Teachers stopped blaming the students for achievement deficits. Under the administration of the new principal, a school culture evolved in which all students had value and deserved the education of a college readiness school.

Teachers mentioned in interviews on several occasions that directions/initiatives from the leadership in the past had changed too frequently, and there was not enough support before new initiatives or programs were introduced. Teacher C that consistent and open communication needed to be extended to achieve understanding and support from as many members of the staff as possible. Teacher A pointed out that there needed to be more opportunities to expand full staff participation in school leadership. The survey results indicated that the school desired a healthy school culture, which included collegial leadership and principal support.

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Summary of findings from the teacher and administrative surveys. The themes that came to light during the surveys with the teachers and the administrators were accountability, collaborative leadership, professional development and school culture. Teachers reported that the principal with implementation of standard operating procedures established accountability. All staff would be required to follow directives and be held responsible for their actions. Administrators agreed that the practice of holding teachers and themselves accountable was good for the school organization. The SOP in an organization can provide direction of the specific things people will need to do to improve a situation. While some members of the school community may see the SOP as micro managing, if you don't know what is expected of you, you may not ever do it. UCPHS was able to reinvigorate the original goal for the school of high student achievement, by providing all stakeholders with a clearer understanding of their responsibilities in moving the school to a higher academic level.

In analyzing the surveys for teachers, it was noted that teachers recognized that the principal had a vision for the school that promoted high expectations for students and college readiness. Teachers appreciated the collaborative leadership style of the principal. One administrator also noted the collaborative relationship that the principal established with the leadership team improved their working relationships. Having an opportunity to have your opinion heard is important to people within an organization.

Professional Development provided the vehicle for teachers to work collaboratively with the administration team on instructional strategies that would drive student achievement.

Both teachers and administrators agreed that ample opportunities were provided for teachers to learn and improve instructional practices.

The teacher and administrative surveys demonstrated that they recognized the school needed a transformation from ineffective practices to more research-based practices that were proven to increase student achievement. There were a number of things the school stakeholders would need to do to improve the school culture in order for high expectations to truly exist for all students.

The critical analysis of the interview and survey data allowed me to see the evolution of the school from a low performing to a high performing school from the perspectives of the students, teachers and administrators. The student surveys allowed me to understand the reasons underlying student performance in the school. It was apparent from the comments made by the staff on the surveys that the school culture was being transformed under the leadership of the new principal. According to Deal and Bowman (2003), a school's culture, whether positive or negative, stems from its vision and its established values. In effective schools, stakeholders make sure that even the smallest aspects of school align with the core ideology and vision for the school.

Document Analysis

The documents selected for review included the 2004 UCPHS School Improvement Plan (SIP) and 2004 professional development agendas. The SIP is a district-mandated document that outlines the goals and objectives for a school each year to promote student achievement. The theme that was illuminated from analyzing the school improvement plan

regarding the practices in the school was restructuring. For purposes of this study, Patterson (2002) noted, "Restructuring typically means altering roles, policies, and procedures, programs, schedules, and other formal elements of a school's organization. Re-culturing is the process whereby teachers question and change their beliefs and practices" (p. 56). While the school in the study underwent a number of changes to improve student achievement, it was not clear if the beliefs and mindsets of the adults were changing toward the students. The interpretative codes found in the school improvement plan for restructuring were student achievement and accountability. The theme of restructuring also came to light in analyzing the professional development agendas for the schedule of meeting activities for comprehensive, sustained and intensive approaches to improving teachers' and administrators' effectiveness in raising student achievement (NSDC, 2009). The interpretative codes that became apparent in the professional development agendas for the theme of restructuring were collaboration and college readiness.

Accountability

The school improvement plan was reviewed and analyzed using the interpretative code of accountability. Accountability in this study refers to the process of holding the school responsible for the performance of the students and students are held responsible for their performance in school. According to the literature on the NCLB legislation, the department of education in each state was required to establish standardized test score goals for schools each year based on the standards set by the U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2004). The standardized tests were expected to measure student achievement across the performance

of various racial and ethnic groups to determine Average Yearly Progress (AYP). All students must meet the minimum test score requirement established by the state. Not making AYP could result in a school being put on intensive assistance by the school district.

The urban school district established the SIP in response to the state requirement of schools setting specific goals to improve student achievement as required by the NCLB legislation. The urban school district provided the form for writing the SIP goals and the faculty were expected to fill out the form with their goals and implementation strategies that would lead to student achievement as depicted in the school's AYP and return to the school district. The 2004 UUCPHS School Improvement Plan (SIP) included two major goals for improvement in mathematics and communication arts. Although UCPHS was a college prep school, 2004 standardized test scores for students revealed a major decline in student achievement across ethnic group performance.

The data on racial and ethnic group performance showed that African American males and Latino male students were performing below the recommended state achievement goal for AYP. After reviewing the achievement data, the school administrative team collaborated with teachers to establish the goals and complete the SIP. The mathematic goal stated in the SIP read as follows: Classroom teachers will incorporate mastery based instruction, performance based tasks, and review of released test items from the state assessment into all classroom instruction and assessment activities resulting in increased achievement for all students. In addition, the SIP outlined strategies for the implementation of the mathematic goal that included: achievement, attendance, college preparation, high expectations and professional development. While the school listed a host of things it would

do to improve math scores, the math scores for every racial and ethnic groups did not improve. According to the SIP, mathematic scores for students had been declining at the school for several years. The document demonstrated that the school had lofty ideas for improving student achievement. However, when comparing the information in the SIP to the findings from the student, teacher, and administrator in-depth interviews and surveys, the strategies were not being implemented on a consistent basis. According to the students interviewed, some teachers held low expectations for students and delivered poor instruction that did not prepare them for college, particularly in math.

A second goal presented in the SIP was for communication arts. The goal read: Classroom teachers will apply best practices in areas of content, process, production, and environment, resulting in increased achievement for all students. Strategies for implementation were outlined under the same categories as mathematics. While the goals appeared very professional on paper, teachers interviewed agreed that they were implementing the strategies across the school. Interview and survey data from administrators were not in agreement with the data obtained from the teachers regarding the strategies.

The student test scores at the conclusion of the school year did not increase or reflect that the strategies had been successfully implemented. While it was understood that all schools would be held accountable for the implementation of the strategies outlined in the SIP, I found no evidence of accountability written within the document from the school district. This appeared to me to be a serious error on the part of the urban school district, and not the schools in the district. School districts were required to set district goals for meeting

AYP. If schools did not make AYP they were cited as being a low performing school. After five years of not making AYP, an individual school could be reconstituted by the school district, in an effort to improve student achievement. Reconstituting a school required that the principal be reassigned and teachers would have to reapply for their positions in the respective school.

Student Achievement

Student Achievement is defined as the academic progress that students obtain while attending school. School achievement goals at UCPHS were established for the school based on the state standardized test score data outlined in the SIP. Student Achievement showed a major achievement gap between White students and students of color. SIP mathematic data read as follows:

> Data collection from the state assessment scores for UCPHS students over the past three years indicates that scores have declined 4.6% in the top three levels. The data for communication arts was more promising for most students. The SIP reflected the following: Communications Arts (CA) is strength for UCPHS with approximately 67% of students placing in the top three steps of the state assessment.

Student in-depth interviews and surveys reflected that students were pleased with their instruction in CA. Students were pleased with one of their CA teachers, in particular, as she provided a caring environment and instruction that promoted a college readiness approach to learning. Interviews with teachers and administrators did not make any specific reference to student performance in CA being a strength for the urban students.

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College Readiness

College readiness refers to the skills students will need to perform successfully in college. College readiness was examined through the SIP for the school. One of the strategies for implementation of the math and communication arts goals reflected the college readiness goal for the SIP read as follows for math:

> (a) Students to be provided with college level instruction in advanced course offerings and (b) Students will become aware of careers available in the area of mathematics by means of career counseling, interest inventories, and college admission preparation. A second strategy for college readiness highlighted in the SIP for communication arts for USPHS stated the following: (a) Students to be provided with college level instruction in advanced course offerings, IB and AP classes and (b) Dual credit classes will be provided in cooperation with a local university.

According to the student interviews and surveys, students were provided college readiness classes using the IB and AP curriculum to prepare them for college. Students interviewed reflected that their math teacher did not prepare them for the AP exam. However, according to the interviews for students enrolled in IB classes, college readiness was a reality. They spoke favorably regarding their instructor during in-depth interviews and in the survey responses. The teacher interviews reflected that they were prepared to teacher the college curriculum, but not all students agreed, particularly in math. Students taking IB classes tended to perform well on exit exams and state assessments.

The vision statement found in the UCPHS School Improvement Plan stated the following:

> UCPHS is a magnet high school, which provides a comprehensive college preparatory curriculum to a select multi-cultural, multi-ethnic student body…The mandate of the vision requires that all students successfully complete an advance studies curriculum, which will assist each student… fully prepared to pursue an intellectually challenging college curriculum.

The mission of the school also located in the school improvement plan stated:

> The academic focus at UCPHS is to provide an extremely challenging college preparatory program with high expectations of success for all students. The administration and staff share the goal of maintaining this focus and working together across the two campuses to encourage success for all students. This requires that specific efforts be initiated to address closure of the achievement deficit, which results between cultural and ethnic groups of students.

> The effective implementation of the SIP was dependent on the instructional practices at the school.

Instructional Practices

Instructional Practices refer to the teaching and learning provided students in the school setting in this study. A review of professional development agendas highlighted that instructional practices were a major concern of the school. The professional development meeting agendas contained specific goals that the school would focus on each month to improve classroom instruction.

Focused professional development and sustained improvement efforts led to a comprehensive restructuring of UCPHS by helping teachers develop effective teaching practices for students, monitor student performance and plan interventions for school success. With specific goals in mind and based on the needs of the school, the Administrative Team expanded its membership to include instructional leaders in the school. The instructional leaders were selected by the teachers to represent them on Professional Development committee. This was also a mandate from the teacher's union to involve teachers in determining the Professional Development needs of the building.

The following steps were taken during professional development, according to the meeting agendas to address student performance and re-culture the teacher expectations of urban students:

- Charting student performance and disaggregating data in classes by racial and ethnic groups and individual students
- Determine content for focused instruction
- Set up a collaborative process for teachers to discuss learning standards
- Develop plans for instructional strategies that have the highest payoff for a diverse group of students
- Develop rubrics and benchmark tests to identify how well students are mastering standards and discuss results collaboratively
- Indentify learning gaps for students and choose appropriate interventions

As I reviewed one of the professional development agendas, I was struck by the title of one activity titled, Structure and Strategies=Success. During this meeting teachers engaged in a teaching and learning activity with an emphasis on engagement, alignment, rigor and high expectations. The teachers were grouped into departments and their task was to discuss how these practices looked in their classroom. The guiding questions for this activity were: (1) How do you know when your students are learning? (2) What do you do when they are not learning? Each department was asked to write down the answers to these two questions and share out when they returned to the whole group setting. The responses were tallied for future use in another Professional Development meeting. The data suggested that the need to raise expectations for student achievement and to provide an education system that prepares graduates for college was not consistently embraced within the school. Many of the teacher responses did not address their instructional strategies, but suggested students looked interested in the lesson; and that was how they knew the students were learning and students

that did not learn during class were welcome to stay after school for tutoring. The work done in the professional development meetings called for teachers to work collaboratively to achieve the goals outlined in the SIP.

Collaboration

Collaboration refers to staff members working together to achieve a common goal. Restructuring the school environment for high expectations and high student achievement was clearly articulated as the main focus of professional development. Setting school-wide academic goals has a significant impact on administrators, teachers and students leading to student success (Marzano, 2003). The principal engaged in a deep exploration of what had been going on in the school and the possible reasons for its current academic achievement status. By conferring with staff, the principal was able to collaboratively design a motto for the school, the UCPHS WAY, which was addressed through the professional development.

UCPHS Way: Committed to Excellence, a programmatic social- and culture-based system that targets all students for success. This system required that there be a paradigm shift in the belief system of the school. The tenants of this system are as follows:

- UCPHS will provide an extremely challenging curriculum with high expectations for all students participating.
- UCPHS will provide appropriate services to allow every student maximum opportunity to succeed in all college readiness areas.
- UCPHS will provide 100% of the graduating seniors with the opportunity and skill sets to enter a college degree program.

The staff brought issues that needed to be addressed to the meeting and the principal suggested looking at specific data to address the issues rather than giving answers to the concerns. By doing this, the voices of the teachers were being heard, but data drove the

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decisions that the staff and administration made, working collaboratively to implement changes for improvement.

Summary of Document Findings

Under the leadership of the 2004-2007 principal, the administrative team began the work of analyzing the data of the school and the historical backdrop of the school to determine the need for changes to improve the school culture during professional development. One common element of successful high school instruction is teachers' use of rich data on student performance to make informed decisions about practice. Schools need to develop comprehensive data systems, a balanced set of formative and summative assessments, and a culture of data use (Marzano, 2007).

After analyzing the vision and the mission of the school in the study, I thought what could have happened to derail such high expectations for students in the school. In comparing the aforementioned vision and mission to the findings in the student, teacher and administrator interviews and surveys, it was apparent that the school –wide practices at UCPHS had fallen short of the expectations of the vision and mission established for the school. I was aware that leadership at the school had become a revolving door and teachers were randomly assigned to the building due to district personnel practices. Despite these facts, students admitted to the college prep school were required to meet high academic standards as evidenced by their test scores. While students were held to a high standard, the district personnel practices did not hold the adults to high standards as reflected in the data.

The documents on professional development contained evidence that research-based instructional strategies were being provided to teachers. The agendas also welcomed parents and students to attend the meetings to share concerns that they would like to see addressed with teachers and administrators. This Professional Development meeting agenda was in alignment with the administrative interviews and surveys. According to the administrators interviewed the focus of improving student achievement relied on effective instructional strategies and an understanding of how data can promote achievement. The agenda also concurred with the findings from the teacher interviews that there were ample opportunities to learn instructional strategies during professional development.

In analyzing the school improvement plan for the school, it was evident that the principal of the school was focused on student achievement, effective instructional practices, and collaborative decision making for which they would be held accountable. While the restructuring of the school was being addressed through professional development, several of the teachers interviewed still indicated that the students were to blame for their own lack of achievement.

Common Themes Found Across the Data Sources

Table 3 depicts the common themes that were illuminated from the three data sources employed in this qualitative case study; in-depth interviews from the students, teachers and administrators, surveys from students, teachers and administrators and documents that included the UCPHS School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Professional Development (PD) meeting agendas.

Accountability was highlighted in the administrative surveys and in the school improvement plan. Leadership was a common theme found in the interviews with the students, teachers and administrators and the SIP and professional development documents. The theme of school culture was identified in the interviews with students and administrators and the administrators' survey. Teacher-student relationships were a common theme in the student and teacher interviews. School Funding was a common theme discovered in the interviews for teachers and administrators. College readiness, as a theme was evident in student surveys and SIP document.

Table 3

Common Themes Found Across the Data Sources

Themes	Student Interview	Teacher Interview	Admin. Interview	Student Surveys	Teacher Survey	Admin. Survey	Documents
Accountability						X	X
Leadership	X	X	X				X
Collaborative Leadership						X	
Collaboration							X
School Culture	X		X			X	
Teacher-Student Relationships	X	X					
Personnel Regulations							
Gate-keeping Practices							
Professional Development						X	X
Challenging Curriculum							
School Funding		X	X				
Lack of Preparation				X			
College Readiness				X			X
Restructuring							X

Summary of Findings Aligned to Research Questions

Through an explicit discussion, I will link the findings from the three data sources, in-depth interviews with students, teachers and administrators, surveys from students, teachers and administrators and SIP and PD school documents to the research questions,

Research Question One

What are the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and students related to the organizational policies and systemic practices that contribute to high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color? While the UCPHS School Improvement Plan highlighted a vision and mission of high expectations and college readiness for all students, the data sources used in this qualitative case study demonstrated that in reality, this was not the case. Through interviews and surveys from the students, there were instances of low-expectations for students of color and low-income students. The teachers in IB and AP classes demonstrated this in the gate-keeping practices at play in the school. Interviews revealed that students had both supportive and unhelpful interactions with teachers. They were well aware that some teachers were afraid of them and when students were being treated unfairly. The students were also able to share comments on teachers that had positive relationships with them and who prepared them for college prep examinations. Students further indicated that some teachers had classroom management problems, poor teaching practices and low expectations for students, which interfered with teaching and learning in their classes. I found it particularly interesting that students wanted

teachers that were prepared to teach and prepare them for college, but some teachers interviewed indicated that students were not prepared to learn, nor college bound.

According to the original guidelines for the school, highly qualified teachers would be assigned to the school. Administrators pointed to teachers that were transferred into the school by the district personnel office that were not qualified to deliver a college prep curriculum. Some teachers also perceived this policy as a direct hindrance to high achievement. Teachers interviewed, pointed to instances where the district personnel office transferred teachers out of the college prep school, under one administrator, then returned the teacher to the school under a different administrator.

The allocation of school funding was highlighted in the interviews and surveys with the teachers and administrators. It was evident that the required trainings for teachers had not been adhered to nor were instructional materials provided on a consistent basis to support the college prep. Through a collaborative budget committee process, teachers were given a voice in the allocation of school funding that provided instructional materials and required training for IB and AP classes that promoted college readiness.

The principal also demonstrated respect for teachers and administrators by inviting them to collaborate on decisions that affected their job responsibilities. The principal visited with each assistant administrator to develop a list of their strengths before assigning responsibilities.

The principal believed employing the strengths of the administrators would help promote a productive leadership team. The administrators indicated that the principal treated

them professionally by inviting shared decision making and giving them a voice in developing a school for high achievement.

In this case study, not only did the principal promote high expectations, she also provided support for students in meeting the high expectations of a college readiness environment by giving them access to ACT preparation courses. Opportunities for increasing their involvement in the governance of the school were also provided by the principal. Students perceived that their voices were valued and heard. While it was clear the principal encouraged the development of leadership for students, students did not describe instances of teachers perceiving them in the same manner.

Research Question Two

How are the organizational policies and systemic practices implemented to promote school-wide high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

The results of the teacher interviews indicated despite the history of leadership turnover in the school, the principal was viewed as having a vision of a college prep environment and was astute at gaining buy-in from the staff; in a relatively short period of time, she worked collaboratively with teachers to transform practices that negatively influenced student achievement at UCPHS. Teachers commented that prior to the arrival of the 2004 principal they sometimes had strained relationships with students due to student behavior and lack of preparation for college prep classes.

The interviews with the administrators reflected that they had a collaborative working relationship with the principal. The principal believed using the strengths of the administrators would help promote a productive leadership team. The administrators indicated that the principal treated them professionally by inviting shared decision-making on school policies and practices student-teacher relationships, and achieving high academic standards.

A school motto was collaboratively established, the UCPHS Way, that demonstrated that all stakeholders, students, teachers and administrators would be held accountable for high expectations. Through an exploration of student achievement data, teachers were guided to strategies for determining what students were learning or were not learning. In order for the school to operate as a college prep school, teachers were provided highly effective and research-based instructional strategies for urban students during professional development. In addition, teachers were allocated the financial support to attend required IB and AP trainings to enhance their understanding of the challenging curriculum. The principal promoted a school culture of high expectations for students and staff. If the school was to operate as a college prep school, students and teachers would be held accountable for doing their part.

Open-access to all college prep classes for all students was re-established in the school by the principal. As indicated in the SIP, the school would address the college readiness needs of all students by encouraging enrollment in challenging classes. Gate-keeping practices in college prep classes that had evolved over time, and made students feel unwelcomed were discouraged and class enrollments were monitored for inclusion of all racial and ethnic groups in the school. Students that were not prepared for the challenging

curriculums of IB and AP classes were given extra support to help them navigate the course work by teachers and administrators. Students were also expected to do their part by being cooperative in classes, doing their assignments and holding themselves accountable to the high expectations of a college readiness environment.

The principal promoted a school culture of high expectations for students and staff. If the school was to operate as a college prep school, students and teachers would be held accountable for doing their part to make this a reality. As a result, the students, teachers and administrators collaboratively established standard operating procedures (SOP) for the school. The SOP's provided the clear expectations for all stakeholders at the school. Accountability also became a major component of transforming the negative practices at the school.

As a result of the restructuring of school organizational policies and practices, the students in the school began to flourish. The original vision and mission of the school did not change. The real change came in everyone holding themselves accountable for doing their best in everything they did at the school and leaving nothing to chance.

A belief system focused on achievement was evident in the mission and vision statements of the school. To that end, data for the 2004-2007 school-years suggests that most African American students' performance in mathematics increased significantly over a 3-year timeframe 11% to 70% proficient. Increases also were observed with the other populations that attended the school. The mathematic scores of the Hispanic population increased from 28% to 82% proficient, those of the Asian population increased from 43% to 77% proficient, and those of the White population increased from 42% to 89% proficient. Data for this

timeframe also indicate that the performance of most African American students in Communication Arts increased significantly (from 39% to 73% proficient). Increases also were observed with the other student populations that attended the school. The MAP scores of the Hispanic population increased from 38% to 74% proficient, those of the Asian population increased from 31% to 84% proficient, and those of the White population increased from 66% to 87% proficient.

The literature reports that there has been a historical under-enrollment of African American students in AP and IB classes (Johnson, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2002). While students of color constituted the majority of the population of UCPHS, these students were not taking full advantage of the program for a number of reasons. School documents indicated that at the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year, less than 20% of the student body from non-White backgrounds participated in the college preparatory offerings at the school. Under the leadership of the new principal, a significant enrollment increase in IB and AP classes took place during the second year of the new administration. One hundred percent of the student body in grades 11 and 12 were encouraged to take at least one higher level, challenging college prep class. Teachers were given an opportunity to receive training in an effort to improve the rigor and relevance of their subject-matter instruction. The number of students taking the exams for college credit doubled for IB students, increasing from 131 to 267 exams taken; for AP classes, the number rose from 20 to 120 exams taken. Given the school-wide expectations of holding all students accountable for the original goal of the school, to prepare students for college, gate-keeping practices of teachers began to disappear, by desire or by design.

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Restructuring a school organization requires leadership that is willing to challenge the status quo in a negative situation; getting people discussing what they think they can do to help improve the school community; working collaboratively together to empower students, teachers and administrators to live up to the expectations of an high performing school with high expectations for everyone. While restructuring appeared to be the main focus, the efforts of the school did not extend to reculturing of the school, through examining the beliefs and assumptions that guided the behaviors and low expectations of some staff.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the United States, educators posit that they hold high expectations for all students; however, in reality this belief is not actualized in the current structure of urban schools. Students that attend urban public schools appear to be losing ground academically faster than any other students in America. Equally alarming is the dismal academic growth of gifted and high achieving students in urban schools (Reardon, 2008). The reality of what is occurring in urban schools has been made evident by the number of low-income and students of color who either drop out of school or do not graduate from high school in four years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Those who do graduate often leave their high schools with skill-sets similar to those expected of middle school students (Haycock, 2005). National survey results also confirm that the nation's high school students are often unprepared to meet the demands of college level work in reading, writing, and math (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2005). Additionally, school policy makers and researchers often focus on the problems urban students face, rather than acknowledging the strengths these young people bring to school. Education programs for teachers also tend to focus on research that links failure in school to socioeconomic status, cultural difference, and family structure. After teachers are overwhelmingly exposed to negative doctrines regarding particular groups in our society, there is a tendency to teach to those deficits, rather than teach to their strengths of the students.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine the role played by organizational policies and systemic practices that allowed a high poverty, high performing,

urban school with large concentrations of low income students and students of color to succeed as perceived by students, teachers and administrators.

To examine this inquiry, the following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. What are the perceptions of students, teachers and administrators related to the organizational policies and systemic practices that contribute to high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

2. How are the organizational policies and systemic practices implemented to promote a school improvement plan for high student performance in one high-poverty urban school with a large concentration of students of color?

Findings

I found that the original vision and mission for UCPHS put an emphasize on high expectations, college readiness and participation in challenging coursework for all students, however data sources used in this qualitative case study revealed that in reality, this was not the case. In answer to the first research question, interviews revealed that students had both supportive and unhelpful interactions with teachers. Students perceived that the school held low-expectations for students of color and low-income students. This was demonstrated in the gate-keeping practices in challenging classes, lower level teaching practices, and classroom management issues. Students further indicated that these problems interfered with teaching and learning in their classes. The students were also able to share comments on

teachers that had positive relationships with them and who prepared them for college prep examinations.

The dominant theme revealed in the interviews with teachers was low expectations for the students at UCPHS. I found it particularly interesting that students wanted teachers that were prepared to teach and prepare them for college, but some teachers interviewed indicated that students were not prepared to learn, nor college bound.

Administrators pointed to dysfunctional practices by the district's personnel office in transferring teachers into the school that were not qualified to deliver a college prep curriculum. Some teachers also perceived this policy as a direct hindrance to high achievement. Not only did the transfer policy of the district impact the teaching staff at the school, it also impacted the longevity of administrators at the school. The school funding was another problem highlighted in the interviews and surveys with the teachers and administrators. Funding had not been allocated on a consistent basis for the required IB and AP trainings for teachers and instructional materials needed to support the college prep curriculum.

In reviewing the findings from the data sources to the second question, I discovered that in-effective practices at UCPHS were being transformed under the leadership of the 2004 principal. Despite the history of leadership turnover in the school, the principal was viewed as having a vision for the college prep environment, promoted a school culture of high expectations for all stakeholders and was astute at gaining buy-in from the students and staff; in a relatively short period of time. The principal conducted conversations with students, teachers and administrators to gain their perceptions of the reasons for the low

performance of the school. The principal thought this step was important, as she felt all stakeholders needed to understand how the school had arrived at its current condition, in order to begin the process of improving the policies and practices at the school.

The principal worked collaboratively with the staff to transform practices that negatively influenced student achievement at UCPHS. Students, teachers and administrators were invited to collaborate on decisions that affected the effective implementation of policies and practices that would promote a school culture of high expectations and college readiness for all students. Examples given of collaborative decision making were as follows: opportunities for increasing student involvement in the governance of the school, a school budget committee to collaborate on the allocation of school funds for instructional resources and required teacher trainings; and assigning responsibilities to administrators in areas, in which they had demonstrated strengths.

In this case study, the 2004 principal in conjunction with the teachers and administrators, provided support for students in meeting the high expectations of a college readiness environment by giving them open access to all challenging IB and AP classes, providing academic support through various after-school and weekend tutoring sessions, and offering ACT preparation courses.

Professional development was provided to teachers and administrators to explore student achievement data. By participating in this activity, school stakeholders were provided evidence of what students were learning or were not learning. The professional development also provided teachers an opportunity to discuss which research-based instructional strategies would be most effective for students at UCPHS. Accountability for a

college readiness environment, under the 2004 principal, became the responsibility of both students and staff at the school. To encourage buy-in for accountability, students, teachers and administrators collaboratively established standard operating procedures for school practices at UCPHS. The SOP's provided clear expectations for all stakeholders at the school and became a major component of transforming the negative practices at the school.

Restructuring a school organization requires leadership that is willing to challenge the negative situations; getting people discuss what they think they can do to help improve the school community and work collaboratively together to empower students, teachers and administrators to live up to the expectations of an high performing school.

Restructuring, as noted in Chapter 4 refers to altering roles, policies, and procedures, programs, schedules, and other formal elements of a school's organization (Patterson, 2002). While restructuring appeared to be a major focus of the school, these efforts did not extend to re-culturing the school, which involved changing the beliefs and assumptions regarding urban learners for some teaching staff. There was a need within the school to closely examine beliefs and assumptions that contributed to negative practices within the school.

Growing diversity in school populations has exerted a number of pressures on urban schools. These changes, set against a historical backdrop of racial and income polarization, have had a significant impact on learning opportunities for students in urban schools. The teachers at UCPHS, for the most part did not reflect the racial, ethnic and socio-economic status of the majority of the students that attended UCPHS. Thus, there may have been a conflict in how each group formed their respective understandings of a college prep environment. The student population had evolved from a majority White population to a

more diverse population since the inception of the school. While high expectations and college readiness were the original vision and mission of the school, as the population changed, the expectations appeared to have changed as well, as evident in low teacher expectations and declining standardized test scores for students. Additionally, students of color indicated that low academic standards and expectations were a problem at UCPHS. Haycock (2005) suggests that all too often, schools may be actively manufacturing the low performance of many students, resulting in an achievement gap among different groups of students.

Some educators contend good teaching has nothing to do with the culture of students and teachers. According to Gay (2000), individuals who have this belief fail to recognize that their standards of "goodness" (p.22) in teaching and learning are culturally determined and are not the same for all racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economic groups. The structures, assumptions, substance, and operations of conventional educational enterprises are European American cultural icons (Gay, 2000). Another common and paradoxical manifestation of the notion that good teaching is devoid of cultural tenets is indicated by teachers who suggest respecting individual student differences is important to effective teaching. Yet these same teachers may indicate that they do not understand certain characteristics of urban students. Gay (2000) states:

> It is inconceivable how educators can recognize and nurture the individuality of students if they do not know them. Ignorance of people different from ourselves often breeds negative attitudes, anxiety, fears, and the seductive temptation to turn others into images of ourselves. The individuality of students is deeply entwined with their ethnic identity and cultural socialization. (p. 23)

Gay (2000) suggests that de-contextualizing teaching and learning from the ethnicities and cultures of students minimizes the chances that their achievement potential will ever be realized. The root causes of academic gaps are complex and race, ethnicity and class gaps are inter-wined within these roots.

Implications of Findings

In the 35 years that I have been an educator, I have read numerous writings on re-structuring and re-culturing schools to become highly successful institutions of learning for urban students. Cosner and Peterson (2003) defined school culture as "a set of underlying beliefs; norms and values held by members of the school" (p. 13). Re-culturing refers to the changes made in schools as a result of educators and school community members beginning to reflect on, evaluate, and expand their own mental models regarding the education of children (Caruthers, Thompson, & Eubanks 2004). Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. We are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behavior (Senge, 1990).

Moreover, re-culturing the school involves changing the belief systems of stakeholders in the school. Transformational visions of schooling require that organizational cultures be "re-cultured" in order to address issues related to purpose, conditions and relationships for those who interact in such a re-cultured school (Cosner & Peterson, 2003). New accountability demands are forcing changes in school practices for administrators and teachers alike. But how can a principal create or maintain a positive school culture in the face

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of the pressures that accountability brings? A common, short-term reaction is to focus on test preparation and scores. But fretting about numbers won't necessarily cultivate a positive school culture that's focused on raising the achievement of all students. In this age of accountability, veteran educators and school leadership experts alike insist that the principal, as the prime shaper of school culture, must listen to other groups within the school. Those include teachers, students, and parents. Encouraging such dialogue indicates the principal's willingness to take risks in sharing power.

Senge (1990) suggests that changing organizational culture may be a formable task. In school reform efforts, educators might benefit from following the steps for setting the stage for a change in organizational culture. However school reformers often miss the big picture in improving individual school cultures. Senge suggests that in order for an organization to prepare for change, a study of the culture of the organization needs to be made. School reform efforts would benefit from looking closely at the individual school organization rather than looking at an entire school district. By employing this method, educators in the school under reform may be more willing to make changes that will develop the type of agendas in schools that facilitate improved education for its students (Senge, 1990).

Sergiovanni (2007), recommends building the nation's educational environments around learning communities in which members provide unique expertise essential to meeting the multiple needs and demands of local, regional, national, and international constituents. The focus on teacher development, the creation of curriculum leadership roles, the development of peer coaching schemes, the introduction of mentor programs,

experiments with collaborative planning, and the growth of school based management and decision making provide testimony to the ways in which many schools and school systems are seeking to involve teachers more in the life and work of the school outside the classroom, to have them take more responsibility for the policies and practices that are created there (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

High poverty, high-performing urban schools promote high teacher and staff expectations and promote a belief in the capabilities of all students. Data-driven instruction helps students increase learning, meet state and national content standards, achieve success on rigorous assessments and improve student achievement on a continuing basis throughout the school year (Reeves, 2009). Practices in high-performing, high-poverty schools include the following (Marzano, 2006): school-wide ethic of high expectations; caring, respectful relationships with school staff; a strong academic and instructional focus; regular assessment of individual students; collaborative decision-making structures; effective leadership; strong faculty morale and work ethic; and coordinated staffing strategies.

Brownson et al. (2004) identified additional characteristics in high-poverty, high-performing schools. These characteristics included a common purpose, thoughtful school structures, and attention to individual students. Staff and students alike shared a common purpose. Schools influence the academic and social development of their students, in particular their academic achievement, through their policies, staffing, organization, resources, and climate (Carbonaro, 2005; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

Transformational Leadership

The factor that appears most in the literature that makes a school successful is effective leadership. Leadership is a process by which individuals, working together, create relationships to attempt to accomplish a shared vision (Northouse, 2004). According to Yukl (2002), transformational leadership appeals to followers' morals and values. A transformational leader will strive to encourage followers to see their significant role in the big picture of the organization. When a leader is able to facilitate within the members an ownership of the organization and its vision and is able to move them from a self-centered perspective to an organizational perspective, transformational leadership has occurred. Transformational leaders empower followers and make them less dependent on the leader. Transformational leaders support followers by "delegating significant authority to individuals, developing follower skills and self-confidence, creating self-managed teams, providing direct access to sensitive information, eliminating unnecessary controls, and building a strong culture to support empowerment" (p. 261). Leithwood (1992) stated that transformational school leaders are in pursuit of three goals: (a) helping staff develop and maintain a collaborative school culture, (b) fostering teacher development, and (c) helping them solve problems together more effectively.

Successful educational leaders are those who are relentless in their effort to identify areas of needed improvement. In schools that "work," leaders pay very close attention to the quality of the workplace environment and work tirelessly to communicate a clear mission and vision; foster collaboration among teachers; encourage teachers' involvement in decision

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making; set high expectations for teachers and students; develop a sense of teamwork and trust; and stimulate thinking and reflection on teaching (Gordon, 2006).

Sergiovanni (2007) suggests that it is important for moral authority to be viewed as the foundation for current leadership practice and moving from traditional organizational structures to educational communities that serve and actively involve teachers, students, parents, and other members of their communities. The key for leadership in the 21st century, according to Sergiovanni, emphasizes the understanding that a leader can be effective only when an entire organization works collaboratively and harmoniously together for the greater good. No one leads alone today-as if anyone ever did. Sergiovanni (2007) contends that when individuals follow ideas and shared conceptions, they are elevated from being subordinates who merely do what they are told, into followers. He also likens school communities to communities of faith, where people do the right thing because it is the right thing to do.

Carter (2000) notes that although politicians demand more accountability from teachers, they seldom address ways to improve and fund teacher education and professional development. This is largely because the effects of improved teacher education and professional development are not readily measured or even quickly apparent during a politician's term in office. Unfortunately, many elected officials decide that long-term solutions of this nature might be good policy, but bad politics. School leaders need to be aware that current forms of staff development in the majority of schools and districts are not designed to provide the ongoing, interactive, cumulative learning necessary for developing the new knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are the prerequisites to implementing and sustaining change in schools (Fullan, 1999). The failure to realize the need for staff

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development both at the beginning of a reform initiative and during the implementation phase is a common problem.

In the report of the National Commission on Time and Learning (1994), *Prisoners of Time,* the authors note that over and again, we attempt to implement new instructional innovations, yet fail to provide teachers with the time to study, reflect on, and apply new research and to learn new skills. Elmore & McLaughlin (1998) recommend that professional development be moved into the line of accountability structures of local schools and districts. Often, professional development is carried out by a number of different staff members who are not required to coordinate their offerings, reduce competing priorities, or plan together toward achieving common goals. Thus, professional development remains diffused and unfocused, with a number of well-intentioned staff members competing for limited space and time.

District personnel offices also need to attend to the toll that staff turnover takes on improving schools (Mizell, 1999). Even in schools and school systems that were serious about increasing student achievement, we have seen time and again that reform is jeopardized by the coming and going of school board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers. School reform can't survive in this context. Even quality staff development will not have a profound effect in schools, if it occurs in unstable environments. Findings from the current study suggest that UCPHS's organizational policies and systemic practices are consistent with those noted in the literature on high performing high-poverty urban schools.

Four Frames of Effective Organizations

Bolman and Deal (2003) identified four frames of effective organizations that can be used by transformational leaders to re-culture the school. In order for an organization to perform at its highest level, all four of the frames must work together for the purpose of improving and stabilizing the school culture to benefit all students. The four frames are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The utilization of these frames can assist in addressing how the school organization interacts. In order for UCPHS to operate more effectively to promote a school culture of high expectations and college readiness, changes would need to be made in the organizational polices and systemic practices at the school. Schools whose leaders focus on sharing roles and responsibilities have higher standards of accountability based on both distributed leadership and the political framework. The political frame views organizations as political arenas that host a complex web of individual and group interests. This frame helps in understanding how to deal with power conflicts that may arise at a school site as well as power struggles that may hinder leadership from getting people to do things they would otherwise not do and making needed changes at the school site. The role of leader at the school site is pivotal in ensuring the shared vision and mission of the organization are being followed (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Schools in urban environments tend to focus more on political issues; so the school leadership must be highly trained in handling those issues. In order for UCPHS to move forward with more stability, the district policy of transferring principals in and out of the school must change. Re-culturing UCPHS will require stable leadership that promotes a college readiness environment. Leadership is significant to increase teacher expectations and

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to create organizational practices designed to increase a sense of responsibility and accountability. Professional development venues allow for these matters to be addressed.

The structural framework, according to Bolman and Deal (2003), discusses how to get results out of groups through organization and structures such as rules, roles, and relationships that will accomplish collective goals as well as accommodate individual differences. The assumptions of the structural frame reflect a belief in rationality and a faith that the right formal arrangements will minimize problems and increase quality and performance. To that end, ongoing professional development would need to become a vital part of re-culturing UCPHS to reflect a belief system that is achievement oriented and focused on all students being capable of learning.

The structural framework would also require UCPHS to address the way they did business or the implementation of systemic practices at the school. With the revolving door of administrators at the school, an unhealthy school culture had evolved. In order for the school to move forward in being more productive, it was essential that all stakeholders be on the same page or at least in the same book. An accountability system, calling for a systemic way of doing things must become a reality at the school. Standard operating procedures would provide clear expectations for students and staff in promoting a school culture of high expectations. Administrators, teachers and students could also form collaborative leadership councils in which they could have input in decisions regarding school policies and systems.

The human resource frame emphasizes the importance of changing people by promoting positive group interaction and building interpersonal relationships among all stakeholders. Human resource assumptions emphasize the fit between individual and

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organizations. This frame is pivotal when dealing with urban schools as educators may have become accustomed to thinking of teaching as a service commodity and forgetting that we are in the business of cultivating students. In promoting the college readiness environment, it is important that the leadership in the school provide a venue for teachers to examine their beliefs and assumptions, underlying in-effective practices and to receive information on the best practices to educate urban students.

In order for UCPHS to develop positive teacher-student relationships, activities could be planned to encourage formal and informal dialogues regarding what it will take to have a positive school environment between the two groups. By getting to know the students better, teachers would be able to see not only the negative attributes of their students, but also some of the underlying reasons for those behaviors. Cultural and social events at the school would also allow students to demonstrate to teachers some of the strengths that they have, which may not be readily observable during classroom lessons. Teachers also need opportunities to get to know their colleagues and develop supportive relationships. By working collectively on the school curriculum and instructional practices, not only would teachers learn from colleagues, but they would be increasing their leadership capacity in the school.

The fourth frame or symbolic frame centers on the complexity and ambiguity in organizational phenomena that will aid in the management of the school site. This frame brings the ceremonies and rituals that a school site needs to create an environment rich with learning and positivity. Meaning, belief, and faith are central to a symbolic perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2003). While UCPHS had a number of areas for improvement, students were making significant personal and group achievements that were not being highlighted by

the school. In order for students to feel appreciated, the school to showcase the enormous amount of talent that the students brought to school could host regular celebrations. Teachers could also be encouraged to promote the diversity of the students during classroom lessons. By highlighting the significant achievements of the diverse group of learners, more students would feel welcomed in the challenging classes. In addition, by providing lessons that are culturally relevant, students may have more buy-in to the subject matter.

Re-culturing UCPHS will require a leader that is willing to challenge the way business had been done at the school. Leaders are visionaries for change, able to communicate effectively and support staff and students. The principal would need to be willing to take the risk of having uncomfortable conversations with stakeholders to get at the root of the problems in the school. In transforming the culture of the school, the leaders would also need to be able to build positive relationships with all stakeholders in an effort to garner buy-in on moving the positive agenda of the school. In addition, by building school traditions and rituals, the principal can create a sense of belonging and empowerment to teachers, students and parents.

Recommendations

In order for UCPHS to realize a school culture of high expectations, I would recommend that the school take the following steps to continue the journey of re-culturing the school:

- Provide professional development on delivering a comprehensive and coherent, curriculum, based on the requirements of the college preparatory program.

- Use curriculum that takes into consideration the student's previous learning experiences and future educational needs.

- Expand opportunities to examine the beliefs and assumptions about culturally diverse students that may be embedded in policies and practices at the school.

- Promote teaching and learning at the school that empowers students to become lifelong learners, to be responsible towards themselves and their learning and be prepared for the rigors of college and the workforce of a global economy.

- Provide a balanced range of strategies for formative and summative assessments that regularly measures student acquisition of the college prep curriculum.

- Develop a system through which all teachers plan and reflect in collaborative teams in an effort to be on the same page of building a college ready community for students.

- Involve parents in supporting a school culture of college readiness through a system of dialogues with teachers and administrators.

- Involve a broad base of community supporters to that would provide mentor relationships, business partnerships and become a part of the rituals and celebrations at the school.

Recommendations for Future Study

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study. They are not in any way a commentary on the school under study but rather are areas that might be considered focal points based on the implementation of research-based organizational policies and systemic practices found in high-performing, high-poverty schools with large concentrations of students of color.

The students in this study tended to fare better in IB classes than AP classes. Future studies should investigate the preparation of teachers and the implementation of curriculum in the IB and AP classes.

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Professional Development was a major catalyst in the changes made at the school, but did not focus on culturally relevant instruction. Future studies may look at professional development to increase staff awareness of the benefits of providing culturally relevant instructions and materials. This would also help prepare students to meet the demands of a more diverse and global society (Gay, 2000; Noguera, 2003).

Transformational Leadership is vital to the re-culturing of the schools. Future studies should explore the use of transformational leadership in both high performing and low performing schools in urban communities. There may be vestiges of transformational leadership in low performing schools that could be used to re-culture the school.

UPCHS had a rich history of parents who had attended the urban high school and were excited that their children would have an opportunity to attend the school as college prep students. Additionally, research has shown that parental involvement can significantly improve student achievement. Unfortunately, studies also show that parental involvement tends to decline as students enter high school (Marzano, 2006; Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Future studies may look at the role of parental involvement in re-culturing an urban high school.

The perceptions of students in this study were very insightful in learning what was happening inside the urban high school that may have played a role on student achievement. Future studies may explore how including the voices of students can support re-culturing a culturally diverse school.

Gate-keeping practices in college prep classes were addressed by students in this study as having a negative influence on their enrollment in challenging classes and

preparation for college. However, studies of student's successful completion of college often reflect on a student's academic foundation from high school (Carey, 2005; Chait & Venesia, 2009). Future studies might explore how re-culturing a school could address gate-keeping practices for a diverse group of students by looking at their college course enrollment patterns and successful course completion.

The data sources in this study communicated that there had not been an adequate supply of curriculum and instructional materials available to the college prep classes. While there was no specific mention of the use of technology in the classes, highly successful schools are bringing students on board with the technological skills and equipment needed to be ready for college and employment in the 21st Century. Future studies may want to explore a comparative study on the use of technology in college prep classes and traditional classes in urban high school with a diverse student population (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; Education Trust-West, 2005).

Conclusion

This qualitative case study, conducted with an ex post facto approach, was designed to bring to light the organizational policies and systemic practices that allowed a high poverty, high performing urban school with large concentrations of low income students and students of color to succeed in a manner that can be translated into effective practices for other schools with the same or similar classification. The findings are intended to provide practitioners with an in-depth understanding of the policies and practices within the

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educational systems that are effective in decreasing or eliminating academic disparities and improving student achievement.

Transformational leaders are visionaries for change, able to communicate effectively and support staff and students. Re-culturing UCPHS will require a leader that is willing to challenge the way business had been done at the school. The principal would need to be willing to take the risk of having uncomfortable conversations with stakeholders to get at the root of the problems in the school. In transforming the culture of the school, the leaders would also need to be able to build positive relationships with all stakeholders in an effort to garner buy-in on moving the positive agenda of the school. In addition, by building school traditions and rituals, the principal can create a sense of belonging and empowerment to teachers, students and parents.

The fours of successful organizations, identified by Bolman and Deal (2003) can also be a useful framework for re-culturing the school. All four of the frames must work together for the purpose of improving and stabilizing the school culture to benefit all students.

APPENDIX A

SSIRB APPROVAL

Staff and Student Perceptions of High School Organizational
Policies and Systemic Practices
Opening the Gates to Foster Scholarship for Urban Students: Organizational Policies and Systemic
Practices in a High Performing High Poverty Urban High School,

Principal Investigator
Regina Ellis

Invitation to Participate

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine the role played by organizational policies and systemic practices that may contribute to high student performance in one urban college prep high school that exceeded the expectations of a high poverty urban high school with a large concentration of students of color in Kansas City, Missouri. Specifically, it will examine the implementation of school-wide practices resulting from those policies and practices to achieve school wide success for high poverty students and students of color. The research project is a qualitative case study designed to examine qualitative data related to organizational policies and systemic practices as perceived by teachers, school leadership team members and students that graduated from the school. The findings will be shared through a doctoral dissertation by the Principal Investigator.

Who will Participate

All teachers of college prep classes and building level leadership team members employed at the college prep school during the SY2004-2007 and students that graduated in the class of 2007 will be eligible to participate in the interview process. Of the eligible participants, four teachers, two building leadership team members and four graduated students will be sought to participate in individual interviews with the principal investigator. Student and adult participants will be contacted via mail, requesting their participation in the study. A postcard will be enclosed for students and adults to return should they desire to participate in the study. From the postcards returned, I will identify four graduates of the school, four teachers and two administrators who will become the primary respondents in my study. Participants selected to participate in the study will be contacted via phone and/or e-mail notifying them of their selection by the primary investigator (PI). A meeting will be established during this conversation with each respondent at a time and location convenient to you to review the objectives of the study, explain the need for your participation, discuss how your identity will be kept confidential, request permission to record your interviews and to advise you what will be expected of you for the study.

> **UMKC Social Sciences**
> **IRB Approved**
> **from: 12/22/2011 to: 12/21/2012**

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the organizational policies and practices that may contribute to high student performance in high-poverty urban schools and how they are implemented to achieve school wide success for high poverty students and students of color.

Description of Procedures

Audiotaped interviews will be conducted with selected participants by the researcher. Teachers will be interviewed during the study in focus groups and/or individual interviews. Building level administrators will be interviewed individually. Graduated students will also be interviewed in individual interviews and/or focus groups. Interviews will take forty-five minutes, which will be accomplished at a time and location convenient to you.

The PI will meet individually with you once prior to the interviews to provide an explanation of the nature of the study and its contributions to the field of urban education. A professional transcriptionist will transcribe all audiotaped interviews verbatim within five days of the actual interview. All data will be analyzed to discover patterns, themes and categories.

You will be asked to complete two audiotaped interviews, which will be reviewed by the primary investigator. Interviews are expected to take approximately 45 minutes to complete. You will be involved in two interview sessions conducted at a location convenient to you. The 45-minute interviews will be held during two separate weeks. There will be a one-week interval between the two interviews. The researcher will provide you with a copy of the finished transcription or written analysis in an effort to check for validity. You may respond to the accuracy of the transcription and corrections will be made as needed. If you do not wish to be identified, please do not use your real name during the interviews or provide any other information that could potentially identify you.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary at all times. You may choose to not participate or to withdraw your participation at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

If you decide to leave the study the information you have already provided in this form or written survey responses will be retained by the principal investigator for data analysis.

Fees and Expenses

There are no monetary costs to you.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study

Risks and Inconveniences

Loss of confidentiality is always a risk to participants. If you do not wish to be identified, please do not use your real name during the interviews or provide any other information that could potentially identify you.

Benefits

You may or may not benefit from this study. By participating in this study, you will be able to give voice to issues and concerns you may or may not had in high school. Your concerns will generate further investigation into how the school's policies and practices may or may not have impacted the academic performance of students or teaching performance. This may in turn help the school in creating more effective policies and practices.

Alternatives to Study Participation

The alternative is to not participate in the study

Confidentiality

There will be identifiable information collected. Loss of confidentiality is always a risk to participants. Throughout the study, the PI will try to maintain confidentiality by keeping all identifiable data locked in a filing cabinet or on a password protected computer in a locked office. Data collected from you will include audiotaped interviews with participants. Interview audiotapes, and transcriptions, surveys and achievement data will be maintained in a university campus private computer that is password protected and only the PI will have access to this data. The PI and the PI's faculty advisor are the only individuals who will have access to this data. Data will be maintained in a university campus private filing cabinet with original interviews and will be destroyed within five to seven years of this study. Selected participants may be requested to participate in focus groups to generate further information for the PI on their perceptions of the policies and procedures of the high school. The PI will be unable to control what the research participants might do with the information they learn from other participants during the focus. Selected participants may decline participation in the focus group to maintain the confidentiality of their responses. The principal investigator will seek publication for the research findings in her doctoral dissertation, however data will be presented in aggregate, and you will not be identified. While every effort will be made to keep confidential all of the information you complete and share, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study for quality improvement and regulatory functions

In Case of Injury

The University of Missouri-Kansas City appreciates the participation of people who help it carry out its function of developing knowledge through research. If you have any questions about the study that you are participating in you are encouraged to call *Regina Ellis**, the investigator, at** 913-221-8092.*

Although it is not the University's policy to compensate or provide medical treatment for persons who participate in studies, if you think you have been harmed as a result of participating in this study, please call the IRB Administrator of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5926.

Questions

If you have any questions regarding this study <u>Regina Ellis</u>, Doctoral Candidate, Urban Leadership & Policy Studies in Education 1832 N. 79th St. / Kansas City, Kansas 66112 913-221-8092/ redbe @ mail.umkc.edu/ 816-413-5949. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please call the IRB Administrator of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5926.

Regina Ellis   Date
1832 N. 79th St
Kansas City, Kansas 66112
913-221-8092
redbe@mail.umkc.edu

Authorization
By signing your name below, you are indicating that (1) you have read this form, (2) you agree to participate in this study, (3) you have received a copy of this consent form, and (4) you agree to have the information you share in the study be used for the stated research purposes.

Printed Name of the Participant _____

Signature of the Participant _____

Date_____

Printed Name of the Investigator _____

Signature of the Investigator _____

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APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL ACCESS (SUPERINTENDENT – MISSOURI))

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Regina Ellis. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri at Kansas City in Educational Leadership, Policy and Foundations under the guidance of Dr. Dianne Smith. In my dissertation research, I will explore the organizational policies and systemic practices that play a positive role in student achievement as evidenced in high performing, high poverty urban schools with large concentrations of students of color and other high poverty students. Because limited research is available on this topic, I am writing this letter requesting access to teachers in the Midwest Urban School District to gain their perspectives on this topic. My hope is that you will grant permission for me to conduct this study and allow teachers from the school district to participate in the study.

In order to participate in this study the teacher must be employed in a high performing high poverty school with a large concentration of students of color and other high poverty students. The teachers must have worked in the district between the 2004-2007 school years teaching International Baccalaureate and/or Advance Placement classes. The informants will participate in two interviews. The interviews will focus on their perceptions of organizational policies and systemic practices that may play a role in high student achievement in a high poverty urban college prep high school.

To maintain quality research, the data collected in this study will be treated as confidential. In order to protect the anonymity of all informants and the school, no names will be written on any documents.

Respectfully,

Regina Ellis
Doctoral Candidate

Your signature will denote your concurrence of permission to allow me access to interview teachers from the college prep high school in the district.

Printed Name_____

Signature_____

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL ACCESS (PRINCIPAL)

LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

Dear Principal,

My name is Regina Ellis. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri at Kansas City in Educational Leadership, Policy and Foundations under the guidance of Dr. Dianne Smith. In my dissertation research, I will explore the organizational policies and systemic practices that play a positive role in student achievement as evidenced in high performing, high poverty urban schools with large concentrations of students of color and other high poverty students. Because limited research is available on this topic, I am writing this letter requesting access to teachers that worked at the college preparatory high school in Midwest Urban School District to gain their perspectives on this topic. The teachers must have worked at the school between the 2004-2007 school years teaching International Baccalaureate and/or Advance Placement classes. The informants will participate in two interviews. The interviews will focus on their perceptions of organizational policies and systemic practices that may play a role in high student achievement in a high poverty urban college prep high school.

To maintain quality research, the data collected in this study will be treated as confidential. In order to protect the anonymity of all informants and the school, no names will be written on any documents. My hope is that you will grant permission for me to conduct this study and allow teachers from the school to voluntarily participate in the study.

Also attached for your review is a signed consent from the office of the superintendent, granting permission to conduct the study at the school.

Respectfully,

Regina Ellis
Doctoral Candidate

Your signature will denote your concurrence of permission to allow me access to interview teachers from the college prep high school.

 Printed Name_____

    Signature_____

APPENDIX D

POSTCARD, PHONE SCRIPT AND E-MAIL SCRIPT

POSTCARD, PHONE SCRIPT AND E-MAIL SCRIPT

Opening the Gates to Foster Scholarship for Urban Students: Organizational Policies and
Systemic Practices in a High-Performing, High-Poverty Urban High School

___Yes, I will be able to participate in the doctoral study

Name_____

Phone_____

E-Mail_____

Thank you for your response

Return Address   Postage Paid

Mrs. Regina Ellis
1832 N. 79th St.
Kansas City, KS 66112

PHONE SCRIPT

Congratulations,

You have been selected to participate in the doctoral study. I would like to establish a time and location convenient to you to review the objectives of the study. During this meeting, I will explain what will be expected of you for the study and will further explain the need for your participation. I will also explain how your identity will be kept confidential and request permission to record your interviews. You will be asked to participate in two recorded interviews.

I look forward to meeting with you on date, time and location.

Thank you in advance for your participation in the doctoral study

EMAIL SCRIPT

Congratulations,

You have been selected to participate in the doctoral study. I would like to establish a time and location convenient to you to review the objectives of the study. During this meeting, I will explain what will be expected of you for the study and will further explain the need for your participation. I will also explain how your identity will be kept confidential and request permission to record your interviews. You will be asked to participate in two recorded interviews.

Please select from the dates, times and locations for our first meeting:

List Date convenient to you_____

List Time convenient to you_____

List Location convenient to you_____

 OR Select date, time, and location by circling.

December 10 1PM List location convenient to you_____ or UMKC Library

December 12 5PM List location convenient to you_____ or UMKC Library

December 13 2PM List location convenient to you_____ or UMKC Library

Thank you in advance for your participation in the doctoral study

APPENDIX E

STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

  Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am currently am studying systems and structures in high achieving, high poverty urban schools with students of color. Your school was identified as a high-achieving urban school according to the guidelines of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about how you achieve high levels of student performance at your school. The information garnered from this research will be used to spread new knowledge and innovation about achieving high levels of student achievement and to inspire educators to improve school performance.
You are being requested to participate in two individual interviews of 45 minutes each. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Pseudonym Name_____

Interview Guide for Staff

1. Tell me about this school.

2. What is the vision or mission of the school?

3. How would you describe the school climate here?

4. What do you feel are the strengths of the school?

5. What areas would you like to improve within the school?

6. Would you consider your school high performing? Why or why not?

7. What are the factors that you feel contribute to student achievement at your school?

8. Does the staff analyze student achievement data in order to take informed actions?

9. How are the needs of students of color being met at your school?

10. How does the school prepare students for college and careers?

11. Describe the practices and policies at your school site that you believe contribute to high student performance.

12. How would you describe an effective teacher at your site?

13. How would you describe the leadership in the school?

14. Are adequate resources available for curriculum instruction?

15. How is professional development aligned to the vision of the school?

16. What are the expectation and implementation of the professional development?

17. Is the professional development practical and adaptable?

18. Are teachers held accountable for the professional development?

APPENDIX F

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am currently am studying systems and structures in high achieving, high poverty urban schools with students of color. Your school was identified as a high-achieving urban school according to the guidelines of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about how you achieve high levels of student performance at your school. The information garnered from this research will be used to spread new knowledge and innovation about achieving high levels of student achievement and to inspire educators to improve school performance.

You are being requested to participate in two individual interviews of 45 minutes each. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Pseudonym Name_____

Student Interview Guide

1. Tell me about this school.

2. What is the vision or mission of the school?

3. How would you describe the school climate here?

4. What do you feel are the strengths of the school?

5. What areas would you like to improve within the school?

6. Would you consider your school high performing? Why or why not?

7. Does the school hold high expectations for all students?

8. What are the factors that you feel contribute to student achievement at your school?

9. Were teachers aware of your academic strengths and weaknesses?

10. Were students provided the support needed to succeed in school?

11. How are the needs of students of color being met at your school?

12. How does the school prepare students for college and careers?

13. Describe the practices and policies at your school site that you believe contributed to high student performance.

14. How would you describe an effective teacher at your site?

15. How would you describe the leadership in the school?

16. Were adequate resources available for instruction in your classrooms?

17. Do you feel adults on campus treated students fairly?

18. Were students encouraged to get involved in school leadership?

19. What are the expectation and implementation of the professional development?

APPENDIX G

STUDENT SURVEY

STUDENT SURVEY

1. Please describe your favorite IB or AP Class.

2. Describe the relationship the teacher had with the class.

3. Did you feel you were prepared for the IB or AP Exam from this class? Explain

4. Please describe your least favorite IB or AP Class.

5. Describe the relationship the teacher had with the class.

6. Did you feel you were prepared for the IB or AP Exam from this class? Explain

7. What advice would you give a teacher who really wants to make sure that all of the students in his/her class are both motivated to learn and able to succeed in school?

APPENDIX H

TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

Teacher Survey Results

Curriculum	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The school had a challenging curriculum that engaged students.	75%	25%			
The school provided me with professional development activities related to aligning the curriculum to college and career readiness expectations.	75%	25%			
The teachers were prepared to teach advanced courses.	50%	50%			
Graduation requirements reflected school expectations that all students enroll in college preparatory classes.	50%	50%			
I used information and communication technology to promote learning.	50%	50%			
The school provided test prep for college readiness exams: the PSAT, PLAN, ACT and SAT.	75%	25%			
The school encouraged student participation in pre-collegiate academic development programs offered by local colleges and community organizations.	50%	25%	25%		
Rigor and Relevance					
The curriculum guides were useful to me in designing lesson plans for the subject I taught.	75%	25%			
My curriculum guide provided me ways to measure whether students had attained each objective.	75%	25%			
The teachers in my building studied the achievement levels of subgroups of students to drive classroom instruction.	100%				
The professional development activities provided me a variety of instructional strategies to help students learn.	75%	25%			
The school had high quality instruction that related the real-world experiences.	50%	50%			
Staff were encouraged to work with students on problem solving and critical thinking skills.	75%	25%			
The school provided additional resources to students who were challenged by academically rigorous work.	75%	25%			
Relationships					
All staff held high expectations for student learning.	50%	50%			
The teachers cared about the students.	50%	50%			

There is good communication between teachers and students.	25%	50%	25%		
I expected all students to achieve at a high level.	50%	50%	25%		
I knew my students' academic interests and goals.	25%	75%			
Teachers were enthusiastic about what they taught.	50%	50%			
Teachers in the school treated students with respect.	50%	50%			
Doing well academically was rewarded in the school.	50%	50%			
Leadership					
The school administration clearly communicated the goals of the school to the staff.	75%	25%			
The school administration worked to persuade staff to work together to accomplish common goals.	75%	25%			
The school provided me with professional development needed to be an effective teacher.	75%	25%			
The school administration provided the instructional materials to support the curriculum.	100%				
The leadership of the school was visible in classroom, hallways and at various school activities.	75%	25%			
The leadership of the school had good communication with teachers and students.	50%	50%			
The leadership in the school encouraged collaboration from staff and students in site-based decision-making.	25%	50%	25%		

1. Describe the policies and practices at your school site that you believe contribute to

   high student performance.

2. How would you describe the leadership at your school from 2004-2007?

3. How would you describe professional development at your school?

4. How would you describe the school culture at your school?

Administrator Survey Results

Curriculum	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The school had a challenging curriculum that engaged students.		100%			
The school provided me with professional development activities related to aligning the curriculum to college and career readiness expectations.	100%				
The teachers were prepared to teach advanced courses.		50%		50%	
Graduation requirements reflected school expectations that all students enroll in college preparatory classes.		50%	50%		
I used information and communication technology to promote learning.		100%			
The school provided test prep for college readiness exams: the PSAT, PLAN, ACT and SAT.	100%				
The school encouraged student participation in pre-collegiate academic development programs offered by local colleges and community organizations.		100%			
Rigor and Relevance					
The curriculum guides were useful to me in designing lesson plans for the subject I taught.		50%	50%		
My curriculum guide provided me ways to measure whether students had attained each objective.	100%				
The teachers in my building studied the achievement levels of subgroups of students to drive classroom instruction.	100%				
The professional development activities provided me a variety of instructional strategies to help students learn.		100%			
The school had high quality instruction that related the real-world experiences.		50%		50%	
Staff were encouraged to work with students on problem solving and critical thinking skills.		50%	50%		
The school provided additional resources to students who were challenged by academically rigorous work.		100%			
Relationships					
All staff held high expectations for student learning.		50%		50%	
The teachers cared about the students.		50%		50%	

There is good communication between teachers and students.					
I expected all students to achieve at a high level.		100%			
I knew my students' academic interests and goals.	100%				
Teachers were enthusiastic about what they taught.		50%		50%	
Teachers in the school treated students with respect.		50%		50%	
Doing well academically was rewarded in the school.	50%	50%			
Leadership					
The school administration clearly communicated the goals of the school to the staff.	50%	50%			
The school administration worked to persuade staff to work together to accomplish common goals.	100%				
The school provided me with professional development needed to be an effective teacher.		100%			
The school administration provided the instructional materials to support the curriculum.	100%				
The leadership of the school was visible in classroom, hallways and at various school activities.	50%	50%			
The leadership of the school had good communication with teachers and students.		100%			
The leadership in the school encouraged collaboration from staff and students in site-based decision-making.	100%				

1. Describe the policies and practices at your school site that you believe contribute to high student performance.

2. How would you describe the leadership at your school from 2004-2007?

3. How would you describe professional development at your school?

4. How would you describe the school culture at your school?

APPENDIX I

DEFINITION OF TERMS

DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study, the following terms will be defined below:

Academic Performance Index (API): The numeric indicator of a schools performance level that can range from 200-1000, on the MAP (*Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007*).

accountability: A mechanism by which students, schools, and districts are held responsible for the academic progress of students. Usually content standards and subsequent assessments are the means whereby performance is gauged.

achievement gap: A consistent difference in scores on student achievement tests between certain groups of children and children in other groups (*EdSource, 2007*).

achievement test: A test to measure a student's knowledge and skills.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Adequate yearly progress is a set of annual academic performance benchmarks that states, school districts, schools, and subpopulations of students are supposed to achieve if the state receives federal funding under Title I, Part A of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). In Missouri, the measures include: (1) specified percentages of students scoring "proficient" or "advanced" on *MAP* in communication arts and math; (2) participation of at least 95% of students on those tests; (3) specified Academic Performance Index scores or gains; and (4) for high schools, a specified graduation rate or improvement in the rate (*Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007*).

assessment: Another name for a test, it may be written or oral, formal or informal. Depending on the type of assessment, results can be used for a variety of reasons. There are several types of assessments: criterion, formative, summative, progress monitoring, and curriculum embedded (*EdSource,* 2007).

content standards: Standards that describe what students should know and be able to do in core academic subjects at each grade level. New K–12 academic content standards were adopted by Missouri, 1997(*Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007*).

disaggregated data: The presentation of data broken into segments, for example test scores for students from various ethnic groups instead of the aggregate for the entire student population. (*EdSource,* 2007).

equity: The belief that state governments have an obligation to equalize students' access to educational opportunities and thus life chances (*EdSource,* 2007).

Free/Reduced Price Meals: A federal program to provide food for students from low-income families. The number of students participating in the National School Lunch Program is

increasingly being used as a way to measure the poverty level of a school or district population. The number of children in this program can affect schools' or districts' eligibility for grants or other funding aimed at helping lower-income families (*EdSource,* 2007).

High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE): Survey created by the University of Indiana, which attempts to measure student engagement through survey items (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007).

high stakes testing: Types of tests that are associated with sanctions for underperformance (*EdSource,* 2007).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*:* This is a national test that is given to specific grade levels in specific subjects every other year. Small samples of student representatives of the state are tested (*EdSource, 2007)*.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): 2002 legislation that emphasizes an increased influence of the federal government within the nation's schools. NCLB has brought attention to the nation's failing schools that are categorized by high numbers of disadvantaged students (primarily poor and English- Language learners) (*EdSource, 2007)*.

proficiency: Mastery or ability to do something at grade-level (*EdSource, 2007)*.

scientifically based research: Research that involves the application of rigorous, systemic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to educational activities and programs (*EdSource*, 2007).

standards-based reform: A shift in education policy and school reform toward reaching consensus on and establishing standards for what students need to know and be able to do at each grade or developmental level (*EdSource, 2007)*.

students of color: People who historically were disenfranchised (African-American, Hispanic American and Native American) (*EdSource*, 2007).

Title I: A federal program that provided funds for economically disadvantaged students. Funding is based on the number of low-income children in a school, generally those eligible for the free/reduced price meals program (*EdSource*, 2007).

urban*:* Area with a dense population and high concentrations of students of color (*EdSource*, 2007).

urban school: A school characterized by large numbers of non-White students, students with limited English proficiency, and students with lower socioeconomic status

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VITA

Regina Anderson Ellis was born March 13, 1951, in Baltimore, Maryland. She is the youngest and only girl in a family of six and was raised by her mother. She began her education in Baltimore, Maryland Public Schools and graduated in 1969 from Hirsch High School in Chicago, Illinois. She received a full scholarship to the University of Iowa and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Secondary Education.

 She began her career as a Montessori teacher at Ezzard Charles Montessori School in Chicago, Illinois. The school was established by her church to serve inter-city children, following the constructivism or discovery model for Montessori Schools.   Marie Montessori established her school program for the children that lived in the ghettoes of Rome, Italy, believing in their ability to learn, and respecting their psychological development. Mrs. Ellis hand-made all of instructional materials, constructed tables and bookcases and painted the walls and floors in the classroom. The children flourished in the environment and tested three to seven years above grade level on national standardized exams. Mrs. Ellis credits this impressive display of learning by the children as the foundation for her career working with children. Marie Montessori believed that something good could come out of the ghetto and so does Mrs. Ellis.

In 1974, Mrs. Ellis relocated to Omaha, Nebraska and taught three years in the Omaha Public Schools (OPS), as a junior high history and English teacher. After completing her Masters of Arts in Guidance and Counseling at Creighton University in 1977, she was appointed to a junior high counseling position in OPS. Mrs. Ellis left the school system for five years to work as a Marketing and Sales Representative for the Union Pacific Railroad.

She was assigned to work in Omaha, Nebraska, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, St. Joseph, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas. Her job responsibilities included international sales, intermodal sales, and grain sales.

Mrs. Ellis is married to Seth Ellis, her husband of 32 years and began a new career as a stay at home mom after the birth of their first child Simone in 1983. To their union, two other children were born, Carmen and Seth II. After three years at home, she made the decision to return to work as a middle school, alternative school and high school guidance counselor in the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) and enjoy the summer months off with her three wonderful children. During that same timeframe she completed a secondary school administrative certification program and an Educational Specialist in Urban Policy and Leadership at the University of Missouri-Kansas. KCKPS assigned her to positions as an assistant principal in a middle school and college prep high school.

She left the KCKPS after twenty years to accept a position as principal and Head of Schools for the International Baccalaureate (IB) middle and high schools in the Kansas City, Missouri School District. Highlighted in her three year career at the IB and college prep high school was leading a transformation of the school from low academic performance to high academic achievement and earning the U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon Award in 2007. Additionally, by establishing a supportive learning environment for students, 98% of the students graduated with scholarships to college, totaling 16.5 million dollars for three years. The remaining two percent of students joined various branches of the military.

Mrs. Ellis also served as the Director of Guidance and Counseling and Executive Director of Elementary Schools for the Kansas City Missouri School District, before retiring

from the district in 2009. She returned to the school community by joining the ranks of the North Kansas City Missouri School District as a high school Assistant Principal at North Kansas City High School. Mrs. Ellis has had the unique experience of working in three of the oldest established schools in the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area. All three of the schools began as segregated schools. Two of the schools only enrolled African American students and the third school only enrolled White students. With the historical decision of Brown v. Topeka, 1957 to end desegregation in schools, the schools were to be integrated. Due to their placement in segregated residential areas, all three schools remained segregated for some time. Two of the schools became college prep magnet schools and one remained as a traditional high school. Each school has established International Baccalaureate Programs (IB). Mrs. Ellis also serves as a consultant for the Middle Years Program, which is the middle school component of the IB program. Mrs. Ellis enjoys making presentations at national education conferences regarding her experiences in successfully leading schools to maximize student potential through structure and support for students and staff.