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Achievement Despite Poverty: Testing the Effectiveness of Timeless Principles

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by

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of Timeless Principles

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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Abstract

School districts composed of a large number of high-poverty students are generally not found to be high-achieving (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). In Missouri, districts are assessed in accordance with the fifth edition of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) which results in an Annual Performance Report (APR) score (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2014d). School administrators of districts having two consecutive years of APR scores over 95% while having a student population composed of a large number of students receiving free or reduced price meals were recruited for a qualitative study. Interview questions were developed based on the Rosenholtz (1985) paper about effective, high-poverty, inner-city schools. The questions were designed to extract information about the ways in which building leaders decrease teacher isolation, maintain a skilled teaching staff, set and monitor goals, remove non-instructional tasks for teachers, and maintain a collaborative school culture. Upon analyzing interview data, seven common themes emerged: collaboration, relationships, consistency and stability, high expectations, clarifying tasks or objectives, using and analyzing data, and community support. Over 60% of Missouri schools report a 50% or higher free and reduced price meal rate among students (MODESE, 2014j), which leads to additional challenges for educators (Balfanz, 2011; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Jensen, 2013). Besides adding to current data about high-achieving, high-poverty districts, this study provides evidence specific to Missouri educators that can be used to inform future practices.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to 2014 statistics obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) (2014j), over 60% of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have a student population consisting of over 50% who qualify for free and reduced price meals. Past studies involving data disaggregated by indicators of socio-economic status (SES) supported a negative relationship between poverty and student achievement (Cutuli et al., 2013; Ladd, 2012; Mulligan, McCarroll, Flanagan, & Potter, 2014; Thompson et al., 2011). Less than 4% of Missouri school districts recorded Annual Performance Report (APR) scores above 95% in two consecutive years and had free and reduced price meal rates of 50% or higher (MODESE, 2014f, 2014j). With many school districts facing high poverty rates, a study of these high-performing districts can be useful for schools with similar challenges and aspirations.

Introduced in the following paragraphs is a description of this study, which was designed to determine the elements leading to success in high-poverty districts. Background information and a conceptual framework for the study are explained, along with the problem and purpose of the study. The research questions and design are also summarized.

Background of the Study

The school reform movement was initiated by a government report entitled, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The 1983 report, released by members

of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, included an 18-month study of education in the United States. Thirteen factors were described as putting the nation at risk of becoming sub-standard in comparison with the world (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). One purpose was stated as, "A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 8). Because the success of a democratic nation is dependent upon the abilities of its citizens to participate effectively in society, future studies focused on the need to improve educational practices in the United States (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

The findings of Susan Rosenholtz (1985) in "Effective Schools: Interpreting the Evidence" communicated common characteristics of subsequent movements in school reform. A feeling of teacher isolation existed in schools due to the fear of being viewed as professionally weak or incompetent (Rosenholtz, 1985). Because of isolation, teachers did not have common objectives or measures for learning (Rosenholtz, 1985). Studies of highly effective schools serving inner-city, low-socioeconomic students were analyzed by Rosenholtz (1985) and revealed shared traits that can be summarized into four areas: maintaining a skilled teaching staff, decreasing teacher isolation, setting goals for student achievement to monitor progress, and focusing leadership on safeguarding the pursuits of teachers toward student achievement goals. These characteristics have similarities with many later reform models (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1985; Senge, 1990).

Senge (1990) described ways in which members of businesses can become trusted teams with shared goals who learn together and use the strengths of one another to achieve higher results. These concepts moved into the world of education with Senge's (2000) book entitled, *Schools That Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents and Everyone Who Cares About Education.* In a 2003 interview with Senge, he spoke about the challenges of teachers in isolation by stating, "The idea of teachers working collaboratively is so vital. It's not easy, but it should be one of the primary goals of a principal because they are clearly, in the language of business, the local line leader" (as cited in Newcomb, 2003, p. 5). Increasing the ability of teachers to be vulnerable about classroom practices and to work together toward school improvement shows congruence to the findings of Rosenholtz (Rosenholtz, 1985; Senge, 2000).

A study by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools was released in 1995. After analyzing data from 1,500 schools and conducting field research of 44 schools across 16 states, co-authors Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found schools experience higher rates of success when they are structured to allow teachers to function as a learning group. Six characteristics were recognized as best practice for professional learning communities:

> Shared governance that increases teachers' influence over school policy and practice. Interdependent work structures, such as teaching teams, which encourage collaboration. Staff development that enhances technical skills consistent with the school's mission. Deregulation that provides autonomy for schools to pursue a vision of high intellectual standards. Small school size, which

> increases opportunities for communication and trust. Parent involvement in a broad range of school affairs. (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 1)

The need to increase teacher collaboration, to move toward goals through development of staff, and to include teachers in decision making are similar among studies (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1985).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggested the answer to the school reform problem is to create an environment where faculties are devoted to a shared mission, vision, and values; are constantly seeking answers to problems; collaborate in teams; are willing to act on ideas; and aim for measurable improvement. Each of these principles can be related to conventions described by Rosenholtz (1985). The basis of DuFour and Eaker's (1998) work has developed into four guiding questions for learning communities aimed at defining learner objectives, effectively identifying struggling learners, and pushing those who are proficient to higher levels (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010).

The allotment of time for professional collaboration is commonplace in schools today (Ermeling & Gallimore, 2013). The model of a learning community continues to decrease isolation of teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 2011). Learning communities offer collegial support through open conversation focused on improving student learning through enhancing teacher ability (Lieberman & Miller, 2011). The design may take on different forms, but learning communities focus on the preceding philosophy (Lieberman & Miller, 2011). Efforts to improve schools have taken on many names and structures, but many of the principles established by Rosenholtz in her 1985 paper continue to be evident in newer initiatives (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1985; Senge, 1990).

Conceptual Framework

Rosenholtz (1985) examined various characteristics of effective schools. Four distinct areas can be outlined including strong leadership aimed at decreasing teacher time spent on non-instructional tasks, decreasing teacher isolation, setting and monitoring shared student achievement goals, and maintaining a competent teaching staff (Rosenholtz, 1985). These attributes continue to be interwoven into subsequent education initiatives (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1985; Senge, 1990).

Effective schools have cultures of collaboration and collegiality (Rosenholtz, 1985). In one study, "time for teachers to collaborate" and "collegial work environment" were rated "very important" or higher as reasons to continue teaching by over 85% of 40,490 teachers surveyed (Scholastic & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010, p. 70). Although separation and isolation of teachers are still commonplace, collaboration among teacher teams can improve instruction, refine assessment practices, and remove obstacles of troubled learners (Ash & D'Auria, 2013).

Through the adoption and adaptation of professional learning community models, the isolated feelings of teachers can be diminished (Lieberman & Miller, 2011). Sackey (2012) stated, "These learning communities are committed to collective responsibility, goal alignment, and ongoing job-embedded professional learning" (p. 46). By sharing the responsibility for student learning, members of today's learning communities seek to increase the frequency of effective instruction (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Participants report continual professional growth, increased career longevity, and the ability to display the vulnerability needed to make positive changes in practice (as cited in DuFour &

Mattos, 2013). Avoidance of open sharing has been evident in the past, but teachers in successful schools have been using this practice for many years (Rosenholtz, 1985).

The impact of teacher competence on student achievement has been supported by various studies (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Schools consisting of high numbers of students from a low-SES often include large numbers of students who are behind grade level, are sometimes difficult to manage, and are facing other non-academic issues (Balfanz, 2011). A study of 29 school districts displayed evidence low-SES students receive less effective instruction (Isenberg et al., 2013). Still noteworthy today, Rosenholtz (1985) described a similar situation by saying, "The paradox of the situation is that schools needing good teachers the most get the fewest of them and have the hardest time keeping the ones they get" (p. 357). Schools able to produce advancement toward goals lead to a higher rate of job satisfaction, maintaining the balance between "frustrations" and "rewards" of the job (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 355).

Schools are not only looking for teachers who possess the ability to teach, but are seeking those who share beliefs of the school in general and of staff currently employed (Cranston, 2012). As Rosenholtz (1985) expressed, "High group cohesiveness in effective schools directs teachers toward adopting student achievement as their primary mission" (p. 366). Cranston (2012) examined the hiring practices of eight school leaders in regard to the "fit" of the candidate in four areas: the profession of teaching, the specific job for which applying, the organization, and the existing team (p. 12). It was found all of the aforementioned areas of fit were evaluated and considered during the process of new hire selection (Cranston, 2012).

Leaders can play an integral role in the success of a school (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). Rosenholtz (1985) noted the importance of the principal in maintaining confidence in the ability to attain student achievement goals. Hiring like-minded teachers, arranging help for struggling teachers, removing hindrances to teaching and learning, tracking progress toward goals, and providing opportunities to collaborate in the development of plans to reach goals were duties cited as common among principals in effective schools (Rosenholtz, 1985). After studying five high-needs districts, Almy and Tooley (2012) concluded, "District and school leaders must intentionally focus on building a collaborative environment; developing reflective, data-driven practice; and securing from everyone on campus an unwavering commitment to professional growth and improving instruction" (p. 16). The parallels between the conclusions of Rosenholtz (1985) and current research provide support for the continued relevance of these 30-year-old findings (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985).

Suber (2011) described characteristics among principals in successful high-poverty schools similar to those mentioned by Rosenholtz (1985). Deemed effective based on South Carolina Department of Education report card data and having leaders as award recipients, the principals and teachers of two schools were the subjects of the study (Suber, 2011). After a mixed methods investigation including interviews of principals, teacher empowerment, relationships, and being an example to others were reported as rising themes (Suber, 2011). Principals asserted student success was created by the collaboration and work of teacher teams (Suber, 2011). Teacher survey responses indicated high levels of useful professional development, high teacher job satisfaction,

the existence of common curriculum aligned to state assessments, and attention of the principal to teacher and student behaviors toward goals (Suber, 2011). Similarities are shared by productive school leaders of 30 years ago and today (Rosenholtz, 1985; Suber, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

The nation has made efforts to provide equal education for all; however, diversity is taking on a new form other than race (Reardon, 2013). As stated by Reardon (2013), "Although both remain high, economic inequality now exceeds racial inequality in education outcomes" (para 6). Reardon (2013) demonstrated the income gap between those in the 90th percentile and those in the 10th percentile has risen from five times higher earnings to 11 times higher since 1970. Aside from academic needs, students from high-poverty homes often come to school with various nutritional, social, and emotional needs increasing the difficulty of the educational process (Balfanz, 2011; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Jensen, 2013).

Reforms aimed at improving education as a whole have been influenced by various contributors and studies over the past 30 years. Easton (2012) observed, "In the haste to get something done, education reforms are usually fast-forwarded, starting before people are ready to start and finished before the reform has shown results" (p. 51). Because educators have a tendency to change reform models prematurely and many newer reforms are closely related to the principles described by Rosenholtz (1985), a study of high-performing schools with low-SES students is warranted to determine if these fundamental conventions still hold true today.

Purpose of the Study

The APR was developed to measure the progress of schools toward the goal of Missouri ranking in the top 10 states in education by the year 2020 (MODESE, 2014d). The areas of focus for calculation of APR scores are academic achievement, achievement of subgroups, college and career readiness, attendance, and graduation rate (MODESE, 2014d). As Missouri strives to ascend to the top 10 states in education (MODESE, 2014d), building leaders, administrators, and teachers are seeking approaches to improve schools. High-achieving districts should be studied to determine factors contributing to continued progress. In Missouri, 54 regular school districts and two charter schools achieved APR scores above 95% in both the 2013 and 2014 school years (MODESE, 2014f).

By the standards set forth in Missouri, these 54 school districts scoring over 95% on the APR were considered highly effective in meeting the identified areas of focus (MODESE, 2014d, 2014f). The average free and reduced price meal rate for these districts was just over 42% (MODESE, 2014j). Seventeen of these high-achieving districts had a free and reduced meal rate of over 50%, and as a group averaged 65% (MODESE, 2014j).

Rosenholtz (1985) described the challenges faced by inner city schools with a high population of low-SES students. Rosenholtz (1985) synthesized information from various studies focused on elementary schools found to be effective despite the aforementioned characteristics. The findings can be generalized into four principles of effective schools: decreasing teacher isolation, setting and monitoring goals for student achievement, employing leaders focused on running interference for teachers, and hiring

strong teachers who are like-minded in practice and goals (Rosenholtz, 1985). The purpose of this study was to bring a conceptual framework of significance to the forefront and to determine implications for districts serving a large population of low-SES students. Current schools, with similar conditions as those in Rosenholtz's (1985) original work, were studied to determine the applicability of 30-year-old principles.

Research questions. The research questions used to guide the study were as follows:

1. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high Annual Performance Report scores (APR) decreasing teacher isolation?

2. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high APR scores maintaining a skilled teaching staff with similar values?

3. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high APR scores setting and monitoring goals?

4. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high APR scores removing non-instructional tasks for teachers?

5. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high APR scores maintaining a collaborative school culture?

Significance of the Study

Data from the MODESE (2014j) related a large number of Missouri school districts with free and reduced price meal rates over 50%. Current studies revealed evidence supporting a rise in poverty nationwide (Kena et al., 2014). Research has exposed lower achievement for students of lower-SES families (Cutuli et al., 2013; Ladd, 2012; Mulligan et al., 2014). With continued emphasis on the achievement of subgroups

in district evaluations (MODESE, 2014d), a study of schools achieving high-APR ratings is valuable to other schools with similar socio-economic demographics.

This study was designed to uncover specific strategies being used by successful districts and common themes communicated by building leaders. Prior to realization of anticipated outcomes, current reforms in education can be replaced and implementation is often rushed (Easton, 2012). The themes determined by the current study can serve as guiding principles when assessing areas of necessary reform focus, deliberating the implementation of new programs, and selecting new staff members.

Qualities of potential leaders and teachers can be evaluated to gauge attitudes in relation to the themes prior to employment. Careful selection of new hires was found to be common among research of successful high-poverty districts (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). Low-SES schools often experience difficulty obtaining and retaining effective teachers (Morgan, 2012), while staff stability can affect the climate within the school (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Interview questions designed to unearth beliefs linked to the findings of the current study can potentially lead to a well-suited hire and can lengthen retention, which in-turn promotes stability.

The means to realization of a vision for school districts lies in discussion of the culture (Kohler-Evans, Webster-Smith, & Albritton, 2013). As defined by Kohler-Evans et al. (2013), “It is the manifestation of the written and unwritten rules, behaviors, traditions, beliefs, and expectations that undergird everything that happens in the life of the school” (p. 22). The actions of those involved in the school can be influenced by the establishment of a continuous climate (Kohler-Evans et al., 2013). Commonalities among successful schools challenged by the additional obstacles that accompany high-

poverty may possibly enlighten others searching for standards on which to base school culture.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Annual performance report (APR). An APR score is the value computed by the MODESE (2014d) to measure the progress of Missouri school districts toward the ascension to the top 10 states in education by the year 2020.

Charter school. As defined by the MODESE (2014b) website, "Charter schools are independent public schools that are free from rules and regulations that apply to traditional public school districts unless specifically identified in charter school law" (para. 1).

Free and reduced price meal rate. Free and reduced price meal rate is the percentage of students in a school population who qualify for meals priced at 40 cents or less based on household size and income or who qualify due to receiving government assistance or as part of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (MODESE, 2014i; United States Department of Agriculture, 2013).

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified:

Longitudinal data. The sample was selected based on APR scores using only two years of data. Due to recent changes made to the evaluation system used by the MODESE, a larger pool of data was not available for use at the time of participant recruitment.

Instrument. The questions posed by the researcher to the interviewees were a limitation of the study, as responses were formed according to the phrasing of the questions and might be perceived differently than intended. Although field tests were conducted and attempts were made to re-direct responses with follow-up questions, this may have affected the initial impression of the questions, and therefore, the answers.

The following assumptions were noted in this study:

The interviewees responded to the questions with the truth based on their perceptions rather than what actually existed. Without the investigation of further evidence to confirm the statements, the honesty of the participants was assumed.

Summary

This study was designed to allow for comparison of the findings of effective high-poverty schools in 1985 to schools with similar characteristics in 2015. The subsequent chapters include in-depth description of the components of the study. In Chapter Two, current literature is reviewed regarding the principles from the 1985 study by Rosenholtz. Specific information about the design of the study is found in Chapter Three, including information about the population and sample selected. Chapter Four contains the specific data collected and analyzed during the investigation, while conclusions and suggestions generated through the research process are discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Poverty is a growing issue in the United States (Kena et al., 2014). In the school year ending in 2000, 45% of students in the United States attended a school where one-quarter or fewer qualified for free or reduced price meals (Kena et al., 2014). By 2012, that number had decreased to 28% (Kena et al., 2014). Students of low socio-economic status (SES) often enter school facing emotional and behavioral problems in addition to being behind academically (Balfanz, 2011). Other domestic struggles affecting children include poorly maintained housing, elevated stress levels, deficient schools and daycare, and decreased parental time due to work schedules and/or single parenting (Duncan, Magnuson, & Votruba-Drzal, 2014).

Students often do not begin at the same level of academic preparedness making it improbable all students reach the same standards when time is held constant (Tienken, 2012). The beginning of a longitudinal research project following children who began kindergarten in the 2010-2011 school year and who advanced to first grade the subsequent year, has preliminary findings that exemplify the inability of children in poverty to catch their more economically advantaged peers (Mulligan et al., 2014). Of those studied, about 22% came from homes where the income levels "fell below the federal poverty level during their kindergarten year" (Mulligan et al., 2014, p. 2).

Reading and math scale scores were disaggregated as follows by household income in relation to the federal poverty level: income over 200% of poverty level, 100-199%, and below 100% (Mulligan et al., 2014). Although reading mean scores of all three groups increased by approximately 14 points over the course of first grade, those in the lowest income group were still nearly 10 points behind students with the highest

income level (Mulligan et al., 2014). Results in math showed an increase of approximately 13 points for the two lower income groups and a little over 12 points of growth for students in the highest income level (Mulligan et al., 2014). The highest-poverty students began first grade nearly 10 points behind in math, and after a year of growth, remained at almost the same deficit from students in the highest income level (Mulligan et al., 2014). Kyle (2011) termed these students as "stuck," meaning that although the learner experiences a year of academic growth, he/she will remain behind due to starting school at a below average level (p. 16). Tienken (2012) suggested legislators reconsider the idea all children reach a specific level and instead shift accountability as dependent upon the growth of individual students.

Recent studies have validated the inverse relationship between poverty and achievement (Cutuli et al., 2013; Duncan, Morris, & Rodrigues, 2011; Ladd, 2012). Cutuli et al. (2013) demonstrated the existence of achievement deficits among differing poverty groups. Nationally normed reading and math tests were analyzed by dividing data into four student groups (Cutuli et al., 2013). The groups were defined by family income and stability of housing (Cutuli et al., 2013).

Longitudinal data over grades three through eight indicated scores are lower as income decreases (Cutuli et al., 2013). Students who received reduced meal rates, having family income below 185% of the poverty line, maintained scores at or near the national norm, while those receiving free meals, having family income below 130% of the poverty line, consistently exhibited scores below their aforementioned peers (Cutuli et al., 2013). With the additional challenge of being identified as "homeless and highly mobile" (p. 841), student scores fell below all groups while marks from students in the "general" (p.

845) category were consistently above all groups including the national norm (Cutuli et al., 2013).

Ladd (2012) compared random samples of eighth-grade reading and math scores to state poverty rates. Although some outliers existed, the data demonstrated an inverse relationship between poverty rates and test scores in both areas (Ladd, 2012). Ladd (2012) presented evidence to support this relationship as also true internationally using reading scores of 15-year-old students in 14 different countries. Collectively, students from families with higher "economic, cultural, and social status" produced higher reading scores (Ladd, 2012, p. 208).

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) reading achievement scores of fourth-grade students in the United States also exhibited data with a negative relationship between poverty and reading achievement. (Thompson et al., 2012). Scores from schools in the lowest poverty category, less than 10% free or reduced-price lunch rate, averaged 605 while scores steadily decreased as the rate of free or reduced-price lunch increased (Thompson et al., 2012). The average reading scores of students attending schools in the highest poverty category, 75% or more students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, achieved average scores 85 points lower than those attending schools in the lowest poverty category (Thompson et al., 2012).

An increase in family income may bring about higher achievement scores (Duncan et al., 2014; Duncan et al., 2011). Duncan et al. (2011) collected data by randomly assigning participants receiving government assistance to programs focused on reducing dependency on this aid. Various strategies included allowing a higher income before reducing aid, income supplements, increased help with child care, and additional

training or education (Duncan et al., 2011). An increase in student achievement of 6% of one standard deviation existed after earning an additional $1,000 yearly during a two- to five-year period (Duncan et al., 2011). After examining studies regarding the relationship between family income increases and the age of children when the financial boost occurred, Duncan et al. (2014) concluded the timing of economic increases did affect achievement to a certain degree. Young school-age children exhibited elevated test scores while older students tended to graduate high school and were more likely to pursue higher education (Duncan et al., 2014).

Missouri schools displayed poverty with over 60% of schools reporting a student population of 50% or higher qualifying for free and reduced price meals (MODESE, 2014i). This study was designed to identify schools in Missouri that are effective despite high rates of poverty and to determine the common factors contributing to success. Comparisons were made to fundamentals of high-achieving, high-needs schools from 30 years ago to ascertain the application to schools with similar challenges today.

The literature review was designed to relate concepts from Rosenholtz's 1985 paper to current studies. The review begins with a detailed analysis and summary of Rosenholtz's (1985) framework followed by current information specific to each area. The headings include the following: qualities of effective principals, safeguarding teacher efforts, employment and retention of effective teachers, establishing and monitoring goals, and decreasing teacher isolation. Through review of the literature, it became evident successful high-poverty schools still rely on the basic principles of employing strong leaders who work to increase teacher collaboration, maintaining a skilled teaching staff, setting and monitoring shared student achievement goals, and decreasing non-

instructional tasks for teachers (Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985; Suber, 2011). Other information related to best practices of the above-stated areas are included as well.

Conceptual Framework

The guiding context for this study was a paper written in 1985 by Rosenholtz entitled "Effective Schools: Interpreting the Evidence." In her writing, Rosenholtz (1985) analyzed studies about inner-city schools with a predominantly low-SES student population while maintaining a high level of achievement. Based on this analysis, common characteristics were found among these schools. Although an in-depth reading of the study by Rosenholtz (1985) reveals many specific attributes of successful schools, the following statements can be used to categorize her findings: the presence of a strong building leader who works to diminish feelings of teacher isolation, the setting and monitoring of common student achievement goals, attention given by the principal to eliminate teacher time spent on non-instructional issues, and the acquisition and maintenance of a skilled faculty with common values. Specific information from the original work by Rosenholtz (1985) follows.

Rosenholtz (1985) discovered many of the factors contributing to successful schools with numerous low-SES students stem from actions of building leadership. Four leadership actions common among successful principals were noted: a positive attitude toward the possibility of goal attainment, planning with goals always in mind, stating clear-cut operational goals, and plainly communicating these goals to stakeholders (as cited in Rosenholtz, 1985). Following are specific ways related to the methods principals used complete these deeds.

An overarching theme in Rosenholtz's (1985) paper was the need to increase clarity for teachers in regard to teacher and student expectations, learning goals, and behavior. As stated in her paper, "Uncertainty about the technology of teaching and its capacity to bring about positive changes in student achievement is the enemy of rational planning and action" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 360). Actions found to reduce the amount of "uncertainty" included engaging teachers in collaborative problem solving, shared goal setting, clear communication, and frequent feedback in the form of teacher evaluations (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 360). Effective building administrators used teacher evaluations to provide examples of acceptable practice and to identify teachers who needed extra guidance (Rosenholtz, 1985). Frequent classroom visits also showed teachers their importance in the quest for student success (Rosenholtz, 1985).

A more understated theme in Rosenholtz's (1985) work was the use of time. When educators in a building are like-minded about aspired outcomes and means by which to achieve them, less time can be spent figuring out what to do and more time can be spent working toward accomplishing objectives (Rosenholtz, 1985). This was true not only for curriculum, but for desired student behavior as well (Rosenholtz, 1985). It was found many teachers in low-SES schools spent a fair amount of instructional time acting in a parental role for students (Rosenholtz, 1985). Developing unified procedures for classroom management allows the teacher to spend more time instructing students (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Teachers are often asked to complete tasks that, although seemingly necessary, are not directly related to the instructional process (Rosenholtz, 1985). Effective leaders are attentive to such occurrences and find ways to lessen or eliminate these distracting

tasks (Rosenholtz, 1985). Rosenholtz (1985) called this "buffering teachers" by decreasing paperwork, protecting instructional time, and delineating procedures to increase clarity related to teaching and to allow more time for skill acquisition (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 354). Rosenholtz (1985) found the ability to abate non-instructional work to be common among the principals in effective school studies.

Other leader behaviors were found as common among the studies cited by Rosenholtz (1985). These included the positive attitude of the leader in regard to the ability of teachers to move students toward achieving the objectives (Rosenholtz, 1985). Maintaining high expectations and making procurement of certain learning standards by all students mandatory are also cited as necessary for successful principals of a low-SES population (as cited in Rosenholtz, 1985).

Aside from effective leadership, Rosenholtz (1985) found other factors to be instrumental in the success of low-SES schools. Employing and retaining quality classroom teachers in these schools was found to be problematic; however, it was essential to the attainment of goals (Rosenholtz, 1985). Rosenholtz (1985) defined a critical problem of low-SES schools by stating, "…good teachers are difficult to recruit and almost impossible to retain because the rewards of teaching do not outweigh the frustrations" (p. 352). High teacher turn-over leads to inexperienced teachers being placed in situations where competent teaching is most challenging as effective teachers seek employment at schools found intrinsically more rewarding (as cited in Rosenholtz, 1985). A reduction in teacher turn-over allows principals to spend more time on progress toward goals rather than tasks associated with hiring and evaluating new teachers (Rosenholtz, 1985). The importance of recruiting skilled teachers is further compounded

by the need to maintain consistency of organizational goals throughout the staff (Rosenholtz, 1985). For this to be maintained, new hires must not only be competent, but must share goals with existing staff (Rosenholtz, 1985). Rosenholtz (1985) summarized, "Thus by carefully controlling the flow of teachers, the homogeneity of values between faculty members in effective schools is sustained" (p. 362). Profound changes take time, and staff stability helps in the progression toward needed outcomes (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Consensus of organizational goals is another aspect discussed by Rosenholtz (1985) as apparent in successful low-SES schools. Rosenholtz (1985) affirmed, "Agreement about goals and means to achieve them increases the school's capacity for rational planning and action" (p. 360). Established goals and measures that allow cognizance of accomplishing wanted results were common in studies of effective schools (Rosenholtz, 1985). This included alignment of academic and behavioral standards which also decreases uncertainty (Rosenholtz, 1985). Effective principals recognized teachers for student successes which served as a catalyst to continued work (Rosenholtz, 1985).

The demise of teachers working in isolation shows congruence with the theme of decreasing uncertainty (Rosenholtz, 1985). As teachers are encouraged to collaborate about curriculum, teaching practices, and goals, a higher level of ownership is attained by each participant (Rosenholtz, 1985). Effective schools have "norms of continuous improvement" that are established and fostered by the relationships built among colleagues through collaboration and unification of purposes (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 377). Such schools were described by Rosenholtz (1985) as "places of intellectual sharing, collaborative planning, and collegial work" (p. 365). Teachers participate in decision-

making and feel less alone in the unique challenges faced when teaching low-SES students (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Low-achieving schools today face similar struggles as those described by Rosenholtz (Le Floch et al., 2014; Rosenholtz, 1985; Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). Forty-two teachers were asked to provide opinions about methods to improve schools (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). The four most mentioned themes were "time with reform, leader consistency, accountability versus need, and teach diverse students" (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011, p. 211). In a case study of 25 high-poverty schools, researchers evaluated progress one year after receiving a grant for improvement (Le Floch et al., 2014). The 25 schools identified factors contributing to low performance including the following: poverty or other factors outside the school; ineffective leadership; student behaviors such as attendance, motivation, and discipline; instructional quality; hiring and retaining quality teachers; and a non-collaborative school culture with low expectations (Le Floch et al., 2014). A qualitative study of current college students who attended high schools consisting of a high minority, low-SES population affirmed the need for high expectations from educators (Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, & Platt, 2011). During focus group interviews, many students credited the efforts of a handful of adults who advocated for students; however, comments indicated the vast majority of teachers held low expectations for students which was reciprocated and spread throughout the school (Reddick et al., 2011).

Current studies of successful schools revealed commonalities to the doctrines stated by Rosenholtz (Rosenholtz, 1985; Suber, 2011). As stated by Suber (2011), "Effective School Research suggests that successful student learning is linked to the

following school characteristics: alignment of instruction and assessment, focused professional development, effective monitoring of instruction, reduction of teacher attrition, and a positive school culture" (p. 2). To describe the attributes commonly exhibited by principals of outstanding high-poverty schools, Suber (2011) used mixed methods to study two such schools that received awards for performance by the state. Consistency was found between the preceding characteristics suggested by research and the schools studied in all five areas (Suber, 2011). These findings illustrate congruence to aforementioned precepts of sharing common goals for student achievement, frequent evaluations, providing support for teachers, retaining quality teachers, and belief in actualization of goals (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Qualities of Effective Principals

In studies of school leaders, researchers concluded fundamentals that parallel Rosenholtz's work (Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985). Seven superintendents of rural schools, having at least 40% of students being economically disadvantaged, participated in a qualitative study (Forner et al., 2012). The superintendents selected were from schools displaying improvement over a minimum of five years (Forner et al., 2012). After analyzing interviews of the superintendents and other stakeholders, common priorities emerged in the data (Forner et al., 2012). The confidence every student could be a successful learner was paramount for all superintendents (Forner et al., 2012). The priority of employing effective teachers was a second shared belief (Forner et al., 2012). Although not necessarily developed collaboratively, the practice of setting and monitoring goals was also prevalent in the study (Forner et al., 2012). The use of "peer coaching" to support and improve teaching

practices was mentioned as a way to help improve instructional practice (Forner et al., 2012, p. 7). These findings are related to the habits of the principals in Rosenholtz's findings (Forner et al., 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985).

A study of nine high-poverty, high-achieving Ohio schools also paralleled with Rosenholtz's cited administrator qualities (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985). Hagelskamp and DiStasi's (2012) study included three regular public schools, five public schools which obtain enrollment by a lottery system, and one charter school, all of which had proven academic success by various measures. Again, leaders were found to project an attitude all students are capable of achievement (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012).

Sixteen common characteristics of principals in the study included the following five: "take responsibility for consistent school wide discipline, work with staff to improve instructional practices, promote teamwork and collaboration among staff, respond to staff suggestions and needs, and hire with care and strategy" (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012, p. 11). These five practices directly related to the attributes of principals found by Rosenholtz (1985), such as reducing ambiguity of classroom procedures and instruction, helping teachers needing improvement, increasing teacher collaboration, decreasing obstacles to instruction, and selecting new hires with similar values. Support for the continued significance of Rosenholtz's (1985) findings can be displayed by the production of aligned results from newer studies (Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985; Suber, 2011).

Leaders must utilize a variety of leadership styles to be successful in struggling schools (Le Floch et al., 2014; Pepper, 2010). Pepper (2010) argued for a meshing of

leadership styles including the ability to create a highly structured school environment that promotes learning while also creating a culture of collaboration and shared leadership that promotes change. In an analysis of schools one year after receiving school improvement grants, it was found all but four of the 25 principals studied received medium to high scores in the areas of transformational, instructional, and strategic leadership (Le Floch et al., 2014). The qualities of a servant leader, recognized by Waite (2011) after analysis of work by five authors, related closely to both high structure and shared leadership. Of the 10 mentioned characteristics, truly listening to people, showing empathy, using persuasion over coercion, and helping others within the organization grow, were five common practices of servant leaders (Waite, 2011).

Safeguarding Teacher Efforts

Sharing leadership opportunities while maintaining procedural structure is necessary for school improvement (Pepper, 2010). According to a qualitative study of teachers in beginning career stages, new teachers struggle to achieve acceptable classroom management and many report insufficient or inconsistent discipline from other teachers and principals (Buchanan et al., 2013). Behaviors associated with disengagement in learning top the list of undesired student behaviors in an Australian study (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014). Teachers who examine teaching practices correct this issue (Sullivan et al., 2014). Leaders can review and amend school procedures to gain both instructional and collaboration time for teachers, leading to improved instruction (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). School leaders can provide support in the form of resources and peer coaches to enhance teaching practices (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Nooruddin and Baig (2014) examined the influence of school leadership on behavior management. After analyzing surveys of teachers and students, data confirmed the influence of the building leader on classroom management (Nooruddin & Baig, 2014). Of the 37 participating teachers, 93% provided responses in agreement to the importance of backing by leadership (Nooruddin & Baig, 2014). Support from leaders was given through establishment of behavior guidelines, classroom visits and evaluations, inclusion of parents, and consequences and awards for students (Nooruddin & Baig, 2014). All results were favorable on the side of agreement for the areas surveyed with the lowest being 58% of students agreeing to the effect of "awards and consequences" on behavior (Nooruddin & Baig, 2014, p. 30).

Instruction is most effective when loss of instructional time to transition, discipline, and administrative tasks is minimized (Suber, 2011). Consistent discipline throughout the school is apparent in successful high-poverty schools (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985). Effective discipline and classroom management are found to increase instructional time for students who often need it the most (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013).

Studies indicated utilizing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) produced a reduction in office referrals by approximately two-thirds (Scott, Regina, & Barber, 2012; Tyre, Feuerborn, & Pierce, 2011). Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, also termed School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS), "…is a prevention-oriented way for school personnel to (a) organize evidence-based practices, (b) improve their implementation of those practices, and (c) maximize academic and social behavior outcome for students" (Technical Assistance Center on Positive

Behavioral Interventions and Supports¸ 2015, para. 3). Expectations for student behavior and uniform consequences are agreed upon by the faculty, communicated to the students, and then implemented while continually monitoring data (Scott et al., 2012).

Tyre et al. (2011) focused on the undesirable behavior of tardiness. After analyzing the problem and enacting a school-wide plan, a decrease occurred from approximately 70 reports of student tardiness per day to an average of 20 per day. Procedures for implementation included educating students on expectations, developing a plan for supervision by administrators and teachers, and applying consistent consequences (Tyre et al., 2011).

Scott et al. (2012) tested PBIS methods on a student population comprised of 54% of students qualifying for free and reduced priced meals and about 14% of students who moved into or out of the district over the course of a school year. Important components included tracking data, having faculty-wide conversations about how to improve student behavior, and coming to consensus on a plan of action (Scott et al., 2012). The reduction in office referrals led to a decrease in time students spend out of class, and possibly a substantial increase in instructional time (Scott et al., 2012). Development of common discipline procedures throughout a school building has been found to decrease behavior issues that lead to the loss of instructional time (Rosenholtz, 1985; Scott et al., 2012; Tyre et al., 2011).

Employment and Retention of Effective Teachers

Because student achievement is dependent on quality instruction, it is evident high-poverty schools often employ less effective teachers (Max & Glazerman, 2014). Although many discuss the need for effective teachers, the urgency is communicated

when stated, “Recruiting capable teachers is critical to creating the breadth and depth of expertise within a faculty necessary to undertake significant school development” (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006, p. 12). Teachers determine the “professional capacity” of a school when considering the ability to work as a collaborative team, the presence of focused professional development, the recruitment and retention of skilled teachers, and the belief in core attitudes (Sebring et al., 2006, p. 12).

Morgan (2012) conveyed teacher quality in low-SES schools was a major contributor to low student achievement. Research in countries with higher scores on student achievement indicators than the United States has shown the best teachers are placed with students who have the most difficulty with skill acquisition (Morgan, 2012). An analysis of three studies published by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) found students of low-SES schools do receive less effective teaching in some cases (Max & Glazerman, 2014). The studies included measurements by value-added techniques based on growth in student achievement (Max & Glazerman, 2014). Value-added methods address the contention highly qualified teachers are not necessarily effective instructors (Max & Glazerman, 2014). Findings from the study displayed students in higher-SES middle schools have nearly twice the opportunity to receive effective instruction in math than their lower-SES peers (Max & Glazerman, 2014). The study also showed in the area of English language arts, the likelihood of being placed with an effective teacher rises to two and a half times higher for students in schools with lower rates of poverty (Max & Glazerman, 2014).

Low-SES schools in the United States often have trouble recruiting highly qualified teachers while serving as a stepping stone for teachers as they gain experience and seek employment in higher-SES schools (Morgan, 2012). Using data from over 6,500 school districts, high-poverty districts were found to employ more first- and second-year teachers than lower-poverty districts (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2012). A study of teacher-requested transfers in New York City schools also supported the idea of the most difficult-to-teach students receiving the least-trained teachers (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2010).

Although some non-traditional teacher certification programs required service in low-achieving schools upon completion, the study's researchers found teachers, who possessed characteristics consistent with effectiveness, generally taught in schools with the lowest number of minority and low-achieving students (Boyd et al., 2010). A qualitative study of teachers was conducted to analyze factors contributing to teacher retention during the first four years of teaching (Buchanan et al., 2013). Six common themes emerged: "…collegiality and support, student engagement and behavior [*sic*] management, working conditions and teaching resources, professional learning, workload, and isolation" (Buchanan et al., 2013, p. 118).

Successful schools with a low-SES student population take hiring new teachers seriously (Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). Schools often involve existing staff in the interview process to insure teacher fit and alignment of values with current employees (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). As stated in an Ohio study of nine high-poverty schools, "When hiring new staff, many of the principals and teachers we spoke to said that a decisive factor is whether a prospective teacher is a good team player,

shared the school's mind-set and expresses genuine commitment to collaboration" (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012, p. 16).

Teacher shortages are often blamed for hiring less qualified teachers, but Morgan (2012) pointed out, "If teachers were paid well, trained well, and supported well, chances are there would not be a problem with teacher shortages" (p. 296). Even when effective teachers were offered a bonus of $20,000 as an incentive to move to a high-needs school, only 38% of over 1,000 eligible teachers displayed interest and less than 10% followed through with a transfer (Glazerman, Protik, Teh, Bruch, & Seftor, 2012). Different types of commitment lead to circumstances in which people remain at their current jobs (Battistelli, Galletta, Portoghese, & Vandenberghe, 2013). Those with a high affective commitment, having beliefs that align with those of the organization, are more likely to stay by choice and to have increased job fulfillment (Battistelli et al., 2013).

Teacher retention is also related to school climate in high-poverty schools (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Leaders aspire to create environments that attract teachers despite the challenges of working in a high-needs school (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Work environments should be rich in collaboration, give appreciation for teacher efforts, and use student data in guiding instructional improvement (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Parallels to collegiality, crediting teacher efforts, and setting and monitoring goals are still found to affect teacher retention in high-poverty schools (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985).

Establishing and Monitoring Goals

Schools that have shown success despite the obstacle of high poverty set and monitor goals (Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985). A

study conducted in Saskatchewan included 90 principals who responded to open-ended survey questions regarding the effects of large-scale standardized testing on schools (Prytula, Noonan, & Hellsten, 2013). Half of the respondents found there to be positive effects such as improved motivation to analyze curriculum and set goals (Prytula et al., 2013). Accountability is maintained for students and instructors as progress is monitored (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012).

Children displayed positive response to setting and monitoring individual goals (Hallenbeck & Fleming, 2011). Even when students want to improve on school or life skills, they often do not know what steps to take toward improvement and may experience trouble accessing an available adult who does (Hallenbeck & Fleming, 2011). A goal-setting strategy was implemented and studied during an after-school program for at-risk students which included 73% of participants qualifying for free or reduced price meals (Hallenbeck & Fleming, 2011). Besides the movement toward goal acquisition documented about many participants, researchers suggested benefits resulted from the individual attention given to students by the adults in the program (Hallenbeck & Fleming, 2011).

Evidence to support the benefits of goal setting was evident in a longitudinal study of over 1,200 high school Spanish students (Moeller, Theiler, & Wu, 2012). A quasi-experimental approach was used to test the use of *Liguafolio,* which is defined as "a portfolio that focuses on building autonomous learners through student self-assessment, goal setting, and collection of evidence of language achievement" (Moeller et al., 2012, p. 156). A positive relationship was found between goal setting and

achievement test scores in Spanish language acquisition during the first three years, but waned between the third and fourth years for Spanish students (Moeller et al., 2012).

Aside from monitoring data related to increased accountability of schools required by legislation, analyzing data can help teachers identify gaps in student learning and respond accordingly (Kekahio & Baker, 2013). Teachers use curriculum-based measurements (CBM) to monitor student progress in reading and to identify when modifications to instructional strategies are needed (Jenkins & Terjeson, 2011). Considerations for the use of a CBM are the loftiness of goals, the time taken to assess students, and teachers' time to plan curriculum adjustments (Jenkins & Terjeson, 2011). It was found less intermittent assessments, eight-week intervals, could be adequate to inform instruction; however, setting higher goals resulted in the need for additional changes to instruction (Jenkins & Terjeson, 2011).

Continued monitoring of data can help educators recognize gains, which fuels teacher motivation (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Kekahio & Baker, 2013; Rosenholtz, 1985). When teachers are involved in the movement for change and see results from those changes, improvements will continue (Sebring et al., 2006). Kekahio and Baker (2013) suggested forming data teams that identify the question(s) to be researched, access and examine related data, determine focus on a few challenges, form an action plan, and continue to monitor progress. Although there are many factors related to student learning that are out of the control of educators, it is important to maintain focus on the difficulties teachers are able to influence (Kekahio & Baker, 2013).

Teachers are often most in touch with the abilities and needs of the students, validating teacher voice in establishment of goals (Pepper, 2010). Pepper (2010)

suggested schools will benefit from long-term teacher training emphasizing "shared decision-making processes" rather than costly supplemental programs (p. 44). Evidence from a case study communicates the feelings of teachers toward mandates (Burke & Adler, 2013). The school was composed of many minority children of whom 88% received free or reduced price lunches (Burke & Adler, 2013). A record of sub-standard test scores caused teachers to agree there was a need to improve educational practices, but the method to accomplish this was mandated (Burke & Adler, 2013). Although the two teachers studied engaged in acts that deviated from the prescribed curriculum, the teachers felt they were acting on professional experience and strongly held beliefs to meet the needs of the students (Burke & Adler, 2013). Burke and Adler (2013) stated, "The perpetual reform cycle resulted in constant changing of teachers' roles without any evidence of significant changes in student achievement; the top-down mandates challenged teacher autonomy and instituted prescriptive solutions" (p. 7). If teachers are given a voice in professional development, efforts become more personal and are viewed as methods of reaching professional goals rather than fixing poor teaching (Daly, 2011).

Decreasing Teacher Isolation

Upon analysis of what sets successful low-SES schools apart from lower-achieving counterparts, Rosenholtz (1985) found teachers in struggling schools to be isolated and reluctant to ask for help or even discuss teaching practices. Goman (2014) discussed the negative effects of the "silo mentality," which is the non-sharing of ideas with others to maintain a monopoly on innovative practices (p. 35). A breakdown of trust causes employees to feel collaboration will reduce individual power (Goman, 2014).

Isolation still exists in some schools today and must be addressed to generate productive conversations rather than blaming students, parents, and lack of time for poor student achievement outcomes (Kohler-Evans et al., 2013). As stated by Kohler-Evans et al. (2013), "Absent functional and effective teaming, school personnel try to figure out, individually, why students are not making the necessary gains in their achievement" (p. 20).

Leaders, such as building principals, can strengthen collegial relationships within collaborative groups (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Goman, 2014). Goman (2014) said, "Leaders demonstrate their trust in employees by the open, candid, and ongoing communication that is the foundation of informed collaboration" (p. 35). Ways to support collaboration among teachers include arranging teachers into teams with common objectives, providing professional resources, defining a straightforward purpose, allocating time for teacher participation in the process, and holding teachers accountable for implementation (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). As relationships develop, collaboration continues beyond scheduled meetings, leading to increases in student achievement (Williams, 2013). In Texas, schools identified as Academically Recognized or Academically Exemplary have a culture where teachers continually collaborate even outside of specifically allocated time (Williams, 2013). These schools report 80-90% of students passing state standardized tests (Williams, 2013).

Psencik and Baldwin (2012) documented the collaborative movement of one district toward goal acquisition. Teachers and administrators collaborated to develop common assessments and goals (Psencik & Baldwin, 2012). Reflections on the process

included recognition of the importance of shared leadership and acknowledging the views of all involved (Psencik & Baldwin, 2012).

A school that utilized an extended day program was the subject of a qualitative study that upheld the success of formal and informal collaborative practices (Curwen & Colón-Muñiz, 2013). The school consisted of a high number of English language learners and a free and reduced lunch rate of 80% (Curwen & Colón-Muñiz, 2013). Utilizing collaborative practices of classroom teachers and extended day program teachers, the school's state "Academic Performance Index" (p. 68) improved by approximately 250 points over a six-year period (Curwen & Colón-Muñiz, 2013). Observation, common instructional preparation, and scheduled and unscheduled collaboration opportunities contributed to the success of the extended day program by providing support to the less experienced after-school teachers (Curwen & Colón-Muñiz, 2013). The creation of a team culture and the lack of apprehension to share struggles and corrective strategies were mentioned by participants as valuable practices (Curwen & Colón-Muñiz, 2013).

Teachers with less experience cited the need for collaboration as a key to improve schools (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). Upon interviewing 42 teachers to discern their opinions about the most effective paths to school improvement, the most common theme was "time with reform;" however, the second-most mentioned theme among teachers who had been teaching less than eight years was "peer communication" (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011, p. 211). Participants communicated a desire to heighten the exchange of information, leading to consensus of best practices and decreased isolation (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011).

When working as a collaborative group, energy is created by the camaraderie that develops over time (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012). In a study of the effects of standardized testing, improving teacher collaboration was the leading answer given for methods of increasing test scores (Prytula et al., 2013). Administrators reported having confidence in the ability of teachers within the building to enhance learning through sharing practices and collaborative planning (Prytula et al., 2013). A study of nine successful high-poverty schools in Ohio revealed collaboration as valuable in developing "shared goals and values," using data to drive instruction, and creating common instructional practices among different classrooms (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012, p. 15).

Summary

Schools with high poverty are wrought with various challenges not unlike similar schools three decades ago (Le Floch et al., 2014; Rosenholtz, 1985). Effective schools with a large population of low-SES students depend on competent leaders who can guard instructional time, maintain a quality teaching staff through recruitment and development of teachers, establish and monitor common goals, and boost teacher collaboration (Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985; Suber, 2011). The following chapter provides detailed information about the methods used to collect and analyze data for the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The fundamental approach used when conducting the study is addressed in this chapter. A brief summary of the essential problem investigated and details of the research design are included. The population and sample are described as well as specific information about data collection and analysis.

Problem and Purpose Overview

Nationally, the poverty rate for school children was approximately 20% in 2012, up nearly 6% over the previous five years (Kena et al., 2014). Students in poverty are suffering from a gap in achievement as measured by various indicators including graduation rates from high school and college and scores on standardized tests (Reardon, 2013). Reardon (2013) stated gaps separating income levels and achievement have increased over the past 30 years. Schools facing high-poverty statistics are generally not high-achieving (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). Suber (2011) noted the low number of high-poverty schools in South Carolina that show high performance on state evaluations. In Missouri, over 60% of school districts are comprised of at least 50% of students eligible for free and reduced price meals (MODESE, 2014j). Out of 54 non-charter LEAs in Missouri that had APR scores of 95% or higher in years 2013 and 2014, only 17 of these schools have free and reduced price meal rates over 50% (MODESE, 2014g, 2014j).

In 1985, a paper was published describing the difficulties faced by inner-city schools with high rates of poverty and the characteristics of schools that seemed to defy these odds (Rosenholtz, 1985). Strong leadership focused on maintaining a skilled teaching staff, decreasing isolation of teachers, setting and monitoring achievement goals,

and decreasing time wasted by non-instructional issues were found common among studies of high-achieving schools with large numbers of low-SES students (Rosenholtz, 1985). Current studies show continued support for these findings (Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Le Floch et al., 2014; Suber, 2011).

Research questions. The following research questions guided this study:

1. In what ways are principals in high poverty schools with high Annual Performance Report (APR) scores decreasing teacher isolation?

2. In what ways are principals in high poverty schools with high APR scores maintaining a skilled teaching staff with similar values?

3. In what ways are principals in high poverty schools with high APR scores setting and monitoring goals?

4. In what ways are principals in high poverty schools with high APR scores removing non-instructional tasks for teachers?

5. In what ways are principals in high poverty schools with high APR scores maintaining a collaborative school culture?

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for the study, due to the desire to understand a "central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 16). According to Creswell (2012), "A central phenomenon is the key concept, idea, or process studied in qualitative research" (p. 16). In this study, the central phenomenon is the existence of school districts that despite high rates of poverty show high scores in academic achievement, subgroup achievement, college and career readiness, attendance rate, and graduation rate as measured by the MSIP standards. The actual cause for high marks under these

circumstances is unknown. When an anomaly like this occurs and the factors which led to this are unidentified, qualitative research methods are needed (Creswell, 2012). Data were collected via personal interviews to avoid the presence of preconceived beliefs of the researcher (Yin, 2011). By removing restricted responses, created by tools such as surveys, participants may express their precise meaning (Yin, 2011).

Population and Sample

In 2012, Missouri received approval from the federal government to hold teachers accountable using the fifth edition of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) (MODESE, 2014d). The fifth cycle of MSIP has been implemented to promote and encourage schools to improve in the areas of academic achievement, subgroup achievement, college and career readiness, attendance, and graduation rate (MODESE, 2014d). Scores in all areas evaluated are summed to reach an APR total for schools which is reported as a percentage (MODESE, 2014d).

At the time the participants were recruited, data existed showing the APR scores of schools for the school years ending in 2013 and 2014. Out of the approximately 563 local education agencies in Missouri, 56 earned APR scores of 95% or higher in both years (MODESE, 2014g). The population to be studied included school districts scoring over 95% APR as evaluated by the MODESE in the 2013 and 2014 school years. Two charter schools were not included in the population or the sample because of the possibility of extreme differences from the rest of the population. Charter schools are not held to the same requirements as traditional public schools (MODESE, 2014b) and may not have similar challenges without required adherence to these regulations. After elimination of the charter schools, 54 districts remained in the population.

Achievement of high APR percentage signifies success in the progression toward the goals set forth by the MODESE in pursuit of the 2020 deadline for Missouri to reach the top 10 states in education. While maintaining a high level of APR, the districts in the population varied greatly in areas such as civics, total enrollment, student-teacher ratios, and demographics (MODESE, 2014e). Schools in this group were found in both rural and urban areas with enrollments ranging from 31 to 17,157 students in 2014 (MODESE, 2014f). Cumulatively, 2014 data showed the average percentage of students receiving free or reduced price meals in the population was just over 42%, while the percentages ranged from 12.3% to 87.5% (MODESE, 2014g). The student-to-classroom teacher ratio averaged nearly 15 students to one classroom teacher; however, this ranged from six to 21 students per classroom teacher (MODESE, 2014h).

Most of the schools were predominantly Caucasian with the lowest percentage of White students reported at just over 60% for one school in the group, and the highest at 100% White (MODESE, 2014j). One district reported an African American population at approximately 25%, while another had a Hispanic population of nearly 14% (MODESE, 2014g). One district consisted of over 10% Asian students, nearly 20% African American, and over 60% Caucasian (MODESE, 2014j). Although high-achieving, the districts in the population exhibited vast differences.

The school districts in the sample were acute representatives of the population. A purposeful sample was needed to make a comparison to the theoretical framework set forth by Rosenholtz (1985). Purposeful sampling is used when researchers deliberately select participants who offer substantial information in explaining a significant development (as cited in Creswell, 2012). Rosenholtz (1985) synthesized information on

studies conducted about inner-city elementary schools with low socio-economics, which proved to be educationally effective. In an attempt to determine if the principles of the Rosenholtz (1985) study still hold true, schools having APR scores above 95% for two consecutive years and a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced price meals based on 2014 data were selected.

By selecting schools with high APR and a high percentage of free and reduced price meal recipients for participation, the use of extreme case sampling was exemplified. Creswell (2012) stated, "Researchers identify these cases by locating persons or organizations that others have cited for achievements or distinguishing characteristics (e.g., certain elementary schools targeted for federal assistance)" (p. 208). Seventeen non-charter districts from the population exhibited APR scores of over 95% and free and reduced price meal rates of over 50% (MODESE, 2014g; MODESE, 2014j).

The districts in the sample had free and reduced price meal rates averaging over 60% and ranging over 50% to over 70% (MODESE, 2014j). According to calculations made using data from the MODESE (2014a), the typical classroom teacher in the sample averaged over 13 years of experience, and the districts had student-to-classroom teacher ratios that averaged less than 20- to- one (MODESE, 2014h). The ethnicity of the sample was lacking diversity due to all schools in the sample having over 90% Caucasian students (MODESE, 2014f). While the average district enrollment for the population was over 2,100 students, the average enrollment for the sample was under 900 students (MODESE, 2014f). Although all district statistics did not fall in line with population averages, the sample was a remarkable portion of the population based on APR scores and free and reduced price meal rates.

The work of Rosenholtz (1985) shows the principal as an integral player in effective schools, leading the researcher to interview building principals. A list including school districts scoring over 95% on the APR in both 2013 and 2014 was created. Using 2014 data, the districts were arranged by free and reduced price meal percentage from highest to lowest. Charter schools and elementary-only districts were eliminated so that only public schools serving pre-kindergarten and/or kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) remained. Charter schools are not held to the same regulations as regular public schools (MODESE, 2014b) and may not experience the same challenges. The calculation of the APR for a K-12 school district includes categories and achievement scores that are not applicable to elementary-only districts, causing differences in the meaning of the scores between these two groups.

Recruitment of principals serving the highest percentages of students receiving free and reduced price meals began via electronic mail (see Appendix A). If a response was not received within one week, an attempt to contact each principal was made by telephone (see Appendix B). Upon electronic or verbal consent to participate, a formal letter of recruitment (see Appendix C), a letter of informed consent (see Appendix D), and an interview protocol (see Appendix E) were mailed to the potential participant. Recruitment continued until a minimum of five elementary and five secondary principals consented to participate in the study.

According to MODESE (2014c) certification requirements, a principal serving students in grades kindergarten through eight is considered an elementary principal. Administrators leading buildings of grades seven through 12 are considered secondary principals (MODESE, 2014c). A principal of grades five through nine is considered a

middle school principal (MODESE, 2014c). For this study, when administrators existed in the overlap between elementary and secondary (grades five through nine), they were not recruited for the study due to the inability to clearly define as elementary or secondary, and the inconsistent existence of this type of grade configuration would justify a third category.

Instrumentation

During a qualitative study, the use of a fixed instrument is not apparent at the outset; however, preparation of questions and interview protocols are necessary (Creswell, 2012). An interview protocol (adapted from Creswell, 2012) was used (see Appendix E) with questions focused on the variables leading to the success of the district. Because information being sought from the participants was somewhat unknown, the questions asked were designed to allow for open-ended answers from the interviewees to minimize the influence of the researcher on the answers (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) suggested beginning with four to five broad questions as part of the interview protocol that may flex as new information is obtained from the participants and the need for probing questions for clarifying or elaborating becomes evident. Besides being reviewed by the dissertation committee, two field tests were conducted prior to the actual interviews to insure validity of questions (Creswell, 2012).

Data Collection

Using school district APR data, a list of schools was created including districts scoring over 95% in both the 2013 and 2014 school years. Data from 2014 were used to record the percentage of enrolled students receiving free or reduced price meals and were

sorted from high to low percentage. Schools above 95% APR with high rates of free and reduced meal price percentage were targeted for consent to include in the study.

Data collection occurred in the form of personal, one-to-one interviews with building principals. Qualitative research has not been the leading research method in education; however, using the interview process allows the researcher to gain insight into the actual experiences of people (Seidman, 2013). Interviews occurring in person are preferable for gaining true perceptions from the interviewees; however, this may not be feasible in some cases (Creswell, 2012). One-to-one interviews were conducted, audio recorded, and transcribed for the coding process.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed as suggested by Yin (2011) and Creswell (2012) in regard to qualitative studies. During interviews, responses were audio recorded and then transcribed into text documents. The data were read and re-read many times to develop a heightened understanding of the meanings within the words in order to find emerging themes by coding similar phrases (Creswell, 2012). Yin (2011) suggested five phases during analysis: "1. Compiling, 2. Disassembling, 3. Reassembling (and Arraying), 4. Interpreting, and 5. Concluding" (p. 177). According to Creswell (2012), "Coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (p. 243). Yin (2011) described a similar procedure during the reassembling stage where coded portions are organized together. The researcher looked to define universal learnings, based on reasoning and perceptions that can be gleaned from the data during the interpreting stage (Yin, 2011).

The results of a qualitative study are specific to the perspective of the researcher as one seeks to categorize the information collected (Creswell, 2012). Findings are reported as a narrative discussion as is common among qualitative studies (Creswell, 2012). Results were compared to the original study by Rosenholtz (1985) for similarities.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to recruitment and commencement of the study procedures (see Appendix F). Attention to manners and procedures that caused the least amount of disruption possible to the schools were taken (Creswell, 2012). Confidentiality and anonymity are important in qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2012). In this study, building administrators were interviewed and asked to reveal information regarding success in a high-poverty district. Interviews were conducted during the summer when fewer students and teachers were in attendance to decrease the amount of disruption to the schedule of the administrator during the demands of a regular school day. The actual names of the principals consenting to the study were not revealed in the analysis of the data. The researcher separated data that would directly connect the comments of a participant to information that would positively identify him/her and the district by which employed. Participants were given a document of informed consent which stated he/she may withdraw from the study at any time.

Summary

Studying schools with a high APR can be of value to leaders in districts confronting high poverty. Use of data obtained from the MODESE helped identify school districts that can be studied to explain the central phenomenon of student success

aside from the existence of economic challenges. A qualitative study can result in information about factors contributing to the success of a district. It can be determined whether or not these variables are similar to those reported 30 years ago. Attention to procedures approved by the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board were identified and followed. Personal one-on-one interviews were used to elicit information regarding district success by employing questions that have been reviewed, field tested, and revised. Data obtained during the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in pursuit of answering the research questions. Reporting of the data is included in the following chapter with the aforementioned ethical considerations in mind.

Chapter Four provides an analysis of the data. Topics discussed in the fifth chapter include the findings and conclusions from the investigation, as well as implications for practice generated as a result of the study.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

Background

Over 60% of Missouri schools consist of a student population with 50% or more students receiving free and reduced price meals (MODESE, 2014j). As demonstrated by recent studies, student achievement scores generally decline with a decrease in socio-economic status (Cutuli et al., 2013; Ladd, 2012; Mulligan et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2012). Missouri school districts are being held accountable by the state and are monitored based on APR scores as described by the Comprehensive Guide to the Missouri School Improvement Program which includes the free and reduced price meal student population as a sub-group (MODESE, 2014d). By examining schools that achieve high APR scores while reporting a high percentage of low-SES students, insight can be gained by other educators who are also experiencing the challenges presented by educating a high-poverty student population.

After identifying a population of high-achieving schools with a high number of low-SES students, a sample of building leaders were recruited beginning with those in districts with the highest free and reduced price meal percentages. Due to the importance of the building leader as described by Rosenholtz (1985) and the desire of the researcher to determine the continued validity of the thirty-year-old findings, building principals were recruited for the study. Qualitative methodology was utilized in the form of personal interviews. The questions posed were influenced by Rosenholtz (1985), field tested, and reviewed by the dissertation committee. The Interview Protocol was adapted from Creswell (2012) and consisted of 14 questions based on themes found in Rosenholtz (1985). The themes included the function of the principal, hiring and retaining effective

teachers, setting and monitoring goals, and decreasing the feeling of isolation felt by teachers in the school (Rosenholtz, 1985). Participants were allowed to review the questions before the interviews.

The interviews were audio taped to assure accurate recording of the participants' responses. Nine building principals and one assistant principal employed in five different school districts agreed to participate in the interviews. Five of the principals served in elementary buildings while the remaining five participants were administrators of a secondary school. Two of the secondary participants were interviewed simultaneously.

Transcripts were prepared, and the responses were coded for developing categories and themes. The processes of open and axial coding were utilized as described in Creswell (2012). During open coding, data are broken into smaller pieces and organized into various classifications (Creswell, 2012). Interview transcripts were first read to identify key words and general meanings in relation to each question. These pieces of data were compiled for all participants by interview question and were analyzed.

Data classifications may be further analyzed into properties (Creswell, 2012), which give rise to categories. As interview transcripts were coded, seven themes emerged: collaboration, relationships, consistency and stability, high expectations, clarifying tasks and objectives, using and analyzing data, and community support. More specific categories materialized in four of the seven categories as are discussed later in this chapter. Interview comments were coded a second time in relation to the research questions. Data pieces were again compiled and studied for all principals; however, this

time in relation to each research question. Similarities among answers can be found in this chapter, while answers to research questions are contained in Chapter Five.

Interview Results

For the purpose of reporting results without exposing the identities of the participants, code names were assigned. Elementary principals are E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5. Secondary principals are S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5. The data are first presented for each question, and then evidence generating general themes is discussed.

Interview questions one and two. Please describe your background in education. How long have you been at this school? In this position?

The principals self-reported total years in education, years in current district, and years in in current administrative position. The participants averaged over 10 years in their respective districts and over seven years in their current positions. Ranges indicating total years of experience in education are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Years of Experience by Range

Participant Code Name	Experience in Years
E1	11-20
E2	11-20
E3	21-30
E4	11-20
E5	11-20
S1	30+
S2	11-20
S3	11-20
S4	11-20
S5	21-30

Note. Participants self-reported total years of experience in education. Exact number falls within the stratum indicated. Strata were identified as 0-10, 11-20, 21-30, and 30+. Zero participants fell into the 0-10 stratum.

Interview question three. What is your primary function as the building principal?

Six of the participants (E1, E2, E3, S1, S3, S5) spoke directly about the varied responsibilities of a building principal. In response, E1 light-heartedly stated, “Well, there are a lot of functions.” Principal S3 began by saying, “Just basically overseeing

everything," but then narrowed responsibilities into the categories of "working with the teachers" and "handling discipline."

Four participants (E1, E2, E3, S5) referred to maintaining organization and creating an environment conducive to learning. Three basic functions were described by S5 as being an "instructional leader," "building manager," and "facilitator." Participant S5 explained, "I take adults who are educators and are staff and try to help facilitate an environment that promotes learning. Whether it is a bus driver, a secretary, a cook, a para, a teacher; it has to facilitate learning." Two other participants (E2, E4) also used the term "educational leader" or "instructional leader" to describe their primary function. Other responsibilities mentioned included maintenance of the school building (E5, S5), setting the school climate (E1), focus on the needs of students (E4, E5), and meeting requirements (S4). The varied responses among participants affirmed the perception of the wide range of a principal's duties.

Question three follow-up. How do you accomplish this?

Communication, either face-to-face or by collaborative meetings, was mentioned by six (E1, E3, E4, S1, S2, S5) of the 10 participants as a means of accomplishing the varied tasks of a principal. Principal S2 stated, "Like a big family, everybody's open to communication. They know they can come in here and talk about anything; any problem. And they know we'll come to them the same way." Participants S1, S2, and E1 mentioned making an effort to talk informally with teachers daily. Meetings were mentioned by two participants (E3, S5) as a means of accomplishing this function. As E3 related, "Lots and lots of meetings" followed with "being in the classroom frequently." Principal E3 indicated being able to see all of the teachers in a classroom setting,

conducting one-on-one meetings, and aiding struggling teachers were other means of accomplishing the work of a principal.

Four principals (E2, E4, S4, S5) mentioned maintaining focus on a common vision and the setting of and monitoring of goals related to that vision. Participant E2 discussed the opportunity to have hired most of the staff during his/her tenure as principal, "Making sure they have the same vision, the same goals, and continue learning." Principal S4 reported although the district does not have teacher teams, the teachers do have regular meetings and professional development that is "…centered around: Are we doing what we're supposed to be doing? Are we looking at test scores? Are we matching up with what we should be doing?"

Other comments were less frequent, but noteworthy. Principals E1 and E5 acknowledged the importance of leading by example, while E5 referenced character traits such as being stubborn and persistent and holding high expectations for staff. Participant E4 discussed focusing on what is best for kids, monitoring data, and the job of insuring "follow through," as it is common for focus to wane over time. Maintaining focus on students was supported by comments from E3 who included, "I think another thing in these meetings is making sure that every decision we make is student centered."

Interview question four. This district has had high ratings on its annual performance report for the past two years. To what do you attribute the success of this district?

All five secondary principals and one elementary principal (E1) attributed at least some of the district's success to the teachers; with three (E1, S1, S5) mentioning teachers as most important. Principal S5 raved, "Number one; good teachers," and went on to

describe teachers as, “The most important ingredient that you control as a building principal.” Participant E1 stated, “The teachers are the most important. You can have a good principal but without good teachers, your school won’t be successful.”

All five secondary principals also made reference to community factors such as pride, tradition, stability, and support from parents. Principal S1 explained, “We take a lot of pride in our academics, athletics, and everything here. We recognize it a lot. We talk about it to our kids.” Participant S2 discussed the “sense of pride” felt by teachers to help students meet the challenges and the ambition to “be great.” Principal S3 described a traditional, stable community with “important strong values” that provided support for the school. As S4 stated, “Stability helps; so the fact that we know the kids, we know their parents, because we are so centered in the community, parents feel very comfortable coming in and talking with us and with teachers.”

Other statements in response to question four were less consistent among the principals. Four participants (E1, S1, S2, S4) made reference to having high expectations as a contributing factor to the success of the district as exemplified by E1, “Every child knows we’re going to get the most out of them regardless of where that point ends.” While acknowledging the differing ability levels of the students, E1 suggested stretching each child to his/her highest possible achievement. Principal S4 articulated the expectations of the school by saying, “We expect the kids to perform. I am a true believer that kids will do what you expect them to do.”

Three elementary principals (E2, E3, E4) discussed the effect of having a clear, consistent vision and goals that are monitored. Principal E3 related:

> I think part of it is making sure that everyone on board has the same vision and goals and that we're all going in the same direction at all times. That you don't have people just doing their own things.

The process of analyzing APR data by breaking the data into categories and determining what should be accomplished by whom was described by E4. Two of these three principals (E3, E4) mentioned the existence of a simple, one-page guide for staff related to the district vision.

Participant E1 communicated the expectation of teachers to work hard during school hours. Principal E5 credited the work ethic of those in the building when stating:

> There's no magic bean. It's not what reading series or math series we use. It's not that we've got 30 minutes in the middle of the day for study hall. It's not any of those things. It's good old-fashioned hard work.

Participant E1 specifically discussed minimizing implementation of new programs and non-instructional tasks for teachers to maximize the time teachers spend with students. Principal E1 expressed:

> We know the needs of our kids, we know where our kids come from, and we pick and choose out of a program that fits our kids. If something doesn't fit our kids to this program, we just don't do that part of it.

Principal E5 also alluded to using all available instructional time as a factor contributing to the success of the district.

Interview question five. What role do teachers play in the success of students?

Eight (E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, S1, S2, S5) of the 10 principals made statements indicating the significance of teachers' work. Participant E2 proclaimed, "They are the

driving force. Teachers make all the difference in the world." Other statements about the crucial role of teachers can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Comments that Conveyed the Significant Role of Teachers

Participant	Comments
E1	"The most important role."
E2	"They are the driving force. Teachers make all the difference in the world."
E3	"I feel they have a huge impact."
E4	"It is a number one priority."
E5	"The teachers, I mean they're everything."
S1	"They're the ones that make it happen."
S2	"Staff is tremendous."
S5	"Yeah, they're number one, number one."

Four principals (S1, E1, E4, E5) discussed their role as secondary to the teachers, serving only to guide or support while teachers actually cause student progress. Participant E5 explained, "I give them the support, but it's the teachers, it's not me." Principal E4 expressed, "They're in the trenches with the kids, if you will." In addition, E4 defined a part of his/her role by saying, "I try to keep distractions away from the teachers so that they can do their jobs." Participant S1 regarded teachers as the people

who “make it happen” and stated, “We’re here to just kind of guide them in the right direction.”

The theme of teachers building relationships with students was evident in the responses of three participants (E3, S3, S5). Principal S3 expressed, “I think our teachers make it clear to our kids, express to them, that they care about them. That’s one of the more important things.” The creation of a caring environment where students feel secure enough to take risks was described by E3 who stated, “It’s a lot about building relationships with those students to show that you care about them, and you do want to see how far they can go.”

The role of teachers having high expectations for students was evident in the responses of two secondary principals. Participant S3 noted, “It’s our job to push them [students], and they’re not going to like some of the things you ask them to do, but I think as you push them, that leads them to success.” Besides teachers setting high expectations, S4 also indicated teachers know the target, “So the fact that teachers know what they want and they expect that out of the kids, I think really plays a big part in kids doing that.”

Interview question six. What actions do you take to help teachers maintain an instructional focus?

Six principals (E1, E2, E5, S3, S4, S5) articulated the need to protect instructional time through various means. Two secondary principals (S4, S5) indicated giving special attention to the master schedule to increase and/or optimize contact time between teachers and students. One secondary (S3) and one elementary (E5) participant discussed the resistance to require teachers to constantly change practices to the latest fads.

Principal E5 stated, “In education there are buzz words, and they roll around, and they’re renamed often, and when the new buzz word emerges, teachers freak out. I don’t jump in.” Later E5 affirmed, “I consider myself to be a big filter.” Comments from S3 show agreement when declaring, “We try to keep things simple, and we try to keep the distractions away from the teachers and just let them do their jobs. So, you won’t come here and find us with the latest fad.” Others mentioned limiting disruptions, while E1 reiterated his/her philosophy on eliminating unnecessary work for teachers.

Four elementary (E1, E2, E3, E4) principals and one secondary principal (S5) included an element of communication and/or collaboration in their answer. Participant E1 outlined the process teachers follow to analyze data from state tests and to determine what objectives are not being met. Teachers traced the problem until specific difficulties with standards were identified. Teachers may find weaknesses emerging in data from one grade level could be caused by a deficiency of mastering an objective from a lower grade level. This process implies the use of collaborative work as E1 summarized, “Every year we focus on the data of where we’re successful, where we’re not successful, and that’s how we stay focused.”

The use of weekly time for Professional Learning Communities (PLC) was credited by E2 and E3 as time teachers spend collaborating about instruction. Principal E3 indicated PLC time is “protected time just to be looking at data, what changes need to be made in instruction, and we do that as a grade level because you want the continuity of everyone going in the same direction.” Participant E2 stated PLC time has made a “huge difference” in response to how teachers maintain focus. Principals E2, E3, and S5 discussed the need to communicate frequently the need to relate instruction to the

standards. As S5 stated, “You have to address it in faculty meetings. You have to address it in your building leadership team meetings. You have to keep instruction number one always.” Another form of communication is by a simple, written plan as referenced by E4.

Three participants noted the use of data. Principals E1 and E3 referenced data during collaborative discussions as stated in the preceding paragraph. Participant E4 also indicated the use of building-wide data in recognition of trends.

Other comments included frequent visits to classrooms by participants E3 and S4 as a way to help teachers maintain focus. Being available as a resource to teachers was stated as “number one” by S4. Principals S1 and S2 indicated accommodating the professional development and resource needs of teachers. Participant S1 specified removing cost-prohibitive obstacles to allow teachers to attend workshops and arranging for teachers to observe other teachers both inside and outside the district. When addressing the act of supporting teachers with needed materials S2 stated, “If it’s for the kids and their education, we’ll find a way to get it for them.”

Interview question seven. This district also has a high number of students receiving free and reduced price meals. What special supports have been implemented to address the challenges faced by at-risk students?

The responses of the secondary and elementary principals showed congruence within the two respective levels. Four secondary principals (S1, S3, S4, S5) gave responses indicating caring for the needs of at-risk students as part of the school culture. Principal S1 stated, “It’s just a community that cares, and we care about our kids, and we try to help them in any way we can help them.” The need to add specific programs aimed

at meeting the needs of at-risk students was negated by S3 who stated, “Let’s keep it simple, and if a kid needs help, you help them. We don’t need something on paper to tell us to do that.” Participant S4 indicated teachers have taken the initiative to utilize time before school begins to check on and help students rather than using it as personal time. Comments from S5 also indicated a culture of caring when stated, “I think as long as you keep that in the forefront, the faculty are very aware of that. You try to build that culture that we’re here to help every student.”

Three secondary principals specified programs aimed at the needs of these students. Teams were organized to focus on identifying individual student needs. Actions identified included checking student grades, monitoring attendance, and building relationships with at-risk students as referenced by S1, S2, and S5.

Various programs were cited by elementary principals in supporting the challenges faced by at-risk students. Three participants (E1, E2, E4) indicated the use of a backpack program to provide food for students while away from school. Three participants (E1, E2, E4) noted the support received from the community in providing Christmas gifts, the basic needs of clothing, shoes, and school supplies. One principal credited the small school size for enabling teachers to easily identify students in need of material items.

Special academic needs were acknowledged by all five elementary principals. Programs provided by Title I funds were regarded by three principals (E2, E3, E4) as helpful for students falling behind academically. Participant E5 affirmed tutoring was available to help students who struggle academically. Principal E1 recognized the lack of

experiences of many low-SES students and reported awareness among the faculty to be mindful of that when instructing students.

Principals E3 and E4 made statements that differed from those of other principals. Participant E3 spoke about helping students take ownership of their learning and specific supports to aid teachers with instructing these students. Principal E3 stated:

> I know a lot of times they're at-risk because of lack of support at home or you know, their environment, so helping them to know that they can achieve any dream that they have. It's goal setting. We work, even at this level, on setting a goal and then trying to accomplish it.

In addition, E3 activated a special team to aid teachers with instructional strategies for students struggling academically.

The meeting of many material needs was discussed by E4. The community has provided a back to school program to assure students a "fresh start" to school and to put all kids "on the same level." Principal E4 also addressed the behavioral challenge that often places students at-risk when noting the implementation of the PBIS program into the district.

Interview question eight. How do teachers in this building identify and pursue instructional goals?

The existence of collaboration during the process of goal setting was common among nine participants. Although teacher or classroom goals may be set individually and are sometimes based on information from evaluations, teachers and/or administrators collaborate at some level of goal setting. For S1 and S2, teachers have individual goals,

but vote on one building-wide goal each year as a staff. Four participants indicated vertical teaming is used to align curriculum either over a few grade levels or K-12.

The participant who did not allude to collaborative goal identification or setting practices described a stable staff. Although this principal indicated teachers received curriculum guidance from the MODESE models, the building encounters little turn-over, resulting in an abundance of experienced teachers. The participant explained, "When you've done it that long, for them to identify what they're teaching, they're just going off experience and then working with their curriculum some." The principal also stated, "Most of them probably know it like the back of their hand."

The use of data to set instructional goals was expressed by six of the 10 participants (E2, E3, E4, S1, S2, S4). Principal S4 described the process of scrutinizing test data to pinpoint weaknesses. The remedy may affect more than one subject area in an effort to strengthen test scores. As S4 summarized, "So we look at areas where we're a little bit weak and figure out how we're going to make them a little bit stronger." Participant S1 described the use of data from End-of-Course (EOC) exams in setting individual teacher goals.

Elementary principals not only mentioned data from state tests, but other assessments used to monitor student progress throughout the year. Principal E4 accounted for beginning with the end in mind which included, "We know where they [students] are, and so we have to use that data to get them where they need to be." Participant E4 further related the use of data as enabling teachers to alter instruction in response.

Standards provided by the MODESE were cited as a way to identify instructional goals by six participants (E1, E4, S1, S2, S3, S4). Three of these principals (E1, E4, S5) recounted beginning with the state standards and then collaboratively breaking those into more specific grade-level objectives or learning outcomes. Another participant (S2) revealed the teachers would be working on creating and monitoring specific learning outcomes in the upcoming school year.

Interview question nine. How would you describe the rate of teacher turn-over in this building?

All 10 principals reported a low turn-over rate among teachers. Several noted retirement as one of the main reasons a teaching position becomes available. One secondary principal (S5) stated, "You know I looked at that information, and I think we're running at about 10%." Explaining further, the principal estimated having lost zero teachers during one school year, while losing as many as six during another. Participant E2 described the rate of turn-over by recounting having to fill only three spots in the past two school years. Principal E5 estimated, "I would say the last five years our teacher turn-over has been less than one per year."

Two declared having more educators interested in working in their buildings than jobs available. Principal E3 stated, "We're very low actually. We've got teachers calling wanting to know if we have openings and I'm like, 'No, not this year.'" Similarly, E1 said, "No one ever leaves and I have a list of teachers 10 long if I ever have a spot open."

Question nine follow-up. Why do you think teachers stay in this district despite the challenges faced?

Factors related to the type of work environment present in the school were referenced by all 10 participants as reasons teachers remain in their current buildings. Principal E5 affirmed, “I really do think that is the number one reason is just because of the environment we’ve created.” Participant S1 described a caring staff who loves the job and stated, “The morale has a lot to do with that.”

A feeling of appreciating and valuing teachers within the buildings was conveyed by eight principals (E1, E3, E4, E5, S1, S2, S4, S5). Table 3 displays specific comments.

Table 3

Comments that Conveyed Appreciation for Teachers

Participant	Comments
E1	New hires report being "So appreciative of the time they get to spend on students."
E3	"Teachers need to feel valued for the work that they do."
E4	"I give teachers all the credit."
E5	Considers teachers when making decisions.
S1	"We do a lot of patting on the backs."
S2	Expressed agreement with S1.
S4	"We appreciate people."
S5	"I want to create a culture in which they feel appreciated."

Others (E1, E2, E4) credited support from the community for retention of teachers. Participant E2 described the support from the community and the continued community presence of past graduates. Furthermore, E2 related, "They're still entrenched in this community, and it's thought of very highly." Principal E4 agreed by stating, "Our community support is phenomenal. I think they really stand behind the school."

The feeling of importance or difference made by the work of teachers was mentioned by three participants (E3, S4, S5) as a contributing retention factor. Principal E3 explained, "It's just that feeling like the work they do is important, and then also seeing our success just helps encourage us to keep working harder." Participant S4 described the staff as being mature and teaching due to the desire to make a difference to kids. Statements of S5 agreed as stated, "They feel like the work that they do here makes a difference with our students, and that's the kind of culture we want to foster anyway."

Others (E4, S1, S3) mentioned established hometown ties between employees and the community. Selecting people for employment with a history in the community or surrounding area when possible is a common practice for S1. Comments of S3 show agreement as noted, "We're looking for good teachers that will come and stay." Although S3 stated that is not the most important characteristic when choosing teachers, factors that forecast retention are considered when applicants are equal.

Principals E4 and E5 discussed using specific leadership traits seemingly preferred by employees. Making decisions collaboratively was noted as common practice by E4. Participant E5 tries to be mindful of the viewpoints of teachers by drawing on previous teaching experience during the decision-making process.

Interview question 10. What actions do you take to support teachers to insure retention of quality teachers?

Providing professional support was noted by seven participants (E2, E3, E4, E5, S3, S4, S5). Principal S5 discussed creating a "culture of learners" that causes teachers to want to stay and grow professionally. Participant S4 communicated the intention to create a culture of "working with you" for employees. Providing feedback during follow-

up conversations subsequent to classroom observations was deemed significant by participants E2 and E3. Principal E3 stated, “I think all that is support for a teacher that she’s not out there by herself.” Similarly, E4 noted collaboration as a form of support and declared, “I think anytime you can get teachers together where they don’t feel like they’re on an island and by themselves, it’s a whole lot easier.”

Three other areas emerged through comments of the participants. One was the ability to support teachers with needed resources as mentioned by three participants (S1, S3, S4). Another was the creation of a work environment that people prefer by S2 and S5. Principal S2 realized teachers have higher-paying alternatives but stated, “We try to make it such a good place that they don’t even entertain the thought of leaving.” Professional freedom was the final area common for participants (E1, E5). Both expressed allowing teachers the freedom to teach in the way they are most successful rather than demanding specific methods. Principal E1 acknowledged the ability teachers possess and stated, “I think sometimes principals make the mistake of trying to control the teachers too much and it kills their creativity.” Participant E1 communicated focus on results rather than the micromanaging of teaching techniques. Principal E5 supported this with, “I give my teachers the ability and the freedom to teach how they best teach.”

Interview question 11. How are new hires selected?

Although all 10 principals outlined similar processes of obtaining teacher resumes, there were differences in the interview process. Four principals (S1, S2, S5, E2) reported utilizing an administrative team or committee to interview, while three (S3, E1, E5) articulated being solely involved in the process until seeking board approval.

Participant E4 reported having conducted interviews both alone and with others in the past. This element of the process was not addressed by E3 or S4.

Principals did divulge some methods of obtaining teachers beyond the usual application process. Creative tactics of advertising employment vacancies have been utilized by S5 for positions that are more difficult to fill. Participants E1, E3, and S4 expressed willingness to contact effective teachers who are employed at other districts or as they termed "steal a teacher." Principal E1 justified by pointing out, "My job is to make this school district the best it can be, and the way you do that is to have the very best teachers."

Selection of an individual who is a good "fit" for the district was specifically addressed by four principals (E3, E4, E5, S1) and alluded to by S4. Participant E3 stated, "A lot of people are good teachers, but they've got to be caring, and they have to fit in with our vision, and our mission, and our values." Employing a person who does not easily work with others was cited as a distraction by E4 who voiced, "I look for that good fit. That's the most important is just a good fit." Principal E5 explained being vigilant for the right person and even allowing a posting to remain open until a suitable hire applies. Participant E5 expressed, "I try to find the person I feel best fits our district; not whoever I feel is best on paper." Principal S1 described the need to find "the best teacher for the school" and someone who will stay in the district.

Interview question 12. How would you describe the culture of this building?

Words and phrases were common among several principals. Table 4 displays the use of similar responses in regard to building culture.

Table 4

Description of Building Culture

Word or Phrase	Participants
"positive"	E2, E3, S3, S4, S5
"collaborative"	E2, S3
"laughter," "fun," "kids smiling"	E1, E3, E4, S3
"family"	E2, E3
"caring"	E1, E2
"friendly"	E1, E5

Note. "Laughter," "fun," and "kids smiling" were determined to be elements of fun in the building culture.

Although the word "collaborative" was not used, S1 and S2 indicated some level of collaboration existed when described evidence of collaboration. Principals S1 and S2 conveyed the willingness of teachers to attend duty assignments for the sole purpose of communicating with colleagues. In addition, S1 and S2 referenced listening to employees, which is indicative of a collaborative culture. Participant E5 included "loving," "nurturing," "ethical," and "moral" as terms to depict the building culture.

Interview question 13. Does the culture of your building play a role in selection of new staff? If so, in what ways?

All 10 participants indicated considering the building culture when selecting new teachers. Five principals (E1, E3, E4, E5, S5) again mentioned the need for a person who

will “fit” in with those already employed. Participant E4 described a good fit as someone who will “work hard, but they need to have fun doing it, and laugh at your mistakes and celebrate your successes.” Being “hard-working” and “student-centered” was cited as essential for a good fit by S5. Three (E1, E2, S4) communicated the importance of being able to work with others. Principal S4 expressed the need to attain like-minded employees saying, “They have to have at least some of the same beliefs and commitments that we do.” Both S1 and S2 reiterated the practice of hiring hometown graduates. Participant S2 stated, “When they’ve got that pride instilled in them already and they see the pride the rest of the faculty has, then it just makes the culture even better.”

Interview question 14. What steps are taken to encourage collaboration among staff?

Scheduled time designated for collaboration among teachers was reported by six principals (E2, E3, E4, E5, S4, S5). Three indicated weekly participation (E2, E3, S5) in the form of PLC, while E4 discussed weekly meetings but did not use the term “PLC” in the description. Professional development days are utilized by E5 and S4 for collaboration.

Two elementary (E1, E4) principals and one secondary (S5) principal are committed to providing common plan times for teachers working in the same grade level or subject areas. Participant S5 conveyed the obstacles presented by protecting the practice of common plan time when constructing the master schedule. Despite these difficulties, S5 is committed to doing the needed work to continue providing this time for teachers.

Leading by example was a common theme between E4 and S3. Making decisions collaboratively is a leadership style for E4. Principal S3 is also in the practice of "taking input" from others and tries to create an environment of comfort with listening to suggestions of others.

Participant S1 reiterated communication as a strength among the building employees. Principal S1 encouraged the teachers to collaborate and observe instructional practices of others when stating, "If you just get one little thing to help these kids, that's important." Furthermore, S1 stated this practice allows teachers to "see a different perspective." Observing other teachers is especially helpful to teachers who are struggling, as expressed by S2.

General Themes

General themes emerged through the comments of the interviewees. Themes are presented in the following order: collaboration, relationships, consistency and stability, high expectations, clarifying tasks and objectives, using and analyzing data, and community support. Within the first four themes, categories surfaced and are explained.

Collaboration. All 10 principals made various comments relating the collaborative nature of the individuals working within the school buildings. Two categories materialized upon analysis of the data: scheduled and unscheduled collaboration time. Table 5 displays samples of comments used in the determination of the theme and categories.

Table 5

Sample Comments Indicative of Collaboration by Category

Unscheduled Collaboration	Scheduled Collaboration
Talks to teachers in hallway each period	Encourages observation of others
Face-to-face communication	Sent struggling teacher to observe successful teachers
Takes input	Collaboration with other districts
Available for instructional advice	Weekly PLC meetings
Cohesive team that works together	Building leadership team meeting
Talks to teachers every day	Common plan time
Observed teachers collaborating at lunch	Vertical teams
	Grade level teams
	Collaborative decision making
	Post-evaluation conferences

Note. Ten participants referenced collaboration. Two types of collaboration emerged from the interviews.

Nine of the 10 participants reported regularly scheduled times for collaboration, while one made no reference to scheduled collaboration time. Eight participants indicated engaging in or observing staff collaborating during unscheduled times. Six participants made remarks suggesting the existence of both scheduled and unscheduled collaboration times.

Relationships. The importance of relationships was referenced at some point during the interviews by all 10 participants. Two categories developed within this theme: relationships between teachers and students and relationships among staff. Table 6 provides sample comments causing the rise of this theme. Nine of the 10 interviewees referred to the caring relationships between teachers and students, and nine described the relationships among staff. Eight made reference to both categories, while two specified only one category.

Table 6

Sample Comments Indicative of Relationships by Category

Among Staff	Teacher/Student
Family atmosphere	Very caring culture
Attend duty by choice to visit with co-workers	Wants teachers to provide a caring community
Developed relationships of trust with teachers	Teachers make sure needs of kids are met
Tries to know about lives of teachers	Teachers are nurturing
Teachers participate in activities together outside of school	We care about kids Expectation of teacher to care about kids
Teachers feel loved, respected, nurtured	Teachers took initiative to help kids before school

Note. Ten participants made reference to relationships. Two types of relationships were referenced during interviews.

Consistency and stability. The theme of consistency or stability was evident in all 10 interviews. Within this motif, two categories developed: staff and procedural. When reporting the rate of teacher turn-over, all indicated a low turn-over rate which suggests stability among staff. All participants also related the practice of considering building culture when hiring new staff, signifying a desire to maintain uniformity. Principal S3 used the word "stable" to partly describe the culture of the building. As S5 stated, "We want people to hold the same values that we do." Five principals (E2, E4, S1, S2, S3) mentioned the existence of several former graduates on staff which alludes to consistency of beliefs and values.

Procedural stability was common among eight participants. Five (E2, E3, E4, E5, S4) noted the use of the PBIS program within the districts. As noted in Chapter Two, PBIS involves faculty agreement on shared expectations and consequences (Scott, Hirn, Barber, 2012). Principal E2 explained the advantage of implementing the PBIS program, "Now it's a K-5 common language, expectations, those expectations being taught." Similarly, S4 related that the goal in implementing PBIS district-wide was "consistency." The attention teachers place on procedures at the beginning of the year was communicated by E4 as preventative from spending time addressing behaviors all year.

Other procedural consistencies were communicated during the interviews. Two principals (S1, S3) expressed the need to be consistent with student discipline, as S3 related the students' ability to predict consequences for misbehavior. Principal E1 makes the time teachers spend with students a top priority and tries to avoid circumstances that will take teachers away from the students. Participant E1 stated, "Any time you pull the teachers away from the students you're losing valuable time that you'll never get back."

High expectations. Holding high expectations was apparent in eight interviews. Two categories emerged within this theme: high expectations for students and high expectations for teachers. Samples of comments are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Comments Indicative of High Expectations by Category

Students	Teachers
"Our job is to test students"	"Do your best job every day"
"We expect the kids to perform"	"I hold them [teachers] accountable"
"We try to set high standards and benchmarks for our students"	"I want my teachers to work very, very hard. I have high expectations."
Culture of holding students to a high standard.	Culture of holding co-workers to a high standard.
"Every kid knows we're going to get the most out of them…"	"We want to get better every year"
"Teachers set high expectations"	

Of the eight participants who expressed holding high expectations, seven related high expectations for students and six established high expectations for teachers. Five informed high expectations for both teachers and students at some point during the interviews.

Clarifying tasks or objectives. All participants provided evidence supporting the act of clarifying tasks or objectives. Five participants (E2, E4, S2, S4, S5) referred to the development of specific learning outcomes by teachers. Principal S5 found the

process of identifying a short list of outcomes for each course "helped re-focus some of the class." According to the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), "Identifying and prioritizing learning outcomes gives focus to both teaching and learning" (Center for Research on Teaching and Learning [CRLT], 2014, para. 3). This practice also helps "optimize teaching strategies and assignment of student work" (CRLT, 2014, para. 3).

Maintaining a common vision or goals was apparent in the responses of five principals (E2, E3, E4, E5, S5). In reference to the value of collaboration time, E5 stated, "We all have the same goal in mind." Two (E3, E4) participants related having a simple, short document stating district goals to guide stakeholders.

Four (E1, E4, E5, S3) principals explained the need to limit distractions for teachers allowing continued focus on teaching students. Participant E5 related, "My favorite thing to do as a principal is to remove barriers for my teachers. Anytime there is something in the way keeping them from doing what they need to do, I try to help take care of that." Principal S3 discussed the need to "keep it simple" and allow teachers to teach rather than adding various tasks, "We try to allow them to keep their focus as opposed to clouding it by giving them all kinds of things to do." Statements from E1 agreed with this sentiment when E1 stated, "Teachers only have so much time, and they can either be doing stuff for me or they can be working with the kids, and so I prefer them working with the kids."

Using and analyzing data. The practice of monitoring and studying data was indicated by nine of the 10 participants. Using data to set and monitor goals is common practice among several participants. Sources of data included state achievement tests,

student benchmarks, common assessments, programs to track discipline data, and universal screeners for specific subject areas.

Principal E1 discussed going through state testing data as grade-level teams to identify weaknesses and pinpoint sources limiting mastery of objectives. Participant E3 indicated the practice of collecting a lot of data and putting it to use. Principal E4 conveyed not only tracking academic data but discipline data as well to determine trends to be addressed.

At the secondary level, four participants made reference to using results from End-of-Course (EOC) exams to set goals or drive instruction. Both S1 and S2 indicated the use of EOC scores for goal setting by teachers. Principal S5 recounted disaggregating data to find discrepancies in achievement between students receiving free meals compared with reduced price meals.

Community support. Community support was referenced by seven participants. Five (E2, E4, E1, S1, S2) principals noted support in the form of donations to meet the needs of students or teachers. It was reported items such as shoes, clothing, glasses, school supplies, food, and Christmas gifts were supplied by community members, local business, churches, and foundations. Donations to meet the needs of an ill teacher were used to describe the caring community by two participants. Three (E1, E2, E4) principals assigned at least partial credit for teacher retention to support from the community. Participant E4 stated, “Our community support is phenomenal.” While acknowledging a less stable student population, E2 maintained, “We still have a tremendous amount of support within the community.” Two (S3, S5) principals referenced financial support through the ease of passing bond issues and levies to benefit the district.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter Four was to present the data collected during the study. Each interview question was posed and responses were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed to ascertain common practices among the principals of successful schools that serve a high number of children living in poverty. From the responses, general themes were determined to be collaboration, relationships, high expectations, consistency and stability, clarifying tasks and objectives, using and analyzing data, and community support.

Chapter Five includes the summary and conclusion of the study. Themes are discussed in relation to the 1985 paper by Rosenholtz as well as current research. Conclusions answering the posed research questions are discussed in the fifth chapter. Implications for practice are explained as related to the leaders of high-poverty schools. Suggestions for further research about high-achieving, high-poverty schools are found in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion

Contrary to the findings of current research (Cutuli et al., 2013; Ladd, 2012; Mulligan et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2012), a small percentage of Missouri schools achieved high APR scores despite reporting a high number of students receiving free and reduced price meals (MODESE, 2014g, 2014j). Qualitative methodology was utilized, through personal interviews of school principals, to uncover the themes common among schools achieving success despite the circumstance of a high number of students in poverty.

The questions posed were inspired by the work of Rosenholtz (1985) and were field-tested prior to conducting the interviews. Ten building administrators were interviewed which consisted of five elementary principals, four secondary principals, and one secondary assistant principal. The interviews included 14 open-ended questions. The purpose of the study was to assess the ways in which principals positively affect the issues of teacher isolation, maintenance of a skilled teaching staff, goal setting, removal of non-instructional tasks, and preservation of a collaborative culture.

Recorded interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Each question revealed similarities among the answers of the participants while overall themes included the following: collaboration, relationships, high expectations, consistency and stability, clarifying tasks and objectives, using and analyzing data, and community support. The first four of the proceeding themes revealed more specific categories. This chapter includes a review of the findings, conclusions in relationship to the research questions, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and a summary of the study.

Findings

Seven themes emerged from the interview data as shared among nearly all principals.

1. Collaboration was discussed by all 10 principals as being utilized within the buildings. Responses were found to comprise two categories: unscheduled collaboration and scheduled collaboration. Unscheduled collaboration included informal or spontaneous meetings, while scheduled collaboration included planned meeting times.

2. Factors indicative of the importance of relationships among those in the building were shared by all 10 participants. Two categories developed within this theme: relationships between teachers and students and relationships among staff.

3. Evidence of consistency and stability within the school was found in all 10 interviews. Staff stability was a developed category within this theme due to the low rates of teacher turn-over reported by all principals. Procedural stability was expressed by eight principals giving rise to a second category.

4. Sustaining high expectations for others was a collective theme for eight participants. Holding high expectations for students and having high expectations for teachers were the two categories that emerged within this theme.

5. The act of clarifying tasks or objectives was a motif developed from all 10 participants. Included were charges such as developing specific learning outcomes, maintaining emphasis on united goals, and limiting distractions for teachers to sustain focus.

6. Using and analyzing data was referenced by nine of the 10 participants. The practice of analyzing data and using this information to set goals is a collective routine of the majority of participants.

7. Support from the community encompassed ways to meet the needs of low-SES students, factors associated with teacher retention, and financial support through the passage of bond issues and levies benefiting the district. Seven principals in the study made mention of the importance of community support.

Theme one. Two categories emerged in regard to collaboration: unscheduled and scheduled collaboration time. Unscheduled collaboration times included informal talk among teachers during lunch, hallway time, and assigned supervision duties. Scheduled collaboration time included the existence of common plan times for grade-level or subject-similar teachers, allocation of PLC time, and periodically held meetings sometimes labeled as professional development time. Frequency of collaboration ranged from hourly informal conversation to time scheduled periodically throughout the school year.

Rosenholtz (1985) described the problems with teacher isolation as leading to incongruence of learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment practices. Benefits included the feeling of support from co-workers and conformity on ideals, principles, and discipline (Rosenholtz, 1985). Further advantages included continued occupational growth and joint resolution of difficulties (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Similar findings were reported in current studies (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). A central idea found among nine high-achieving, high-poverty Ohio schools was the importance of

collaboration among staff (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). The findings of Chenoweth and Theokas (2013) included evidence from 33 principals of effective schools with a large number of low-SES students. The culture of these schools was an environment of continued learning and professional improvement through collective, collegial work rather than the solitary efforts of individual teachers (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). Case studies of five high-poverty schools led Almy and Tooley (2012) to suggest strategies to diminish ineffective instruction for low-SES students as increasing collaborative practices to especially include successful teachers.

Theme two. The significance of positive relationships among students, teachers, and administrators was evident in the results of all 10 interviews. Two categories were student-teacher relationships and staff relationships. While all 10 principals mentioned either one category or the other, eight participants referenced the importance of both categories.

Congruence to other current studies was found in the arena of relationships (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Suber, 2011). Students involved in the study by Hagelskamp & DiStasi (2012) stressed "the personal connection" experienced with school personnel while, "Students feel valued, loved, and challenged," was recognized as a common thread (p. 4). Suber (2011) also found "relationships" between teachers and principals to be a common theme after interviewing principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools (p. 13). Findings were specific to forming feelings of a "team" environment through collaborative processes (Suber, 2011, p. 13).

Theme three. Staff and procedural stability were the categories developed within the theme of consistency and stability. Staff stability was established due to the

existence of low teacher turn-over rates as reported by the 10 participants. Principals agreed with the practice of considering current school culture when hiring new individuals. Components contributing to a desirable work environment were credited by all 10 participants as a reason for teacher retention. Eight participants indicated efforts to communicate appreciation for the work of teachers. This was deemed another element influencing teacher retention.

Rosenholtz (1985) conveyed the practice of hiring "like-minded staff" as common among effective high-poverty schools (p. 361). Rosenholtz (1985) found, "Applying school goals to the selection of teachers serves as an important control mechanism to ensure the school's quality" (p. 362). Low teacher turn-over and hiring teachers who hold similar beliefs contributes to the steady movement toward goals (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Similarities in current research existed in relation to teacher retention (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). Forner et al. (2012) examined the practices of superintendents working in districts that exhibited substantial improvement despite a minimum of 40% low-SES student population. The significance of attaining quality educators was identified as a priority for success (Forner et al., 2012). Two high-achieving schools in South Carolina with many low-SES students reported a teacher retention rate of nearly 90% (Suber, 2011). Hagelskamp and DiStasi (2012) suggested employment of like-minded teachers will advance, rather than hinder, improvement efforts. Almy and Tooley (2012) recommended administrators be cognizant of teacher feedback about factors affecting work settings as a strategy to reduce turn-over.

Procedural stability encompassed factors such as uniformity of discipline and limiting time teachers spend away from students. The existence of PBIS programs identified by half of the participants points to standardized student expectations among staff. Direct statements from two more principals related to consistent student discipline, while a third principal noted the importance of keeping teachers with students.

Inconsistency of procedures is a contributing factor to teacher uncertainty (Rosenholtz, 1985) and results in loss of instructional time (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). The theme of consistency is paralleled in Thornburg and Mungai (2011), who examined concerns held by teachers experiencing reforms. The study included districts struggling to meet achievement requirements in specific subgroups (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). The second leading concern was "leader consistency" among participants (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011, p. 211). The theme not only included frustrations caused by a series of revolving-door administrators but also lack of backing on discipline matters (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). Building leaders in successful high-poverty schools are active in maintaining uniformity on discipline matters (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012).

Theme four. Communicating high expectations consisted of two sub-themes: high expectations for staff and high expectations for students. While eight principals contributed to the theme of high expectations, five provided evidence causal to both sub-themes. Expectations of students or teachers were indicated by seven and six participants, respectively.

To bring about change in low-achieving schools, leaders must act in ways that demonstrate belief in the ability to achieve goals (Rosenholtz, 1985). Rosenholtz (1985)

stated, “Goals of high student achievement are almost always at the forefront of their planning and action” (p. 360). Principals must display confidence in the connection between effective instruction and increased student learning (Rosenholtz, 1985) and hold learners accountable (as cited in Rosenholtz, 1985).

Chenoweth and Theokas (2013) found high expectations for students to be a consistent trait among the 33 principals serving high-poverty schools studied. Principals indicated the importance of stretching kids to levels beyond average (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). Stakeholders of successful, high-poverty schools involved in Hagelskamp and DiStasi’s (2012) study also maintained high expectations for students and teachers alike. Students involved in a qualitative study of high-poverty, high-minority schools conveyed the need for high expectations in schools (Reddick et al., 2011). Although not always experiencing such an environment, students gave great credit to the adults in the school who did raise the bar (Reddick et al., 2011).

Theme five. The clarification of tasks and/or objectives was expressed by all 10 participants. Responses underwriting this theme were related to three specific areas. Teacher development of specific learning outcomes for students was cited by half of the participants. Some of the principals in the current study implemented tactics to specifically define and delineate learning objectives for teachers. The process is accomplished collaboratively which ensures accessibility and knowledge of specific skills to be obtained by students. Completion of tasks in this manner provides the opportunity for clarification while working alongside colleagues.

The second area contributing to the aforementioned theme was concentration on united ambitions. Five administrators gave responses indicative of sustaining attention

on a mutual vision and goals. The third topic included statements that defined the building leader's intention to reduce distractions for teachers and to increase focus.

Rosenholtz (1985) described the role of the building leader in decreasing the ambiguity of teaching and limiting unnecessary duties for teachers. Rosenholtz (1985) determined these tenets go hand-in-hand; reducing tasks that cause inattention to instruction increases sureness about actions toward purpose. Instead of being sidetracked by responsibilities that are not likely to lead to goal attainment, teachers are confident about doing the work that will lead to academic progress for students (Rosenholtz, 1985).

The ability of leaders to maintain a well-defined vision throughout leadership activities was recognized as a vital characteristic of principals (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). Teachers involved in Suber's (2011) study conveyed corresponding feelings by rating "performance standards for students are identified and measured" at an average of over 4.7 on a five-point scale while overall ratings related to "alignment of instruction" averaged over 4.5 (p. 6). This connects the ability to discern necessary objectives as a factor leading to success in high-needs schools.

Theme six. The use of data to either set goals or drive instruction was referred to by nine of the 10 principals. Several described collaborative processes when analyzing data, setting goals, or examining instructional practices and curriculum. Various data sources were named ranging from state-required test results to teacher-made common assessments.

While noting the importance of setting goals, Rosenholtz (1985) cited sources indicating leaders in less effective schools rarely use data about academic achievement (as cited in Rosenholtz, 1985). Conversely, the goals of effective schools are taken on by

all members of the organization and work to entice new recruits (Rosenholtz, 1985). A study by Prytula et al. (2013) involved responses from 90 principals regarding the effect of implementing a standardized test. Principals reported a rise in knowledge and use of data to improve curriculum and instructional practices (Prytula et al., 2013). Hagelskamp and DiStasi (2012) found teachers in successful high-poverty schools are influenced by data when preparing for various instructional tasks. Teachers in these high-poverty schools analyze data about future students and use periodically collected data to monitor student progress throughout the year (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012).

Theme seven. Enlisting community support to meet the needs of the school and students was shared among seven participants. Prideful community members were credited with creating a desirable environment for teachers to remain, providing for needs of low-SES students, and backing the district financially. A sense of caring from community members was exemplified during interviews as well.

Although Rosenholtz (1985) did not emphasize the importance of community support, other current studies show congruence to this factor. Faculty members from 12 high-poverty, low-achieving school districts included negative community factors as contributing to the problems faced by the school districts (Le Floch et al., 2014). Specific areas of concern were not limited to "poor relationships with parents and the community," "parents or the broader community not demanding high academic achievement or rigor," and "lack of value placed on education by parents" (Le Floch et al., 2014, p. 46). Hagelskamp and DiStasi (2012) also identified the advantages of a supportive community to the high-poverty schools studied. Various forms of support

encompassed involvement ranging from monetary donations to tutoring of students (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012).

Conclusions

A combination of data was considered in answering the research questions. One source was qualitative data obtained during the study. The work of Rosenholtz (1985) utilized as the conceptual framework was considered in relation to the research questions posed and the gathered qualitative data. Finally, influences from current research referenced in Chapter Two were reflected upon.

Research question one. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high APR scores decreasing teacher isolation?

Principals reported supporting teachers through various actions. Strategies mentioned included the use of frequent classroom visits and providing feedback to teachers in relationship to practices observed. Rosenholtz (1985) found frequent observations essential to demonstrate the significance of instruction, help teachers recognize expectations, identify needed changes, and acknowledge arrival at goal attainment.

Three principals mentioned the practice of identifying struggling teachers and either pairing with or requiring observation of an effective teacher. Rosenholtz (1985) illustrated congruence by describing the need for increased ease with vulnerability for new teachers. Rosenholtz (1985) stated, “If improvement in teaching results from collegial exchange, beginners stand to profit directly from the suggestions of others” (p. 378). The purpose of a study about school reform by Thornburg and Mungai (2011) included identifying limiting factors to student achievement. Less experienced teachers

found “peer communication” to be the second-most concerning factor in relation to reform efforts, and some feared isolation would stall progress (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011, p. 211).

Other practices to reduce isolation are closely related to collaborative processes. The allocation of time to collaborate in teams, identification of specific learning outcomes, and use of common planning time were included by various principals. Employing collaboration time can serve to decrease feelings of teacher isolation and is further discussed under research question five.

Research question two. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high APR scores maintaining a skilled teaching staff with similar values?

All 10 participants reported a low rate of teacher turn-over within the school buildings. Three practices contributing to minimal turn-over were common among principals in the study and are as follows: creating a desirable work environment, showing appreciation for teachers, and consideration of the current school culture when hiring new teachers.

The creation of a desirable work environment was a collective response of the participants. Providing professional support was an element mentioned by seven participants. Specific practices included frequent classroom visits, giving feedback, providing needed resources, and fostering professional growth through collaboration and professional development.

Rosenholtz (1985) found teachers in adequate high-poverty schools “…are further encouraged by a supportive collegial group that lends ideas and assistance where needed” (p. 355). Other comments related to the work environment alluded to collegiality.

Elements of having fun at work are apparent in responses, as well as references to knowing one another on a personal level. Relationships were not only established through common work but through staff luncheons, frequent conversations, and participation in outside-of-school activities. Through analyzing studies of successful, high-poverty schools, Rosenholtz (1985) found, "…under collaborative conditions, friendship and work tended to overlap" (p. 365).

A feeling of appreciation and value within the school was expressed by eight participants as a reason teachers stay in the building. Rosenholtz (1985) specifically discussed the need of teachers to feel as though they are making a difference, "That is, the rewards of teaching must outweigh the frustrations" (p. 355). All administrators in the study either credited teachers for the high APR scores of the district or articulated the significance of the teachers' role in student success.

Consideration of the school culture when hiring new teachers was shared by all interviewees. Rosenholtz (1985) stated, "Applying school goals to the selection of teachers serves as an important control mechanism to ensure the school's quality" (p. 362). School culture can be defined as "…the manifestation of the written and unwritten rules, behaviors, traditions, beliefs, and expectations that undergird everything that happens in the life of the school" (Kohler-Evans et al., 2013, p. 22). MacDonald (2013) defined school culture:

> Often described as "the way we do things around here," school culture is full of beliefs, values, customs, and traditions that suggest how people have interacted in the past and are the basis for how they interact in the present (and likely will in the future unless deep-rooted change is made). (p. 41)

By selecting candidates for hire who mesh with the culture of the school, it is probable a certain level of comfort within the workplace will be achieved, contributing to teacher retention.

Another element believed to forecast the probability of teacher retention was the existence community factors. While three principals gave the community partial credit for teacher retention, other participants mentioned consideration of or seeking individuals originating from the area when hiring. Ties to the community not only provided reasons to remain, possibly related to family, but suggested a contributing factor to the aforementioned "fit" within the school culture. Participant S2 alluded to this when discussing the "pride instilled" in former graduates who return to teach in the district.

Research question three. In what ways are principals in high-poverty school with high APR scores setting and monitoring goals?

Setting and monitoring goals through the use of data was indicated by nine of the 10 participants. Setting goals at different levels was apparent in responses and ranged from district-wide to individual student goals. Half of the participants specified the building level for setting goals. Four cited goal setting taking place at the grade level or department level while three told of individual teacher goals. The existence of classroom goals was referred to by two participants, while one further revealed students as setting individual goals.

Rosenholtz (1985) suggested the practice of setting and monitoring goals reduced professional doubt about instructional practices among teachers. Kekahio and Baker (2013) related the benefit of monitoring data to assess the positive and negative effects of instructional practices. The principals in the study alluded to using data in this way when

discussing the use of testing data to determine instructional goals or identify short-fallings. An added benefit of monitoring goals is the apparent drive created by the realization of success (Kekahio & Baker, 2013; Rosenholtz, 1985). This sensation was echoed by E3 who stated, "Seeing our success just helps encourage us to keep working harder."

The process of goal setting included collaboration at some level for nine participants. Two administrators indicated the value of staff input when making decisions. The benefit of involving teachers during goal determination is two-fold; involvement increases the clarity of teaching and allows teacher voice. Reducing ambiguity in relation to teaching practices was an over-arching theme of Rosenholtz (1985). Rosenholtz (1985) stated, "Teachers' willingness to participate in technical decision making denotes adoption of school goals" (p. 373). Burke and Adler (2013) documented the feelings teachers experience when given mandates that go against one's own beliefs, and in this case, resulted in straying from the dictated curriculum. Including teachers in the process of goal setting both increases the probability of cognizance of the desired outcome and faculty buy-in.

Research question four. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high APR scores removing non-instructional tasks for teachers?

Teaching in a school consisting of a high number of low-SES students is further complicated by the varying needs of students outside the arena of academics such as nutritional, social, and emotional difficulties (Balfanz, 2011; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Jensen, 2013). Balfanz (2011) described the obstacles faced by schools with large numbers of students in poverty, "Their sheer numbers often overwhelm such traditional

efforts as providing extra help, behavior management, attendance monitoring, and counseling" (p. 54). Academic, nutritional, material, and behavioral needs were addressed in the school districts included in this study.

The presence of a PBIS program referred to by half of the participants could be a contributing factor to procedural stability and decreased time spent tending to misbehavior. During the implementation of a PBIS program, staff agree to common procedures and consequences for undesirable student behaviors (Scott et al., 2012). As E2 indicated, PBIS involves teaching students proper behavior rather than punishing students for engaging in unacceptable behaviors without being aware of correct actions. Once students are aware of the expectations and consequences, unwanted behaviors tend to decrease (Scott et al., 2012; Tyre et al., 2011), resulting in less time spent addressing such conduct. Rosenholtz (1985) addressed this issue and included, "The absence of school rules and procedures for dealing with misbehavior forces teachers to focus on disruptive students at the expense of their students' instructional time and their own psychic dividends" (p. 372). While only one secondary principal mentioned the PBIS program, two others spoke of making an effort to ensure student expectations are clear and consistent discipline is assigned.

Three elementary participants credited receiving community support to fulfill material needs of students. Examples of community-supported programs at the elementary level included purchasing Christmas gifts, school supplies, and backpack programs that provide food during weekends.

Three secondary principals described the formation of teams of staff members to aid at-risk students. The teams meet to identify students in need and monitor academic,

attendance, and various other needs of students. One principal reported having a team specifically to monitor seniors in danger of not graduating. While teachers are still involved in helping these students, the implementation of such teams may prevent non-academic problems from entering the classroom where instructional time may suffer.

Instructional needs such as time were addressed during interviews. Attention to scheduling, protection of instructional time, and decreasing needless tasks for teachers were among the applicable responses. Three principals discussed exercising caution when confronted with new educational programs that could serve as a distraction to teachers. As noted by Psencik and Baldwin (2012), who documented the process of a staff implementing common assessments, "Starting too many initiatives at one time has challenged the staff and inspired resistance" (p. 33). The leading concern for teachers involved in reform was apprehension about the loss of time with students (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). Rosenholtz (1985) provided a theme of decreasing the uncertainty of teaching. Being selective about changing programs and instructional strategies may contribute to clarity for teachers.

Research question five. In what ways are principals in high-poverty schools with high APR scores maintaining a collaborative culture?

The allocation of time specifically set aside for collaboration among teachers was the most prominent approach to maintaining a collaborative culture. Nine of 10 participants indicated the presence of scheduled collaboration time. Various methods of group communication included PLC, common planning time for teachers of the same subject or grade level, vertical teams, grade-level teams, and leadership teams. Leaders laboring to create a more collaborative work environment must be willing to augment

accustomed school arrangements (Rhoads, 2011). Other collaborative practices occurred between the teacher and administrator in the form of post-evaluation conferences and participation in decision-making.

Efforts to partake in conversation during unscheduled times were also apparent. Some administrators communicated an effort to engage in conversation with teachers on a daily basis and observed teachers discussing instruction or curriculum during unscheduled times. Rosenholtz (1985) communicated the benefits of professional conversation when she stated, "Collegial norms represent a form of group problem solving, social support, and ongoing professional development" (p. 380).

Implications for Practice

The evidence obtained through this study paralleled other current and former studies about successful schools charged with the additional challenges associated with a low-SES student population (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1985). Hagelskamp and DiStasi (2012) identified 11 themes among nine of Ohio's high-achieving, high-poverty schools. All seven themes identified in this current study shared similarities with at least one of these 11 themes (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012). Value can still be established for the 30-year-old findings of Rosenholtz (1985). Based on the evidence collected and studied, the seven themes characterized successful schools with high numbers of low-SES students. Besides adding to the body of data about the factors that make high-poverty schools successful, the current study provides information relevant to Missouri schools. Another purpose achieved by this study was the identification of specific ways the aforementioned factors are being accomplished.

School districts facing similar circumstances should consider beliefs related to the presented themes when deliberating a choice for potential building leaders. Interview questions should be designed to extract the attitudes of candidates about collaboration, relationships, consistency and stability, high expectations, clarifying tasks and objectives, the use of data, and seeking and utilizing community support. Building leaders can further use the determined themes to focus the work of teachers and recruit employees holding similar values.

The primary recommendation for leaders in high-poverty districts is to work daily to build a specific culture within their buildings. Build a culture based on positive relationships between teachers, students, co-workers, and parents. Build a culture wrought with collaborative practices where conversations about the work of teachers can comfortably overlap into informal collaboration. The culture should include high expectations for adults and students in the form of data-driven goals that are clearly stated, monitored, and revisited as needed.

Procedural and professional support should be evident within the culture leading to improvement of educational practices, organizational stability, and effective use of instructional time. Leaders should commission support from the community to uplift students in need. The culture must be protected by careful selection of new individuals who complement the culture. Once the culture is in place, teachers will function at elevated levels and will desire to remain, continuing work among colleagues who feel like family.

More specific implications are related to elements of the school culture. Collaborative practices should be at the forefront of educational practices. Schedules

should be flexed to allow collaboration and may require creativity in development. As stated by Chenoweth and Theokas (2013), "…leaders must ensure that master schedules maximize both instructional time for students and collaboration time for teachers" (p. 58). Elements indicative of a culture of collaboration were evident in the workings of the districts as cited by all 10 participants.

Creating a stable work environment contributes to the retention of quality teachers, generating a reciprocal effect. Administrators should seek ways to create a desirable workplace to attract the best teachers, fitting the beliefs and values of current staff. Factors to be considered include development of positive, caring relationships between students and teachers and among staff. Teachers should be made to feel appreciated for the valuable work being accomplished with students. Consistency of procedures leads to a sense of support for teachers provided by administrators and colleagues.

Building leaders should create and communicate well-defined goals that raise expectations. Collaborative processes are advantageous when determining goals and analyzing progress. Progress toward goal attainment needs be recognized to fuel continued efforts.

Numerous benefits can be realized by working to create relationships with agencies of the community. These relationships give added strength to school culture with a sentiment of school pride and lofty expectations for continued achievement. Because of the various material shortages of low-SES students, community cooperation can be utilized to help support needs of students.

Recommendations for Further Research

As exposed by conducting the current study, various subsequent studies could be conducted in relation to the topic of successful, high-poverty schools. Some proposed ideas follow:

1. Because of the relatively small school size included in this study, other studies could be designed to target buildings with a larger student population. This would provide the ability to generalize among school buildings of all sizes in Missouri.

2. A study including multiple stakeholders as conducted by Hagelskamp and DiStasi (2012) and inclusion of quantitative data as in Suber (2011) could be conducted in Missouri. The study would provide increased data sources and the ability to corroborate information among multiple participants.

3. The districts included in the current study were comprised of a student population that was mostly homogenous racially and located in fairly rural settings. Rosenholtz (1985) focused on inner-city schools with a large number of minority students. A study of successful school districts including urban settings and racially diverse students may be conducted to determine the continued applicability of Rosenholtz (1985) to the specified population.

4. Research about this topic could target failing schools with high poverty rates. Data collected would show whether or not the themes identified in this study were lacking among low-achieving schools, providing reinforcement for the current findings.

Summary

With over 60% of Missouri schools experiencing free and reduced price meal rates of over 50% (MODESE, 2014j), information regarding successful districts under

these challenging circumstances is valuable to school leaders. Examining long-standing operational principles outlined by Rosenholtz (1985) can serve as a resource to guide building leaders toward effective practices. Identifying specific strategies utilized by current districts deemed as successful by the MODESE adds to the depth of applicable knowledge for building principals.

Qualitative research methods were used to identify seven themes contributing to the success of schools serving students largely from homes of low-SES. Based on the work of Rosenholtz (1985), interview questions were formed to answer the posed research questions. Building principals in districts scoring 95% or higher on APR while serving a student population with over 50% receiving free and reduced price meals were identified. Ten administrators, five elementary and five secondary, were recruited for the study, and personal interviews were conducted.

Interview information was analyzed to recognize common practices and emerging themes among responses. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed to ensure the reliability of the data. Transcripts were coded and revealed the following themes: collaboration, relationships, consistency and stability, high expectations, clarifying tasks and objectives, using and analyzing data, and community support. Other commonalities found in responses and strategies related to each interview question were recorded. Emerging themes showed great congruence to the Rosenholtz (1985) paper as well as elements of current research studies (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Forner et al., 2012; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Le Floch et al., 2014; Reddick et al., 2011; Suber, 2011; Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). When defining building culture, as "…the manifestation of the written and unwritten rules, behaviors, traditions, beliefs, and

expectations that undergird everything that happens in the life of the school" (Kohler-Evans et al., 2013, p. 22), the researcher found specific practices of the building administrators studied to be remarkably related to factors associated with building culture.

Appendix A

Letter of Recruitment

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student conducting qualitative research to fulfill the requirements of my program of study in educational administration. The title of my dissertation is *Achievement Despite Poverty: Testing the Effectiveness of Timeless Principles*.

You have been identified as a potential participant due to being the building leader in a school having two years of high Annual Performance Report scores by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) as well as having a student population consisting of a large percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced price meals.

Because of the increasing number of students living in poverty nationwide and high amounts of schools with high free and reduced price meal levels in the state, this study will be conducted to analyze potential factors contributing to the success you are creating in your school. After general themes have been determined, comparisons will be made to a paper written in 1985 to see if the principles are holding true. This study will be valuable to other district leaders having similar challenges and aspirations.

Should you choose to participate, I will contact you to schedule a time for personal interview that is convenient for you; likely during June 2015. The questions will be sent in advance so you may contemplate your answers. The estimated interview time is 60-90 minutes. It will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Your name will not appear in the study. In the results and discussion, efforts will be made to separate extremely identifiable district information and your specific comments. Again, the purpose is to uncover common themes that make high-poverty districts successful.

I sincerely hope you will participate. As educators, sharing of successful strategies strengthens us professionally and helps the future of the students we serve.

Sincerely,
Nicole Keller
nlk520@lionmail.lindenwood.edu
[redacted]

Appendix B

Telephone Script

Hello,

My name is Nicole Keller. Besides teaching for the past 16 years, I am also a doctoral student at Lindenwood University. I am conducting qualitative research to fulfill the requirements of my program of study in educational administration. The title of my dissertation is *Achievement Despite Poverty: Testing the Effectiveness of Timeless Principles*.

You have been identified as a potential participant due to being the building leader in a school having two years of high Annual Performance Report scores by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) as well as having a student population consisting of a high number of students who qualify for free and reduced price meals.

Because of the increasing number of students living in poverty nationwide and high amounts of schools with high free and reduced price meal levels in Missouri, this study will be conducted to analyze potential factors contributing to the success you are creating in your school. After general themes have been determined, comparisons will be made to a paper written in 1985 to see if the principles are holding true. This study will be valuable to other district leaders having similar challenges and aspirations.

Should you choose to participate, we will schedule a time for personal interview that is convenient for you; likely during June 2015. The questions will be sent in advance so you may think about your answers. The estimated interview time is 60-90 minutes. It will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Your name will not appear in the study. In the results and discussion, efforts will be made to separate extremely identifiable district information and your specific comments. Again, the purpose is to uncover common themes that make high-poverty districts successful.

Would you please consider participating in my study?

Appendix C

Formal Letter of Recruitment

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study. I am looking forward to learning more about your school and you as a building leader.

Enclosed you will find a document entitled, *Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities*. Please read this over carefully. I will obtain a signed copy from you when we meet before our interview.

You will also find a document entitled, *Interview Protocol,* including the questions I will be asking during our interview.

I am hoping to schedule our meeting during the month of June as best fits your schedule. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Nicole Keller
Lindenwood University
nlk520@lionmail.lindenwood.edu
[redacted]

Appendix D

Lindenwood University

School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Achievement Despite Poverty; Testing the Effectiveness of Timeless Principles

Principal Investigator: Nicole Keller

Telephone: 417.[redacted] Email: nlk520@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

Participant: _____ Contact info _____

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1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Nicole Keller under the guidance of Dr. Robyn Gordon. The purpose of this research is to determine the common factors contributing to the success of schools with a high amount of students receiving free and reduced price meals. Another purpose is to determine if the common themes of successful high-poverty schools of today relate to those identified 30 years ago.

2. Your participation will involve one 60-90 minute interview that will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Approximately 10 people will be involved in this research.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study; however, your participation may serve as a guide to other schools with facing similar challenges and aspirations. Participation will also allow you to examine current practices and make comparisons to similar schools.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location. You should know that this study involves a small sample (n = 10). This may make it easier to identify you as a participant.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Nicole Keller, 417[redacted] or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Sherry DeVore, 417.881.0009. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636.949.4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____	_____
Participant's Signature	Participant's Printed Name
_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator Date	Investigator Printed Name

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

The following survey protocol was developed by following a design structure by Asmussen and Creswell, as shown in *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* by J. Creswell (2012), p. 226. Pearson Education, Inc.

Project: Achievement Despite Poverty: Testing the Effectiveness of Timeless Principles

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

The interview is being conducted to ascertain the characteristics of schools that have high APR scores despite the challenges faced by educating students from a low socio-economic background. Upon analyzing the data, comparisons will be made to a paper written in 1985 to determine if the factors discovered as common among effective schools with low socio-economics still hold true today.

Questions:

1. Please describe your background in education.

2. How long have you been at this school? In this position*? (May have answered in first question).*

3. What is your primary function as the building principal? Follow-up: How do you accomplish this?

4. This district has had high ratings on its annual performance report for the past two years. To what do you attribute to the success of this district?

5. What role do teachers play in the success of students?

6. What actions do you take to help teachers maintain an instructional focus?

7. This district also has a high number of students receiving free and reduced price meals. What special supports have been implemented to address the challenges faced by at-risk students?

8. How do teachers in this building identify and pursue instructional goals?

9. How would you describe the rate of teacher turn-over in this building*? (Follow-up: Why do you think teachers stay in this district despite the challenges faced?)*

10. What actions do you take to support teachers to insure retention of quality teachers?

11. How are new hires selected?

12. How would you describe the culture of this building?

13. Does the culture of your building play a role in selection of new staff? If so, in what way(s)?

14. What steps are taken to encourage collaboration among staff?

Appendix F

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: May 8, 2015

TO: Nicole Keller
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [743599-1] Achievement Despite Poverty; Testing the Effectiveness of Timeless Principles

IRB REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: May 8, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE: May 8, 2016
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of May 8, 2016.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

If you have any questions, please contact Megan Woods at (636) 485-9005 or mwoods1@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to mwoods1@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

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Vita

Nicole Leigh Wallace Keller was born on July 1, 1976, in Butler, Missouri. She attended elementary and high school in Forsyth, Missouri, graduating in 1994. Mrs. Keller received her Bachelor of Science degree from College of the Ozarks in Secondary Education and Unified Science. She began her career as an educator in 1999. In 2005, Mrs. Keller earned her Master of Science in Educational Administration from Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri.

Over the past 16 years, Mrs. Keller has taught assorted science courses at the high school and junior high levels in four different school districts. Currently she serves as a seventh grade science teacher in the Branson R-IV School District where she has worked since the 2007-08 school year. She has led various teacher teams and committees during her years as an educator, allowing her to utilize her passion for the evolving practices of teaching and learning.

Mrs. Keller has been married to Jeramy Keller of Pittsburg, Kansas, since 2000. Together they enjoy watching their three sons participate in athletic activities as well as spending time with family and friends. Mrs. Keller is a member of the Alpha Psi Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma International for which she has held various leadership positions. The Keller family attends Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church. As a family they enjoy outdoor activities such as kayaking and boating, as well as following the St. Louis Cardinals and the football teams of Pittsburg State and Notre Dame Universities.