

# AGAINST ALL ODDS: LEADERSHIP IN A HIGH-POVERTY HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

Research indicates that impoverished school districts face a unique set of barriers in regard to school achievement. However, according to statistics from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, there are schools that would be considered impoverished that are ranked in the top ten in regard to sustained performance on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) in the areas of mathematics and communication arts. This study examines the leadership characteristics of a building leader of a high-poverty, high-performing public school in Missouri.

A qualitative case-study model was implemented in this study, utilizing structured interviews of faculty and staff, parents of students, and the building leader. In addition, field notes documenting observations and reflections from the researcher's four day visit to the site were compiled and pertinent documents were reviewed.

Prominent themes were identified that described the leadership at the school. The emergent themes were presence, hands off leadership, golden communication, power source (through both personal and professional support), high expectations, hiring the best, students first, values individuals, caring and fairness.

A synthesis of those themes led to the identification of specific leadership roles embraced by the building leader. Those roles were human resource director, academic leader, and culture facilitator.

Implications for educational leaders and programs designed to train educational leaders were discussed. Some of those implications for educational leaders included the necessity to develop a vision for the school beyond yearly achievement test results and the impact of fully embracing the philosophy of developing life long learners. In addition, leaders must develop a culture within their school of high expectations accompanied by support.

Implications for programs designed to train educational leaders included the development of programs that more thoroughly prepared leaders in the area of personnel selection, induction, and evaluation.