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It Takes Leadership to Build a Village: A Portrait of a Public School Community That Is Closing the Achievement Gap

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**IT TAKES LEADERSHIP TO BUILD A VILLAGE:
A PORTRAIT OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMUNITY
THAT IS CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP**

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By

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We approve the dissertation of Julie MacCarthy.
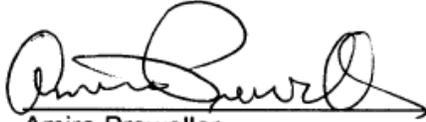
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ABSTRACT

This case study explored a high-achieving elementary school on Chicago's far South Side that fosters academic success for its African American students who come from predominately low-income homes. Tyler School serves a demographic group that historically underperforms. Yet multiple measures of evaluating student achievement indicate that Tyler is an exceptional school.

The research question driving this study is this: How does the school's administrative team at Tyler School create conditions that support student achievement? Secondary questions explore the school's climate, teachers' qualifications, curriculum, and the other factors that contribute to student success. Interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents, as well as observations of staff meetings served as the primary methods of inquiry. A review of the school's improvement plan and School Report Card supplemented the data collection.

Research revealed that under the administrators' leadership, Tyler School features these inter-related conditions that support success: a warm, positive, inclusive, and optimistic culture where relationships between administrators, teachers, parents, and students thrive; highly qualified teachers; and a rigorous curriculum. Through the administrators' resourcefulness and perseverance, some structural features at Tyler are comparable to those at schools serving affluent Caucasian students. Curricular materials and technological resources are up-to-date.

The results of this dissertation, that a complex matrix of inter-related

supports underscores student achievement at a high-performing school serving

low-income African American students reinforces the findings of the Effective

Schools Movement and other research on demographically similar high-

achieving schools. Contributing to this body of research is essential since

national accountability-based education reform efforts have proven unsuccessful

in closing the achievement gap. Documenting how schools such as Tyler

operate, and disseminating that data, will support dedicated administrators and

educators at low-income, low-performing schools to transform their schools by

implementing best practices from real-life school success stories.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research has found that the climate in many public schools serving low-income African American students is dismal (Kozol, 2005; Payne, 2008). Relationships between administrators, teachers, parents, and students are fragmented (Kunjufu, 2002; Nieto, 2004; Noguera, 2003), and schools are plagued by a sense of futility (Payne, 2008). In addition, teachers' perceptions of students' aptitude for learning are low and instruction emphasizes rote learning (Anyon, 2003; Noguera, 2003). Moreover, the structural features of these schools are not conducive to learning: Class size is large, curricular materials are out of date, and teachers at these schools frequently have less education than their counterparts at schools that serve affluent, Caucasian students (Kozol, 2005). Not surprisingly, researchers link academic underachievement at these schools, in part, to these socio-cultural conditions and structural features at these schools. Researchers also point out that the high-stakes accountability provisions of 2002's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the sanctions this legislation imposes on schools, undermine the educational experiences of many low-income students of color. NCLB incentivizes teachers at underfunded schools, which are statistically more likely to serve low-income students of color, to use uniform, test-based teaching strategies and prescriptive curriculum materials to raise test scores (Kohn in Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004). Reitzug and West (in Shapiro, 2009) contend that the principals participating in their study of the impact of NCLB on school leadership indicated

that those principals condoned teachers' use of "drill and skill" strategies to raise test scores. This policy compensated for the perceived inability to meet seemingly unattainable district, state, and federal requirements to maintain their employment.

This case study explored an elementary school on Chicago's Far South Side (Tyler) that, despite the preceding caveats, supports low-income African American children to attain academic success as evidenced by their standardized test scores and other quantitative measures. The leadership team at Tyler, the principal and assistant principal, do not craft their students' learning experiences to raise test scores at any cost. Nor do they use ethically questionable methods to "push out" low-scoring students or to attract high-scoring students to artificially boost their school's standing. Instead, these visionary leaders consciously initiate and maintain the school's warm, positive, inclusive culture while they nurture relationships among teachers, parents, and students. And they believe, as do the staff and parents, that students can attain academic success. The teacher-directed curriculum at Tyler is rigorous, and the teachers themselves are highly qualified, all having at least one master's degree. Moreover, despite funding challenges, some structural features at Tyler are comparable to those at schools serving affluent Caucasian students: Class size is relatively small, and the school's curricular materials and technological resources are up-to-date.

Although the accountability provision of NCLB uses a single factor, standardized test scores, as an indicator of a school's success or failure (Michelman, 2012), multiple quantitative indicators, including students' test

scores, demonstrate that Tyler is an exceptional school:

- The school's ISAT scores are impressive by Chicago standards;[1]

- The school has made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) every year since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was enacted in 2002;[2]

- One third of the school's 8th grade students attend Selective Enrollment high schools;

- The school's rate of teacher turnover is low;[3]

- The rate of student mobility is low (2%);

- The climate is focused, friendly, inclusive, and optimistic;

- The school features high quality resources such as contemporary curriculum materials and computers.

It will be shown in the Findings and Analysis sections that Tyler School also exhibits a number of exemplary qualitative, socio-cultural features that contribute to student achievement. The school's Mission and Vision Statements convey many of the key precepts that underscore the school's success:

Mission

Tyler provides an exceptional educational program that instills high expectations, shapes caring, responsible, and ethical citizens, promotes cultural awareness, and fosters partnerships with families and the community. We develop the knowledge and skills necessary for successful individual achievement and lifelong learning in

the least restrictive environment as well as connecting learning to life.

(Tyler School SIPAAA Planning Report, 2010-2012 – Year 1)

Vision

Students at Tyler enjoy a safe, supportive, and educationally rich learning
environment where the unique academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of
students are met and enhanced through a wide variety of experiences and
opportunities across the curriculum. A strong core curriculum with an emphasis on
math and science along with the integration of technology will ensure that our
students are prepared for high school, higher education, and beyond.

(Tyler School SIPAAA Planning Report, 2010-2012 – Year 1)

In addition to these two statements, the study identified the School
Improvement Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement (SIPAAA), all of which
defined the school's philosophy and approach to learning. Observational and
interview data were collected that explored and described how the administrative
team supports student achievement, key characteristics of the school's climate,
teachers' skill sets, major elements of the school's curriculum, and additional
factors that contribute to the school's success. The manner in which Tyler
School responds to challenges which, if not addressed successfully, would inhibit
student success is also captured.

This case study presents an analysis of those features of the school—
effective administrative team, constructive climate, highly qualified and dedicated

teachers, rigorous and innovative curriculum, effective manner of dealing with challenges, and the other factors that contribute to student achievement—that underscore its success.

Research Questions

The essential question driving this study is this: How does the school's administrative team support student achievement? In my effort to understand and describe the other factors that contribute to student success at Tyler, I also sought answers to the following sub-questions:

- What are the key characteristics of the school's climate?
- Do the teachers possess special skills/behaviors that reinforce student achievement?
- What are the key characteristics of the school's curriculum?
- What other factors contribute to the school's success?

My experience in working with demographically similar, yet underperforming schools that are unable to respond to the challenges—insufficient budget, high rates of student mobility and teacher turnover, CPS's ever changing bureaucratic structure, governance and mandates, and the added pressure that NCLB and accountability politics inflicts on schools—led me to ask:

- What challenges does Tyler School face and how does the school

respond to challenges?

Answers to the research question appear in narrative form in the Findings section of this report. In the Analysis section, the findings are reconciled with the literature on the factors that researchers hold reduce the Achievement Gap. The Conclusion section presents insights as to why these factors appear to contribute to students' success.

Relevance

The research findings presented in this report contribute to the literature on the factors at high-achieving public elementary schools that support low-income African American students to succeed in school. This study draws on Edmonds' (1979) definition of effective schools as high-achieving public schools that support low-income students of color to attain academic success. Contributing to this literature is significant because the American educational system has not helped the majority of such students attain high, or even proficient, levels of academic achievement (Greene & Anyon, 2010). National education reform efforts such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) have proven unsuccessful in closing the achievement gap. NCLB's philosophy is based on the assumption that requiring schools to raise test scores or face sanctions will force improvement (Gamoran, 2007; Peterson & West, 2003; Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2005). This legislation, along with other accountability-based educational reform movements, deflects attention from

structural and socio-cultural factors that underscore the achievement gap. Neil
(in Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004, p. 105) explains:

> …we must recognize that any accountability system for schools runs the
> risk of holding educators and students accountable for factors they cannot
> control. Schools, most prominently, do not control poverty or the historical
> consequences of racism. Neither schools nor accountability can solve the
> accumulated problems of class inequities and racial bias, but school
> systems can and should be held accountable for doing well what they can
> control.

To add insult to injury, the punitive nature of the NCLB Act and other
accountability-based reforms undermines the morale of teachers and principals
(Payne, 2008).   Additionally, in response to pressure to demonstrate rapid
improvement, some educators employ questionable methods to boost test scores.
Many educators and researchers hold that NCLB and other accountability-based
educational reform initiatives undermine authentic learning
(Loveless, 2012; Meir et al., 2004). The Effective Schools Movement and other
researchers who study high-achieving schools serving low-income students of
color do not wholly discount the value of standardized test scores. They use
standardized test scores as a means of identifying successful schools, then
analyze and report on the authentic factors that have a positive impact on
academic performance.

In sum, this body of research shows that successful schools feature a complex matrix of interconnected supports: effective school leadership, an inclusive climate that encourages parental involvement, dedicated and effective teachers, and a rigorous curriculum. Accordingly, this body of literature offers insights that administrators and teachers, committed to working together and with parents, can use to develop a school culture and rigorous curriculum that elevates student achievement.

Despite rhetoric decrying the racial achievement gap, national and local reform efforts, historically and currently, fail to remedy the unequal distribution of educational resources between schools that serve middle-class and/or affluent students who are likely to be Caucasian and schools that serve their African American peers who are likely to be low-income. This creates an opportunity gap or a poverty gap (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). Not surprisingly, Caucasian students who have access to rich academic resources enjoy a number of social advantages, and they outperform low-income African American children who are more likely to attend under-resourced schools and face the challenges that accompany poverty (Kozol, 2005; Payne, 2008). Detractors comment that the Effective Schools Movement deflects attention from the moral imperative to provide equitable educational resources to economically disadvantaged children so they receive a resource-rich education comparable to that of high-income students (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2001).

Disturbingly, many middle-class African American students also under-perform in comparison to their Caucasian peers (Ferguson, 2002; Lee, 2004).

Researchers link the achievement gap between middle-class African American and Caucasian students to socio-cultural factors that impact students' motivation to learn and subsequent academic performance (Ogbu, 1994, 2003, 2004). Educational reform initiatives and legislation fail to foster an equitable distribution of educational resources to students regardless of where they live and attend school (Anyon, 2003; Biddle & Berliner, 2003) and fail to examine and address the socio-cultural factors that contribute to academic under-performance by African American students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

The ensuing achievement gap is evidenced by the fact that African American students attain lower standardized test scores than Caucasian students on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests,[5] as well as on state developed standardized tests. In a NAEP report released in 2009 (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin, Anderson, & Rahman), data revealed that although the nationwide test score gaps in mathematics and reading between African American fourth and eighth grade students and Caucasians in these grades narrowed in 2007, Caucasian students had average scores at least 26 points higher than African American students in each subject on a scale of 0-500.

While African American students made gains on state tests in reading and math since NCLB was enacted in 2002, and the gap between African American and Caucasian students narrowed, the African American subgroup was the lowest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup in 2008 in the grade levels analyzed: grades 4, 8 and high school (Loveless, 2012). Loveless acknowledges, as do others, that the state-reported percentages of proficiency have their limitations.

Gaps can appear larger or smaller depending on where the states set their cut scores for proficient performance. That is, gaps will appear to be small if the cut score is set so low that most students reach it, or so high that few students reach it. The rigor of state tests varies by state.

Research by Payne (2008) and Steele (in Perry, Steele, and Hilliard, 2003) revealed another dimension of the achievement gap: African American students receive lower grades than Caucasian students.   Moreover, Payne (2008) and Steele (in Perry et al., 2003), determined that the graduation rate for African American students is lower. Furthermore, Nieto (2004), Oakes (1985), and Tyson (in McNamara-Horvat & O'Connor, 2006), assert that many racially integrated schools employ structural barriers, such as tracking systems, that further inhibit opportunities for African American students to attain academic success. Oakes (1985) asserts that proponents of tracking claim this policy enables schools to meet the needs of individual students. Her research indicates, however, that students of color are more likely to be excluded from classes for those deemed gifted in elementary school and from honors and advanced placement classes in high school. Likewise, the over-representation of African American students in the lower tracks and in special education programs is linked to the tracking system.

Hall (in Finkel, 2010) comments that African American students, primarily boys who are academically behind and accordingly labeled "learning disabled," frequently become angry. As a result, they are then labeled as having a "behavior disorder." Oakes (1985) explains that decisions about track placement

are based, in part, on test scores. Oakes comments that while poor and minority students consistently score lower than more affluent and Caucasian students, there is no evidence to suggest a relationship between test scores and IQ. The ability to learn, she contends, is normally distributed among and within social groups.

Using test score data as a sorting mechanism results in disproportionate placement of African American students in lower tracks and, in many cases, in special education programs. Teachers' and counselors' recommendations, and sometimes students' and parents' choices, are also taken into consideration in determining where to place a student. Oakes comments that while it is assumed teachers and counselors make accurate, appropriate, and fair recommendations about student placement, the assumption is not supported by evidence. Oakes theorizes that factors of race, class, dress, speech patterns, and ways of interacting with adults shape counselors' and teachers' subjective judgments about student placement.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two interconnected frameworks—the structural and the socio-cultural frameworks—suggest that there are economic and political factors that create and reinforce the achievement gap. The structural framework identifies challenges that low-income African American children and their parents face as a result of their financial condition. These include living in high-crime neighborhoods, the lack of access to healthcare, the lack of access to grocery

stores selling fresh produce, the psychological impact of living in dilapidated housing, and the impact of growing up with inferior educational experiences. The socio-cultural framework holds that public schools fail to engage African American students because they enforce Caucasian cultural norms (Lewis in McNamara-Horvat, & O'Connor, 2006; Ogbu, 2004), fail to integrate non-dominant cultural history (Nieto, 2004), and employ tracking systems that create internal segregation in schools. In the process, schools reinforce negative stereotypes about African American students (Oakes, 1985; Nieto, 2004; Tyson in McNamara-Horvat & O'Connor, 2006). While neither framework provides a sufficient explanation for the achievement gap, together they provide a firm basis for understanding the complexities underlying the gap.

An awareness of the achievement gap, and a belief that public education should be judged on whether or not schools produce racially equal educational outcomes (Rothstein, 2004), evolved after the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The Brown decision held that segregation of students by race in public schools violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. A decade later, in response to provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Congress ordered the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to commission *The Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey* (EEOS) to ascertain whether there existed a lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, or national origin (Viadero, 2006). At the time, the prevailing assumption was that funding differences between schools serving African American and Caucasian students would be

large and that this difference created the unequal achievement between the two student groups (Kahlenberg, 2001).

Two researchers conducted the EEOS: Johns Hopkins sociologist James Coleman, whose name has become associated with the study and the subsequent report on the findings, and Ernest Q. Campbell, a sociologist from Vanderbilt University. The EEOS revealed that among students who stayed in school until the twelfth grade, about 85% of African American students scored a standard deviation below the average for Caucasian students.

Moreover, the schools were highly segregated: 80% of the Caucasian students attended schools that were 90-100% Caucasian while 65% of the African American students attended schools that were predominantly African American. Coleman found differences among the schools regarding resources (e.g. school facilities, curriculum and teacher quality) were not as great as expected. He held that the impact of school resources on achievement was not as significant as the impact of students' family background and economic status. In addition, Coleman posited that students' peers had a direct impact on academic achievement. "Attributes of other students account for more variation in the achievement of minority group children than do any attributes of a school facility and slightly more than do attributes of staff" (Coleman et. al., 1966, p. 302). Coleman asserted that low-income students have higher levels of achievement and larger achievement gains over time when they attend middle-class schools; these schools are typically attended mostly by Caucasian students. But the increased achievement was not large enough to make up for

achievement differences due to family background (Viadero, 2006; Wong & Nicotera, 2004).

The EEOS findings were the catalyst for implementing busing systems intended to bring lower-income African American students into racially-mixed, mainly middle-class schools. In the first decades after the *Brown* decision, as a result of court-ordered desegregation, urban schools in the South became the nation's most integrated (Orfield, 2009). From the early 1970s until the late 1980s, a very large narrowing of the gap between Caucasian students and African American students occurred in both reading and mathematics, with the size of the reduction depending .on the subject and age group examined. For some cohorts, the gaps were cut by as much as half or more. In reading, for example, a 39-point gap for 13-year olds in 1971 was reduced to an 18-point gap in 1988. For 17-year-olds, the gap declined from 53 points to 20 points. In mathematics, the gaps also were narrowed significantly, especially for 13- and 17-year-olds (Barton, 2010).

Some theorists attribute African American students' academic gains to the direct effects of school desegregation, largely in the South, where African American students participated in more rigorous courses and attended schools with lower class size and strong educational resources. Lee's (2002) analysis of NAEP data, along with data evidencing African American families' increasing socioeconomic status during this period identifies a correlation between the narrowing of the achievement gap during the 1970s and early 1980s and a narrowing of the African American-Caucasian gap in socioeconomic and family

conditions during this same period. It should be noted, however, that despite these gains, the median score for African American students was at the 20th to 25th percentile of the Caucasian distribution in 1996.

While Ronald Edmonds (then Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard) acknowledged Coleman's assertion that family background impacts student achievement, he did not accept Coleman's notion that curriculum and teacher quality were unrelated to academic outcomes (Mace-Matluck, 1987). In 1974, Edmonds and others conducted a study titled *Search for Effective Schools: The Identification and Analysis of City Schools that are Instructionally Effective for Poor Children* (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978). The study was to determine if there were inner-city schools in Detroit where African American students scored at or above the city averages on the Stanford Achievement Test and the Iowa Tests of math and reading proficiency. They identified eight schools as effective in teaching math, nine as effective in teaching reading, and five as effective in teaching both math and reading.

Having established that effective schools exist, the researchers matched two demographically similar schools, one an effective school and the other not. They concluded that the characteristics of the effective school, not the students' family backgrounds, supported success. The researchers further discredited Coleman's contention (1966) by reanalyzing Coleman's data and identifying at least 55 effective schools, that is, schools where students scored at or above the city grade average in math and reading. Edmonds explained:

Without seeking to match effective and ineffective schools on mean social-background variables, we found that schools that were instructionally effective for poor and black children were indistinguishable from instructionally less efficient schools on measures of pupil social background (mean father's and mother's education; category of occupation; percentage of white students; mean family size; and percentage of intact families.) The largest differences in performance between effective and ineffective Schools could not therefore be attributed to differences in the social class and family background of pupils enrolled in the schools. This finding is in striking contrast to that of other analyses of the EEOS that have generally concluded that variability in performance levels from school to school is only minimally related to institutional characteristics (Edmonds, 1979, p. 21).

Edmonds and others went on to define the five common characteristics, labeled "Correlates," that underscore success at Effective Schools. And under Lezotte's leadership, following Edmonds' death in 1983, the "Correlates of Effective Schools" were refined and expanded to seven: strong leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations, frequent monitoring of student progress, positive home-school relationships, and opportunity to learn and student time on task (Lezotte, 2009). Lezotte currently works with the National Center for Effective Schools Research, founded in 1986, providing professional development and support to individual schools and

districts seeking guidance to implement reform grounded in the Correlates of Effective Schools.

In the 1990s, researchers at the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UCCCSR), a public research and information organization that examined schools where student achievement is rising, developed a similar theory of practice that offers guidance to practitioners seeking effective methods of improving schools. In *Organizing Schools for Improvement* (2010), UCCCSR researchers, Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) identified five essential supports present at those of Chicago's public elementary schools where students' achievement levels are rising. The authors define these supports as: school leader as the driver for change, parent-community ties, professional capacity, student-centered learning climate, and instructional guidance*.*

The Education Trust, like the UCCCSR, is "dedicated to identifying schools where poor children and children of color do better than their peers at other schools" (Chenoweth, 2008, p. 2). The Trust commissioned education reporter Karin Chenoweth to conduct a qualitative study to determine how "schools…help children who face the substantial obstacles of poverty and discrimination to learn to read, write, compute, and generally become educated citizens" (Chenoweth, p. 1). Chenoweth's findings appear in the 2008 book, *It's Being Done* and her subsequent book, published the following year, *How It's Being Done: Urgent Lessons from Unexpected Schools.* Chenoweth contends that students thrive at schools that feature strong leadership, high expectations

for students, teacher collaboration, a focus on what educators want students to learn, formative assessments, and strong relationships between stakeholders. Leader's (2008) study of leadership at five urban public schools that "graduated students with high levels of achievement under some of the most trying and problematic conditions" (Leader, p.1) contributes to the collective understanding of the critical role school leaders play in student outcomes and the traits of effective leadership. He holds that effective leaders "embraced, communicated, and operated from strong beliefs about schooling" (Leader, p. 223). Like Chenoweth, Leader holds that effective leaders foster strong relationships between stakeholders, create a constructive and inclusive school climate, and engage teachers in discussions about curriculum.

Edmonds' and Lezotte's contentions about the common features of Effective Schools, in combination with the essential supports reported in UCCCSR's research and the factors Chenoweth and Leader identify, underscore that the schools supporting success informed the research questions that produced this study. The insight I gained from reviewing the literature on the structural shortcomings that contribute to the achievement gap at schools that serve low-income students of color—large class size, teachers with less education than those at schools that serve affluent Caucasian students, inferior curricular and technological resources—is also reflected in my research questions.

Purpose of Study

The goal of this study is to contribute to the body of research on the internal features, curricula, and culture of public schools that support low-income African American students to succeed in school. Supplementing this body of literature will support the efforts of educators and parents who are committed to eliminating social reproduction and fostering equitable educational outcomes for children regardless of their socioeconomic status. Furthermore, I posit that the efforts of individual educators and schools committed to raising the academic achievement of low-income African American students offers more promise than prescriptive, and sometimes punitive, national and local governmental reform initiatives. In an article that appeared in 2011 in The *New York Times*, two respected educational commentators, Fredrick M. Hess and Linda Darling-Hammond, express a similar opinion:

> The federal government can make states, localities and schools do things—but not necessarily do them well. Since decades of research make it clear that what matters for evaluating employees or turning around schools is how well you do it—rather than whether you do it a certain way—it's not surprising that well-intentioned demands for "bold" federal action on school improvement should have a history of misfiring. They stifle problem-solving, encourage bureaucratic blame avoidance and often do more harm than good. (Hess & Darling-Hammond)

Diane Ravitch, who served as the assistant secretary of education under

President George H.W. Bush, and whose beliefs about how to close the achievement gap shifted dramatically from advocating for accountability-based reform to advocating for improving curricula, instruction, and the conditions in which teachers teach and students learn, contends:

> Our schools will not improve if elected officials intrude into pedagogical territory and make decisions that properly should be made by professional educators. Congress and state legislatures should not tell teachers how to teach, any more than they should tell surgeons how to perform operations. Nor should the curriculum of the schools be the subject of a political negotiation among people who are neither knowledgeable about teaching nor well educated. Pedagogy—that is, how to teach—is rightly the professional domain of individual teachers. Curriculum—that is, what to teach—should be determined by professional educators and scholars, after due public deliberation, acting with the authority vested in them by schools, districts, or states. (Ravitch, 2010, p. 13)

Accordingly, this case study explored how visionary, inclusive administrators empowered committed teachers and parents at a high-achieving Chicago public elementary school, Tyler, to support success for their mainly low-income, African American students.   I recognized that Tyler is an exemplary school many years ago through my work as the marketing director for a visual arts education organization, *Art Everyday*, that conducts programs at more than

80 public elementary schools each year. I am in Chicago's public schools on a daily basis and have ample opportunity to observe the culture, climate, and curricula of those schools. Tyler has always stood out; the administrators, teachers, and the ancillary staff with whom I have worked at Tyler have been unfailingly professional in demeanor and uncommonly friendly. At grant-mandated monthly meetings, the administrative team gave regular reports of the many local awards the school received and innovative curriculum initiatives. My appraisal of Tyler was reinforced in 2008 when the school received a prestigious and exclusive national award for demonstrating "dramatically improving" student test scores on the Illinois Standard Achievement Tests (ISATs).[2] In addition, Tyler has made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)[2] every year since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law went into effect.

Tyler continues to be an academic exemplar. In the 2009-2010 school year, the school made AYP in reading and math.[6] This was especially noteworthy during that school year as 44.2% of the schools in Illinois failed to make AYP (Rado, 2011). A recently released report (September 2011) by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) revealed that racial test score gaps on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) in Chicago have steadily increased over the past twenty years, and that African American students fell behind all other groups.

Tyler's teacher and student retention rate is as impressive as the students' test scores. Teacher turnover at Tyler is remarkably low, with teachers leaving the school only when they retire. The student mobility rate, 2%, is also

exceptionally low. These statistics evidence the fact that teachers and students

are satisfied with their experiences at Tyler. Moreover, the school does not face

the impediments that inhibit academic achievement at schools with high rates of

teacher turnover and student mobility.

In a site-visit report on the school,[4] the national award committee identified

three features contributing to the school's success: (a) strong school leadership,

(b) high expectations for students; and (c) parental involvement.

The findings of my research underscore the importance of these same

features and demonstrate what they look like at Tyler. The analysis of the

research findings provides insight into why these features contribute to students'

success. Not surprisingly, the literature on high-achieving public schools links

these same features, along with others, to providing support for low-income

students of color to succeed in school.

It is critical to supplement this body of literature with evidence that

students succeed when they participate in authentic educational experiences in

an inclusive and supportive school environment. Accountability provisions and

sanctions levied on educators whose students don't demonstrate academic gains

under NCLB (and other accountability-based educational reforms) tempt some

schools to use ethically questionable methods to raise test scores. Some do this

by "pushing out" low-scoring students, and others by narrowing teaching to the

test and devoting inordinate amounts of class time to test preparation (Meir et al.,

2004).

Context

      Awareness of the achievement gap, a belief that public education should be judged on whether schools produce racially equal educational outcomes, and a national interest in education reform evolved after the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and during the Civil Rights Movement. These sentiments triggered educational reform initiatives geared to reducing the racial achievement gap such as the now defunct practice of court-ordered busing of African American students to schools that serve mostly Caucasian students for the purpose of fostering desegregation, which was championed by James Coleman (1966), and the Effective Schools Movement described previously.

      National interest in education reform spiked again in 1983 after then President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell, empowered the National Commission on Excellence in Education to study available research and data on public school students at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary level, as he believed that the United States' educational system was failing to meet the needs of an internationally competitive workforce. The commission's report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983), declared there was a "long-term decline in educational achievement" (p. 6) that resulted in failure to produce a well-educated citizenry for an ever-expanding competitive economic market. *A Nation at Risk* provided recommendations for educational reform in the areas of content, standards and expectations for students' performance, length of school day, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support.

These recommendations provoked a national discussion about the quality and purpose of public education (Borek, 2008).

As a result of these recommendations along with other studies on the quality of education, a number of restructuring reforms, particularly at the state level, were implemented in the early to mid-1980s. These reforms focused on students' experiences in school, teachers' interactions with students, school governance, and restructuring the relationships between schools and the larger community (Berends, 2004). *A Nation at Risk* also gave rise to the standards-based reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, which shifted attention from the activities of teachers to the achievement of students (Borek, 2008) and resulted in state-mandated regulation of teacher licensing, graduation requirements, standardized tests and assessments, and accountability standards, among other things (Gamoran, 2007).

In 1994, Congress passed the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and the *School-to-Work Opportunities Act,* which President Clinton signed into law. This legislation was intended to change the educational system by putting the achievement of academic and occupational competence at the center of education (Hess & Petrilli, 2008). To that end, the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* established eight educational goals that were to be met by the year 2002. These goals mandated that: all students would enter school ready to learn; high school graduation rates would rise to 90%; students would leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in English, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, art, history, and

geography; teachers would have access to professional development to help them prepare students for the next century; U.S. students would be the first in the world in mathematics and science; every adult American would be literate and possess the knowledge to compete in a global economy; schools would be free of drugs, violence, unauthorized firearms, and alcohol; and every school would promote parental involvement in the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

In 2002, under President George W. Bush, Congress passed the *No Child Left Behind* Act and withdrew authorization and funding for *Goals 2000.* Both Republicans and Democrats supported this law, initiating sweeping changes to the 37-year-old *Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA).* The *ESEA, or Title I,* was enacted as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program in which he declared a "War on Poverty*."* It was a federal compensatory program intended to remedy educational inequity resulting from funding discrepancies between schools that serve low-income students and those serving middle and upper-income students (Wong & Nicotera, 2004). Title I allocated extra funds to schools with a high concentration of students from low-income families to enhance their educational opportunities.

The NCLB act reshaped ESEA by greatly expanding the federal government's role in education. It mandated that states receiving Title I funds implement standardized testing, adhere to greater accountability provisions, and focus on closing the achievement gap (Hess & Petrilli, 2008). NCLB stipulated that all states and schools receiving Title I funds develop academic content

standards in reading/language arts and mathematics and that all students,
including traditionally under-served students (students from low-income families,
those with disabilities, with limited English proficiency, and of color) should meet
or exceed State standards in these areas by the 2013-2014 school year (U.S.
Department of Education: www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter.)[7]

Soon after NCLB went into effect, a number of Democrats and some
Republicans challenged the assumption underlying NCLB, that accountability
provisions alone would enable schools to eliminate achievement gaps. This
challenge ignores the magnitude and impact of the social inequalities that
contribute to the gap (Gamoran, 2007; Orfield, 2009) and deflects attention from
the repercussions of race-based social, political, and economic inequity by
suggesting that schools can prepare all students, regardless of their
circumstances, to meet academic standards established by the states (Noguera,
2009).

Moreover, a number of educators and theorists hold that the provisions of
NCLB actually undermine public education. In response to the pressure to raise
test scores, teachers are encouraged to "teach-to-the-test" and devote
instructional time to practicing test-taking techniques (Lipmann, 2004).
Principals, increasingly held responsible for standardized test scores (Meir, Kohn,
Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004) are indirectly incentivized to allocate
class time and school resources to test preparation. They are required to devote
a significant amount of their own time to completing additional paperwork
generated by district-mandated NCLB compliance requirements (Johns, 2009).

To avoid having their schools labeled as failing, some states have set low standards for "proficiency" on state-developed standardized tests, one of the measures of achievement NCLB requires states to collect (Center on Educational Policy, 2007). Since NCLB mandates that proficiency standards increase each year, Federal authorities caution that 74% of the nation's schools may not meet NCLB standards in 2012 (*Chicago Tribune*, 10/31/2011.)

Among the many shortcomings of NCLB*,* most notable is the fact that its one-size-fits-all approach to accountability has resulted in an inordinate number of schools failing to meet AYP. With this designation comes such paralyzing stigmatization and punitive sanctions that Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and President Obama have advocated for an overhaul of this legislation (Michelman, 2012). To that end, the Obama administration has enabled states to apply for waivers from some of the accountability provisions of NCLB (Rado, 2011) including the elimination of AYP, in exchange for adopting certain educational improvement strategies—among them revamping teacher-evaluation systems to factor in student growth (McNeil, 2010) and the voluntary adoption of the national Common Core State Standards (McNeil, 2012) that specify what students must know and be able to demonstrate in language arts and mathematics (http://www.isbe.net/common_core/default.htm.) At this writing, both the Senate and the House of Representatives have put forth bills that call for a massive rewrite of NCLB (Klein, 2012)*.*

Summary

Despite the complex socio-cultural and structural factors that underlie the racial achievement gap, and the obstacles that prevent national and local school reform movements from closing the gap, there are high-performing schools that find ways to support their low-income African American students to achieve academic success. Research, including this study, demonstrates that these schools do not resort to using unscrupulous methods to raise students' standardized test scores in a desperate effort to meet the NCLB mandate to make AYP or face sanctions. Tyler and other high-achieving schools feature complex, inter-connected elements that stimulate authentic learning and collectively support students to succeed. One particular element is especially critical: school leadership. This study demonstrates, as do others, that school leaders are positioned to initiate and sustain the other supports. Studying how successful schools operate and sharing that data will support dedicated and ambitious administrators at low-income, low-performing schools to transform their schools by developing a vision of what can be achieved and then implementing best practices from real-life school success stories to realize that vision.   The Findings and Analysis chapters in this dissertation paint a portrait of the school community that the leadership at Tyler School built and continue to support. The implications of this research for policy makers and educational practitioners are presented in the Conclusion.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tyler School, a high achieving elementary school on Chicago's Far South Side, fosters academic success for its African American students, most of whom come from low-income homes. This study identifies the factors that allow this success to be attained and sustained. It is intended to contribute to the body of literature on schools that help low-income African American students achieve academic success by offering a view into the development and management of relationships between school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Previous studies have shown these relationships to be critical to successful student outcomes. The existence of high-performing schools serving low-income students demonstrates the possibility that historically marginalized students can achieve academic success in school despite structural challenges.

National and local reform efforts to close the achievement gap, which have proved largely unsuccessful, focus narrowly on test scores/outcomes. Research has shown that high-performing schools serving low-income students, in contrast, focus on the factors/inputs that contribute to student success. Further research into the internal features, curricula, and culture of high-achieving public schools, as well as public dissemination of the findings of these studies, is recommended to support educators and administrators at low-performing schools who aspire to transform their schools and, in the process, to support efforts to narrow the achievement gap.

Contemporary Explanations for the Achievement Gap

Two interconnected frameworks suggest that there are economic and political factors that create and reinforce the achievement gap; the first is structural while the second is a socio-cultural framework. The structural framework links the challenges that low-income African American children and their parents face as a result of their economic condition: living in high-crime neighborhoods, lack of access to healthcare, lack of access to grocery stores selling fresh produce, the psychological impact of living in dilapidated housing, and the impact of inferior educational experiences. The socio-cultural framework holds that public schools fail to engage African American students because they enforce Caucasian cultural norms (Lewis in McNamara-Horvat & O'Connor, 2006; Ogbu, 2004), fail to integrate non-dominant cultural history (Nieto, 2004), and employ tracking systems that create internal segregation in schools. In the process, schools reinforce negative stereotypes about African American students (Tyson in McNamara-Horvat & O'Connor, 2006; Nieto, 2004; Noguera, 2001; Oakes, 1985). While neither framework provides a sufficient explanation for the achievement gap, they provide a considerable basis for understanding the complexities underlying the gap.

Structural Factors that Contribute to the Achievement Gap

Structural theorists assert that our society is organized in a manner that creates economic inequality, and that public education contributes to the class

system (MacLeod, 1995). Critical theorists who analyze education through a structural lens, such as Apple (1995 and 2004), Giroux (2001) Nieto (2004), and Noguera (1999), argue that in a capitalist economic system, only a percentage of the population will acquire high levels of technical knowledge. Certain levels of low achievement on the part of "minority" students are tolerable and, in fact, are advantageous. Consequently, they argue that the failure of low-performing schools serving students of color does not pose a problem for the economy. Rather, that failure sustains the existing system of economic inequality.

Apple (1995 and 2004), Giroux (2001), Nieto (2004), and Noguera (1999) draw on the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) to argue that schools reproduce existing social and economic inequality. A "hidden curriculum" prepares students with high socioeconomic status for high-paying, high-status jobs through intellectually stimulating educational experiences in well-funded schools. Students with low socioeconomic status, in contrast, attend underfunded schools that emphasize rote learning, conformity, and discipline that prepares them for low-status, low-wage work.

Noguera (2003) and Anyon (2003) explain that the achievement gap corresponds closely with larger patterns of race and class privilege: Schools reinforce hegemonic social and economic inequity by confirming the cultural legitimacy of the dominant group (middle- and upper-class Caucasian Americans) and by limiting the voice and power of members of the non-majority group (persons of color and members of the lower-class). To this end, schools employ a "hidden curriculum" that appears to be politically neutral, but in fact

"normalizes" the existing, hierarchical social order (Apple, 2004). In the process, hegemony perpetuates the notion that academic achievement is connected to individual students' aptitude for academic work and level of commitment to achievement.

Anyon (2005) and MacLeod (2005) assert that capitalism creates a predominance of low-wage work and too few jobs, which, in turn, creates massive urban poverty that inordinately impacts African Americans and Latinos. MacLeod (2005) explains further that while most poor people in the U.S. are Caucasian (Caucasians make up 74% of the country's total population of 300 million citizens; African Americans are 13.5% of the population-http://factfinder.censu.gov/servlet), a disproportionate number of African Americans are impoverished, living in racially segregated, economically devastated ghettos. Moreover, African Americans on average earn less than their Caucasian counterparts. The average hourly wage for newly hired African Americans in jobs that do not require a college degree is $10.23; newly hired Caucasians in similar positions, in contrast, earn $13.08 (Dillahunt, Miller, Prokosch, Huezo, & Muhammad, 2010). Anyon (2005) states further that most job openings in the next ten years will not require sophisticated skills or a college degree. And only 25% of the new and projected job openings are expected to pay more than $26,000. This amount is too low to sustain a family (Economic Policy Institute, 2004).

Austin (2009) and Shierholz (2009) report that the current recession in the United States contributes to racial and economic inequality. The Bureau of Labor

Statistics reported that in 2008, only 63% of African American men ages 20 and over were employed, and 17% of African American teens had jobs. Among Caucasian men, 72% had jobs and 33% of Caucasian teens were employed (Orfield, 2009). Goldman (2009) reported that the employment gap between African Americans and all other races increased in November 2009. In 2010 the unemployment rate for African Americans stood at 15.6% while for Caucasians it was 9.0 % (Dillahunt et al., 2010). The poverty rate, as reported by Shierholz (2009), was predicted to increase by 2010, anticipating that nearly one-third (31.8%) of all African Americans would be living in poverty. Her research revealed that one-third (33.9%) of all African American children were living in poverty in 2008. Dillahunt et al. (2010) report that African American children are 3.3 times more likely to live in poverty than are Caucasian children.

Anyon (2005), Austin (2009), Goldman (2009), and Virella (2008) explain that two key factors underscore high levels of African American unemployment— limited job opportunities in the urban areas where the majority of African Americans can afford to live and racially discriminatory hiring practices. Dillahunt et al. (2010) report that college-educated African Americans are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their Caucasian counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Austin (2009) asserts that audited or paired-testing studies where African American and Caucasian job applicants present basically the same qualifications in the same ways to employers consistently find that the Caucasian applicant is much more likely to be offered the job. Virella (2008) explains that from 1991-2007, in the six-county Chicago region where this study took place,

the greatest job growth occurred in the 41 municipalities with the lowest African American populations. More than 45,000 jobs were lost in the 14 area municipalities where African Americans make up at least 30% of the population (Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security).

Dillahunt et al. (2010) assert there is no evidence that federal job creation projects initiated under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in areas like infrastructure, transportation, and green buildings will have a positive impact on chronically economically depressed communities; nor will they offset the disproportionately high rate of unemployment in the African American community. In an effort to foster greater employment parity along racial lines, African American leaders, including Reverend Al Sharpton, met with President Obama on February 10, 2010, to encourage him to spur job creation in such chronically depressed communities.

Clearly, poverty and unemployment rates for African Americans are higher than for Caucasians. And when employed, people of color earn significantly less than Caucasians; African Americans earn 62 cents for every dollar earned by Caucasians. Likewise, African Americans have 10 cents of net wealth for every dollar of Caucasian net wealth (Dillahunt et al., 2010). The wealth gap, aggravated by predatory lending practices where over half of the mortgages to African Americans were high-cost and subprime, has led to a high rate of foreclosures (Leigh & Huff, 2007). Lardner (2008) holds that African American homeowners who live in communities with a high rate of foreclosures will likely see the value of their property decline. Austin (2009) comments that a growing

number of middle-class African American children will grow up to be worse off economically than their parents.   This instability undermines African American students' educational experiences, reinforcing the achievement gap.

Funding disparities between schools serving Caucasian students and those serving African American students also contribute to the achievement gap and underscore social reproduction (Ladson-Billing, 2006; Noguera, 2009). Nearly half of the funding for any single school district is generated by local property taxes; the remainder comes from federal and state funds, the ratio varying by state. Accordingly, higher levels of funding will come from communities where poverty is minimal and the African American population sparse. Significantly lower levels of funding are more likely to come from communities where poverty is prevalent (Neas, 2004, & Noguera, 2009). Consequently, there are large funding differences between school districts across the states (Biddle & Berliner, 2003).

In Illinois, property taxes generate 53% of school monies (Neas, 2004), and the ratio of per-pupil spending varies widely. In affluent communities like Rondout School District 72 in Lake Forest, per-pupil spending is more than $22,700. The students in this district are 73% Caucasian and 7.81% African American. By contrast, Bartonville School District 66 spends $5,006 per student. In Chicago, where the school population is 45% African American and 9% Caucasian, the per-pupil spending rate is $9,726. Wenglinsky (2002) found that in the United States, gaps in achievement between students from high- and low-socioeconomic status homes are greater in poorly-funded than in well-funded

schools. Educational funding based on property tax is a uniquely American phenomenon. Biddle and Berliner (2003) point out that in other developed countries, public schools in rich and poor communities alike are normally funded equally from state taxes, varying only in the number of children they serve.

In the United States, affluent students, more likely to be Caucasian, receive significantly better educational opportunities than low-income students, notably low-income African American students. Students in affluent school districts enjoy rich academic resources, including highly qualified teachers with strong subject-matter knowledge and superior skills in teaching and managing classrooms, fortified by low student-to-teacher ratios (Biddle & Berliner, 2003), as well as challenging curriculum materials and access to technology (Kozol, 2005).

Kozol (2005) asserts that middle-class Caucasian children enter elementary school with an advantage over African American children from low-income homes as they often have attended private pre-schools where they acquire pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. They are introduced to the world of numbers, the shapes of letters, the sizes of and varieties of solid objects, and they learn how to sort and arrange things into groups or to arrange them in a sequence. Ferguson (2008) and Lee and Burkam (2002) support Kozol's contention that the lack of well-designed, public preschool programs available to low-income children contributes to the achievement gap that begins when these children enter kindergarten.

Kozol (2005) and Rothstein (2004) observe that affluent children enjoy extracurricular activities that supplement in-school experiences largely

unavailable to poor children. Rothstein (2004) further speculates that Caucasian middle-class children learn more, or possibly forget less, during the summer than their low-income African American peers. During the summer months, middle and upper-class children are more likely to attend camps, take family vacations that expose them to new and different environments, go to zoos and museums, or take sports, dance, or music lessons, all intellectually stimulating activities.

As a result of the American system of funding, low-income students, predominantly African American, are taught by teachers with less seniority and less experience than those in affluent suburbs, where attractive salaries and working conditions are offered (Kozol, 2005; Lee & Burkam, 2002). Class size is significantly higher in schools serving low-income African American children (Barton, 2003; Ferguson, 2008; Lee & Burkam). Schools serving low-income students frequently lack innovative curriculum materials and state-of-the-art technology (Kozol, 2005). Kozol, Noguera (1999), and Payne (2008) contend that the dismal physical surroundings of low-income schools—often poorly lit, poorly maintained, and lacking green space—contribute to a sense of hopelessness for both staff and students.

Many poor African American children face the daily challenge of living in high-crime neighborhoods frequently plagued by violence, gangs, and drug activity. Children who witness crimes or know people who have been victimized can come to believe that the world is violent, dangerous, and unjust (Ellen & Turner, 1997). These children can grow to believe that crime, vandalism, and serving time in jail is normal. Anderson (1994) comments that in certain inner-city

communities, the "toughening-up one experiences in prison can actually enhance one's reputation on the street." To protect their children from crime and violence, parents in poor neighborhoods often forbid them to walk to school alone or play outside. These children, sheltered and isolated from the social fabric of their neighborhoods, are insulated from certain learning opportunities (Ellen & Turner) and can become fearful. Ludwig (1993) observes that the few affluent, educated adults these children encounter tend to be Caucasian.

Accordingly, low-income African American children can come to assume that education provides advantages to Caucasian people that are not available to them. MacLeod (1995) describes this phenomenon as "leveled aspirations," which he says reproduce class inequality from one generation to the next. In the process, the "Hidden Curriculum" is perpetuated—the class system is reproduced and through their political socialization, low-income students are indoctrinated to be obedient, rather than inquisitive (Apple, 2004).

Economic instability creates high rates of mobility, further undermining low-income students' educational experiences; the mobility rate for African American children is double that of Caucasian children. High mobility impacts not only those who move, but also the schools and the achievement level of students who do not move frequently (Barton, 2003; Rothstein (2004-a). Schools with high mobility rates are disrupted by the need to reconstitute classrooms to balance class size and avoid placing all of the new students in one classroom. Teachers at these schools, then, are more likely to review old material than to introduce new materials, and they are less able to customize instruction to meet

the needs of new students (Rothstein, 2004). Payne (2008) notes that the mobility of both students and teachers contributes to the general sense of instability and subsequently undermines morale.

Brooks (1998) and Rothstein (2006) posit that health differences between low-income and middle- and upper-income children widen the achievement gap. Low-income African American students are one-third less likely to get standard vaccinations for diphtheria, measles, and influenza or to have access to regular dental care than Caucasian children. In addition, these students have high rates of vision and hearing problems, and medical issues resulting from poor nutrition and asthma.

Brooks (1998) also notes that despite the regulatory ban on lead-based paint, a study conducted in 1994 revealed that 37.8% of African American children in the United States suffer from lead poisoning (compared to 6.1% of Caucasian children) because they tend to live in older homes with deteriorating lead-based paint. The collective differences in health—vision, hearing, oral health, asthma—between poor African American children and more affluent Caucasian children place the former at a cumulative disadvantage that depresses academic performance. Brooks notes that the medical profession can control asthma, eradicate lead poisoning, and prevent such diseases as tuberculosis. That this does not happen in minority communities is evidence of "environmental racism."

Shelton (2009) reports that the Sinai Urban Health Institute found a nationwide gulf between the health status of African Americans and Caucasians;

this divide has worsened between 1990 and 2005 for six of the 15 health indicators studied. And in Chicago, the disparity worsened for 11 of those 15 indicators. Researchers attribute this phenomenon to the prevalence of poverty, segregation, and the lack of access to healthcare and costly medications. Steve Whitman, the author of the Sinai Urban Health Institute study, contends that the underlying issues are racism and poverty, forcing low-income African Americans to live in neighborhoods where there are no stores to buy fresh produce and no parks in which to play and exercise, and where health facilities are poorly funded (in Shelton, 2009).

While well intended, the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) deflects attention from the funding inequities and social, political, and economic inequities by suggesting that schools can prepare all students, regardless of their circumstances, to meet academic standards established by the states (Noguera, 2009). NCLB requires public schools to administer annual standardized tests in the core subjects of math, reading, and science to elementary and high school students. It mandates test scores be disaggregated by the sub-groups of race, language, income, etc. (Hess & Perilli, 2008). While NCLB is grounded in the moral imperative to foster equity in education and address achievement gaps (Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004), the provisions of this legislation fail to explore why students of color underachieve (Noguera). Nor does it ensure that all students are taught the material covered on standardized tests by effective teachers, learn in intellectually stimulating environments, and have access to rigorous curricular materials.

Indeed, several theorists contend that NCLB actually *contributes* to the achievement gap. Teachers at overcrowded, under-resourced, and under-funded, low-income schools often succumb to pressure to "teach to the test" by devoting a substantial amount of class time to practicing test-taking techniques. Likewise, the curriculum at these schools is frequently restricted to the subjects tested (math, reading and science). Instruction in non-test areas such as art, music, and social studies is frequently eliminated, as are enrichment opportunities such as field trips (Lipman, 2004). Research shows that some principals, whose livelihood is also on the line, condone these practices. Wood comments:

> However, there is growing evidence that virtually all the effects of the tactics used to raise test scores have been negative. This includes the pushing out, retention, and dropping out of students who do not test well; the narrowing of the curriculum and classroom practices and the limiting of the school experience. These have been the cost of our growing reliance on standardized tests as measures of our schools, and with the NCLB upping the ante for schools when it comes to these scores, we should expect to see even harsher consequences for our schools, kids, and communities. (in Meier et al., 2004 p. 36)

Socio-Cultural Explanations for the Achievement Gap

While the glaring unequal distribution of educational resources

concomitant with the challenges of living in poverty impede the academic

achievement of low-income African American students, these factors cannot

wholly explain the achievement gap between these students and their Caucasian

peers. Moreover, these structural features fail to fully explain the achievement

gap between middle-class African American students and Caucasian students.

A fuller understanding requires an analysis of the socio-cultural factors

that impact learning. These include the failure of public schools to affirm the

values, culture, and aspirations of ethnically and racially diverse students and

failure to integrate non-dominant cultural history into the curriculum. The manner

in which school policies and teachers themselves reinforce negative stereotypes

about African American students undermines their ambition. This is also

associated with the achievement gap.

The late John Ogbu, a professor of anthropology at the University of

California, conducted several studies that indicated a link between the impact of

the history of racism on African American students' negative attitude toward

education and their ensuing low academic outcomes. Ogbu's cultural-ecological

framework, or oppositional theory (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1992, 1994),

holds that African Americans are systemically denied access to educational and

employment opportunities equal to those that Caucasian Americans enjoy,

indicating that racial discrimination and structural inequalities persist. As a result,

Fordham and Ogbu posit that African American students "experience inordinate

ambivalence and affective dissonance around the issue of academic excellence

in the school context."   Those students who exhibit behaviors such as listening

to "White" music, participating in (White) cultural activities like ballet, reading, and writing poetry, bear the burden of being perceived as "acting White."

Ogbu's (1978) cultural ecological perspective holds that job ceilings give rise to disillusionment with the real value of school and with conforming to the social rules and expectations of the dominant group. He acknowledges that race relations in the United States have improved since the 1960s and that African Americans now have greater access to employment opportunities (Ogbu,1994). Nevertheless, he asserts that most low-income African Americans see racial barriers in employment, education, and housing as the primary causes of their menial positions and consequent poverty.

The socioeconomic barriers that African Americans encounter inhibit their aspiration for traditional upward mobility and create a "cultural inversion." This rejection of the values of the dominant culture produces an oppositional culture. Ogbu asserts that African American students resist assimilation by participating in a counterculture, a "collective identity" that rejects assimilation and, accordingly, academic success. Ogbu (2004) explains that this concept began to develop during slavery when the collective experience of oppression and exploitation gave rise to an African American racial identity and sense of community. He notes that after emancipation, African Americans did not abandon their oppositional culture although they recognized the need to "act White" to navigate the educational system and attain a greater degree of social mobility and acceptance by the Caucasian population.

Ogbu holds that African Americans developed coping strategies to

manage the tension between their own oppositional culture and the dominant

White culture. These strategies include: cultural and linguistic assimilation,

accommodation without assimilation (e.g., behaving like Caucasian people at

school and at work), exhibiting ambivalence (recognizing that African Americans

can never overcome racial stigma), resistance to White cultural and linguistic

frames of reference, refusing to "act White," and encapsulation—that is,

remaining within the African American cultural identity. He explains that at

school, students apply these very same coping strategies. His research

indicates that adopting White attitudes and behaviors (striving to get good

grades, speaking standard English, regularly completing homework assignments,

etc.) is critical to academic success.

Yet African American students often experience peer pressure that causes

them to reject Caucasian behaviors. Noguera (2001 a) however, comments that

Ogbu's theory about the social stigma of acting White is overly deterministic. His

research indicates that many African American and Latino students manage to do

well in school while retaining a sense of pride in their racial and cultural identity.

Lewis (in McNamara-Horvat & O'Connor, 2006) draws on Ogbu's

oppositional theory and the notion of the stigma that students face if they "act

White." He cautions, however, that oppositional theory and the "acting White

theory" became popular because they reinforce the perpetuation of a racial

hierarchy by blaming the subjects of racial exclusion for their own situation.

Lewis (in McNamara-Horvat & O'Connor, 2006) and Noguera (2002) hold that

while public schools appear to be culturally neutral, they are, in fact, bastions of

Caucasian cultural hegemony. They attribute the problems that African American students encounter in school, in part, to the failure of mainstream educational systems to incorporate non-dominant cultures into school culture and pedagogy, thereby creating the barriers that inhibit African American students' academic success.

Noguera (2003) points out that educators ignore the possibility that schools can affirm the values, culture, and aspirations of ethnically and racially diverse students; instead they accept the notion that minorities must assimilate and conform to the dominant culture. Nieto (2004) adds that African American students are alienated by the lack of connection between their experiences at home and the curriculum at school. As a result, the possibility exists that cultural discontinuity between the familiar, home experiences of students of color, and their experiences at school inhibit their aspirations and level of achievement.

Nieto (2004) reports that a study of four highly diverse public schools in southern California revealed that students are frequently bored in school because they see little relevance between what is taught and their actual lives and probable futures. Nieto posits that teachers' reluctance to discuss difficult and contentious issues such as racism, slavery, inequality, and genocide reinforces students' feelings that school life is not related to real-life. Kunjufu (2002) asserts that teachers, typically middle-class, Caucasian, and female, often lack information about the quality of their students' lives. Unwittingly, they assign homework that can require resources—encyclopedias, atlases, computers, and Internet—that are not available to the students in their homes. Moreover,

teachers sometimes give assignments that necessitate a visit to a public library, museum, planetarium, aquarium, or another cultural institution. Kunjufu contends that assignments requiring parent-directed field trips are unrealistic if families live in gang-ridden neighborhoods subject to frequent "lockdowns." Additionally, transportation can be cost-prohibitive for many low-income families, and many African American parents can feel out-of-place in cultural institutions. Because teachers assign homework that their students can't complete, students' grades and their identification with school will suffer.

Kunjufu, as well as Young, Wright, and Laster (2005), contend that teachers fail their students by tailoring their instruction to left-brain thinkers, despite the fact that most African American students are right-brained thinkers. Left-brain thinkers are analytic, respond best to written assignments, prefer to concentrate on one task at a time as opposed to multiple tasks, and suppress their emotions, preferring to respond to logical appeals. Right-brained thinkers, in contrast, respond best to instruction by example, prefer to study or work on many things at once in a noisy atmosphere, and respond to emotional appeals. Kunjufu and Young, Wright, and Laster, hold that educational pedagogy geared only to analytic learners places African American students at a disadvantage as it fails to engage their interests and to capitalize on their strengths.

Freed and Parsons' (1997) work supports the assertions of Kunjifu and Young, Wright, and Laster that most teachers are left-brained and use the left-brained teaching methods of lectures and individual reading assignments. These fail to engage and educate right-brained students. Moreover, Freed and Parsons

found that children who are right-brained are often misdiagnosed as suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). They state: "Nowadays, it seems every child who has a high energy level, who is bored in school, or who sasses his teacher is said to have ADD" (p. 26). Though Freed and Parsons do not see a link between race and brain dominance, they provide valuable insight into the disconnection between left-brained teachers and right-brained students:

> Our classrooms are being flooded by a new generation of right-brained, visual kids. While our school system plods along using the same teaching methods that were in vogue decades ago, students are finding it more and more difficult to learn that way. As our culture becomes more visual and brain dominance shifts to the right, the chasm widens between teacher and pupil. (Freed & Parsons, 1997, p. 77)

Perry (in Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003) asserts that many Caucasian teachers believe African American students who speak Black English are intellectually inferior. She contends that this perception can impede their motivation and ability to teach students who are culturally different. Nieto (2004) acknowledges that many teachers perceive that the racially and ethnically diverse languages and cultures of their students are inadequate, thereby undermining students' identities. She adds that when teachers correct students who speak Black English, the students perceive that the language they speak has little status and power in our society. She laments the fact that little has been

done to familiarize teachers with communication differences and to help them more effectively adjust curricula to address their students' backgrounds.

Ferguson (2008), Ferguson in Jencks and Phillips (1998), Nieto (2004), and Noguera (2002) all assert that teachers influence how students, particularly African American students, feel about school. They explain that students' feelings about school have an impact on their aspirations and, ultimately, their level of academic achievement. These researchers point to studies that link student outcomes to teachers' perceptions, which, in turn, influence the way teachers treat their students. Ferguson and Nieto hold that teachers treat students differently based on their perceived status as high or low achievers. Ferguson (in Jencks & Phillips, 1998) asserts that when teachers expect African American children to have less potential, they are less likely to search for innovative ways to help their students to improve. Ferguson asserts that teachers wait less time for students perceived to be low achievers to answer questions, give answers, accept incorrect answers, call on them less often, and criticize these students more and praise them less. He contends, moreover, that students seem to understand the distinctions of status that these behaviors convey.

Noguera (2002) reports studies demonstrating that as a group, African American students do not trust their teachers. Meier (2002) and Noguera hold that America's long history of race and class conflicts inhibits African American students from developing trusting relationships with their teachers and this, in turn, hinders their level of academic achievement. That said, both Meier and

Noguera acknowledge that there are schools where African American students and their teachers develop supportive and trusting relationships and where students attain high levels of academic achievement.

A discussion of the factors that create and reinforce the achievement gap would not be complete without acknowledging that many racially and economically integrated schools use tracking systems that bestow undue advantages on Caucasian students. This, in turn, contributes to the achievement gap at the national level.

Tyson (in McNamara-Horvat & O'Connor, 2006) acknowledges that institutional patterns of segregation based on race and socioeconomic status in courses, programs, achievement, and tracking influence students' day-to-day experiences in school as well as their perception of themselves as students. Tyson believes that it is the cumulative experience African American students have by the time they reach adolescence that underlies their lack of identification with school. Her field research in schools and interviews with more than 250 students in elementary, middle, and high schools revealed that students do, in fact, value education and knowledge. Moreover, she found evidence of the stigma of acting Caucasian in the context of schools where only Caucasian (usually well-to-do) or disproportionately few African American students had the opportunity to participate in academically and intellectually gifted (AIG) or honors and advanced placement (AP) programs.

Steele (in Perry et al., 2003) asserts that the confidence of high-achieving African American students from middle-class homes is undermined by a societal

"stereotype threat" which he defines as "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (p. 111). Steele explains that a significant part of the negative stereotype of African Americans concerns intellectual ability. He holds that African American students internalize negative stereotypes as performance anxiety and develop low expectations for achievement. Stereotype threat, he believes, gives rise to self-fulfilling prophecies. McKown and Strambler (2008) and Steele note that when African American students are asked to indicate their ethnicity before taking a test, they perform worse then when they are not asked to indicate ethnicity. Consequently, these researchers contend that direct and overt messages African American students receive about race and intellectual ability inhibit their academic achievement.

Despite evidence of the impact of social and cultural factors on the educational experiences of African American students, Noguera (2003) points out that while there is a high degree of diversity within racial groups, a number of students of color do attain academic success. He notes that structural factors such as class and income, the educational experiences of parents, the quality of the schools that students attend, and the neighborhoods they live in affect the performance of all students, regardless of their race. Noguera posits that cultural explanations for the achievement gap that attribute African American students' underachievement to parents' attitudes and behaviors absolve schools and society at large of responsibility for reversing the structural factors, as well as the socio-cultural factors, that create racial, social, and educational inequity.

Despite the multitude of factors that inhibit the academic achievement of low-income African American students, there are schools that help these students attain academic excellence. An educational reform movement established in the mid-twentieth century, the Effective Schools Movement, demonstrated the existence of such schools. Researchers identified the features that work in concert to support student success. In the late twentieth century other researchers, not associated with the Effective Schools Movement, also studied and reported on schools that foster academic achievement for low-income African American students. What follows is a history of the Effective Schools Movement, an analysis of a Chicago-based educational reform effort, and a discussion of the factors other researchers have concluded will support school success for low-income African American students.

The Effective Schools Movement

The Effective Schools Movement arose as a reaction to the release of the 1966 Federal report, the Equal Educational Opportunity Survey (EEOS) by James Coleman and Ernest Q. Cambell. The EEOS, which was widely accepted for decades following its release, refuted the notion that financial resources available to schools that served Caucasian students and those that served African American students were equally distributed and that the unequal distribution of school funding underscored the racial achievement gap. Coleman (Coleman et al., 1966) also found that the caliber of the teachers who taught minority (African American) students had some impact on those students' level of

academic achievement, but almost no impact on Caucasian students' academic success. He asserted that when low-income African American students attend predominantly middle-class Caucasian schools, their level of achievement increased. He held that "…children from a given family background [low-income African American families], when put in schools of a different social composition [predominantly middle-class Caucasian], will achieve quite differently" (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 302).

Ronald Edmonds, then the director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, refused to accept Coleman's theory. Rather, he held that "…all children, excepting those of certifiable handicap, are eminently educable, and the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of that education" (Edmonds, 1977, p. 5). Edmonds conducted the "Search for Effective Schools" project in 1974, which formed the basis of the Effective Schools Movement. Lezotte (2009), a researcher on Edmonds' team (currently considered the driving force behind the contemporary Effective Schools Movement), calls this early work "Phase I: Identification." During this phase, the research team sought to determine whether there were schools that were instructionally effective for poor children of color.

Reading and math scores on the Stanford Achievement Test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were established as the measure. The researchers analyzed a random sample of these scores from twenty inner-city schools in Detroit's Model Cities Neighborhood and compared the mean scores with citywide norms. Effective schools were defined as those in which students scored at or above the

city grade average in math and reading; ineffective schools were defined as those in which students scored below the city average. Based on these criteria, eight schools were identified as effective in teaching math, nine were identified as effective in teaching reading, and five were identified as effective in teaching both math and reading.

After establishing the presence of effective schools, the researchers compared two demographically similar schools, one an effective school and the other an ineffective school, concluding that the characteristics of the effective school, rather than the students' family backgrounds, supported student success. Edmonds and his team then re-analyzed Coleman's data, identifying at least 55 effective schools, with students scoring at or above the city grade average in math and reading. This evidence further discredited Coleman's (1966) contention. Edmonds held that effective schools "…eliminate the relationship between successful performance and family background" (Edmonds, 1977, p. 6).

In the ten-year period 1970-1980, Edmonds' conclusions were reinforced by research on the inner workings of "outlier" schools where poor and minority students achieved high levels of academic achievement. Edmonds reviewed a number of studies including:

- Weber's 1971 study of four inner-city schools where reading achievement was successful. (Inner-City Children can be Taught to Read: Four Successful Schools, Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1971**);**

- The findings of a 1974 State of New York Office of Education Performance Review of two inner-city schools that revealed one to be high-achieving, the other low-achieving. The difference was attributed to factors at the high-achieving school such as the administrators' abilities as educational leaders and managers and the teachers' high expectations for students and use of "appropriate principles of learning;"

- W.B. Brookover and L.W. Lezotte's 1977 study, *Changes in School Characteristics Coincident with Changes in Student Achievement, The Michigan Department of Education's Cost Effectiveness Study* (1976); and

- The Brookover study of *Elementary School Climate and School Achievement* (1976).

Collectively, these studies established that effective schools supporting low-income students of color to attain academic success did, in fact, exist. Since these schools were not the norm, they were referred to as "outlier schools." (Mace-Matluck, 1987). Having documented the existence of outlier schools, Edmonds concluded that, "...all children are eminently educable and that the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of that education" (Edmonds, 1979, p 20).

After studying effective schools, Edmonds (1982) identified five characteristics they had in common. Lezotte (2009) categorizes this period as

"Phase II of the Effective Schools Movement: The Descriptive Phase." These characteristics are titled "The Correlates of Effective Schools". Edmonds found that effective schools are led by principals who devote substantial attention to the quality of instruction. Hence these schools exhibit a broadly understood instructional focus. Moreover, they feature an orderly, safe climate that is conducive to teaching and learning. Accordingly teachers' behavior communicates the expectation that all students will obtain at least minimum mastery. Therefore, these schools use measures of pupil achievement as the basis of program evaluation.

Glenn and McLean's (1981) vast literature review and their observational study of effective schools reinforced Edmonds' (1977) belief that the school as an organization, and the characteristics of school personnel, are more important determinants of achievement than the students' family background. Their research revealed yet another dimension of effective schools: "Effective schools use what they have more efficiently—personnel, parents, students, space and discretionary funds" (p. 146). Like Edmonds' work, Glenn and McLean's research revealed that efficient planning, teacher effectiveness, administrators' leadership characteristics, and a focus on basic skills were common features of effective schools.

Purvey and Smith (1983) also reviewed the findings of researchers who studied Effective Schools. They described Effective Schools as a system of "nested layers" in which the outer layer, the school, sets the context for the inside layer, the classroom. They held that nine organizational-structural and four

process variables undergird student success. Organizational-structural variables are school site management, instructional leadership, staff stability, curriculum articulation and organization, school-wide staff development, parental involvement and support, school-wide recognition of academic success, maximized learning time, and district support. Purvey and Smith believe that organizational-structural variables precede and facilitate process variables, defined as collaborative planning and collegial relationships, sense of community, clear goals and expectations commonly shared, and order and discipline.

While other studies validated Edmonds' findings regarding effective outlier schools (Lezotte, 2009), the Effective Schools movement lost focus following Ronald Edmonds' death in 1983 (Mace-Matluck, 1987). The movement regained momentum in 1986, during a phase that Lezotte identifies as "Phase III, the Prescriptive Phase." During this phase, the National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development was founded in Okemos, Michigan. It was to serve as a research and resource center for education professionals designing and implementing school reform initiatives using the Effective Schools Model (Taylor, 1990). During this phase, Lezotte explains, the Correlates of Effective Schools that Edmonds (1982) developed were refined and expanded to include the following: instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations, frequent monitoring of student progress, positive home-school relationships, and opportunity to learn and student time on task. During the "Prescriptive Phase," in response to questions from local school leaders about how to make their schools effective, Lezotte and

others at Michigan State University explored the school improvement process. They concluded that sustainable change requires commitment by the people who have to do the changing. Leadership is critical in providing both the vision and the support for the changes needed to make it happen. Although effective leadership is a necessary condition, leadership alone is not a sufficient condition for change. Involving practitioners is the best and surest way to build ownership, buy-in, and sustained commitment.

Lezotte (2009) also contends that while schools can become effective on an individual basis, it is difficult to sustain the effective school as such without the support of a central office, superintendent, and board of education. Lezotte and his team at Michigan State University received a grant from the U.S. Office of Education to develop an approach to school reform. Their design was grounded in the seven Correlates of Effective Schools, and the intervention ran on two tracks. The first was designed to train and empower school-level collaborative teams to plan and implement school improvement. The second track focused on a district-level leadership team, including the superintendent of schools. Lezotte comments that his team successfully guided hundreds of teams through this process. However, he notes that when trained superintendents left their positions, the district's successes were often obscured when the new superintendent did not share their predecessors' commitment to the Effective Schools method.

UCCCSR-Theory of Urban School Improvement

Like Edmonds and Lezotte, researchers at the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UCCCSR) document the features at Chicago Public Schools (CPS) that support students to succeed. The UCCCSR was created in 1990 after the passage of the Chicago School Reform Act that decentralized governance of the city's public schools. For more than a decade, the Consortium has studied the long-term effects of restructuring CPS as well as factors contributing to school improvement. In *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) present the framework that their research revealed undergirds success at those schools where test scores have been rising over a seven-year period. This framework is called the Five Essential Supports. These supports are defined as school leadership, parent-community ties, professional capacity, student-centered learning climate and instructional guidance*.*

Like Edmonds (1982) and Lezotte (2009), Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton hold that "essential supports" are connected to one another. In fact, they found that: "…if there is a material weakness in any core organizational support, school improvement won't happen" (p. 203). They comment that many school districts and schools concentrate reform efforts on just one or two elements, but their research attests to the value of orchestrating initiatives across multiple domains. Moreover, Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) assert that school leadership acts as the "driver for improvements in [the] four other organizational subsystems" (p. 197). Their empirical research revealed that:

Efforts to strengthen school-community ties and the professional capacity

within a school's faculty demand a dynamic blend of both instructional and

inclusive-facilitative leadership. Principals in improving schools

encouraged the broad involvement of their staff in reform as they sought to

guide and coordinate this activity by means of a coherent vision that

integrated the diverse and multiple changes which were co-occurring. The

strength of these statistical findings is highly consistent with our own field

of observations—we know of not even one case of sustained school

improvement in Chicago where local leadership remained chronically

weak. (Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu & Easton, p. 199)

Bryk, Bender Sebring et al. (2010) also found that effective principals at schools

serving very disadvantaged students provide supports that address psychosocial

and health-related needs that affect academic shortcomings. They report that

ineffective principals at low-functioning schools fail to respond to these needs.

As a result, the impact of instruction on students with unmet needs is

undermined, and their disruptive behaviors often diminish effective instructional

time for all students. Neither the key figures in the Effective Schools Movement

nor the researchers at the UCCCSR explore the topic of the merits of utilizing

culturally relevant teaching strategies.

Additional Contemporary Research on the Factors that Support Low-Income African American Students to Attain Academic Success

Chenoweth (2008 and 2009), Leader (2008), and other researchers who do not identify with a specific reform movement, also explore and document factors that support academic success for low-income students of color in public schools. These researchers have not developed a conceptual and coordinated framework, as have researchers of the Effective Schools Movement and the UCCCSR. Yet they identify a number of factors that are similar to those celebrated by Edmonds, and Lezotte, and Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010).

Chenoweth (2008 & 2009), and Karp (2009), like Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010), assert that effective principals forge relationships between their constituents, encourage new relationships between schools and families and dispel any preconceived notions teachers might have about their students' shortcomings. Sergiovanni (1994) explains that teachers and administrators who forge respectful relationships with low-income parents demonstrate that they will not undermine parents' authority, values, or their standards.

Meier's work (2002) indicates that it is critical for parents to feel that teachers like their children and make purposeful curricular decisions with the students' best interests in mind. Meier explains that teachers who listen to parents can develop an understanding of how classroom activities might, or might not, fit with what happens in the home. She believes schools that form constructive relationships with families can be truly transformative in that:

…children can see the school as just one part of the larger adult company that surrounds and protects them, and thus as a place where they dare to challenge themselves to go beyond their customary limits, and even beyond the viewpoint of their families and their communities—to explore the wider world (p. 57).

In addition to cultivating relationships between stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, effective principals serve as instructional leaders by cultivating school-wide supports around rigorous curriculum and instruction (Jenkins, 2009). Chenoweth (2008) found that effective principals provide teachers with the time to meet and work collaboratively. Leader (2008) asserts that effective principals coach their teachers to develop curriculum documents that spell out the content of the curriculum, the methodology to be employed, the learning outcomes for students at each grade level, and methods for assessing achievement. Chenoweth (2009) comments that no teacher can be an expert in all aspects of curriculum and pedagogy, but through collaboration, teachers can share their expertise and improve knowledge and skills on topics less familiar to them. Chenoweth also indicates that effective teachers observe other classrooms, often with a specific goal in mind, such as to learn how to present new material or how to transition between activities. Marzano (2003) contends that teachers who are collegial and professional in their work develop a sense of efficacy grounded in the perception that they can effect positive change in their schools and their students.

The existence of high-performing and effective schools like those examined by Edmonds, Lezotte, the UCCCSR and others demonstrates that despite the constraints and the socio-cultural factors that can inhibit African American children from attaining their academic potential, it is possible for historically marginalized students to achieve academic success in public schools. These researchers hold that schools fostering success for low-income students of color share a set of common, interrelated, and critical characteristics. Other researchers (Chenoweth, 2008 and 2009; Karp, 2009; Leader, 2008; Meir, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1994) also hold that some schools exhibit features that support low-income students of color to succeed.

Chenoweth's extensive case study research (2008) revealed that the composition of these successful schools varies greatly in terms of school size, district size, location (urban, rural, suburban), school calendar (traditional vs. year-round), curriculum, budget, and access to and use of technology. Like Edmonds (1979), Glenn and McLean (1981) found that effective schools are often surrounded by low-achieving schools serving the same population. They report that effective and ineffective schools were charged with the same task of educating students. Both sets of schools received similar funding, but the effective schools used their resources—personnel, parents, students, space, and discretionary funds—more efficiently.

Summary

The United States has a long history of race-based economic and

educational inequity. This legacy bestows significant and complex material as well as socio-cultural advantages on the Caucasian population. At the same time, it places African Americans at a disadvantage with respect to vocational and educational opportunities. As a result, rates of poverty and unemployment among African Americans are greater than for Caucasians. Among the consequences of this situation is that a high percentage of African American children face the daily challenges of living in high-crime neighborhoods and the repercussions of limited access to healthcare. All these conditions affect their ability to learn in school.

Educational funding is based largely on local property taxes. Children from low-income homes, who are statistically more likely to be African American, generally reside in areas of lower real estate value and, consequently, attend schools that receive low-levels of educational funding. Other educational supports—small class size, high quality curriculum materials, and technology— are often limited for these African American children. The totality of these structural elements has been linked to the underachievement of African American students. This situation is compounded by socio-cultural factors including the failure of public schools to affirm the values, culture, and aspirations of ethnically and racially diverse students. Public schools do not integrate non-dominant cultural history into the curriculum, and school policies as well as teachers themselves reinforce negative stereotypes about African American students, thereby undermining their ambition.

It can hardly be surprising, then, that there is an achievement gap

between Caucasian and African American students. Yet there are schools with effective practices and policies that demonstrate an ability to overcome all these restraints and make it possible for historically marginalized students to achieve academic success. Tyler is such a school. Research demonstrates that schools like Tyler exhibit a number of common features: these schools are led by inclusive, assertive principals who serve as instructional leaders, thereby ensuring that their schools feature a rigorous curriculum. Parental involvement is high. Teachers at these schools enjoy collaborative relationships with each other, as well as with students and parents. They are sensitive to their students' personal situations and academic needs.

Contributing to existing research into such schools is critical to the effort to foster equitable educational outcomes across racial lines. National and local reform efforts historically and currently fail to provide resources and to establish policies that remedy the long-term, systemic academic achievement gap between Caucasian elementary and high school students and their African American peers. Research on the schools that support low-income students of color to succeed provides insight into the factors that have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on students' academic performance and can offer guidance to dedicated administrators who seek guidance in developing effective policies for their schools.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Choice of Methodology

This research employed a case-study methodology to conduct an in-depth exploration of how a specific institution, Tyler School, supports student achievement in a real-life context. This interpretive case study (Merriam, 1990) will contribute to scholarship on the characteristics of schools that are effectively closing the achievement gap. The analysis was inductive (Merriam, and Patton, 1990), that is, my understanding what happens at Tyler evolved from direct experiences at the school (interviews, observations, review of documents). Theories were not imposed on the setting *a priori* through hypotheses or deductive constructions (Patton).

Accordingly, I paid close attention to emic perspectives, e.g. the informant's' views (Jaeger, 1997). I present thick descriptions of the perceptions and values expressed by the informants in the Findings and the Analysis sections of this dissertation. My understanding of the dynamics at Tyler evolved by observing and documenting patterns of behavior and oral comments, then developing categories to describe the patterns that emerged. A holistic understanding of the multiple interrelationships between the administrators, teachers, students, and parents at Tyler emerged.

By using case-study methodology, I hope to take readers vicariously to an exemplary school they would not otherwise have observed or experienced (Stake, 1978). Moreover, as Donomoyer (in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990) comments, "readers of a case study have the opportunity to learn through a researcher's eyes and in the process, see things they might not otherwise have seen" (p.

194). Donomoyer (in Eisner & Peshkin) further asserts that clinicians learn best from modeling, but there are not enough really exceptional models to go around. This case study enables readers to learn about the impact of the administrators' purposeful and resourceful methods of governance, the exemplary relationships between administrators, teachers, and parents at Tyler, and the school's climate, curriculum, and the manner in which stakeholders respond to challenges.

Thick descriptions and rich detail captured in this dissertation offer readers an opportunity to identify with the conditions at the research site and to think about new ways to support student achievement at their own schools (Patton, 1990). This qualitative study is not intended to identify cause-and-effect information about the impact of specific variables on student achievement that could be generalized to other schools. Instead, the study provides insight into the positive features of a specific school and offers readers an opportunity to "transfer" this insight to their reflections (Donomoyer in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990) about their own roles as administrators, teachers, and parents.

Site Selection

I became aware of Tyler some six years ago through my work as the marketing director for a visual arts education organization that conducts programs at public elementary schools in Chicago. At that time, Tyler, along with a cohort of five other high-performing CPS schools serving low-income African American students, had received a grant. The purpose of the grant was to support the schools to collaborate with each other and to maintain and enhance

student achievement over a three-year period. The administrators of the six schools were required to meet once a month with a CPS administrator and a project manager; I served as that project manager.

Early on, Tyler stood out because the principal, Mr. Leonard, volunteered to host all of the monthly meetings and provide refreshments; the other administrators gratefully accepted the invitation. As a regular order of business at the monthly meetings, the CPS administrator asked the attendees to share success stories, which were then documented and submitted to the grantor. The principals typically related stories about the awards and honors their students received. At one meeting, however, Mr. Leonard indicated that rather than reciting a list, he would read a letter from a former student who had just completed her first year of high school. In the letter, the student stated that she was doing well in high school and thanked Mr. Leonard and the teachers at Tyler. She explained that she had not done well in school until she transferred into Tyler in the seventh grade. At Tyler, she went on, the teachers and the principal taught her how to study, complete school assignments, and get up to grade-level. Mr. Leonard's voice cracked with emotion many times while he read the letter, and by the time he finished reading the letter, he was crying unabashedly.

It was during that meeting that I recognized something special about Tyler. Several years later I was reading Charles Payne's thoughtful indictment of CPS titled *So Much Reform, So Little Change* (2008), and I was reminded of the meeting. Mr. Leonard, who is well-dressed, professional in demeanor, and generally quite self-possessed, lost all composure as he shared a story about

this student, on whom he and his staff had made a profound and positive impact. Here was my dissertation topic: I selected Tyler for my inquiry into how a seemingly typical CPS school is closing the achievement gap.

Tyler School, located on the southeast side of Chicago, serves 486 students in kindergarten though eighth grade. Eligibility for admission to Tyler is based on a random lottery for all ability levels without academic testing (SIPAAA, 2010-2012). Ninety seven and seven-tenths percent of the students are African American, 76.3% are low-income, and 5.3% are Special Education students. No students are Limited English Learners.

Students in kindergarten through the third grade attend the "Branch," also referred to as the "North Building" and the "Little Building." The "Main Building/South Building" serves students in fourth through eighth grades. The two buildings are four miles apart. The assistant principal oversees the Branch; the principal oversees the Main Building. There is a security guard at the Main Building and clerks at both buildings. The resource teachers, administrative team, and the ancillary team work in both buildings. The resource teachers include the NCLB resource teacher, the media specialist, the special education teachers, the technology coordinator, and the physical education teacher. The administrative team is composed of the lead teacher/math coach and the counselor/case manager. The ancillary team is composed of the psychologist, the nurse, the social worker, and the speech pathologist. A teaching assistant as well as two special education aides are stationed at the Main Building. One special education aide is stationed at the Branch.

There are 17 classroom teachers, six resource teachers, five educational support staff members, two engineers, four lunchroom managers, two security guards, four members of the administrative team (which includes the principal and the assistant principal) and four members of the ancillary team. The majority of the staff is African American (33 of the 44 members). Seven classroom teachers, one resource teacher, and one administrator (the assistant principal) are Caucasian. One classroom teacher and one resource teacher are Hispanic.

The first step in undertaking this research was to meet with the principal, Mr. Leonard, and the assistant principal, Mr. Makely, and ask permission to conduct research at their school. Both seemed flattered by this request. They both chuckled and noted that what they do may look simple to an outsider, but as I learned more about their school, I would learn how complicated their jobs actually are. During our meeting, both administrators agreed to share copies of their School Improvement Plan (SIPAAA), their school and staff meeting calendar, and other relevant documents. In addition, they granted permission for me to observe staff and parents' meetings and to recruit teachers and parents for my interviews during meetings or when I encountered them on the school grounds, and they agreed to be interviewed themselves.

After our initial meeting, I developed the following documents:

- A recruiting flyer for potential interviewees;

- A consent form for interviewees;

- An announcement (script) to read at the beginning of the staff meetings to inform participants that I would be observing their meeting, and that I

would not identify anyone by name;

- A guide for the staff meeting observations; and

- An interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews.

(see Appendixes A - E, p. 187-191)

I then prepared and submitted an Exempt Application for Review of Human Subjects Research, including copies of the documents described above, to the DePaul University IRB. The IRB review process took approximately four months. After receiving IRB approval, the proposal was submitted to the CPS Research Review Board (RRB), requesting permission to conduct research in a Chicago Public School; the approval was granted within a few weeks of submission. The data collection process began on receipt of the RRB approval.

Data Collection

Data collection began with a review of the school's Mission and Vision Statements, the organizational chart, school report card, and the school's School Improvement Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement (SIPAAA). The organizational chart was invaluable in helping me understand the roles of the school's staff and structure at each of the two buildings. The SIPAAA provided insight into many of the answers to the research questions (see page 5 for a list of the research questions.) Observations at staff meetings, and interviews with the two administrators, eight teachers, and four parents rounded out my understanding of the administrators' values, vision, and the manner in which they

perform their duties; the schools' climate, the teachers' special skills; the school's curriculum; and the manner in which the school responds to challenges.

Because IRB and RRB approval was not obtained until mid-November, I could not attend the first three monthly staff meetings of the school year. Observations began, then, in December, followed by meetings in January and April. I missed the February meeting due to a work-related conflict. Each of the meetings began in the morning and concluded by lunchtime. The locations for the meetings alternated between the Branch and the Main Building. The meetings at the Branch were held in one of the classrooms, there being no common meeting rooms large enough to accommodate the entire staff. The meetings at the Main Building were held in the library.

As per the IRB requirement of disclosure of my intentions in observing staff meetings and of participant confidentiality, at the beginning of each staff meeting I read an Announcement (see Appendix C, p. 188.) During each meeting, I used an Observation Guide (see Appendix D, p.190) to focus my field notes. In addition to capturing the information on this guide, I took additional notes on everything covered during each meeting. In preparation for data analysis, I typed the notes from each observation.

I supplemented the review of pertinent school documents and observations at staff meetings with interviews with the school's principal, the assistant principal, eight teachers (each of whom worked at Tyler for a minimum of three years), and four parents who had children at the school for the previous two years.

Participants were selected on a "first come" basis. The first attempt at

recruiting teachers involved posting a flyer (see Appendix A, p. 187) in the

school's library immediately after receiving IRB and RRB approval. No one

contacted me, so at the December staff meeting, I made a brief appeal to the

teachers about serving as subjects for my interviews; I passed around a sign-up

sheet asking for names, email addresses, and cell phone numbers. Only one

teacher responded to my email and cell phone inquiries, a fairly young and very

chipper man whom I interviewed before the break. At the conclusion of the

interview, the teacher commented that he enjoyed the interview.

At the January staff meeting, I reminded teachers that I hoped to schedule

interviews with seven teachers. The teacher I had already interviewed said

something along the lines of, "You should help Julie out. It's not so bad, it was

kind of fun." Following his comment, three teachers scheduled interviews on the

spot and over the next couple of weeks, four more teachers responded.

Scheduling interviews with the principal and the assistant principal was

much easier. I simply called them, asking about their availability, and then set up

interviews. Recruiting parents proved to be more challenging. Initially, I

distributed a recruiting flyer (see Appendix A, p. 170) to the parents I encountered

around the school before the school day started; none responded to this

overture. One parent invited me to attend an evening meeting for parents in

December. At this meeting, and at a subsequent meeting in January, I made a

brief presentation about my study. After each meeting, parents agreed to be

interviewed and shared their cell phone numbers.

Soon after each of the interviews, I transcribed the audiotape and assigned pseudonyms to the interviewees. Transcribing the audiotapes gave me the opportunity to listen to my subjects more closely than I had during the interviews. As I typed the interviews, I listened both to the content of the responses and to the particular patterns of speech.

After compiling and reviewing the observation notes and interview transcripts, I developed the first set of coding categories based on the research questions. Numbers were assigned to each of the coding categories and to each recurring theme. I then reviewed the data and superimposed numbers that corresponded with the coding categories. Finally, I developed a chart with the coding categories and recorded the number of respondents who commented on a particular topic or expressed a recurring theme as well as the number of times respondents commented on this topic or expressed this theme.

As I sought answers to the research questions to present as findings, I reviewed the coding chart, the coded observation notes, and the coded interview transcripts. In preparation for analyzing this data, I distilled the themes identified in the coded observation notes and the coded interview transcripts, and I created a more efficient chart to use when analyzing the data. These findings were then supplemented with a review of literature on those topics related to the common features of high-achieving schools that serve low-income African American elementary school students, the structural factors that contribute to poor performance at many schools that serve such students, and the essential supports that undergird school improvement identified by the UCCCSR. Findings

are presented in narrative form under self-descriptive headers in the "Findings" chapter. The findings, which are integrated with literature on high-achieving schools that serve low-income African American elementary school students and on related topics such as effective leadership, serve as the basis of the Analysis section.

Limitations of My Research

Because the staff at Tyler is small and the interviewees were volunteers, I was not able to employ a carefully crafted sampling strategy to yield either a random sample or a sample that was representative of the larger group (Merriam, 1990). Accordingly, people who are happy with Tyler School could be overrepresented in the sample. Their opinions and observations might not accurately represent those of the entire group of stakeholders. Likewise, while the role of researcher requires a neutral approach, the fact that I had a friendly relationship with the administrators prior to undertaking this research could have impacted the data collection and subsequent analysis.

As a novice researcher designing this study, I assumed that by asking each informant the same interview questions, I would elicit responses about the key components at Tyler that contribute to student success. Accordingly, I assumed that the patterns emerging from those answers would be authentic. But as I analyzed the findings and recognized the pivotal role the administrators play, I regretted the failure to ask the administrators to describe what they do to achieve success. This is the first question that Chenoweth (2009) posed when

she interviewed principals at high-achieving schools serving low-income students of color. Further data analysis revealed that the administrators at Tyler remain optimistic, even when presented with enormous challenges. In retrospect, I might have inquired how they maintain a positive and proactive approach to addressing challenges. The literature indicates that major challenges stymie many principals (Payne, 2008). Such an inquiry would have provided an example of best practice.

In addition, the insight into what actually happens in the classrooms is limited. I might have asked teachers specifically about their techniques in engaging their students; the literature on the pedagogical techniques that promote success recognizes the importance of student engagement (Hall, Campbell, & Miech, 2009). Finally, I could have asked the teachers specific questions to determine whether or not they use culturally relevant teaching strategies (Kunjufu, 2002; Nieto, 2004).

All that said, even if I had asked the teachers to describe the pedagogy they employ, it must be acknowledged that the information about the curriculum and classroom dynamics presented in the Findings chapter was culled solely second-hand from observations, interviews, and the school's SIPPAAA. There was no opportunity to observe teachers in their classrooms, limiting the accuracy of perceptions of the teachers' curricula and their behavior in the classroom. And as the data was collected over a short time span, events and interactions that could impact the findings might not have been observed, documented, or analyzed.

Likewise, the findings of this study should be viewed as situational, focused as it is on a single school with some unique characteristics. The physical structure of this school—two buildings each managed by an administrator and housing a total of 486 students, in small classrooms that limit class size to less than 30 students—may not be replicable in other public elementary schools. Tyler is a magnet school that requires parents to make application for admission. This might imply that the students attending the school could come from families with a higher degree of social capital than is typical of low-income families. The principal and the assistant principal are inordinately resourceful about finding resources that enable them to procure contemporary textbooks and 21st-century technology. Talented, well-intentioned administrators at other schools may not possess the skill-set that allows them to obtain expensive resources that supplement the standard issue generally available to public schools. Consequently, some of the factors that contribute to student success at Tyler may not be replicated at other public schools that serve a similar student population.

Accordingly, the generalizations that have been derived from this research might be of limited value, since some of the conditions at that site might not be representative of conditions at typical public elementary schools that serve low-income African American students. That said, I believe this work to be of value to readers, with the findings and analysis contributing to readers' collective understanding of the issues that impact low-income African American students' educational experiences. To support this contention, I quote Stake (1995):

...single cases are not as strong a base for generalizing to a population of cases, as other research designs. But people can learn much that is general from single cases. They do that partly because they are familiar with other cases and they add this one in, thus making a slightly new group from which to generalize, a new opportunity to modify old generalizations (Stake, p. 85).

The forthcoming Findings chapter provides insight into the leadership at Tyler School, the school's climate, the teachers' unique traits, the school's teacher-developed curriculum, and the administrators' constructive and inclusive approach to addressing challenges. The Analysis chapter illustrates how the administrative team created and supports the school's inclusive climate; empowered teachers to collaborate with one another, develop curriculum, and continue to expand their professional knowledge; encouraged parental involvement; and responded to students and families' needs, some of which arose from their unfortunate financial circumstances. The implications of this study for effective educational policy and practice are presented in the Conclusion.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

The literature on high-achieving schools serving low-income African American students indicates that several interrelated factors undergird their success. They include strong leadership, clear educational focus, constructive and collaborative school climate, parent-community ties, teachers' professional capacity, and a student-centered learning environment. Conversely, the literature on the structural shortcomings at schools where African American students underperform indicates that failure occurs when class size is large, teachers are less educated than those at schools that serve affluent Caucasian students, and the curricular and technological resources are subpar. Moreover, in response to the accountability provisions of the NCLB and the ensuing sanctions that underperforming schools face, some desperate administrators use tactics such as "pushing out" low-scoring students, encouraging teachers to narrow the curriculum to those subjects to be tested, and devoting inordinate resources to preparation (Wood in Meier et al., 2004).

Informing the research questions for this study was literature on the Effective Schools Movement as well as research into schools not identified with this movement that also support low-income African American students to attain favorable outcomes. The factors that impede student achievement and the researcher's observations of the dynamics at Tyler School are both reflected in the research questions. The essential question driving this study is: How does the administrative team at Tyler support student achievement? Other questions

include:

1. What are the key characteristics of the school's climate?

2. Do the teachers possess special skills/behaviors that reinforce student achievement?

3. What are the key characteristics of the school's curriculum?

4. What other factors contribute to the school's success?

5. What challenges does the school face and how does the school respond to these challenges?

Answers to these six research questions are presented in narrative form under self-descriptive headers. A review of the data shaped my understanding of the administrators' values, vision, and the manner in which they perform their duties; the schools' climate; the teachers' special skills; the curriculum; and the manner in which the school responds to challenges.

Kind, Visionary Leadership

The teachers at Tyler both like and respect the school's administrators and feel the administrators empower them to succeed in the classroom. Five of the eight teachers interviewed stated that the principal and the assistant principal are the best administrators they have worked with. Ms. Morrison's comments capture those sentiments:

You can talk to Mr. Leonard (the principal) and Mr. Makely (the assistant

principal) about just about anything. Now Mr. Makely is a little more

intense, he needs to hear all of the details. Mr. Leonard, he needs to

know the basics: what you plan to do, what you need, how you plan to do

it. These guys are great. They are the best administrators I've ever had.

Ms. Blackbird commented:

I think the leadership, Mr. Makely and Mr. Leonard, they have

provided a culture or a climate where a person [teacher] can feel

free to be themselves, to teach the way they would like to teach.

He [Mr. Leonard] makes us aware of the criteria, bottom line. After

that, you can do your own thing. And Mr. Makely is really good

about praising everything you do. He'll say 'that was really great,

good job." I think all of that helps to make a staff feel good, on an

even keel, appreciated.

Mr. Martin noted:

Our principal is not a top down person, so he kind of allows us

[teachers] to run the show for the most part. We feel his presence,

he's very visible. He's around the building all the time, in and out of

our rooms all the time.

Ms. Mireia's comments provide further insight into the manner in which the

principal guides and inspires teachers:

> He [the principal] is a true facilitator, not someone who just jumps
> in, dictates 'and this is the way we do things.' So I think when he
> senses there might be a bit of a problem, he'll work to support
> whomever it is, parent, teacher, child. He'll take it all in, and not
> give a knee jerk reaction. And so things play themselves out,
> things [issues] turn themselves around.

Observations at staff meetings and interviews with the administrators confirm the teachers quoted above regarding the personalities of the principal and assistant principal. The principal has a warm, laid-back manner, except when he speaks at staff meetings about the importance of presenting interesting lessons and encouraging students to strive for success. At these times, he speaks like a preacher spreading the gospel. The assistant principal generally has a jolly and reasonable manner, except when he talks about students' needs (emotional, academic, monetary). At these moments, his manner is quiet and thoughtful.

Despite differences in demeanor, both administrators share the same values with respect to education. They listen to, respect, and support all the teachers, students, and parents. In addition, they serve as educational leaders and coaches to the teachers and provide teachers with the curricular resources they need to be effective. Moreover, the administrators effectively address and

shield their staff from the many challenges (e.g., stress that arises from the uncertainty about the future of CPS, budget shortfalls, etc.) that threaten to undermine the teachers' ability to focus on teaching.

The principal, Mr. Leonard, and the assistant principal, Mr. Makely, have a close, mutually respectful, and constructive working relationship that contributes to their ability to successfully manage the complexities of running a high performing school. In our interview, Mr. Leonard explained how Mr. Makely is a critical component of Tyler:

....and I found that that I needed someone who I could trust, who was willing to stay and to assist wherever needed. Being an assistant principal entails a lot of duties; some are written and some are not. You have to have a strong mind to endure some of the things that are thrown at you on a daily basis. I needed someone like that. We [Mr. Makely and I] not only work together at school, but we also work outside of school, at home, away from school. So he's the person. He knows his job, and I can depend on him. I don't have to question every judgment he makes. Usually he'll call me [the principal is stationed at the main building, the assistant principal is stationed at the branch during the school day] when something comes up and he asks my opinion. I do the same with him. So it's a trust factor. We work as a team.

While the assistant principal did not describe his relationship with the principal specifically, during an interview he made a number of "we" references:

> We [the principal and I] make sure all teachers' assignments adhere to the CPS homework policy about the recommended amount of time students are required to devote to homework....We [the principal and I] involve the office staff and the ancillary staff in key decisions so they feel involved, etc.

Ms. Mireia commented: "The principal is available to everyone. The assistant principal also." So you really have one principal running one place, one running the other, although their titles are principal and assistant principal."

As Ms. Mireia and other interviewees noted, Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely have an "open door policy." The small ratio of students to administrators (194 students at the branch and 267 students at the main building) is conducive to the administrators' policy of accessibility to all. This open door policy contributes to the school's inclusive climate, engenders trust, facilitates open communication, and enables the administrators to work with teachers, students, and parents to resolve conflicts in an expedient and equitable manner.

The assistant principal notes that the school's small size enables the administrative team to work out schedules that allow for common preps (for teachers), regular staff and grade level team meetings, and meetings in which teachers work together to develop curricula. While the term "accountability" was

never spoken by any informant, it is clear that the principal and the assistant

principal monitor the teachers' performance, and they support the teachers to

work together to attain excellent results. Mr. Makely explained:

> In terms of collaboration, we [the principal and I] require teachers to
> meet and to keep anecdotal information, sign-in sheets, etc.
> Teachers all know each other and have a collegial bond. They
> have worked together for years. We try to match people with other
> staff members who they get along with [when we form grade-level
> teams]. We try to make good pairings so teachers can work and
> teach together.

The administrators' commitment to fostering collaboration, building the

stakeholders' commitment to Tyler, and empowering stakeholders to have a voice

in school policy and practice is also evidenced by their invitation to stakeholders

to participate in decision making. At a staff meeting in January, the principal

urged teachers to: "Start thinking about what you want to teach next year." And

he explained, "Some people have told me that they want to follow their kids."

During her interview, a teacher, Ms. Patton, praised the administrators'

propensity to listen to stakeholders and incorporate their perspectives in school

policy:

> I think one of our strong points is our staff as well as Mr. Leonard

and Mr. Makely, we do a lot of communicating back and forth even

when we write the SIPAAA (school improvement plan). I chaired

the meetings and we really got a lot of input [from stakeholders]. At

the end, we came to a consensus about what we would agree on

and what we deem as the most important things to focus on for the

next two years.

The assistant principal explained that he and the principal consciously

employ democratic decision-making strategies and intentionally involve

stakeholders from all sectors in school matters:

We [the principal and I] involve the office staff and the ancillary staff

in key decisions so they feel involved. We involve the ancillary staff

(engineers, kitchen staff, etc.) in the SIPAAA. They are also part of

staff meetings. We feel that this makes individuals take pride in

their work.

During staff meetings, it was noted that both administrators encourage teachers

to take pride in their work by praising them frequently and acknowledging their

specific contributions to their students' success. At one meeting, the principal

informed the staff that an outside team of evaluators reported favorably on the

teachers' performance. Then he read the portion of the evaluators' report

devoted to the teachers:

- Teachers demonstrate current knowledge and effective teaching;

- Teachers are open to learning new strategies;

- Teachers post students' results in their classrooms;

- Students know their teachers' rules and they follow them;

- Students know who to go to if they have a problem; and

- Students feel their school is a safe place.

At that same meeting, the principal commented that the teachers support students who transfer into the school to succeed:

Last year we got a dozen kids from Bryce [a school that is close to Tyler] that were classified as special education. Guess what, all of these kids have achieved because of you. At their old school, all the kids got was worksheets. You never gave up on those kids. All I want is that everybody is involved in some type of learning. I am adamant about these kids learning, especially the kids in special education. I don't tell you how to teach because I know what I have here.

During another meeting, the principal praised the caliber of the teachers' lessons and their mode of teaching. He noted, "I do informal observations every time I go into a classroom." He then encouraged the teachers to challenge their

students and praised three teachers for their performance:

> If you have a fifth grade student who can read at the eighth grade
> level, talk to the eighth grade teachers and get advice about what to
> teach. You have to challenge the kids. All of the kids can excel. I
> love going in Ms. Blackbird's and Ms. Elller's rooms. They stand up
> and teach these kids. There's a lot going on. In science, Ms.
> Morrison has these kids going.

Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely feel it is imperative for teachers to participate in professional development activities on a regular basis. At one staff meeting, Mr. Leonard stated: "If you are going to continue to teach my kids, you are going to continue going to school. You are going to be constantly going to school. Otherwise you become burnt out."

During interviews, both Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely explained that they encouraged all of the teachers to get advanced degrees and endorsements in the core curricular areas. There is a bulletin board in the school that recognizes those teachers who went back to school. As a result, all the teachers have at least one master's degree. The culture is so pervasive that even the security guard went back to school. Mr. Makely explained:

> Mark, the security guard, just got his BA and his teaching
> certificate. I think a lot of the reason [he did this] is from our

encouragement and support. We've been trying to hire him as a

second grade teacher. We were almost able to hire him this

summer, but he did not have the proper endorsement. He's now

taking the proper classes [toward certification.]

The principal explained that although the school places strong emphasis on

academic achievement, administrators and teachers also honor students' good

behavior:

We have [student] "citizens of the month," not "students of the

month" because we realized that when we had "students of the

month" we just recognized the same kids who made As and Bs

every month. We recognized that other kids also contribute. They

may not be the "A" students, but if they are doing something worthy,

it's recognized. The teachers select them to be "citizens of the

month." I had a little treat for them last Friday, I talked to them and

we recognized them at the LSC [Local School Council meeting].

Gave them [the students] a little certificate with their name on it, put

their name on the bulletin board.

The administration encourages parental involvement and recognizes their

contributions. All four of the parents interviewed said that they volunteer at the

school regularly. One explained:

I was excited for my child when she started at Tyler. This was my

youngest child to start school, and I know what level of participation

I was allowed to have at my other child's school. So I was excited

to see what was offered here in the way of parents and support and

that type of thing.

Another parent said: "I think the school appreciates me because whenever

they have an awards ceremony or what not, I'm always acknowledged and given

a certificate for my appreciation. I find it very rewarding to be here at the school."

Both of the administrators attested to their commitment to, and success in,

fostering parental involvement. The assistant principal noted:

With parents, I have an open door policy. I participate in parent-

teacher conferences. I work hard to recognize parent volunteers

and to honor them at assemblies, to give them certificates of

recognition, gift certificates, cards, etc. Parents want to volunteer in

school because the administration recognizes their contributions. If

you [a parent] volunteer one day, it's appreciated. The principal and

I feel this makes parents feel supported and they know we are

approachable.

The principal said that one reason parental involvement is so high is that

the school makes a very deliberate effort to keep parents informed of new developments at the school and involve parents in decision-making. He explained:

> Before we had a website, we had a newsletter. Now we post information on the website and we make phone calls. We have parents to come up and volunteer, just become part of the program. And teachers call parents [to discuss their children] and they have room parents. Now we don't have as much as we used to, because a lot of parents are working. But if we need them, they are there. We have monthly LSC meetings and a PTA. This year we have grade-level meetings where we call parents in to discuss the curriculum and to enable them to ask questions. So we always try to involve our parents, always notifying them as to what is going on. We share a lot with the parents. Like just last month we got a letter from the state telling us we had just gotten another Illinois Spotlight Award. So last night we had the LSC meeting and I made a copy of the [award] letter and I put it in all of the folders.

At a staff meeting, the assistant principal also highlighted the importance of reaching out to parents in a positive manner: "On report cards, add some comments to the comments section. Also when you begin a conference [with parents], please start the conference on a positive note. Parents will be your

best friends if you recognize their children's good attributes."

None of the parents made critical comments about the principal, the assistant principal, or the teachers. Only two of the eight teachers had anything critical to say about the administrators. Both expressed irritation about the same issue: The principal and the assistant principal are reluctant to suspend children who misbehave. Mr. Martin explained:

Our most challenging situations are probably discipline. We don't have a lot of fights and bad kids. We do have some very rude kids at times. They are not malicious in nature—they are just inconsiderate. And my administration does not like to suspend, you know. What happens is when we correct behavior in the classroom, and after a while that behavior continues, it's really hard to get to those higher-level punishments because he [the principal] does not like to suspend. That's probably the biggest problem at our school. And that's just the principal's demeanor. He's not a confrontational person and he is the king of second chances. He always gives people a second chance, which is a great thing. But when you try to be a disciplinarian, it's kind of hard because some people do not learn with second and third chances.

The assistant principal touched on the issue of suspensions:

Over the last couple of years we've seen more kids go through trauma and turmoil outside of school. They don't live with both parents, their homes have been uprooted, they've experienced trauma. Naturally we can't expect them to experience things like their peers. I try to do puzzles and play catch with these kids when they are referred to me. This gets them to open up and talk about what's going on outside of school. Then I try to work with the parents to get them what they need. We try to suspend as little as possible. Though suspensions have gone up at the branch and at the main building with the budget cut and no dean of students. [This position was cut the previous year.] Mr. Leonard and the security guard at the main building use PBIS (positive behavior instructional strategies] to focus on positive behavior and to offer incentives to toe the line and avoid problems.

The principal also clarified his position on suspensions:

And only if there's a fight or something that's really out of the ordinary do we suspend because I try not to suspend. That's the last resort because they [students who act out] need to be here because we have instruction going on a daily basis here.

Interestingly, during interviews with the principal and the assistant principal and at staff meetings, they never recited curriculum theory or used formal

terminology to discuss pedagogy. Nevertheless, on several occasions, both

demonstrated a "real world" understanding of how to support students to learn

and teachers to stay fresh. The assistant principal explained how he manages to

fulfill his responsibilities to students and staff:

> Long hours:10-hour days, sometimes 12. Occasional weekends.
>
> Follow up is critical. Student teachers also teach our veterans new
>
> stuff, and vets get to take a free university class. We get extra
>
> people by having student teachers. We assign them duties like
>
> breakfast duty and we have them involved with report card pick up
>
> and conferences. Organization is also important. We use lots of
>
> files, label everything. The computer helps me manage projects.
>
> Being a [former] teacher also helps. I work with students on
>
> academic issues, prep them for the Academic Olympics. I really
>
> don't want to be in the office. I want to work directly with kids. I do
>
> my administrative work after the students leave for the day.

At a staff meeting, the principal also demonstrated that he draws on his own

teaching background to inspire teachers to develop positive relationships with

students. The following are field notes from this particular meeting:

> The principal told the group about his first teaching experience in
>
> Cabrini-Green. He said at first he was terrified because he heard a

lot of negative information about Cabrini-Green. On his first day he simply asked the kids to ask him any questions they had about why he wanted to teach at Cabrini-Green. The principal told the kids he wanted to learn how to work things out with them and how to teach them. The principal said: "It's all about how you as the teacher associate with the students and their parents. These kids want someone other than their parents to care about them."

He went on to state emphatically:

Give kids a fresh start each year. Learn kids' habits and personalities. Don't make assumptions about kids. Take time to talk to kids. Last year we got a kid [from another school] with an IEP with negative comments on it. He has not gotten into any trouble at our school.

When I taught, I graded every student's work at the end of the day, every day, so they got immediate feedback. Get to know your students. Don't sit at your desk. Let kids know you are in charge of the class. Don't keep everything the same all the time, change things up.

In addition to creating a climate where trust is high between stakeholders, teachers collaborate with one another, communication with

parents is strong, students are encouraged to reach high academic targets

and to become good citizens, and the administrators also attend to all of

the administrative duties that accompany running a successful school that

operates within a bureaucratic structure. At every staff meeting that I

observed, the administrators communicated CPS policies, testing dates,

mandates, and developments with respect to the current and the

upcoming school year. Moreover, they apprised teachers of new school

initiatives, school wide events, and new equipment that had been

purchased.   Administrators also allocated time at staff meetings for

teachers to share information they received at the external professional

development workshops they attended with their colleagues.

Inclusive and Constructive Climate

Staff longevity at Tyler is one of the school's many noteworthy

characteristics. The principal and the assistant principal have been at Tyler 30

and 19 years respectively, and both taught at the school before they became

administrators. Two of the teachers taught there for more than 20 years. The

teacher interviewed with the least seniority is in his fifth year. In an interview, the

assistant principal shared his thoughts on this quality:

> We have low teacher turnover and low student mobility. What I've
>
> determined is that teachers leave [other] schools because they
>
> don't get administrative support/back up. I think we [the principal

and I] are really supportive and involved with the work they do. We

managed to get updated classroom furniture, access to technology

for each teacher. Each teacher has their own laptop and landline.

We get them any supplies they need and updated curriculum

materials that allow them to do flexible grouping and differentiated

instruction. Plus new programs [curriculum materials] with hands-

on activities. I feel this allows us to keep teachers and staff happy

so they enjoy their work and they want to stay. Usually teachers

stay here until they retire. The continuity of the office staff, the

teachers, the administrators means students can expect to see the

same individuals at school [each year]. They may not have that

kind of consistency outside of school. I think that the consistency is

reassuring and comforting.

Formal observations at staff meetings, informal observations in the

school's halls and main offices, and conversations with the administrators,

teachers, and parents revealed a high level of trust among all three groups. This

trust is produced by the staff's longevity at the school, the many opportunities for

staff to collaborate, and the administrators' willingness to listen to teachers and

parents and involve them in decision-making. One teacher, Mr. Green, praised

the administration for fostering trust between teachers and the staff:

The administration is great—very supportive. Mr. Leonard and Mr.

Makely, probably two of the nicest people you could ever work for. They always have your side regardless of the situation. They trust me and they let me do my thing, they don't put too much pressure in terms of 'You need to do this, you need to do that.'

Yet another teacher commented explicitly on the sense of trust among teachers: "There's a good amount of trust especially between grade level partners [teachers who teach the same grade-level and who work together on lesson plans and units.] They seem to trust each other a lot."

During interviews, all of the parents indicated that they trust the staff at Tyler to serve their children's best interests. One parent highlighted the trusting relationship she has with the entire staff at Tyler:

My relationship with the teachers is friendly. We talk a lot. I'm comfortable [talking to teachers] especially when the teacher is one of my children's. I feel comfortable going inside classrooms; you know asking to talk with them. They [teachers] feel comfortable when they see me in the halls to say 'your daughter is not doing this or your daughter is doing this.' It just happens. I have a very comfortable relationship as far as communication is concerned. It's about the same with the administrators. I feel very comfortable coming in the office and talking to Mr. Leonard, Mr. Makely, Mrs.Christopher [the clerk] about everything.

There is ample evidence that trust is high. There was no indication that the racial composition of Tyler's staff has either a positive or negative impact on the relationships between them and parents. Neither was there a race-based disconnection between staff and parents and students. The majority of the staff at Tyler, 33 of the 44, is African American. Seven classroom teachers, one resource teacher, and one administrator are Caucasian. One classroom teacher and one resource teacher are Hispanic. That said, the issue of race came up during an interview with a parent who demonstrated an understanding of race-based politics:

> If we compare the resources that our children [at Tyler] have versus their [Caucasian] counterparts in other parts of the city, we're lacking in many cases. So we have to work extra hard in order to get those resources to our kids. Most of our kids are African American. Predominantly African American kids. And most of the time when resources are being allocated, it might not be done intentionally, it might be done in the subconscious mind. But we don't get the same type of resources that many of our counterparts have. It's just that simple.

Like trust, communication flourishes at Tyler between all of the school's stakeholders. Five of the 14 informants (the principal, the assistant principal, a teacher, and two parents) commented on how the school's clerks and the

security guard facilitate communication. One teacher, Mr. Green, remarked:

> Mrs. Robins, she's our clerk [at the branch], she's pretty much like the heartbeat of the school. When she's not here, things don't run as smoothly as they normally do. So I pretty much want to stay on her good side because she pretty much knows everything that's going on around here. She's taking the phone calls and making the phone calls and dealing with the issues. She's wearing a lot of hats.

In response to the question about her relationships with the staff, one of the parents stated:

> They are typically very friendly whenever you need something and very willing to give you the time if you need a few minutes to speak with them. That's pretty much with everybody in the school, even the security guard. The security guard at times is willing to talk to you about different issues that might be going on with clothing items that tend to get lost in the lunchroom. If I call a few minutes before the end of the day because my daughter may or may not need to get on the bus, the receptionist [clerk] is more than happy to set up/handle that for me.

The assistant principal stated:

> [the ancillary staff] are often the first people visitors see. We [the principal and I] feel we have two of the best clerks in the city. They answer the phones in a polite, professional manner. We feel this makes people feel welcome.

The principal made a similar, even more emphatic, statement about the ancillary staff:

> I try to select the best people and I try to respect people at all times. I treat all of my staff the same no matter what their titles or their duties are. At one time I told the security and the clerks "You are some of the first people that people encounter when they walk into the building." I also consider the clerks my boss because they are the ones that I trust and they know my whereabouts all of the time. And they know how to contact me [if something important arises]. And if I need something, they know how to secure it. So, I love them.

As these quotations demonstrate, the administrators, teachers, parents and the school's ancillary staff care about each other and about the students. One parent, Michelle, explained:

[The climate at Tyler is] warm and family-like. Of course in a family we have our little debates and things like that, but basically everybody is about taking care of the education of their kids and so we look out for each other. We want the best that we can get in the school.

Ms. Morrison, one of the teachers, echoed this sentiment:

My relationship with parents is one of sisterhood or brotherhood. Most of the time, I see parents on a regular basis. If I ever have a problem, I can call them, they come up [to the school.] There's not usually a big issue with students and behavior. Which is why this is probably the best one [school] I have worked at.

Yet another teacher, Ms. Reynolds, observed:

I think everyone at the school is like family and everyone works together. You don't just look after your kids in your classroom, you continue looking after kids in the other grades as well. We're a family. As soon as you join the staff, that's what they say. We're like a family here.

Interestingly, the principal and three of the teachers noted that the staff works together after school hours and some times off-site. Yet another teacher

indicated that the staff socializes after hours:

> I have a good relationship with the staff. We do things outside of
> school also that doesn't just have to do with inside of school. We
> see each other socially and then we also see each other to
> collaborate and work on the curriculum. Not just inside of school,
> we also work outside the school.

The staff's bond and commitment to the students is evidenced by their
willingness to participate in school-sponsored fundraisers. At the December staff
meeting, the principal disseminated information about a toy drive for children
from needy families. At the April staff meeting, the principal announced that there
were two on-going fundraisers: one to solicit donations for a third grader who had
been diagnosed with leukemia, and the second, a student read-a-thon, to raise
money for charity. Fundraisers and donation drives can play a vital role in a
school like Tyler that serves mostly low-income students. The principal
explained:

> We also have an exchange program where kids who've been here,
> who graduated, bring their uniforms back to school. We clean them
> up and we have them here and we give them to those who are not
> able to purchase them. And the PTA does things to offset any costs
> that parents may not... I do it, staff members do it. I've paid,

sometimes I buy uniforms for kids....

While the culture at Tyler is warm, caring, and compassionate, the "vibe" at the school is also very professional and focused, especially at the building that serves students in fourth through eighth grades.   One parent's response reflected the sentiments of all three interviewees (two teachers and the one parent) who commented on this issue:

To be honest with you when my son started, both of my children started in the little building. And so my knowledge of Tyler back then was the little building and it was like phenomenal, you know I loved the teachers, they were caring and comforting to the children, all about the education, that kind of thing. And it was really nice. And it took me about a minute when my son went to fourth grade, he had to come to this building. It took me about a minute to get used to the difference. For me it felt like it was a little cold and they expected too much of a fourth grader who was like ten years old. They expect them to be this way and how can you expect someone to be a certain way when they don't know. So that was my "This can't be this way." And it wasn't just me it was a lot of parents in that particular class when my son was in the same class. We all felt that way. But after a while we became visible, that's how you know that this is going to work because you are in there and you

are watching and seeing things. And of course if you are not in agreement, Mr. Leonard is always open to hear what you need, what you want to say. It was okay. So by the time my daughter went to fourth grade, I was like "Ah, you know, so this is the difference.' The difference is a good thing because at the Branch they nurture them. At the main building they are being nurtured, but they are also being prepared for high school, especially when they get to seventh and eight grade.

Four teachers and one parent proudly described the school's reputation for supporting students to succeed academically. One of the teachers, Mr. Martin, explained, succinctly:

...Tyler has always had a very good reputation, always had a tradition of excellence. Ever since I can remember, Tyler is one of the gems in the crowns as far as elementary schools in this area. And especially when you look at report card data for this area. We are one of the three schools in the southeast area of maybe 30 schools that consistently makes AYP. So it speaks well of us. It does not speak well for our district. Tyler has always been a place where excellence is the standard, so to be part of that is just amazing.

Despite the criticism expressed by two teachers that the administration is reluctant to suspend students, six informants (both administrators, two teachers and two parents) said they think one factor contributing to the school's success is the mechanisms in place for resolving conflicts. It appears that the principal's and the assistant principal's approaches to conflict resolution are different. This could be due in part to the fact that the assistant principal oversees the branch, serving younger students, while the principal oversees the main building that serves fourth through eighth grades. A parent, Lisa, explained that the assistant principal is actively involved in ensuring that students behave appropriately in the classroom:

I have noticed with the large classrooms some of the children have a hard time with engaging in the classroom. It kind of really made me think back to when I was a child in public schools and to wonder how did I actually come through. What I did notice what the school did was that the AP circulates the hallways consistently, other teachers check in with each other. And this particular day when I was in the classroom several supports [teaching assistants, volunteers] came in to assist and I was already there to kind of help the teacher with some of the groups in the classroom who needed some special assistance with the classroom. I think there's a great team effort in that aspect and if a child needed to be removed from a classroom they would be spoken to and in the

end encouraged to make better choices and then return to the classroom, more times than not in a better demeanor.

The assistant principal went on to explain:

Often when kids don't receive the services they need, teachers become frustrated. The teachers are not trained to deal with certain behaviors and academic issues. Certain students act out because they are frustrated in school. The administrative staff may be flooded by referrals—kids who are referred to the office because they act out. We work with these kids and try to keep them on task, but out of the classroom. I work one-on-one with kids in the resource room and then give them a chance to return to their classrooms. Often we call parents to let them know what's going on. I handle this at the branch. We used to have a dean of students until last year when the position was cut. My philosophy, I understand some kids need to come out of the room. I try to be therapeutic—not punitive, especially with the little ones.

The principal, in contrast, assists parents and students to work things out themselves rather than draw him into the situation unless his involvement is warranted:

Many times parents come to me before they go to a teacher just to

find out if that teacher is approachable. And I always tell them, if

you have a problem before you go to me, go to the teacher first and

find out [if he/she is approachable and if you can work things out

together]. Because even though I am in the school every day, I'm

not in the classroom every day, all day in all these classrooms. And

so they [disgruntled parents] find that if there's a problem [they can't

solve themselves], they bring it to me and I go to the teacher, talk to

them, we come together with all the issues.

The principal also described a situation in which he employed a *laissez-faire*

approach to conflict resolution successfully:

So on the first day we got back [in September after we adopted our

new school uniforms] I talked to the staff and told them that there's

a possibility some of our students might not come in with the

uniform that had been selected because of some of the things that

had gone on with some of the parents. So [I told the teachers] don't

say anything. Just acknowledge them and welcome them back.

Because I felt that the other kids who had the uniform would say

something. And sure enough, the first day we had about a half a

dozen kids who did not have the uniform, but the kids who did were

the ones who said something to them and made them feel

uncomfortable. The next day, the second day, everybody had their

uniforms on. So that seemed to resolve that issue.

One teacher, Ms. Morrison, acknowledged that disputes between teachers, as well as between teachers and students, arise at Tyler. But these disputes do not last for long periods or undermine the teachers' ability to collaborate:

> Last year we had lots of fights, arguments, blow-ups amongst the students—the staff, when we disagree, we just disagree, we say what we have to say and get it over with and then someone usually comes in and mediates, whether it's the principal or one of the other staff members or, you know, somebody just walking up to you and saying "You know, I just misunderstood." We kind of solve our own problems, and there's not a lot of them because we all know what we have to do and we're all dedicated to getting our mission accomplished. There have been some disagreements in the past, but none so great that you're ready to quit or to beat somebody up or, we're just not that type of people. Usually we hear each other and, you know, we get over it.

Similarly, a parent observed that Local School Council (LSC) members do not always agree on matters, but they do not let their differences escalate:

> Sometimes in LSC meetings we don't agree on things that's for the

well being of the school and the kids so we just try to talk it out. And nothing really major, just the budget, where's this money going to go, why are we purchasing this or why are we purchasing that. People have their own opinions and so that can be a challenge. People not liking how things are run. Though it's been like run this way and a lot of people love this school. New people come in and they are not used to this school. For lack of a better term "Buy into what Tyler is all about."

Four informants (two teachers and two parents) said that although things are not perfect at Tyler, they feel lucky to be associated with the school. Mr. Martin stated:

Even when I get frustrated, when I talk to my colleagues at other schools, it kind of centers me and brings me back down because our biggest problems, what we consider big problems, are not even issues. They are non-existent. They [my colleagues at other schools] are dealing with major violence—major issues, and our biggest problems are a kid talking back to you. Not a kid throwing a chair at you, so when I talk to my colleagues, I realize how blessed I am where I am in a situation where I can actually teach.

Another teacher feels that the administration at Tyler is unique in that the

administrators create a climate in which students and teachers flourish:

> Well I think the leadership is a very nurturing leadership for the kids. It's not so punitive for the teachers. Because I go to the union meetings and I hear some of the stories of what some of the people have to work with, some of the conditions that they have to work under, and just the meanness, or the punitive nature of a lot of the principals. And I think that the leadership, Mr. Makely and Mr. Leonard, they have provided a culture or a climate where a person can feel free to be themselves, to teach the way that they would like to teach. He [the principal] makes us aware of the criteria that you have to be aware of, the bottom line. And after that you can do your own thing.

Highly Qualified and Dedicated Teachers

Structural theorists also assert that as a result of the American system of funding, low-income students are taught by teachers with less seniority and less experience than those in affluent suburbs, where attractive salaries and working conditions are offered (Kozol, 2005, Lee and Burkam, 2002). Interestingly, all of the teachers at Tyler have taught at the school for at least five years, many for significantly more, and all of them hold at least one master's degree. The assistant principal addressed the issue of creating an attractive workplace for teachers during our interview:

We have low teacher turnover and low student mobility. What I've determined is that teachers leave [other] schools because they don't get administrative support/back up. I think we're really supportive and involved with the work they do. We managed to get updated classroom furniture, access to technology for each teacher. Each teacher has their own laptop and landline. We get them any supplies they need and updated instructional materials that allow them to do flexible grouping and differentiated instruction. Plus new programs have hands-on activities. I feel this allows us to keep teachers and staff happy so they enjoy their work and they want to stay. Teachers are knowledgeable about the Illinois Academic Standards for Math, English-Language Arts and Science; they design curricula that meet these standards. They select the textbooks and collateral materials to use in developing their curricula.

Tyler is a math/science school. Accordingly, there are content specialists in these areas at the middle school and a lead math/science coach who works with all of the teachers to help them integrate complex math and science into their lessons. A media specialist and a technology coordinator also support teachers to incorporate technology in their lessons.

While teachers do due diligence with respect to presenting quality curricula that supports learning the core subjects, they are also attuned to students' social and emotional needs. As one teacher, Ms. Patton, explained:

We emphasize the core subjects but we take an interest in the

emotional and social development and the academic development.

The emphasis is on math and science which we try to integrate

throughout with the use of technology. We feel like the whole child

is just critical because just developing cognitively is not enough.

We have to be able to say that this child knows the difference

between right and wrong, that they make good decisions when it

comes to times of stress or times of happiness. That they know not

to take from anyone else, to respect one another's property, all the

things that we are supposed to have done for character education

this is still what is expected, it's in our curriculum.

This same teacher explained that the school consciously promotes cultural

awareness among students—the absence of which Nieto (2004) and others link

to alienating students who come from non-dominant cultures. Ms. Patton

explained:

The climate is very open; the culture is very diverse. It's not as diverse as

some because we only have maybe three ethnic groups, it's

predominantly African American, but the children are very aware of

the different cultures that are represented here as well [as] throughout the

continental US. When we are talking about Ramadan or Hanukkah, they

are very observant. For winter break, that's what we term it so that we are

not offending anyone or forcing religious beliefs.

Teacher-Developed Curriculum

As happens at many schools, NCLB shapes the content of the curriculum

at Tyler. Mr. Green put it this way:

So from the beginning of the year to the ISAT test, it's all business.

You know I stay on them [the students], I keep them busy. The

school day flies by. Most of the students understand and they

cooperate and they stay on task and get their work done.

Another teacher, Ms. Reynolds, complained:

I think a lot of our curriculum is geared toward the testing. And we don't

have as much freedom as lots of us would like. Because we have to do a

lot of teaching to the test. Basically with all the ISAT books we receive

and then Study Island. I think after ISAT we feel freer to be more creative,

be able to do more of what we want to do.

Nevertheless, the administration empowers the teachers to select the textbook

series they prefer and encourages parents to express opinions about potential

new textbooks. The principal explained:

Neither I nor Mr. Makely make any of the decisions about the

books. We want teachers, because they are the ones that teach,

so we want to make sure they have input in whatever we purchase.

And we also invite parents to come in and give their input.

While all of the teachers acknowledged they cull their lessons from textbooks,

several teachers described customizing lessons to engage their students. An

upper-grade science and reading teacher, Ms. Morrison, said:

> Sometimes I jump from segment to segment, but it all makes sense
>
> in the end. I always try to tie the lessons together, whether it's
>
> reading or science. And that's what I like, the fact that I have the
>
> freedom to teach. And from the scores [evaluations] I have
>
> received in the past, the students are getting it. And that's
>
> important to me. I can't do it all by the book, because the book
>
> does not know my students. I usually try to design something to
>
> pull my students into a lesson. I do a lot of that.

Another teacher, Ms. Mireia also addressed this synergy:

> There's always a change in the curriculum. And the curriculum, I
>
> don't just mean the books that are ordered. I mean what's being
>
> done in the classrooms, the type of teaching strategies, the type of
>
> interaction between the children where it's not rote learning, it's

using the higher-order thinking skills, and it's interaction between

the teachers, not just teacher-directed.

Ms. Morrison further explained:

We do problem based [instruction]. Lots of open-ended questions

as far as, especially in science. We allow the students to formulate

or to display their own information about a concept. We do

differentiated instruction in order to help those students who have

not yet grasped a concept. We present it [lessons] in many

different ways.

Three teachers noted that they also regularly make accommodations for

special education students and collaborate with the school's speech education

teacher, Ms. Blackbird, who detailed her role as follows:

What I do with the regular teachers and general education staff, if

they have a special education student in their classroom, I confer

with them as to how best to work with this child and I give them the

modifications and accommodations for each child. I give them the

IEP—each child's individual education plan—and review them

[IEPs] with them and give them ideas as to how to best deal with

them, how to grade them, whether their assignments should be

shortened, whether they should be much smaller in scope. Maybe

they might have a bare-bones concept for each chapter in social

studies or science as opposed to more fleshed-out lesson plans

that she might have for other students. And then there's special

education students who can do it all, but just need a slower pace. I

just collaborate with them on that. They tell me what they see, what

they feel they can do based on what they are seeing as opposed to

just going along with what's in the plan because children do grow

and mature. So we just collaborate in regards to plans for the

children. The teachers are very responsive to collaborating.

While the teachers are open to accommodating special education students, the

majority of informants (both administrators, five of the eight teachers, and three

of the four parents) attested to the rigor of the curriculum at Tyler and the high

expectations for students. As the assistant principal stated: "Being a magnet

school, there are higher expectations. Kids may have homework every day,

during spring break, winter break and over the summer. We let parents know the

expectations upfront."

The upper-grade math teacher, Mr. Martin, said that Tyler's rigorous

curriculum prepares students for success in high school:

Generally speaking we are teaching on grade level in every single

grade, which is great and is very evident when they go to high

school and the kids are taking AP classes or honors classes and

not just the regular freshman slate of classes. We do, in the upper

cycle, our reading curriculum is more novel-based than basal-

based. We really try to get them exposed to a lot of literature first

hand. In math we are doing pre-algebra and algebra. With my

advanced math class, eighth grade, we do the entire first semester

of Algebra I; so we are right on point. Most of my kids in that class

go on to honors algebra or they skip algebra altogether and they go

directly to geometry. For my sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, my

sixth grade, we are also doing a lot of pre-algebra, not as much

algebra as the eighth grade.

Three teachers and the assistant principal attribute the school's academic

success to the fact that teachers use textbooks that are vertically aligned in the

core subjects of reading, math, social studies, and science. Those teachers who

commented on this topic expressed satisfaction with the textbook series and the

accompanying supplements. The assistant principal noted that the school's

curriculum materials are contemporary:

We have updated our curriculum over the last several years. When I first

became assistant principal, we had very dated materials. Now everything

is updated. Nothing we use was produced before 2005. In addition, the

school uses 21st-century technology equipment to enhance instruction.

While the teachers at Tyler use technology to enhance instruction, technology is viewed merely as an instructional tool. At the April staff meeting, a teacher who was conducting a professional development workshop for her colleagues (on creating haiku poetry with students using Power Point) gave this advice: "Technology is a tool; use it to teach a meaningful lesson. Don't over-emphasize the technology component."

Manageable Class Size and Contemporary Technology

Structural theorists also point out that class size is significantly higher in schools serving low-income African American children (Lee & Burkam, 2002; Barton, 2003; Ferguson, 2008). The average class size at Tyler, however is 29 students. While not small by public school standards, neither is it large. The assistant principal claimed that the relatively small class size presents advantages to the school and is due to the school's physical size:

> One thing we have going for us is our small size. Two locations
> separated by five miles is a bit of a hindrance, but it's not
> overwhelming. Being under 500 kids allows us to work out
> schedules [for common preps, meetings, curriculum planning]. Two
> classes per grade level really helps. CPS is trying to pressure us to
> add more kids, but because our building's so small, we can't put
> more than 29 kids in a room.

Kozol (2005) and others point out that schools serving low-income students

frequently lack resources such as innovative curriculum materials and state-of-the-art technology. At Tyler, in contrast, all of the curriculum materials are contemporary, and the school obtained and uses 21st-century technology. The principal remarked on this:

> Throughout the years, we've gotten more into technology. And we try to do as much technology across the curriculum as possible. As you know the technology portion a lot of time it has to do with securing the proper equipment, enough equipment, and making sure that equipment is in good working condition. The building had to be fitted for wireless and we've had difficulty in securing funding and so forth. When I was teaching here we had no computers, none whatsoever. So now gradually when the board came up with this leasing program, we were one of the first schools to jump on the bandwagon. So we started off with the big monitors, so now we have laptops. And as of last night, the LSC approved the budget so we can get additional laptops and LCD projectors because we are trying to get more involved with technology across the curriculum. And our focus is math and science. And hopefully one day we will be absolutely able to use technology in these areas without the use of textbooks. So we are trying to get there.

Collaborative Problem-Solving

While the standardized testing component of NCLB does not seem to put undue stress on the school, the provision of that law that enables students dissatisfied with their neighborhood schools to voluntarily transfer into Tyler has a strong impact on the school. The principal, the assistant principal, and the three teachers who commented on "transfers in" [students who transfer in from other schools] observed that these students are, as one teacher put it, "really far behind." Two of the teachers complained about the behavior of the transfers-in and one commented:

> And a lot of them [the students who transfer in] were leaving their
>
> schools because of behavior issues. Because their parents want to
>
> let their children start fresh here. But unfortunately they are
>
> bringing their behavior and their problems and their same attitude
>
> to our school.

The assistant principal acknowledges the issues that result from the transfers-in, but he expresses the administration's commitment to supporting all students:

> We as a staff have been dealing with transfers-in as a result of
>
> school closures in the area. We've gotten kids from NCLB. Many
>
> of the kids are below grade-level, some have IEPs. We're an
>
> inclusive school. We work with all the students, particularly those

that are below grade-level when they transfer in. We work with

parents and guardians to determine how we can customize

instruction to their needs.

The special education teacher explained that the school addresses the

needs of transfer students by using a program called School Based Problem

Solving, and Response to Intervention (RTI).[1] In addition, she pulls students out

of the classroom for individual instruction, and she does inclusion programs in

the classroom. Likewise, she said, teachers develop their own interventions for

challenging students:

> In general and with transfers-in or people who are just sent here,
>
>   for some reason, it seems like for the past five years, the first
>
> day of school it's just like five, six, eight, nine kids just show up from
>
> a nearby school, a neighborhood school or whatever, and they are
>
> just sent here by the Board and Mr. Leonard [the principal] just
>
> takes them. And they usually are really far behind. There seems to
>
> be real gaps in their learning. We had a group that came in, I think
>
> last year, where it seemed like everybody can't be special ed. Well
>
> there has to be something to do with where [which school] they
>
> came from. They all came from the same school and they are all
>
> very far behind. So that's been a challenge with working with those
>
> students. Most of them are doing much better. Some of them are

working with, we had school-based problem solving in place and now the RTI,[1] so some of those students are pulled out for extra help. I do inclusion in my classroom. When I see a student who is lagging behind, I work with that student. The teachers also have

    some type of intervention plans in place for each of these students.

The assistant principal acknowledged that students' misbehavior sometimes presents a challenge for the school, and he explained that he and the principal and the school's security guard consciously strive to work with the students who act out:

    Certain students act out because they are frustrated in school. The administrative staff may be flooded by referrals—kids who are referred to the office because they act out. We work with these kids and try to keep them on task, but out of the classroom. I work one-on-one with kids in the resource room and then give them a chance to return to their classrooms. Often we call parents to let them know what's going on. I handle this at the branch. We used to have a dean of students until last year when the position was cut. My philosophy, I understand some kids need to come out of the room. I try to be therapeutic —not punitive, especially with the little ones. Over the last couple of years we're seeing more kids go

through trauma and turmoil outside of school—they don't live with both parents, their home has been uprooted, they've experienced trauma. Naturally we can't expect them to experience things like their peers. I try to do puzzles and play catch with these kids when they are referred to me. This gets them to open up and talk about what's going on outside of school then I try to   work with the parents to get them what they need. We try to suspend as little as possible. Though suspensions have gone up at the branch and at the main building with the budget cut and no dean of students. Mr. Leonard and the security guard at the main building use PBIS (Positive Behavior Instructional Strategies)[2] to focus on positive behavior and to offer incentives to toe the line and avoid problems.

Several teachers complained about the school's physical layout. The distance between the branch and the main building presents challenges to those teachers who want to collaborate. An upper-grade teacher, Mr. Martin, elaborated:

The hardest thing about having two buildings is doing vertical planning. Because it is just really hard when you are not in the same place. Vertical planning means when you plan from third grade to fourth grade, from fourth grade to fifth grade. Our third grade teachers are five miles away. And our fourth grade teachers are over here, so if they want to plan together, they have to make a

special effort to stay really late or do it on their own time. Because

it's really not possible to meet here. With us being so far apart,

when school gets out at 1:45, the fastest they can get over here is

2:30 and that's when it's really hard, when you can't just walk into a

meeting when your kids are dismissed.

Despite the geographical challenges, there is significant evidence that

teachers manage to share information at staff meetings and after hours; the

administrators build time into their annual and monthly calendars for teachers to

come together. Teachers spoke enthusiastically about collaborating with their

grade-level partners and the special education teacher on curriculum and lesson

planning. They acknowledged that collaboration requires give and take. Ms.

Morrison, the upper-grade science and reading teacher, explained:

> We kind of work together. We have a common prep. We also
>
> decided to stay after school one or two days a month and it's
>
> usually for about two hours when we talk about what's going on.
>
> That's how we collaborate as far as if we find that one student is
>
> falling behind or we see that there's a conflict in the schedule where
>
> I need to have these students for two hours and so I'll get you to
>
> give them to me this time for two hours and then the next time, I'll
>
> give them to you for two hours. Like for example, Ms. S does the
>
> constitution, so she likes to have the Battle of the Wits and all of

that. So she'd be pulling my students from class in order to do that.

So if she gives me time during dissection or to watch "An

Inconvenient Truth," I'll give her time. We just kind of flip-flop. I'll

give her the time that she's lost. And that's where our

disagreements usually come in. 'Well, I really need them this time."

But we work it out.

Budget shortfalls also present a challenge for Tyler. Administrators and teachers were resourceful about obtaining external grants to fund special initiatives such as their extensive science lab and computer equipment. Moreover, administrators actively remind teachers to take care of their technical equipment, and the technology teacher helps teachers maintain that equipment. In addition, despite administrators' and teachers' occasional complaints about budget constraints, the school manages to allocate funding to purchase the curriculum materials that teachers select. While Tyler receives funding comparable to other public elementary schools in Chicago, the school offers uncommon curricular resources for students and teachers.

Despite the school's success, administrators and teachers acknowledge that the school is vulnerable to external threats. One of the teachers, Ms. Patton, spoke compellingly about the impact of school budget cuts on teachers' morale:

People are having so many problems as far as keeping their jobs.

That is challenging when you lose teachers and you don't know

really until September. Then you are kind of on pins and needles while you wait to see if your numbers [of students: a determinant as to school funding] are up. The Chicago Public School System is losing children because so many people are moving out of Chicago. The cost of living is high so the whole CPS enrollment is down, period. You see that reflected in our school. We lost teachers in 2009-2010. Mr. Leonard [the principal] was very kind and he really tried to keep everyone's spirits up, he listened to everyone, he tried to see what is best for everyone. He tried to see which teachers' positions he could save. He was successful in working with downtown [the CPS Central Office] to save some of that. He saved, I would say, maybe two positions. One teacher assistant position and a half-day position and a regular position.

At staff meetings, the principal and the assistant principal remind teachers that there is a great deal of uncertainty about the direction CPS could take under the new mayor and the new chief educational officer. The entire staff discusses the possibility that Tyler could be closed and re-opened as a charter school. Administrators and teachers grapple with the fact that some of the selective enrollment schools are trying to attract the highest scoring students from Tyler. Field notes from an April 2011 staff meeting where this issue was discussed follow:

- Principal: "Last bit with the lottery, many of my students who got high scores at the benchmark grades have been accepted at selective enrollment high schools. We need to prevent the exit of our highest performing students. We need to challenge them. So if we want to keep our better students, we have to do something. My heart ached when I saw a large number of our third and sixth and even some of our kindergarten students leaving. "

- Teacher: "That's kind of a good thing, we taught them well."

- Principal: "In one respect it's good, in another respect it says something about us. We've never had this before. Tyler is not the only school that is facing this. A lot of parents of sixth graders are pulling them out to go to selective enrollment schools with a high school because it's easier to get in at sixth grade than at HS."

- Teacher: "We need to think about how we can prepare kids to compete. This is an excellent school, but we need to communicate better to parents about programs and innovations."

- Principal: "In your grade levels [meetings] make sure you give input. You have telephones in all of your classrooms. Call parents. We don't have music and art, but we do have a staff with all of these advanced degrees. We have to do something—maybe departmentalize. I'm afraid, I don't know what my seventh grade and my eighth grade are going to look like. This will have an affect on our ISAT scores. Fortunately we've always been able to make AYP."

- Principal: "All of us have to play a part in this. They are really pushing to pull kids into the selective enrollment schools. Our name, Tyler, carries a lot of weight. We have a list of kids who graduated from here who are doing great things. We need to carry this legacy. We are all in this together. We don't know how we are ranked. Whether we will continue to make AYP."

- Teacher: "Children want reliability-consistency. They feel safe. Develop procedures so you don't have to confront children all day because confrontation elicits emotional responses."

- Assistant Principal: " I have a positive story. I have been working with a third grade parent whose child is a top scorer. The family lives in Hyde Park. The dilemma is transportation. Tyler matches up [academically] with the Hyde Park schools. She [the mom] can get him [the student] here in the morning, but I don't have a way for him to get home in the afternoon. I'm working with the mother to see if we can work out the transportation. With a lot of kids transportation is an issue. In fact the principal in Hyde Park said "Tyler is an excellent school."

- Principal: "The kids showed great growth on the NWEA [test] in the fall; now we need one more push from winter to spring."

- Assistant Principal: "On report cards add some comments to the comments section; Also when you begin a conference [with parents], please start the conference on a positive note. Parents will be your best friends if you recognize their children's good attributes."

- Principal: "In your cycle meetings develop ideas about how to adjust, change, revise the schedule for next year. We want to begin the dialogue now so that by June we can give you a schedule that is set in stone. We need to know what materials you need and what professional development you want, so we have a lot in place in June."

Despite the challenges and threats that the school faces, the principal remains calm, optimistic, and solution-oriented. This was especially apparent in his response to the question: "Have you observed any challenging situations, and if so, how did the school respond to the situations?" He responded with a description of how the school successfully dealt with a serious asbestos issue. He concluded by stating: "Other than that, we haven't really had any really challenging situations."

Summative Comments

The administrators at Tyler School worked together as a supportive administrative team for 12 years and also taught at the same school for seven years prior to becoming administrators. They are humanitarians, visionaries and extraordinary leaders, possessing remarkable management skills—relationship development, communication, and educational leadership. Complementing these traits is their ability to identify, attract, and retain a staff of highly qualified teachers and provide them with opportunities to collaborate and develop their skills. Consequently, the teachers use innovative approaches to present content-

rich lessons.

To support an inclusive culture in which parents feel comfortable, the administrators consciously hired friendly, polite front-office staff—clerks and the security guard—and they create opportunities for parental involvement. The administrators, sensitive to the challenges low-income families face, support families on an as-needed basis. They are uncommonly adept at responding to the financial challenges faced by schools serving low-income students. Through their personal diligence, the administrators procure state-of-the-art curriculum materials and technological equipment. Consequently, the administrators at Tyler School cultivate and support a complex matrix of inter-connected supports that collectively support student achievement.

Unfortunately, current educational policy as established by the NCLB Act, fails to acknowledge that inputs—socio-cultural supports, authentic, teacher-driven curriculum, contemporary curricular materials and state-of-the-art technology—are critical to favorable educational outcomes. High test scores should reflect' real knowledge, not merely the ability to use gimmicky test-taking strategies. It is hoped that studies like this one will inspire educators, administrators, and teachers to focus on creating those conditions that produce motivating inputs and trust that favorable outputs will follow.

An in-depth assessment of the administrators' style of leadership; the inclusive and effective policies they set; their uniquely ethical position with respect to student enrollment; their optimistic beliefs about students, teachers

and parents; their exemplary performance as leaders; their ability to cultivate and sustain relationships among stakeholders; and their ability to manage their school budget prudently and to find external resources to enable their school to obtain contemporary curriculum materials and 21st-century technology is presented in the Analysis section that follows this chapter.

Chapter V

ANALYSIS

The preceding chapter presented findings about the features at Tyler

School that facilitate academic achievement there, including: the effective

leadership team, the constructive climate, the highly qualified and dedicated

teachers, the rigorous and innovative curriculum, the school's effective manner of

dealing with challenges, and other factors that contribute to the students'

success. These features align with those that Edmonds, Lezotte, and the

researchers at the UCCCSR identify as interrelated correlates or essential

supports that collectively reinforce each other and underscore success at high-

achieving schools serving low-income students of color. Data analysis revealed

that the leadership team, the principal and assistant principal, serve as the

catalyst to initiate and sustain the school's other exemplary features—climate,

teachers, curriculum, and effective response to challenges. This finding is in

keeping with the results of the UCCCSR's extensive research on schools that

support low-income students of color to succeed:

> School leadership sits on the first position. It acts as driver for
>
> improvement in four other organizational subsystems: parent-community
>
> ties, professional capacity of the faculty and staff, a student-centered
>
> learning climate, and an instructional guidance system (Bryk, Bender
>
> Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu & Easton, 2010, p. 197).

Additional literature about the impact of effective leadership on student outcomes, as well as on ancillary factors that contribute to student success, supports these findings about the critical role of leadership. While the term "leadership" generally refers to principals, at Tyler, the principal and the assistant principal work as a team to co-manage the school. Fullan (2010, p. 148) points out the magnitude of the principal's impact: "there is clearly a multiplier effect if the principal helps directly and indirectly, 30 or more teachers become dramatically more effective in their teaching".

Likewise, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty's (2005) meta-analysis of 35 years of research on the impact of school leadership on student achievement indicates a correlation between effective school leadership and favorable student outcomes. This chapter will demonstrate how Tyler School's administrators embody the attributes of leadership that Marzano et al. herald, specifically modeling "constructive translational leadership" as they define it:

> This type of leader sets goals, clarifies desired outcomes, exchanges rewards and recognition for accomplishments, suggests or consults, provides feedback, and gives employees praise when it is deserved. The most distinguishing feature of this transactional leadership style is that followers are invited into the management process.... Followers generally react by focusing on and achieving expected performance goals.

Tyler's leadership also models "instructional guidance," one of the five essential supports that Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) hold underscore effective schools. Marzano et al. (2005), who use the synonymous term "instructional leadership," draw on Smith and Andrews' (1989) work to define the dimensions of instructional leaders: resource providers, instructional resources, communicators, and visible presences. This analysis reveals that Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely embody Smith and Andrews' (p 18) succinct, yet specific definition:

>As resource provider the principal ensures that teachers have the materials, facilities, and budget necessary to adequately perform their duties. As instructional resource, the principal actively supports the day-to-day instructional activities and programs by modeling desired behaviors, participating in in-service training, and consistently giving priority to instructional concerns. As a communicator, the principal has clear goals for the school and articulates those goals to faculty and staff. As a visible presence, the principal engages in frequent classroom observations and is highly accessible to faculty and staff.

The policies that Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely set, the beliefs that they hold, their personal dispositions, and their skills in management—relationship development, communication, educational leadership, and the ability to respond to the challenges faced by schools serving low-income students—shape the

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school's inclusive and constructive climate, effective teachers' performance, and rigorous and dynamic curriculum, and the school's pragmatic and effective response to challenges. While the principal and the assistant principal never made a statement against NCLB, my data revealed a notable absence of discussion of testing. I speculate that the absence of discussion of NCLB reflects their recognition that in creating optimum conditions for teaching and supporting students to learn (inputs), they are also creating an environment that produces favorable outputs; that is, high test scores.

Inclusive Policies

All of the policies established by Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely are inclusive. Their "open-door" policy is the one the interviewees spoke about most frequently. This policy extends universally across time to teachers, other members of the school staff, parents, students, and external constituents such as this researcher, alike.

Mr. Leonard's and Mr. Makely's willingness to listen to others is not merely a reflection of their gracious dispositions. Rather, they practice "distributed leadership" (Marzano et al., 2005)*,* actively employing policies designed to foster democratic decision-making. For example, they ensure that teachers, other members of the school staff, parents, and Local School Council members (not all of whom have children at the school) are involved with developing the annual School Improvement Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement (SIPAAA). Chenoweth's reporting (2008) of the common features identified at 15 effective

schools underscores that the leadership at those schools does not make all the decisions. Chenoweth comments: "Teachers and other administrators, and sometimes parents and community members as well, sit on committees that make important decisions for the school, decisions such as hiring, curriculum, school policies and procedures, Title I spending, and much more." (Chenoweth, p. 222)

Moreover, teachers at Tyler are empowered to select the curricular materials they use and to choose the grade levels they teach. These policies can explain, in part, why teacher turnover at Tyler is unusually low. Two recent research reports, *Transforming Teacher Work for a Better Educated Tomorrow* (Advance Illinois, 2011) and *The Schools Teachers Leave Teacher Mobility in Chicago Public Schools* (Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute, 2009) link the degree of influence teachers feel they have to their level of job satisfaction, commitment to professional practice, and the level of teacher retention. It is likely that the Tyler administrators' policy with respect to the importance of teacher collaboration, and their willingness and ability to build schedules that are conducive to collaboration, also contribute to teacher longevity at the school. In *The Schools Teachers Leave Teacher Mobility in Chicago Public Schools*, the researchers report:

> … the schools that retain their teachers at high rates are those with a strong sense of collaboration among teachers and the principal. Teachers are likely to stay in schools where they view their colleagues as partners

with them in the work of improving the whole school. (Consortium on

Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education

Institute, 1)

Mr. Leonard's l*aissez-faire* approach to conflict resolution also empowers those around him (students, teachers, and parents) to have input (Marzano et al., 2005) into these situations and defuses strained relationships between stakeholders. Stakeholders themselves reach mutually agreeable resolutions to issues that, initially, are contentious. In the process, collegial relationships and stakeholders' sense of self-efficacy are reinforced. Mr. Makely, who oversees the building serving younger students, takes a different, yet also effective, approach to resolving conflicts. He frequently works one-on-one with those students who act out, to help them gain control over their behavior and to prevent them from disturbing their classmates and teachers. He will also reach out to the parents of disruptive students and will help them obtain external support services.

These administrators also employ policies that support teachers' forming relationships with parents, thereby fostering a significant level of parental involvement. Parental attendance at school meetings is high, and a number of parents volunteer at the school on a regular basis. The disconnection that often occurs between the parents of low-income students and school personnel (Bryk et al., 2010; Karp, 2008; Sergiovanni, 1994) is not present at Tyler.

Interestingly, Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely employ an inclusive policy that acknowledges students' accomplishments. A student who makes a positive

contribution to the school beyond an academic one is recognized as "citizen of the month." Mr. Leonard explained that this policy was created to ensure that any student who makes a positive contribution to the school is honored, not just the "A" and "B" students,

Ethical Leadership

Tyler's leadership employs another inclusive and generous policy that is unusual. At Tyler, which is a magnet school, all of the students who legitimately secure a place at the school through the magnet school lottery system are accepted. And those students who exercise the NCLB option allowing students from low-performing schools to transfer into higher-performing schools are also accepted. This is in contrast to the widespread practice among principals of discouraging low-scoring students and those with a history of behavioral issues from enrolling in their schools. There are remedial education policies and social supports in place at Tyler that assist the "transfers in" to acquire the academic skills and emotional stability to interact with their peers and their teachers. While some teachers interviewed grumbled mildly about the added work "transfers in" present, even the grumblers accept their administrators' inclusive policies and comply with the systems that support remedial students.

The administrators' commitment to educational inclusivity is further evidenced by the policy that regards disciplining acting-out students by suspension as a last, and rarely used, resort. The administrators explained, during their interviews, that they believe all children belong in school. So they

use an established school-wide intervention called Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) that emphasizes changing underlying attitudes and how students' behavior is addressed. They work directly with the children who act out and will also work with the families to obtain needed social and health services. Bryk et al. (2010) confirm the importance of providing psychosocial and health-related support to disadvantaged students.

Research also indicates that Tyler's policies may have long-term benefits for difficult students. Losen's policy brief *Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice* (2011) reveals that Black and Hispanic students are statistically more likely than Caucasian students to be suspended when they break the rules. Losen finds that students who miss class time as a result of being suspended are at greater risk of eventually dropping out of school. To curtail suspensions, Losen advocates for the application of the system-wide intervention, PBIS, already in-place at Tyler School.

Empowering Teachers, Students and Parents

Edmonds (1979), the founder of the Effective Schools Movement, held that "...all children are eminently educable and that the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of that education" (Edmonds, p 20).

Likewise, Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely hold optimistic beliefs about students' potential. At staff meetings and during our interviews, they stated:

- Children deserve a fresh slate every year;

- Because all children are entitled to an education, a school should provide

supports to those who need remedial educational or socio-emotional intervention;

- Students need to be challenged;

- Instruction must be contemporary and dynamic;

- Curriculum materials must be up-to-date;

- To stay invigorated, teachers must be life-long learners;

- Parents care about their children and want them to succeed in school;

- It is imperative that teachers form mutually respectful relationships with parents; and

- The entire staff—classroom teachers, resource teachers, support staff, engineers, lunchroom attendants, clerks, the security guard—plays an important role at the school and should be treated with respect.

This research indicates that teachers at Tyler School accept, internalize, and are guided by their administrators' beliefs. Marzano et al.'s thorough meta-analysis of effective leadership (2005) corroborates the value of leaders who possess well-defined beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning; who share their beliefs with their staff; and who demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with those beliefs.

Establishing a Climate of Optimism

Quotations and descriptions presented in the Findings chapter demonstrate that teachers and parents genuinely like and respect Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely. These administrators are approachable, open-minded,

trustworthy, caring, courteous, and thoughtful—not reactionary or punitive. Moreover, these two men model successful collaboration and delegation. In addition, both work long hours on school days and into the evenings and weekends, as the nature and complexities of their responsibilities are time-consuming and not limited to standard business hours. Despite the many complicated challenges they face in managing a public school serving low-income students in an age of accountability politics, Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely exhibit remarkably optimistic and solution-oriented approaches in responding to those challenges. Regrettably, I did not directly ask Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely how they remain positive and pragmatic despite the many hurdles that arise. That said, my sense is that their long and mutually supportive partnership, of a piece with their personal dispositions, their long and successful history of responding to challenges, and their focus on the "big picture"—that is, managing a school that supports students to succeed—underscores their seemingly unflappable outlook. Leader (2008) conducted a case study of five effective principals and a review of literature on behaviors correlated with academic achievement. He holds that effective principals are "optimizers" who inspire and lead new and challenging innovations.

Data analysis indicates that the described policies along with the beliefs the administrators hold and their personal dispositions shape the school's inclusive and constructive climate. Their management skills establish a base that enables teachers to teach unencumbered by the distractions that inhibit teachers at many demographically similar public schools.

Initiating and Sustaining Relationships

One of the most noteworthy features at Tyler School is the close, respectful, and collaborative relationships between the administrators, teachers, ancillary staff, and parents. There was no evidence that teachers or parents felt intimidated by or distanced from the administrators or one another. All the teachers and parents interviewed spoke in glowing tones about the administrators. They noted, as observations confirmed, that the administrators are a constant presence in their respective buildings. During the school day, neither spent much time in his office or working on the computer. Instead, they were constantly engaged with members of their staff and with students, parents, and external people (vendors, CPS personnel, etc.). In her study of the factors that undergird effective schools, Chenoweth (2008, p. 222) observed: "... the principals are in the building and walking the halls, conferring with teachers, looking at student work, and interacting with students, teachers, and parents." Similarly, Bryk et al. (2010) and Smith and Andrews (1989) hold that an effective principal models "instructional guidance/leadership" by being an accessible, visible presence.

Analysis indicates that Mr. Leonard's and Mr. Makely's accessibility contributes to their relationships with stakeholders. The administrators were observed praising teachers and parents and publicly acknowledging their contributions to the school. During interviews, teachers and parents spoke with pride and appreciation about the accolades they received from the

administrators. This recognition contributes to their relationships with the

administrators and their sense of loyalty to the school. Research indicates that

the administrators' propensity to acknowledge teachers and parents, and in the

process to reinforce their relationships with teachers and parents, is uncommon.

Marzano et al. (2005, p. 45) note how unusual this is: "One might expect that

recognizing individual accomplishments is standard operating procedure in

schools. However, singling out individual teachers for recognition and reward

appears to be rare in K-12 education."

Not only do Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely cultivate relationships between

themselves and the teachers and parents, they purposefully and successfully

coach teachers to reach out to parents in a positive, friendly, and respectful

manner. As a result, parents and teachers report they are comfortable with one

another, there is mutual respect between parents and teachers, and they work

together to support student success. Some of the parents interviewed described

the climate at Tyler as "family-like," and one teacher said, "My relationship with

parents is one of sisterhood or brotherhood."

These strong relationships are especially noteworthy as researchers link

strong relationships between teachers and low-income parents with students'

success (Anyon, 2005; Bryk et al., 2010; Meier, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1994). Those

researchers, and others, point out that low-Income parents can feel intimidated

by school personnel. Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely understand that many parents

have complicated lives, some working multiple jobs or facing challenging life

circumstances. These administrators accommodate parents' scheduling needs

to enable them to meet with their children's teachers at times convenient to them. In this manner, Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely further support relationships with parents who might otherwise feel disenfranchised from the school.

Further analysis indicates that Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely initiate and support relationships between teachers. They develop schedules that give grade-level partners (teachers who teach the same grade) common preparation periods, and they allow them to decide how and what to teach. In doing so, relationships between grade-level partners are fostered, and collaboration is built into teachers' everyday routine. A number of teachers described the congenial and collaborative relationships they have with colleagues and the amount of time they spend together both during and after school hours. One teacher explained that not only do teachers work together after hours, but they also socialize with one another. Interestingly Bryk, Lee and Holland (1993), who conducted a study of high-achieving Catholic high schools that serve low-income students, found that these schools operate as "communal organizations." They hold that collegiality among teachers is a critical component of their success. They elaborate:

> Collegiality amongst teachers represents another structural component in a communal school organization. Catholic school faculty spend time with one another both inside and outside of school. Social interactions serve as the resource for school problem solving and contribute to adult solidarity in the school's mission. In such contexts

school decision-making is less conflictual and more often characterized by mutual trust and respect. (p. 299)

Chenoweth (2008), too, says that at the effective schools she studied:

These schools have a kind of camaraderie that comes from teams of people facing difficult challenges together, not unlike the camaraderie that is built into military units, sports teams, theatrical groups, and any other group that goes through an arduous process to achieve a common goal. As a result, they do not have the kind of turnover that many schools with similar demographics have. (p. 226)

Payne (2008) reviewed a study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research on characteristics shared by schools serving low-income students of color who were improving academically, that further heralds the importance of trust between teachers. He comments:

Social trust is a highly significant factor. In fact, it may well be that social trust is the key factor associated with improving schools. Teachers in the top 30 schools generally sense a great deal of respect from other teachers, indicating that they respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts and feel comfortable expressing their worries and concerns with colleagues. In contrast, in the bottom 30 schools,

teachers explicitly state they do not trust each other. They believe that

only half the teachers in the school really care about each other and they

perceive limited respect from their colleagues. (p. 35)

The strong relationships, trust, and sense of camaraderie among the

administrators, teachers, and parents at Tyler extend to the school's ancillary

staff, clerks, and the security guard. The administrators said they consciously

involve the ancillary staff in the development of the annual School Improvement

Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement (SIPAAA) and other school-wide

activities; they believe it is critical for the entire staff to feel vested in the school.

In addition, the security guard works directly with the administrators to execute

the policies outlined in PBIS, the school-wide intervention program used to curtail

suspensions. Both administrators explained that because the clerks and security

guard are the first people visitors see, it is imperative that they are friendly and

professional.   Accordingly, Mr. Leonard explained that he hires the best people,

respects his entire staff, and treats everyone the same, regardless of title.   In

interviews, teachers and parents commented favorably about the security guard

and clerks.

Running a school while serving as an educational leader who cultivates

collaborative and constructive relationships between teachers, other staff, and

parents is time consuming, challenging, and requires a great deal of thought.

Data analysis indicates that the close, mutually respectful, and constructive

relationship Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely share enables them to manage and

attend to the complexities of running a high-performing school. Mr. Leonard

delegates the management of the branch to Mr. Makely while he manages the

main building. This division of labor by leaders who respect and trust one

another, share the same beliefs about children and education, enforce the same

policies, and share the complex responsibilities involved in managing a school

enables the principal and the assistant principal at Tyler School to create

optimum conditions for student achievement.

Proactive Communication

An analysis of observational and interview data indicates that Mr. Leonard

and Mr. Makely are highly communicative administrators. This shared

characteristic serves to garner stakeholders' buy-in and adherence to school

policies and initiatives, and fosters parental involvement. Parents and teachers

easily articulated the school policies, indicating that they were well internalized.

During interviews, several teachers observed that the administrators clearly

communicate their expectations with respect to supporting all students to attain

high levels of academic achievement and cultivating and maintaining constructive

relationships with parents.   Observations confirmed that Mr. Leonard and Mr.

Makely present thorough accounts of new and on-going national and local

policies and mandates as well as their implications for teachers. The

administrators' ability to synthesize relevant information for teachers contributes

to the school's overall functionality.

Similarly, Mr. Makely explained that he and Mr. Leonard apprise parents of

the expectation that students complete homework every day, during spring and winter breaks, and over the summer. In doing so, they establish parents' buy-in to the school's rigorous requirements for students. Meier (2002), who extols the merits of creating learning communities where administrators, teachers, and parents work together to support student achievement, comments that effective communication is a critical component of building relationships with parents: "First schools need to be clear about their agenda—how they define what they mean by being well-educated, how learning best takes place, and what they think learning looks like at age five, ten or eighteen." (Meier, p. 51)

In addition to communicating the school's expectations to parents who are new to Tyler School, the administrators use several methods (website posts, phone calls, meetings, and presentations) to keep parents informed of new developments at the school and to ensure that they feel a sense of connection to the school.   The administrators at Tyler consciously employ these multiple forms of communication to ensure stakeholders understand, buy in to, and comply with the school's policies. Effective communication between the school's administrators and the stakeholders is one of the components that contributes to student success at Tyler.

Empowering Teachers

Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely exemplify "instructional guidance/leadership" (Bryk et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005; Smith & Andrews, 1989) by creating the conditions to support teachers to be successful in the classroom. They:

- Communicate expectations to teachers clearly;

- Apprise teachers of federal and local educational policies and mandates;

- Encourage teachers to participate in on-going professional development;

- Praise teachers' successes in public forums;

- Create schedules that enable teachers to collaborate with each other;

- Delegate decision-making about curriculum materials to teachers;

- Empower teachers to personalize their lessons and teaching styles;

- Ensure that teachers have contemporary curriculum materials;

- Ensure teachers have laptops and other modern technological resources; landlines in their classrooms to facilitate communication with parents; and

- Address students who act out in class to minimize the disruptions created for the teachers and the other students.

While the administrators give teachers substantial freedom to customize instruction, they monitor the teachers' work in a subtle, supportive manner. Both administrators walk in and out of the classrooms, unannounced and frequently. They require teachers to take notes at their grade-level meetings, and turn in sign-in sheets. At staff meetings, the administrators cite examples of the positive lessons they observed in specific classrooms and encourage the teachers to learn from their colleagues. In this manner, Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely establish a form of internal accountability that was lauded in a report on a recent three-year initiative, the *Partnership for Instructional Leadership.* This initiative was conducted by Business and Professional People for the Public

Interest (BPI), and was geared to developing frameworks to support participating schools to improve student achievement and share the lessons learned. The BPI report, *Every Child, Every School: Lessons from Chicago's Partnership for Instructional Leadership,* indicates: "Schools have also been found to perform more effectively when they have strong internal accountability, predicated on a high level of agreement on norms, values, and expectations." (Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, p. 11)

Administrators, teachers, and parents report that the curriculum at Tyler School is rigorous, expectations are high, and students are required to complete a substantial amount of homework. The teachers said that while the topics covered on the ISAT largely shape the content of lessons, their leadership empowers them to present lessons in a manner that makes sense for their classrooms. To engage students' critical thinking skills, several teachers report that they use problem-based instruction and ask open-ended questions. To respond to the administrators' emphasis on reaching every child, the teachers differentiate instruction and work closely with the Special Education teacher who assists them to make accommodations for students with remedial needs. Teachers also report that their textbooks, from which they draw much of the content of their lessons, are vertically and horizontally aligned in the core subjects.

One teacher's comments capture the manner in which the administrators support teachers to excel in the classroom:

I think the leadership, Mr. Makely and Mr. Leonard, they have provided a culture or a climate where a person [teacher] can feel free to be themselves, to teach the way they would like to teach. He [Mr. Leonard] makes us aware of the criteria, bottom line. After that, you can do your own thing. And Mr. Makely is really good about praising everything you do. He'll say "That was really great, good job." I think all of that helps to make a staff feel good, on an even keel, appreciated.

Shrewd Money Managers

While many schools serving low-income students feature sub-par resources (outdated curriculum materials and computers), Mr. Leonard and Mr. Makely are inordinately resourceful about managing their regular school budgets, applying for external grants, and allocating funds for contemporary textbooks and 21st-century technology. As a result, the low-income students at Tyler have access to resources comparable to those at schools that serve more affluent children.

Responding to Students' Needs

To be successful, schools that support low-income students to attain academic success must be attuned to the special needs of the population they serve (Bryk et al., 2010; Greene & Anyon, 2010) and should provide social, and sometimes financial, supports to the families they serve (Greene & Anyon). Tyler's administrators sponsor fundraisers, in which teachers participate, to

provide financial assistance for families in financial straits. To offset the financial burden of purchasing school uniforms, Tyler features a uniform exchange program; parents donate their children's old uniforms and the staff cleans, presses, and distributes the uniforms to children whose parents cannot afford to purchase them.

Two structural features uncommon in schools serving low-income students contribute to success at Tyler School. Because classrooms in both the Branch and the Main buildings are small, class size in each never exceeds 30 students. In the absence of mandated limits on class size, many schools serving low-income students feature inordinately large classes. That the two Tyler buildings are five miles apart enables the administrators to create an appropriate atmosphere for the students at the buildings they oversee. The climate at the Branch is especially nurturing and supportive of the primary age students. At the Main Building, the teachers are conscious of preparing students for high school. Their demeanor toward students is a bit more formal, and students are required to complete more lengthy homework assignments. As a result of Tyler School's physical structure, class size is manageable, and the school features both a primary school and a middle school, each overseen by a dedicated administrator.

Summation

As has been shown, Tyler School features a number of optimal conditions that have been linked to student achievement for students from any income bracket: The school's climate is supportive and inclusive, the teachers are highly

qualified and they care about their students, teachers collaborate with one another, parental involvement is high, class size is manageable, teachers use contemporary textbooks and 21st-century technology, the school's curriculum is rigorous and dynamic, and the rate of teacher retention is high whereas student mobility is low. In addition, the school provides remedial support to students with academic deficiencies and social-emotional support to students who act out at school. Not surprisingly, the students who attend Tyler School typically attain academic success.

The findings of this study indicate that the long-term, supportive partnership between the principal and the assistant principal at Tyler enables these administrators to create and sustain the interrelated conditions that support their students' success. Their personal dispositions, the policies they set, and the beliefs they hold contribute to their ability to manage the school. The Conclusion chapter outlines the need for additional research on developing effective leadership and creating policies that encourage the retention of effective leaders. Many present-day principals were born during the Baby Boom (1946-1964) and are retiring in large numbers (White & Agarval, 2011). Moreover, in Illinois, the rate of principal mobility is increasing. White and Agarval extensive survey results indicate that accountability pressures could be exacerbating this turnover; it is the schools that fail to make AYP that experience the highest levels of principal turnover. They note, however, that their analysis does not indicate if high turnover at these schools is positive, reflecting the replacement of ineffective principals with more effective successors, or negative, with effective principals

leaving their schools because of the stress of accountability policies. A recent report, *Estimating the Effect of Leaders on Public Sector Productivity: The Case of School Principals* (2012) presents additional evidence which suggests that as a result of the AYP requirements, schools serving low-income students have a hard time retaining their principals and thus tend to have principals with less in-school experience. The researchers comment that replacement principals often fare no better than those who were removed. Moreover, principal turnover is unsettling for students and staff alike. Hence I contend that more research into training principals as effective leaders, able to respond to the pressures that come with the job, is strongly warranted.

In sum, as will be detailed in the Conclusion to this study, this research highlights the need for additional research into training new cadres of administrators in an effort to replicate the success that the students at Tyler enjoy and to grow the number of high-achieving schools that serve low-income students of color.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSIONS

From the outside, Tyler School looks quite ordinary—dull, in fact. The two buildings, the primary-grades building and the main building, are plain brick and concrete edifices erected some time around the turn of the 20th century. There are no adornments on, or "green space" around, either structure. As this investigation revealed, however, extraordinary things are accomplished inside these ordinary buildings. Quantitative data demonstrate that the school produces favorable outcomes:

- The school's ISAT scores are impressive by Chicago standards;
- The school has made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) every year since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was enacted in 2002; and
- One-third of the school's eighth-grade students go on to Selective Enrollment high schools.

Achieving these outputs requires exemplary inputs. The culture at Tyler is friendly, focused, and inclusive. Expectations for students are high, and the teacher-developed curriculum is innovative, rigorous, and challenging. Moreover, the teachers themselves are highly qualified, all having at least one master's degree. Parent participation is high and lauded by administrators and teachers alike. In addition, academic and other forms of support are available to students and families as needed. And the school features contemporary curricular

materials and 21st-century technology. Not surprisingly, student mobility is low, and teacher retention is high. In many respects, Tyler School provides an educational environment for African American students that is structurally similar to that of their advantaged Caucasian peers. This is extraordinary, as current and historic educational policies fail to address the systemic inequitable distribution of educational resources (Kozol, 2005): schools that serve low-income students typically feature inferior resources, contributing to the achievement gap.

Data analysis revealed that the visionary and entrepreneurial leaders at Tyler School, the principal and assistant principal, secured the school's structural supports—highly qualified teachers, contemporary curriculum materials, and 21st-century technology—and they initiated and maintain the socio-cultural supports that are a critical component of the school's success. They are committed to educational excellence and equity. They do not engage in the dodgy policies used by some other schools in a frantic effort to comply with the NCLB mandate to attain AYP or face sanctions. These commitments and principles undergird the policies they set. Their skills in management—relationship development, communication, educational leadership, budgeting, and ability to respond to challenges as they serve low-income students—are the catalyst that initiated and sustained the school's other exemplary features—climate, skilled teachers, curriculum, effective response to challenges—-that contribute to the students' success.

This study reinforces the findings of the Effective School Movement, the UCCCSR, and researchers such as Chenoweth (2008 and 2009) and Leader (2008) who hold that there are indeed public schools in which low-income students of color get a good education. This study also supports and contributes to prior research that reveals a complex matrix of interrelated socio-cultural supports (inputs) that undergirds achievement at high-performing schools. This finding is significant, and it is important that it be communicated to educators. Current national educational policy as established by NCLB focuses narrowly on outputs, i.e., test scores. This policy, which provides no clear guidance to educators committed to supporting student achievement, punishes schools that fail to demonstrate gains. As a result, many overburdened teachers, especially those who teach low-income students at underfunded schools, use a narrow curriculum and simplistic test-based teaching strategies in their effort to raise test scores (Darling-Hammond in Meier et al., 2004). And this practice is condoned by principals whose jobs are at risk when their schools fail to show gains (Reitzug and West in Shapiro, 2009).

At Tyler School, in contrast, teachers and administrators rarely discuss testing. Curricular issues and students' needs, however, are frequent topics of discussion. This finding supports that of Reitzug and West (in Shapiro, 2009):

The assumption that rote processes and teaching to the test result in higher test scores is, perhaps, the most influential assumption guiding instructional practice in schools in the high-stakes testing era of No Child

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Left Behind. That there has been such wholesale and uncritical

acceptance of this assumption is truly an educational and societal tragedy

when one considers that there is significant research evidence, from both

quantitative and qualitative studies, that shows that standardized test

scores are higher in schools where more authentic instruction occurs (e.g.

Newmann & Welage,1995: Newmann & Associates, 1996; Marks & Printy

2003; Marks et al., 1996). Not only does authentic instruction result in

higher test scores, but the achievement gap between high and low socio-

economic students is also smaller in schools that restructured in ways that

permit more authentic instruction. (p. 81)

The administrators at Tyler facilitate the development of authentic

curriculum by creating schedules that enable teachers to collaborate with one

another, to form constructive working relationships, and to co-develop

curriculum. In doing so, they eradicate teacher isolation, a condition that has

been shown to undermine teachers' performance (Wallace Foundation, 2012),

and they empower teachers to work together in a collaborative manner to

improve their instructional practice (Advance Illinois, 2011). The administrators'

policy of creating schedules that support teacher collaboration likely contributes

to their ability to retain effective teachers. In a report titled *The Schools Teachers*

Leave: Teacher Mobility in Chicago Public Schools (2009) researchers from the

Consortium on Chicago School Research found that:

… the schools that retain their teachers at high rates are those with a

strong sense of collaboration among teachers and the principal. Teachers

are more likely to stay in schools where they view their colleagues as

partners in the work of improving the school. They are likely to leave

schools where colleagues are resistant to school-wide initiatives and

where teachers' efforts stop at their own classroom door. Teachers stay in

schools with inclusive leadership, where they feel they have influence over

their work environment and they trust their principal as an instructional

leader (Consortium on Chicago School Research, p. 2).

Clearly the authentic, teacher-developed curriculum at Tyler and the

school's effective teachers contribute to student achievement. Another

characteristic of this school is essential to its success: Academic and socio-

emotional support is available to students as needed. Bryk et al. (2010), Greene

and Anyon (2010), and other researchers recognize the importance of providing

additional resources to schools that serve low-income students. Boykin and

Noguera (2011) point out however, that "relatively few schools have combined a

social service strategy with a well-though-out academic achievement strategy" (p.

178). It is important to note that by offering extra support to students who

transfer into the school, Tyler is able to help those students catch up

academically to students who have attended the school since kindergarten. Thus

the administrators at Tyler eliminate pressure other administrators feel to "push

out" low-scoring students or prevent them from gaining admission to the school,

in an effort to make AYP. In sum, this study of Tyler School indicates that closing

the achievement gap depends on providing an inclusive and intellectually

stimulating educational environment for African American students where

academic and socio-emotional interventions are readily available.

Implications of Study

This study contributes to research that indicates that national and local

education reform, grounded in accountability policies, needs to move in a new

direction to close the achievement gap. Boykin and Noguera (2011) point out

that the gap persists nine years after the adoption of NCLB. NCLB fails to

address the systemic inequitable distribution of educational resources among

schools and deflects attention from this societal failing (Kozol, 2005). Moreover,

high-stakes accountability systems, such as NCLB, that sanction schools,

administrators, and teachers when students don't reach predetermined outcomes

on standardized tests in reading and math, impel schools to narrow the

curriculum to the test subject and to limit instruction in other curricular areas—

e.g., social studies, history, science, art, music, and physical education (Noguera

& Rothstein, 2008). Moreover, the threat of sanctions incentivizes teachers at

typical, underfunded schools to use uniform, test-based teaching strategies and

prescriptive curriculum materials to raise test scores (Meir, Kohn, Darling-

Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004; Reitzug & West in Shapiro, 2009).

Sadly, the results of the 2011 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*

indicate that teachers were less satisfied with their careers at that point than

when they were surveyed two years before; job satisfaction is at the lowest level

seen in the survey series in more than two decades. Teachers with the lowest

job satisfaction are less likely than others to feel that their job is secure (56% vs.

75%); more likely to be in schools that have had layoffs of teachers (49% vs.

37%) or other school staff (66% vs. 49%); and more likely to have faced

reduction or elimination of arts or music programs (28% vs. 17%), after-school

programs (34% vs. 23%), or health or social services (31% vs. 23%). In

response to pressure to meet seemingly unattainable district, state and federal

requirements, and to keep their own jobs, administrators at underfunded, under-

resourced schools condone teachers' widespread use of "drill and skill" strategies

to raise test scores. (Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer & Wood).

Taken together these consequences of NCLB demonstrate how the

prevailing national educational policy undermines public education.

Unfortunately, while there is widespread recognition that NCLB is inherently

flawed, plans to replace it are also grounded in testing and continued sanctioning

of schools that fail to meet pre-determined goals. Darling-Hammond

(2012) asserts that the "test-and-punish" approach to school reform will continue

to inhibit the efforts of administrators and educators at schools in high-need

communities, where they earn lower salaries, teach larger classes, and deal with

more stressors than those who work in more affluent schools.

Despite the hurdles NCLB creates for schools and the challenges of

working with very limited school budgets, high achieving, high poverty schools

such as Tyler demonstrate that public schools can develop internal policies and

systems that help students succeed. It is my hope that readers of this study who work at demographically similar schools will identify with and be inspired by this portrait of Tyler. School leaders are encouraged to review their methods of governance and adopt the kinds of policies and strategies used by the administrators at Tyler School—inclusive decision-making, cultivation of relationships among stakeholders, providing socio-emotional support to students, nurturing collaboration between teachers, and using non-threatening and constructive internal accountability to ensure teachers employ best practices in their classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate and to use effective instructional strategies in their classrooms.

Suggested Area for Further Research

My findings indicate that the principal and the assistant principal at Tyler are uncommonly competent, self-taught, visionary leaders whose expertise has been honed over the twelve years they have worked together in administrative roles. These administrators were able to create, and they continue to sustain, an exemplary matrix of supports that undergird student success at Tyler. During their tenure at Tyler they developed exceptional skills in:

- Relationship development;
- Communication;
- Inclusive decision making;
- Appropriate delegation;

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- Hiring friendly and capable front-office staff;

- Hiring and retaining effective teachers;

- Inspiring teachers to become life-long learners;

- Encouraging parental involvement;

- Providing remedial academic and socio-emotional support to students;

- Responding to challenges in an inclusive and positive manner; and

- Effectively managing their school budgets and writing proposals for external funding.

I posit that the skills of Tyler's administrative team in these areas enable them to create an optimal environment for student achievement despite the multitude of challenges that inhibit educational attainment at so many other schools serving low-income students. To replicate the success that Tyler's students enjoy, I recommend that school districts invest in research to explore the feasibility and logistics of developing comprehensive training programs for principals and assistant principals; the aim should be to increase the pool of effective leaders, expand the number of high-achieving schools, and increase the odds that low-income students of color will attend a high-quality school.

I assert that this recommendation is timely. A recent research report by the Wallace Foundation, *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning* (2012, January), concludes that the job of principals has grown increasingly complex: "They [principals] can no longer function simply as building managers, tasked with adhering to district rule, carrying out regulations

and avoiding mistakes. They have to be (or become) leaders of learning who can develop a team delivering effective instruction (p. 4)."

Another recent study by Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin, *Estimating the Effect of Leaders on Public Sector Productivity: The Case of School Principals* (2012), contends that in serving on the "front line," principals are positioned to directly affect student achievement. They hold: "The leadership and decision-making provided by a school principal is proximate and tied directly to outcomes at her school, unlike that of a school superintendent of a large district who operates more like a CEO in terms of providing broad policy guidance" (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, p. 3-4). Likewise, a recent Rand report, *First-Year Principals in Urban School Districts How Actions and Working Conditions Relate to Outcomes* (2012), presents evidence that suggests that as a result of NCLB-mandated AYP requirements, schools serving low-income students have a hard time retaining their principals and thus tend to have principals with less in-school experience. The researchers comment that:

> While some argue that it is a good idea for districts to act quickly and replace principals who do not do well, principal turnover can have negative effects on students and teachers. Our research reveals that the replacement principals often fare no better than those who were removed. Overall, schools that lose one principal after one year do not perform well in the subsequent year under (another) new principal. (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012, p. 47)

As has been shown, under-resourced public schools serving low-income students are charged with the seemingly insurmountable challenge posed by NCLB to raise student achievement, as evidenced by standardized test scores, or face sanctions. As a result, many public schools model "worst practices" in a futile attempt to "game the system" and remain open.   Hence the achievement gap persists. Nevertheless, there are schools, such as Tyler, where the gap is narrowing. High achieving, high poverty schools feature complex, inter-connected elements that stimulate authentic learning and collectively support students to succeed. Research, this study included, indicates that effective school leadership at high performing schools serves as the catalyst that initiates and sustains the other supports. This study presents a portrait of two highly talented leaders, provides insight into how these leaders create an optimal environment for student achievement, and points to the need to develop comprehensive training programs that prepare future administrators to carry the charge to close the gap.

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Appendix A
Flyer Distributed to Potential Interviewees

Research Study to be Conducted at Tyler
Interviewees Needed

Description of Study
DePaul University doctoral student Julie MacCarthy is conducting a research study at Tyler to learn about how the administrators, teachers, students, and parents at this school work together to enhance students' learning. To collect her data, Ms. MacCarthy will review documents such as the school's report card and the school's improvement plan (SIP). In addition, she will observe teachers and administrators at staff meetings, and she will interview 14 adults who are involved with Tyler.

Information about Interviews
Ms. MacCarthy will interview the school's principal and the assistant principal. In addition, she will interview eight teachers and four parents. To be eligible to participate in the interviews, teachers must have worked at Tyler for a minimum of three years. Parent participants must have had children at the school for the past two years. Participants who meet the criteria will be selected on a first come basis.

Interviews will be approximately one hour and will be scheduled around the participants' availability. If you meet the criteria above and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to respond orally to several interview questions about the culture, climate, and curriculum at Tyler. You can choose not to participate in the interview. There will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate or change your mind later. If you choose to participate in this interview, the interview will be recorded for research purposes. During the interview, you may request that the recording stop at any Mr. Martine.

Benefits of Study
Tyler was selected for this study because the school consistently demonstrates impressive student outcomes on standardized tests despite the fact that students are randomly selected for enrollment; they are not admitted on the basis of attaining high standardized test scores or demonstrating any other measure of academic achievement or aptitude before they are admitted to the school. Tyler serves as a model of what could be achieved at typical public schools (non-selective enrollment schools) that serve low-income African American students. The findings from this study will contribute to literature on the internal features, curricula and cultures of effective schools.

If you are Interested in being Considered for an Interview, Please contact Julie MacCarthy at your Convenience:(708) 369.1213-cell

Appendix B

Consent Form
Information Sheet for Participation in Research Study

Portrait of a High-Achieving Elementary School that Supports
Low-Income African American Students to Succeed in School

You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted by a doctoral student at DePaul University, Julie MacCarthy, under the direction of her dissertation chairperson, Dr. Amira Proweller. We are trying to learn more about how the administrators at your school support teachers, students, and parents to work together to enhance students' learning. We are asking you because you are an administrator, teacher, or a parent of a student attending this school. If you are in the research, we will ask you to complete an interview that will take approximately 1 hour of your time. During the interview we will ask you to respond verbally to questions that we ask. The questions will be about the culture, climate, and classes offered at your school. We will audiotape the interview, so that we can make accurate written notes regarding what you have said. You can ask me to stop recording the interview at any time. If you are a teacher, your involvement in the research may also include observing you at staff meetings.

You can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate or change your mind later after we start the interview. Your relationship, your child's relationship or grades, or your employment with the school will not be affected by your decision whether or not to participate.
If you have questions about this study, please contact Julie MacCarthy at (708.369.1213) or jaz_june@hotmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul Universities Director of Research Protections at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information or your records.

Please sign and print your name and date the form below.

_____
Signature

_____
Print Name

Appendix C

**Announcement Made
At the Beginning of Staff Meetings
That Julie MacCarthy Observed**

Greetings. My name is Julie MacCarthy. Many of you may already know me. I am here today as I am a doctoral student at DePaul University and I am currently conducting a research study at your school to learn about how the administrators, teachers, students, and parents work together to enhance students' learning. Accordingly, I am going to observe today's meeting. I will be taking handwritten notes at this meeting. I will not identify any of the people I observe in my notes by their given name. Instead I will categorize the participants as "teacher", "administrator", etc. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to speak with me at the end of the meeting.

Appendix D

Observation Guide
For Observations of Staff Meetings

Date:

Start and stop time:

Location:

Description of setting:

People present:

Planned and Unplanned Activities:

Perceived Mood of Participants:

Appendix E

Interview Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews with Participants

Issues to be addressed at onset of interview:

Researcher's motives and intentions and the inquiry's purpose:
- This study is intended to contribute to literature on public schools that effectively educate African American children from predominately low-income homes.
- The goals for today are for me to get some information about:
  o your relationships with the staff and the parents at Tyler;
  o your perceptions of the school's climate and culture;
  o your knowledge and perception of the school's curriculum;
  o your knowledge about how the school responds to challenges; and
  o to develop a list of interview questions to be used when I conduct more-in-depth interviews.
- Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and the identity of all of the participants.

Questions:

- What is your connection to Tyler school?

- How long have you been involved with Tyler?

- Please describe your relationships with the school's staff and the students' parents.

- Please describe the climate and culture at Tyler.

- Please share what you know about the school's curriculum.

- Have you observed any challenging situations at Tyler? If so, how did the school respond to these situations?

- Please describe how you felt when you first became involved with Tyler?

- What other information would you like to share with me about Tyler?

Notes

Introduction

1. 82.2% of the Tyler students met or exceeded state standards in reading, 80.1% of the students met or exceeded state standards in math and 83% of students met or exceeded standards in science during the 2009-2010 school)

2. The school has made AYP every year since NCLB was enacted in 2002. The distribution of elementary schools in Illinois that meet AYP has varied during the period from 2002-2010 with 70.3% of the schools making AYP in 2002 and only 55.8% of the schools making APY during the 2009-2010 school year: Source Illinois State Board of Education);

3. The school's rate of teacher turnover is low: teachers only leave the school when they retire.

4. The national award committee that evaluated Tyler reported:
   o Although the many virtues and good practices in evidence at Tyler have a multiplying, synergistic effect, a few key practices stand out. First the school leadership is strong and directed, tightly focused on student achievement, although the touch is light and the mood is open.
   o A second powerful factor is the school's unceasing orientation to the future. Every student is expected to work hard and go to college, a message that is constantly reinforced. Class work is rigorous and high-level, and abstract thinking is woven throughout the curriculum, reinforced by the school's math science magnet focus.
   o The school's close and continuing relationship with parents is the third key factor in its success. Because families have invested themselves in the [magnet school] application process, a parent explained, they usually understand that they have an ongoing role to play in their children's academic career---and the school makes its expectations of a committed partnership clear.

5. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, has been producing the Nation's Report Card to inform the public about the academic achievement of elementary and secondary students in the United States since 1969. The national results are based on a representative sample of students in public schools, private schools, Bureau of Indian Education schools and Department of Education Schools. The state results are based on public school students only. The main NAEP assessment is usually administered

at grades 4 and 8 at the state level and grade 12 at the national level. The long-term trend assessments report features the results of 9, 13 and 17 year-old students in mathematics and reading . (http://nces.ed.gov/nationalreportcard/faq.asp

6. To achieve AYP, 95% of the students in a school must have taken the State test with 77.5% meeting or exceeding state standards. 82.2% of the students at Tyler met or exceeded state standards in reading, 80.1% in math, and 83.0% in science. This is an especially significant accomplishment as the Illinois Interactive Report Card indicates that in Chicago only 56.7% of African American students meet AYI in reading and only 62.2% of African American students meet AYP in math.   Likewise, only 59.1% of the students deemed Economically Disadvantaged meet AYP in reading and 68.4% of the students in this group meet AYP in math (http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?districtID=15016299025).

7. NCLB Mandates:
   The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment must be administered to a sample of fourth and eighth graders in each state every other year to in order to make cross-state comparisons.
   a. Districts and schools that receive Title I funds must demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state defined minimum levels of improvement as measured by standardized tests chosen by the state.
   b. Schools that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years will be deemed in need of improvement, will face increasingly stringent sanctions each year they fail to meet AYP.
   c. Schools may be restructured if they fail to meet AYP for five years (www.greatschools.net/definitions/or/nclb/html.)
   d. Achievement data must be disaggregated by student subgroups according to race, ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, migrant status and low-income status.
   e. Each school district must prepare and disseminate local report cards that include information on how students in the district and in each school performed on state assessments.
   f. These report cards must tell which schools have been identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring (www.education.com/print/Ref_Questions_Answers_No/.)
   g. Schools identified as needing improvement are required to provide students with the opportunity to take advantage of public school choice, e.g. the option of transferring to a better public school in their district.
   h. Elementary teachers must pass a state test demonstrating their subject knowledge in reading/language arts, writing and mathematics. Middle and high school teachers must demonstrate a high level of competency in each academic subject area they teach

either by passing a rigorous state academic subject test or by an undergraduate major, a graduate degree, coursework equivalent to an undergraduate major, or an advanced certification or credentialing.

i. *NCLB* seeks to support parents to become involved with their children's education by requiring that each state's education agency disseminate information on effective parental involvement to local education agencies and schools. Schools receiving Title I funds must take measures to ensure parental involvement in the following areas: planning at the district and school levels, annual meetings, involving parents in developing plans for school wide programs designed to raise the achievement of low-achieving students in high poverty Title I schools and coordinating parent involvement strategies among federal education programs such as Title I, Head Start and Reading First (www.education.com/print/Ref_Questions_Answers_No/.)

Findings

1. Response to Intervention (RTI) is a three-tiered model that provides extra support for students in reading and math who might otherwise be headed for a special education program. A team of teachers and a psychologist use data from assessment tests to determine how much, if any, extra help each student needs.

2. Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) is a data-driven approach to improving school learning environments. Its emphasis is on changing underlying attitudes and policies concerning how behavior is addressed. PBIS consists of three different levels of interventions. The school-wide level effects every member of the school community. Its goal is to ensure a safe and effective learning environment by emphasizing appropriate student behavior and simultaneously working to reduce punitive disciplinary measures. At this level, PBIS entails frequent monitoring of office referrals for discipline and setting school-wide goals for reducing these referrals. The system of interventions and supports is designed to shift the focus from the individual student as the primary problem to the collective behaviors, working structures, and routines of educators and to the whole school as the unit of analysis. The second level and third levels of intervention provide additional supports and services for smaller numbers of students who exhibit challenging behavior. These include interventions conducted in individual classrooms and focus more on specialized instruction of school expectations, skills training for students, or other strategies tailored to specific behaviors. (Losen, 2011, p 14-15).

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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Consultant: Arts Programming and Non-Profit Management	

Art Resources in Teaching (A.R.T.) – Chicago, Illinois	**1998-2012**
Marketing Director	

Oak Park YMCA – Oak Park, Illinois	**1995-1998**
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The Law Office of Barbara Sherman – Chicago, Illinois	**1992-1994**
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The Astor Group – Chicago, Illinois	**1990-1992**
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St. Benedict High School – Chicago, Illinois	**1987-1989**
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CURRENT VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Cool Classics – Chicago, Illinois
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EDUCATION

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