Common Characteristics of Elementary Schools That Have Been Recognized as Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition

by

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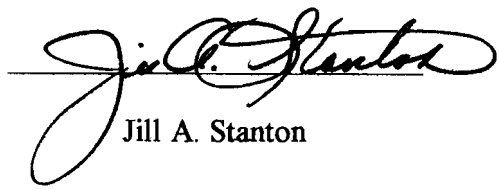

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ABSTRACT

High-poverty elementary schools across Wisconsin, who are struggling with low academic achievements, need to know what Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition are doing in order to be so successful. The purpose of this study was to identify the common characteristics of 32 Wisconsin elementary schools that have continually been recognized as Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition. These schools have been able to reach the highest levels of student achievement despite the obvious barriers that their students face.

Data collection for this study entailed having the principal and at least one teacher from each grade level complete an online survey for each of the 32 schools. The survey was developed based upon what current research has proposed to be the characteristics of schools like Wisconsin Promise Schools. The survey questions were made up of ten

rating scale questions to identify how each school matches the characterisitics identified in previous research and also an eleventh open ended question that sought to identify the additional things that these schools are also doing.

The results and the conclusion of the study was a list and explanations of the ten common characteristics of Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition at the elementary school level. These characteristics closely followed the findings of research on a national level. Recommendations for the use of this research are for elementary schools to consider using the examples from the survey results and the literature review to implement these characteristics that have improved student achievement in high-poverty schools.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Many people, including educators, believe that there is a direct relationship between poverty, ethnicity, and academic achievement. This is understandable given the fact that schools that enroll large numbers of children from poor families rank among the lowest performing schools (Cooley, 1993). Conversely, when schools enroll few poor children, achievement typically ranks much higher. Allington and Cunningham (2002, p.3) stated, "Poverty is not the only factor that places a child at risk of academic failure, but it is the most pervasive one." This is consistent with national observations dating back to the 1960s in which demographic characteristics were regarded as the dominant variables influencing student achievement (Reeves, 2004).

Researchers such as Reeves (2004), Izumi (2002) and several others listed in this study, have discovered that many high-poverty schools have been able to defy the odds and make it possible for their students to achieve very high levels of academic achievement. These schools have been able to reach levels of achievement equal or greater to other schools in their states despite the fact that they enroll high numbers of low-income and minority students.

The state of Wisconsin has recently identified its public schools that have defied the odds as "Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition". To be recognized, schools must be eligible to receive federal Title I funding and be among the highest poverty schools in the state based on free and reduced-price school lunch data. Additionally, student achievement must be above average for the state in both reading and mathematics, based on statewide assessments, and there can be no noticeable lag in achievement for subgroups of students. In the 2005 - 2006 school year, 77 elementary

schools were recognized as Wisconsin Promise Schools, of which 32 were recognized for the second or even third consecutive year (Donovan, September 6, 2006).

This study will focus on these 32 Wisconsin Elementary schools that have continually shown that they can reach the highest levels of achievement despite the obvious barriers that their students face. The achievement of these schools is remarkable and it is the goal of this study to identify the common characteristics that these schools share so that other schools from around the state of Wisconsin can learn from their example.

Statement of the Problem

There has been some research done on high-performing, high-poverty schools across the nation, but there have been very few studies conducted with Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition. Schools across Wisconsin that are struggling with low academic achievements need to know what Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition are doing in order to be so successful. The first step to emulating these successful schools is to conduct research and identify what it is that they all have in common.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the common characteristics of Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition at the elementary school level. These identified characteristics will be shared and will hopefully give guidance to schools that have high poverty and minority levels like "Wisconsin Promise Schools," but have not been able to reach the same high levels of achievement.

Assumptions of the Study

A major assumption of this study is that schools that implement the identified characteristics of Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition will enjoy the same results. This may not necessarily be true. What worked for one school may not work the same way for a different school. Reeves stated, "The most compelling argument against any research about success in high-poverty schools is the observation that there are cases where teachers are doing all of the right things, and yet student achievement remains low. There are no magic potions to deliver improved student achievement. The best that researchers and policymakers can do is to examine the preponderance of the evidence and draw appropriate conclusions" (2004, p.207).

Definition of Terms

Academic Standards. Academic standards specify what students should know and be able to do, what they might be asked to do to give evidence of standards, and how well they must perform. They include content, performance, and proficiency standards (Academic Standards – What are They, June, 2006).

High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools (HP2 Schools). HP2 schools appear to routinely provide for low-income and other historically marginalized groups of students the same opportunities to acquire intellectually challenging subject content that are taken for granted in more affluent communities. They are more likely to embrace, and even surpass, requirements of the state's accountability system. They tend to engage in school practices that reflect a culture of success and excellence. They respect the primacy of adults supporting one another, as

well as children, toward a common vision of success in school and life (Bell, 2001).

Title I. This program provides financial assistance through state educational agencies (SEAs) to local educational agencies (LEAs) and public schools with high numbers or percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards (US Department of Education Website, 2006).

Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) annual award presented to schools who meet the following criteria: schools must be eligible to receive federal Title I funding and be among the highest poverty schools in the state based on free and reduced-price school lunch data; additionally, student achievement must be above average for the state in both reading and mathematics, based on statewide assessments, and there can be no noticeable lag in achievement for subgroups of students (Donovan, 2005).

Methodology

The remainder of this paper follows a logical path towards identifying the characteristics of Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition. In chapter one, the reader is introduced to the basic purpose and goals of the study. In chapter two, there is an in-depth review of the literature on the subject of high-performing, high-poverty schools. In the chapter three methodology section, the specifics of the study and how it was conducted are outlined. In chapter four, the results of the study are presented. In chapter five, the results of the study are discussed and the paper is concluded.

This study was developed to look at elementary schools that had been recently and continually recognized as Wisconsin Promise Schools. This recognition was based on solid data about the poverty levels of these schools and the results that these schools have produced. In the 2005 - 2006 school year, 77 elementary schools were recognized, of which 32 were recognized for the second or even 3rd consecutive year. This study focused on these 32 schools that have continually shown that they can reach the highest levels of achievement despite the obvious barriers that their students face.

Data collection for this study entailed having the principal and at least one teacher from each grade level complete a survey for each of the 32 schools. This calculates to at most 192 surveys (32 schools x 6 people (Principal and 5 - K-4 teachers)). The survey was developed based upon what current research has proposed to be the characteristics of schools like Wisconsin Promise Schools, which nationally are referred to as 90/90/90 schools (90% below poverty, 90% minority and 90% achieving high proficiency). The survey questions were made up of ten rating scale questions to identify how each school matches the characterisitics identified in previous research and also an eleventh open ended question that sought to identify the additional things that these schools are also doing. The surveys were conducted online. Each principal/school was called in advance, and also were sent an invitation to complete the survey via email. The principals were asked to complete the survey and then forward it to at least one teacher from each of the 5 grades (K-4). The data collected from the online surveys from each school was assessed in order to identify the common characteristics exhibited throughout all 32 Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition.

The culmination of this study is a list and detailed description of the characteristics that Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition have in common.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The body of literature on high-performing, high-poverty schools is relatively recent. While the first studies using these terms were conducted in the late 1990's, the research agenda is related to Edmonds' 1979 study that focused on the attributes of effective schools serving high proportions of low-income children. The studies of the 1990's, as synthesized by Levine and Lezotte (2001), demonstrated that these schools shared such factors as strong administrative leadership, high expectations, an orderly school atmosphere, a collective faculty dedication to improve student performance, an instructional emphasis on basic skills and frequently monitored student progress.

The literature review in this study presents eight different research studies from across the nation that were conducted between 1998 and 2004. These studies are explained and their findings are compared and discussed. In addition, the literature review presents the Wisconsin Department of Instruction's (DPI) characteristics of high-performing schools that are displayed on the DPI website.

Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons from High-Performing Schools

Miles and Darling-Hammond (1998) investigated how teaching resources are organized at five schools that support high levels of student learning in "Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons from High-Performing Schools." The five schools in the study included 3 elementary and 2 secondary schools. All of the schools in the study had extremely high levels of eligibility for Title I funding and/or a large number of students who qualified for free or reduced–priced lunch.

The authors provide evidence of each school's "strong or improving student achievement" that include such criteria as the rate of improvement of student performance, low drop-out rates, and high levels of graduation and college admissions.

The result of the study was the identification of six principles of resource allocation. The six principles included:

1. Reduction of specialized programs and creation of more generalized roles for teachers.

   Schools rethinking resources could consider how remedial, special education, Title 1 and bilingual education resources might work together to support an integrated plan to benefit these students in the regular education environment.

2. More flexible student grouping targeted to individual needs.

   Traditional schools assign teachers and students to classrooms using formulas and classifications of students such as age, program and ability. Group sizes stay constant over the day regardless of lesson and skill level. Schools looking for better ways of matching resources and student needs could consider new ways of assigning students to groups based on educational strategies.

3. Structures that enable personal relationships.

   The traditional large secondary school with its fragmented schedules and heavy student load makes it difficult for students and teachers to know one another. To address these issues, schools could consider ways of restructuring schedules and grouping to reduce teacher loads and create smaller contained teacher-student groups.

4. Longer and more varied blocks of instructional time.

Traditional schools have created inflexible fragmented daily schedules. Schools could consider ways of more effectively matching resources to teaching and student needs for better ways of matching daily schedules to learning requirements.

5. Creation of more usable common planning and professional development time for teachers.

   Traditional schools have not designed non-instructional time to enable significant joint curriculum or professional development. Schools rethinking their use of teaching resources could consider ways of creating longer periods of time for teachers to plan and develop curriculum together.

6. Creative definitions of staff roles and work schedules.

   Traditional schools use full-time teaching staff all working the same hours. While some schools use instructional aides to support teachers, most schools do not have systematic strategies for using aides or other non-certified teachers to support instruction. Schools looking to match resources to student and staff needs could consider the use of part-time positions and varied job schedules.

How Low-Income Schools Get High-Octane Results

The article titled: "Who Says Poor Children Can't Learn" (Chaddock, 1999) summarizes the research conducted by two different education organizations, The Education Trust and The Heritage Foundation. The summary of these two research studies is appropriately titled: How Low-Income Schools Get High-Octane Results.

In these studies, The Education Trust, a Washington-based research group, identified and studied 366 high-performing, high-poverty schools in 21 states and The

Heritage Foundation, on the other side of Washington, D.C., located and studied 125 of these schools. Both groups say they expect to find many more. Samuel Casey Carter, who directed the Heritage Foundation survey, stated: "These are not isolated examples. They have proven by simple and sure means that high achievement is not out of reach of any school" (Chaddock, 1999, p.20). Examples of what works from both studies include:

1. Restructure the school day to spend more time on core academic subjects.

   The education trust found that 86 percent of successful schools in its survey had increased the time spent on reading; 66 percent increased time teaching math. Outstanding schools provide extended school days and years, after-school and summer programs: "Time on task is the key to progress in time... Effective principals reject the notion that teaching is an 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. job. They expect the same of their teachers," notes the Heritage Foundation.

2. Improve the quality of teaching with more and better professional development for teachers.

   The Education Trust found that schools in its survey spent more than 10 percent of their federal dollars on professional development – nearly double the national average for comparable schools. Master teachers can help faculty implement the curriculum, direct peer evaluations, or head team teaching.

3. Monitor student progress and provide early support to low performers.

   More than 4 in 5 schools in the Education Trust survey say that they have such systems in place. Testing is used for diagnostic purposes to adjust teaching and define outside tutorials to meet student needs. Some schools provide weekly reports to parents.

4. Focus parent involvement on areas that most directly affect student achievement. Help parents learn more about the new standards expected of students. Some schools establish contracts with parents to read to their children, check homework, and keep in touch with their assignments. The Education Trust notes that nearly 1 in 3 schools reported that 25 to 50 percent of their parents were involved in processes to help them understand the quality of student work.
5. Set and monitor schools goals. Make sure that new accountability systems also have consequences for adults.

   Most states do not hold schools, teachers or principals accountable for student learning. But the Education Trust reports that nearly half of high-performing schools in their survey held principals subject to sanctions if their students did not improve – and 35 percent report that teachers are held responsible for student achievement.
6. Give principals freedom to decide who teaches, what is taught, and how to spend school resources.

   > Chaddock (1999) stated:
   >
   > Schools serving low-income children are often poorly funded. Even on shoestring budgets, effective principals make their schools work, but innovation and flexibility are the keys to their success… Effective principals either are given their freedom or take it for themselves," concludes the Heritage Foundation. (p.3)
7. Use standards to guide school activity, assess student progress, and design the curriculum.

The Education Trust reports that nearly every school in its survey (94 percent) uses standards to assess student progress and 77 percent offer regular ways for teachers to measure student work against state standards.

Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations

The study, "Dispelling the Myth: High-Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations," (Barth, et al., 1999), presents analyses of survey data on 366 elementary and high schools with attention to common attributes of high-performing, high poverty schools. In this study, Barth, Haycock, Jackson, et al. (1999) surveyed 1,200 schools that were the top-performing or most improved with poverty levels of over 50%.

"Dispelling the Myth" (Barth, et al., 1999, p.2) explained that the high-performing, high-poverty schools in the study tend to:

1. Use state standards extensively to design curriculum and instruction, assess student work and evaluate teachers.

   A full 80% of the high-performing, high-poverty schools reported using standards to design instruction. Similarly, the successful schools in this study were using standards to assess student work and evaluate teachers.

2. Increase instructional time in reading and math in order to help students meet standards.

   A 78% majority of top performing, high-poverty schools reported providing extended learning time for their students. This time was primarily focused on reading and math.

3. Devote a larger proportion of funds to support professional development focused on changing instructional practice.

Changes in the 1994 law require schools to provide for thorough professional development for teachers in high-poverty schools. The schools in this study seem to be moving faster than their less successful counterparts to company with this provision. As important is that the focus of professional development seems to be centered on helping students meet specific academic standards.

4. Implement comprehensive systems to monitor individual student progress and provide extra support to students as soon as it's needed.

   Four out of five of the top performing, high-poverty schools had systematic ways to identify and provide early support to students in danger of falling behind in their instruction.

5. Focus their efforts to involve parents on helping students meet standards.

   In these schools, traditional roles for parents as fund-raisers are giving way to activities that address parents' knowledge of standards, encourage their involvement in curriculum and involve them in reviewing students' work.

6. Have state or district accountability systems in place that have real consequences for adults in the schools.

   Nearly half of the principals in these schools were subject to some kind of sanctions if their students failed to show measurable academic improvement.

Hope for Urban Education: A study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

Johnson and Asera's study (1999), "Hope for Urban Education: A study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools," identified use of Title I funds as a common factor in reform efforts. In the fall of 1998, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned a set of case studies of nine urban elementary schools. In these case

studies, the majority of children met federal free or reduced-price lunch criteria and the student performance on reading and mathematics assessments exceeded the average for schools in the state (or the average for schools in the nation, when nationally-normed assessments were used). These authors were particularly interested in the schools' transformation processes. The researchers viewed school documents, utilized two-day site visits, and used focus groups with administrators, teachers, and parents.

The common characteristics and similarities of the schools in this study lead to the following recommendations (Johnson and Asera's, 1999, p.x):

1. Build the capacity of principals to provide instructional leadership.

   Federal, state, and local education agencies should promote efforts to build the capacity of principals to provide the quality of instructional leadership demonstrated by the principals in the nine schools studied.

2. Channel resources in ways that provide additional instructional leadership to schools.

   Federal, state, and local education agencies should consider other ways to increase the quantity of instructional leadership available to schools, such as the development of instructional facilitator or specialist positions within schools.

3. Create clear, measurable, and rigorous school accountability provisions.

   The federal government should continue to encourage states and districts to frame rigorous school accountability requirements. However, a focus on adequate yearly progress is insufficient. Many educators will be motivated to higher levels of performance if states and district policies define exemplary academic achievement.

4. Ensure that accountability provisions are accompanied by adequate strategies to build capacity and provide support.

   In considering requirements for adequate yearly progress, states and districts should set ambitious requirements but also provide high levels of support. One of the most important supports is time for school personnel to engage in processes that align instruction to standards and assessments.

5. Along with accountability, provide schools adequate flexibility and support to use that flexibility well.

   Federal, state, and local education agencies should ensure that accountability provisions are coupled with adequate resources for schools and reasonable flexibility in the use of those resources. Principals and school decision-making committees need high quality training that helps them use data to focus resources on critical areas of instructional need.

6. Infuse the tenants of comprehensive school reform into other federal education programs.

   The federal government's focus on comprehensive school reform should be expanded and infused into other federal education programs. However, emphasis does not need to be placed on the adoption of models of reform as much as upon the principles of reform, as defined in the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program legislation.

7. Use legislation, policy, and technical assistance to help educators create regular opportunities for true professional development.

Professional development needs to be completely rethought in a way that results in more effective teaching and improved student achievement. State and federal resources should support the costs associated with the provision of high-quality, school-based professional development that increases the amount of time educators spend working with and learning from each other.

8. Provide resources for increasing the quantity of time made available for instruction.

   State and federal resources should support efforts to increase the quantity of time made available to instruction. After-school programs, "Saturday Schools," and extended year programs are important vehicles for ensuring that students meet challenging standards.

9. Strengthen legislation and provide technical assistance to encourage schools to build the capacity of teachers and parents for increasing parental involvement at school.

   Paper compliance with existing federal parental involvement requirements is inadequate to improve schools. The capacity of educators to work with parents must be broadened. Also, educators must work to build the capacity of parents to support the education of their children.

10. Research is needed to better understand how school districts can better support the improvement of teaching and learning in high-poverty schools.

No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

A former colleague of The Heritage Foundation, Samuel Casey Carter, examined the KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) Academies in Houston and New York, along

with 19 similar schools, in the book, "No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools" (Carter, 2000).

Carter wanted to give these schools the recognition they deserve, of course, but his goal was also to identify what it is that makes them and their principals successful. Carter listed seven defining traits of a No Excuse School " (Carter, 2000, p.8-11):

1. Principals must be free.

   Effective principals decide how to spend their money, whom to hire, and what to teach. Unless principals are free to establish their own curricula, seek out their own faculties, and teach as they see fit, their teaching will not be its best.

2. Principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement.

   Tangible goals are the focus of high-performing schools. Once the principal sets a clear vision for the school, every teacher has to be held personally responsible for enforcing it.

3. Master teachers bring out the best in a faculty.

   Master teachers are the key to improved teacher quality. Master teachers often head peer evaluations, lead team teaching, devise internal assessment measures, and keep the mission of the school focused on academic achievement.

4. Rigorous and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement.

   Testing is the diagnostic tool that best enforces school goals. Regular testing at all levels and in all areas ensures that teaching and learning of the prescribed curriculum are taking place in every classroom.

5. Achievement is the key to discipline.

When a school clearly teaches by example that self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem anchored in achievement are the means to success, that school's own success inspires confidence, order and discipline in its students.

6. Principals work actively with parents to make the home a center for learning.

   Principals of high-performing schools establish contracts with parents to support their children's efforts to learn. Effective principals teach parents to read to their children, check their homework, and ask after their assignments.

7. Effort creates ability.

   Time on task is the key to success in school. Extended days, extended years, after-school programs, weekend programs, and summer school are all features of outstanding schools.

Promising Practices: How High-Performing Schools in Texas Get Results

Promising Practices: How High-Performing Schools in Texas Get Results (Education Commission of the States, 2001), summarizes findings from "Just for the Kids," a recent examination of promising practices in Texas Schools.

Just for Kids looked at 17 high-performing schools that were "best in their class" at serving low-income and ethnic minority students. Just for Kids looked for schools where at least half the students were from low-income families (receiving free or reduced-priced lunches) with consistently high-test scores during a three-year period.

The key focus of "Just for Kids" is on the students. Schools break down the goals of school reform into manageable chunks, constantly reviewing individual data and examining what can be done for each child. Issues of teacher and teaching quality are critical, and the schools are very grounded in research-based instructional practices.

Five common strategies of these high-performing schools were identified and are featured in this report. The five strategies common to all of the high-performing schools are (Education Commission of the States, 2001, p.5-11):

1. Take initiative, make no excuses, and strive for success.

   High-performing schools place students and student achievement first, and they don't make excuses. These schools have a driven principal and a committed team of faculty leaders – individuals who set the tone for the school's work and ensure the other four improvement strategies are implemented.

2. Develop and execute a clear strategy for improvement.

   High-performing schools agree on a plan that provides a common mission and purpose for the work of the school. This plan spells out a building-wide course of action – what the school intends to accomplish and what steps it will take to succeed. Everything that happens in the school – how time is spent, teachers are trained and resources are allocated – supports the plan.

3. Continuously assess progress and intervene immediately when students or teachers are struggling.

   Data and assessment inform what happens in these schools, from choosing instructional priorities each year to evaluating the effectiveness of professional development programs to helping teachers improve their teaching. Because they use multiple and frequent measures of student achievement, teachers can pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of each child, review progress regularly with other teachers, and the principal and teachers can intervene when a student is struggling.

4. Make high-quality teaching and research-based instructional practice the top priority.

   High-performing schools are focused clearly on teacher quality. These schools select their own professional development opportunities for teachers to reinforce the school's instructional priorities. These efforts are based on scientific research about what helps students learn, not on fad or fashion, and student assessment data help gauge their effectiveness. Workshops, peer coaching, and time for planning and reflection all help build instructional capacity in core subject areas at each grade level.

5. Collaborate both inside and outside the schools.

   Teachers coordinate with each other across subject areas and grade levels, making sure students are learning what they need to as they progress. The result is a school wide team, not a collection of individuals working independently. "Just for Kids", also found that the outside support, direction and motivation schools receive from their district administrators, can make an enormous difference in what they accomplish.

They Have Overcome: *High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools in California.*

They Have Overcome*:* High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools in California (Izumi, 2002) examined reasons for the success of eight high-performing California elementary schools with high numbers of impoverished students. Interviews with principals focused on teaching methods, curriculum, content standards, test scores, teacher professional development, safety, discipline, local decision making, parent

involvement, emergency teacher certification, obstacles to student performance, and reasons for success.

The results of the study included a list of characterisitcs that these eight schools all shared. This list of characteristics included (Izumi, 2002, p.47-49):

1. Principals were strong leaders with clear visions of what worked and what did not work.
2. Rather than sticking with ineffective theories and methods, they emphasized what worked in the real world. Many schools ignored the move toward whole-language reading instruction and remained with phonics-based instruction.
3. Principals emphasized the importance of the type of curriculum chosen to teach a particular subject. A well-implemented, research-proven curriculum was key in determining student performance. The schools used a research-proven curriculum, supported teacher-directed instruction, and had well-planned strategies to ensure that students acquired standards-based knowledge.
4. Principals encouraged frequent testing to discover students' and teachers' strengths and weaknesses.
5. Professional development emphasized subject matter and implementation of state standards. Most schools were more interested in teacher qualities than teaching credentials.
6. Principals emphasized parent involvement in their schools.
7. Principals cited teacher quality as a key reason for high achievement.

The study also stated that the high-poverty and high-achieving schools in the study can teach lawmakers and education policy makers some valuable lessons. These lessons

are that high-poverty schools could overcome their challenges by focusing on key factors that include (Izumi, 2002, p.49-50):

1. Empirically proven research-based curricula.
2. Empirically proven research-based teaching methods.
3. Comprehensive use of the state academic content standards as goals for student learning, guiding posts for teaching, and tools for professional development.
4. Use of frequent assessment as a diagnostic tool for identifying student and teacher strengths and weaknesses, and for improving student and teacher performance.
5. Standards-based professional development that emphasizes subject matter.
6. Teacher quality and teacher willingness to use proven curricula and methods.
7. Strong discipline policies that emphasize sanctions and rewards.
8. Increased flexibility to use available funding
9. Reduction in bureaucratic rules

The 90/90/90 Schools: A Case Study

This research study was conducted at the Center for Performance Assessment on the "90/90/90 Schools" by Douglas Reeves and was published in chapter nineteen (The 90/90/90 Schools: A Case Study) of his book titled, "Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning Organization." (Reeves, 2004)

The research in Reeves' study included four years of test data (1995 through 1998) with students in a variety of school settings, from elementary through high school. Analysis considered data from more than 130,000 students in 228 buildings. The school locations included inner-city urban schools, suburban schools, and rural schools. The

student populations ranged from schools whose populations were overwhelmingly poor and/or minority to schools that were largely Anglo and/or economically advantaged.

The research sought to identify the extent to which there was a common set of behaviors exhibited by the leaders and teachers in schools with high achievement, high minority enrollment, and high poverty levels. As a result, five characteristics were found to be common to all 90/90/90 Schools. These characteristics were (Reeves, 2004, p.187):

1. A focus on academic achievement.
2. Clear curriculum choices.
3. Frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement.
4. An emphasis on nonfiction writing.
5. Collaborative scoring of student work.

The research also highlighted the nine characteristics that distinguished the schools with the greatest academic gains. These characteristics included (Reeves, 2004, p.195-200):

1. The schools devoted time for teacher collaboration. Collaboration meetings were focused on an examination of student work and a collective determination of what the word "proficiency" really means.
2. The schools provided significantly more frequent feedback to students than is typically the case with a report card. Their approach provided feedback that was timely, accurate, and specific.

3. The schools made dramatic changes in their schedule. Although they had the same budget, state requirements, teacher's union contract, and other restrictions as other schools in the system, these schools made remarkable schedule changes that resulted in a genuine increase in instructional hours of math and English.
4. Teachers engaged in successful action research and mid-course corrections. They asked the central office for permission to change goals and strategies that were not effective and start new ones that held promise, even during the school year. Moreover, these faculties and leaders learned from one another.
5. Principals made decisive moves in teacher assignments. Effective leaders know that they should seek not to "fix" the person, but rather find a job (and accompanying set of standards) that best meets the teacher's abilities and backgrounds.
6. The schools with the greatest improvements in student achievement consistently used common assessments. The use of a common assessment for each major discipline allows for a combination of daily discretion and independence by teachers, while preserving a school-wide commitment to equity and consistency of expectations.
7. The schools employed the resources of every adult in the system. In holistic accountability systems, we can explore the extent to which professional development is distributed among all adults in the system. By committing their systems to consistency in the education and behavior of adults, these leaders ensure that every adult leader, from the bus driver to the food service employee to

the classroom teacher is regarded as a significant adult leader in the eyes of students.

8. There is explicit involvement of the subjects that are frequently and systematically disregarded in traditional accountability systems—music, art, physical education, world languages, technology, career education, consumer and family education, and many other variations on these themes. Analysis of holistic accountability data reveals that the involvement of these seemingly peripheral subjects in academic achievement is neither serendipitous nor insignificant. Rather, there is a deliberate strategy of involvement in these subjects in the improvement of academic results for all students.

Common Themes from Studies on High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

The nine research studies outlined in this review of literature all focused on the topic of identifying how high-poverty, high-performance schools are able to reach such high levels of achievement. The goals of these studies were all very similar but each was different in that they all looked at different students and staff, at different schools, in different areas of the country and many of them used different research methodologies to gather data in which to reach conclusions. Collectively, these studies looked at the phenomonon of high-performing, high-poverty schools from many different perspectives across the United States.

Despite the fact that these studies all looked at very different schools, using different research methodologies, the findings were remarkably similar. Each study gave a list of common characteristics that they found throughout the schools that they studied. By comparing these lists, 10 common themes were found that kept coming up over and

over again throughout all the studies. The ten common themes and documentation as to which studies contained each theme, is presented in the following chart.

Common Themes Throughout The Nine Studies Included in the Literature Review	Wisconsin DPI Lessons from High Performing Schools	Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources	How Low Income Schools Get High Octane Results	Dispelling the Myth	Hope for Urban Education	No Excuses: Lessons from 21 Schools	Promising Practices	They Have Overcome	The 90/90/90 Schools: A Case Study
1. Increased parent & community involvement in ways specific to academic student achievement.	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
2. Increased instructional time due to flexible and varied teaching schedules.		X	X	X	X	X			X
3. A clear vision and goals and greater accountability for goal attainment.	X		X	X	X	X		X	
4. Strong principals who were willing and able to make decisions to improve achievement.	X		X		X	X		X	X
5. More and better professional development opportunities.	X	X	X	X	X			X	
6. More frequent assessment of student progress with immediate intervention to make improvements.	X		X	X		X	X		X
7. Use of academic standards to guide all schools activities towards focusing on achievement.	X		X	X	X			X	X
8.Relentless focus and commitment to academic achievement & student success.		X				X	X		X
9. High quality teachers & teaching was seen as a key to high student achievement.					X	X	X	X	
10. Greater collaboration between teachers & throughout the school.		X					X		X

As presented in the chart, these nine studies found that many of the high-performing, high-poverty schools across the country are doing many of the same things. Four of the studies included seven of the ten common themes, three of the studies included six of the ten common themes and two studies included four of the common themes.

These nine very different studies from the literature review, conducted between 1998 and 2004, identified very similar characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools. The results of other studies conducted prior to 1998 also showed similar characteristics. The first known research on the attributes of effective schools serving high proportions of low-income children was conducted by Edmonds (1979). The results of Edmonds and other studies from the late eighties and early nineties were synthesized by Levine and Lezotte (2001). Levine and Lezotte found that these schools shared such factors as strong administrative leadership, high expectations, an orderly school atmosphere, a collective faculty dedication to improve student performance, an instructional emphasis on basic skills and frequently monitored student progress.

It is apparent that, the seven common characterics discovered by Levine and Lezotte from earlier research are also very similar to the list of ten common themes found in research from 1998 to 2004. The fact that these characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools have been identified in research over a twenty-five year period (1979 – 2004) suggests that these characteristics are long-lasting and proven.

Wisconsin DPI Characteristics of High-Performing Schools

Before continuing on to the actual research in this study, the researcher felt that it was important to include The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) current

perspective on what they feel are the characteristics of a high-performing school. As presented, many of these characteristics are aligned with the national studies described previously in this literature review.

Under the State Superintendent's leadership,Wisconsin's DPI is actively involved in the development of a variety of resources related to improving the schooling experience and outcomes across our state. Based on current research, Wisconsin's DPI has adopted a set of characteristics that define the framework for a successful school. The seven characteristics that comprise the framework for successful schools (as listed on Wisconsin's DPI website) are:

1. Vision

   A vision represents clearly articulated statements of goals, principles, and expectations for the entire learning community. A common unifying vision is achieved when the administration, teachers, support staff, students, families, and demographically representative community members are able to clearly communicate that vision through the daily operation of the school district. A vision becomes a guiding force when all educational decisions are based on its framework and goals.

2. Leadership

   Strong leadership promotes excellence and equity in education and entails projecting, promoting, and holding steadfast to the vision; garnering and allocating resources; communicating progress; and supporting the people, programs, services, and activities implemented to achieve the school's vision.

3. High Academic Standards

High academic standards describe what students are expected to know and be able to do. High standards in each and every subject are the foundation for academic success.

4. Standards of the Heart

   In a school, standards of the heart help children become caring, contributing, productive, and responsible members of society. This includes: advocating for equity, diversity, fairness, inclusiveness, and justice; making responsible decisions; caring about others; being a contributing member of the community and the broader society; developing personal and interpersonal skills; and developing and adhering to a core set of values.

5. Family School and Community Partnerships

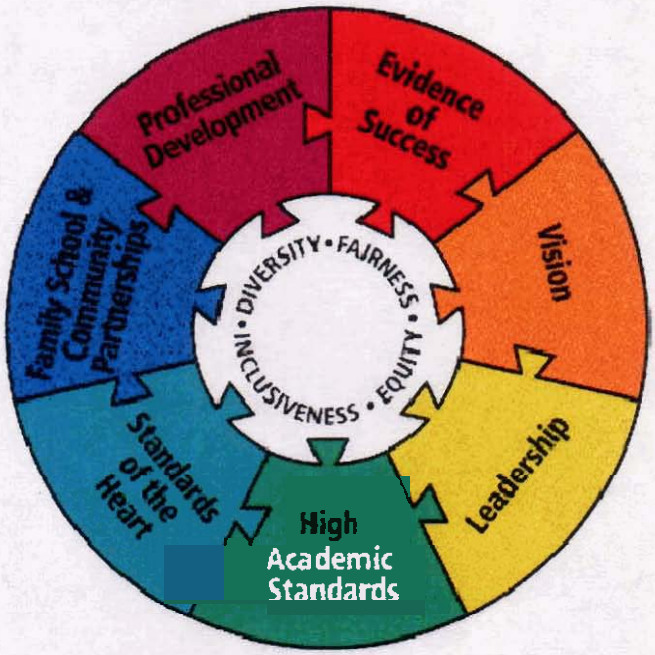
   Family and community participation in the schools recognizes the important role that families, communities, and schools play in helping all children succeed in school and in life. Partners bring their own strengths, skills, perspectives and knowledge to the educational process, and they all need to be welcomed and respected for their contributions.

6. Professional Development

   Professional development is a continuous learning process across all levels of education for the entire learning community. Quality professional development expands the capacity of the learning community to realize its vision and reach its goals.

7. Evidence of Success

Evidence of success is found in the data related to student achievement, behaviors, demographics, programs, and staff perceptions. It facilitates decision-making leading to the improvement of teaching and learning.



The resulting framework emphasizes essential elements of a school that is successful at helping all students achieve academically and helping them to be caring, contributing, productive, and responsible citizens. These dual missions, educating the hearts and educating the minds of youth, are considered of equal importance in a school's quest to be successful.

The elements represented in the framework do not stand alone: they are interdependent and part of a dynamic process. Each element must be revisited time and again as the staff gather and examine relevant data, develop and refine their vision; and employ the resources needed to provide leadership, high academic and behavioral standards, and continuous professional development (Characteristics of Successful Schools, 2006).

Chapter III: Methodology

Subject Selection

This study chose to look at elementary schools that had been recently and continually recognized as Wisconsin Promise Schools because this recognition was based on solid data about the poverty levels of these schools and the results that these schools have produced. In the 2005 - 2006 school year, 77 elementary schools were recognized, of which 32 were recognized for the second or even 3rd consecutive year. This study focused on these 32 schools that had continually shown that they could reach the highest levels of achievement despite the obvious barriers that their students faced.

A list of the 32 schools included in this study along with their district is presented below:

Table 1

List of the 32 Schools Included in this Study Along With Their District

School	District
1. Castle Rock Elementary	Adams-Friendship
2. Lincoln Elementary	Alma Center
3. Marengo Valley Elementary	Ashland
4. Almena Elementary	Barron Area
5. Birchwood Elementary	Birchwood
6. Park View Elementary	Cudahy
7. Prairie View Elementary	De Soto Area
8. Longfellow Elementary	Eau Claire Area
9. Chegwin Elementary	Fond du Lac
10. Chappell Elementary	Green Bay Area
11. Sullivan Elementary	Green Bay Area

12. Stone Lake Elementary	Hayward
13. Hurley K-12	Hurley
14. La Farge Elementary	La Farge
15. Ladysmith Elementary	Ladysmith
16. Barton Elementary	Milwaukee
17. Brown Street Elementary	Milwaukee
18. Fernwood Elementary	Milwaukee
19. Hawthorne Elementary	Milwaukee
20. Parkview Elementary	Milwaukee
21. River Trail Elementary	Milwaukee
22. Roosevelt Elementary	Oshkosh Area
23. Webster Stanley Elementary	Oshkosh Area
24. Phelps Elementary	Phelps
25. Central Elementary	Rhinelander
26. Gresham Elementary	Shawano-Gresham
27. Thorp Elementary	Thorp
28. Koenig Elementary	Two Rivers
29. Redgranite Elementary	Wautoma Area
30. Neshkoro Elementary	Westfield
31. Winter Elementary	Winter
32. Prentice Elementary	Prentice

Data collection for this study entailed having the principal and at least one teacher from each grade level complete a survey for each of the 32 schools. This calculated to at most 192 surveys (32 schools x 6 people (Principal and 5 - K-4 teachers)). The survey was developed based upon what current research proposes to be the characteristics of schools like Wisconsin Promise Schools, which nationally are referred to as 90/90/90 schools (90% below poverty, 90% minority and 90% achieving high proficiency).

Survey Design

The survey questions were made up of ten rating scale questions to identify how each school matches the characterisitics identified in previous research and also an eleventh open ended question that sought to identify the additional things that these schools are also doing. The actual survey that was administered on-line is included in Appendix B.

Data Collection Procedures

The surveys were conducted online and each principal was sent an invitation to complete the survey via email. A copy of the email is included in Appendix A. A consent to participate In UW-Stout approved research form was offered to participants upon request (Appendix C). In addition, each school was contacted by telephone and informed about the pending email and asked to complete the survey. The principals completed the survey and then forwarded it to at least one teacher from each of the 5 grades (K-4). The additional teachers also completed the survey.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected from the online surveys from each school was analyzed by the online survey software that was provided by University of Wisconsin-Stout. The software organized the data and provided the researcher with the exact responses to each survey question from each participant along with the average response ranking to each question by all the participants combined. The average response ranking to each question was what was used to provide evidence as to the common characteristics exhibited throughout all 32 Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition. The open ended eleventh question provided insight into any additional characteristics that the schools possessed.

The culmination of the data analysis in this study is a list and detailed descriptions of the characteristics that Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition most have in common.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

The results of the survey (Appendix B) are listed below. The figure 1 shows the results the first ten questions of the survey. In this figure, each of the questions are listed first, and then the percentages from the rating scale are shown under each rating number, with five being the highest measure. Shown next to the percentages are the total number of people who responded with that ranking. The total number of responses and the average response for each question is also stated.

Results

Survey Results

1. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have a high percentage of parent involvement in very specific ways to improve student academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?							
0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	4% (2)	15% (8)	37% (20)	37% (20)	7% (4)	54	3.3
2. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to develop creative and flexible teaching schedules in order to devote an above average amount of instructional time to academic subjects. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?							

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	2% (1)	4% (2)	13% (7)	43% (23)	39% (21)	54	4.1

3. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have a clear vision and measurable goals with a very high level of accountability for goal attainment. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	0% (0)	4% (2)	13% (7)	37% (20)	46% (25)	54	4.3

4. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have principals who display the ability and the willingness to make timely decisions in order to maximize the ability of the school to improve student academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	2% (1)	2% (1)	7% (4)	43% (23)	46% (25)	54	4.3

5. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to devote a large portion of available funding to professional development opportunities that are valuable and directly related to improving academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	17% (9)	35% (19)	48% (26)	54	4.3

6. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to conduct frequent assessments of student progress with immediate intervention to make improvements when needed. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	2% (1)	4% (2)	15% (8)	50% (27)	30% (16)	54	4.0

7. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to use academic standards to guide all of the schools activities towards focusing on academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	2% (1)	4% (2)	4% (2)	46% (25)	44% (24)	54	4.3

8. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to display a relentless focus and commitment to academic achievement & student success throughout the entire school. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	0% (0)	2% (1)	17% (9)	30% (16)	52% (28)	54	4.3

9. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to devote a great deal of time, effort and resources to attracting and developing high quality teachers. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	4% (2)	4% (2)	11% (6)	46% (25)	39% (21)	54	4.2

10. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to display frequent collaboration and team work between teachers & throughout the school to improve academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

0	1	2	3	4	5	Response Total	Response Average
0% (0)	0% (0)	2% (1)	11% (6)	39% (21)	48% (26)	54	4.3

11. Please indicate if your school possesses any characteristics that are different from the ten nationally known characteristics listed in the previous ten questions. If your school does not display any additional characteristics, then leave this question blank.

(Responses to question number eleven are listed separately)

The comments people gave to the open-ended question number eleven at the end of the on-line survey are also presented. The comments were put into seven categories, and then were written as they had been received in the survey. Most comments made are quick and to the point, while some are more lenghthy and paint more of a mental picture. Some of the comments listed below might echo the same ideas in the other questions asked in the survey. However, the comments are very relevant because they give additional insight other than what was aquired in the first ten questions of the survey. The seven categories and the comments under each category were as follows:

1. Continuity and Teamwork Between Faculty, Staff, Community and Students
    a. Continuity in K-5 Teaching Staff
    b. Strong School/Community Relationship
    c. Our school district shares a common mission, which is the driving force of our "strategic plan." We continually reflect upon our goals and beliefs and structure academics around this common plan. Our mission statement is, ". . .to ensure all students reach their dreams while making a positive impact on the world."

d. Close knit staff and students

e. High staff commitment and loyalty

f. Teamwork

g. Teachers that work good together and put in the extra time

h. The Faculty and Staff are close and work together. We are more a family

I. Strong school-community partnerships

j. Tribes

k. Teachers who team together for success for each student

l. Community involvement

m. Teachers interact with students at all grade levels outside of instruction time

n. Quality community partnerships

o. Certified teachers and retired teachers from our building as substitutes

2. Smaller class sizes and teacher abilities to individualize instruction

a. We work to maintain small class sizes through creative use of staff

b. More attention/one-on-one time given to students due to smaller class size

c. Personal attention to children from 4K up

d. Student supportive in every academic area

e. A commitment to small class size – we have outside funding and use our own funding to achieve this because we feel it significantly impacts achievement at our school

f. Follow up from year to year of students

g. Resource mapping to address needs

h. Small class sizes

i. Responsiveness to stakeholder needs

j. Positive in problem solving for the best of each student

k. Focusing on individual needs of the student

l. "What's best for children" at heart of all that is done

3. Teaching ability, freedom and attitude of high performing teachers

a. Teacher leadership for curriculum improvement

b. The district teacher contract limits our ability to hire specific teachers

c. Low staff turnover in elementary grades

d. We are also focusing on improving the physical wellness of our students believing that this will positively impact academic achievement. We believe that high-poverty students may be at risk for obesity and related health concerns due to their lack of resources.

e. Background knowledge of teachers

f. Positive attitude in the face of challenges

g. Teachers (schoolwide) post learning goals for their students at the beginning of each lesson

h. Our professional development funding is extremely limited, but we do make the best possible use of the little that we have.

i. High focus on nutritional, physical, social needs of students

j. Using student interest as a motivator for learning

k. A great deal of freedom is given to teachers to develop the program.

l. Teachers who take risks to create new programs and LOVE their jobs!

m. Using hands-on methods on new concepts

n. Evidence based best practices for instruction and intervention

o. Commitment to a 7-year cycle

p. Utilizing Special Education teacher when needed

q. Provide as many field trips as possible to enrich curriculum

4. After-School and Summer Programs

a. After-school programming

b. Excellent After-School and Summer School Programs

c. Summer camp at school

d. After-School Tutoring or Mentoring Programs

e. Provide bussing for after-school and summer activities

5. Literacy as a Focus

a. Literacy Coach

b. Reading buddy volunteers

c. Older and younger students are involved in buddy classroom activities (e.g., K&3 are buddy classrooms)

d. Principal leadership in literacy

6. Parental Involvement

a. Providing services to parents beyond the regular school curriculum (breakfast, after school, summer school)

b. Great parental communication and support

c. Parent education/support

7. Miscellaneous comments
    a. Focus on Attendance/Truancy
    b. Behavior Interventions
    c. Access to updated technology
    d. Grants

Discussion

The response rate to the online survey was very good with 54 out of 192 possible responses. In addition, the responses given were very detailed and honest. The good participation could be because the researcher called each of the 32 schools and either left voice mail messages or talked to the secretary or principal over the telephone. The fact that these schools were contacted ahead of time seemed to make a big difference in whether principals and teachers responded to the survey or not. More people took the time to fully fill out the online survey because they had been informed about the pending email and survey. Because of this interaction, most principals did not just delete the email, but took the time to complete it.

The researcher made several observations when looking at the numerical data from the first ten questions of the online survey. One was that no one single characteristic stood out as being the most important characteristic in high-performing, high-poverty schools. All of the ten characteristics were rated very highly, with mostly 4 or 5's being the highest ranking. Nine of of the ten characteristics were rated at 4.0 or higher on a scale of 0-5. The remaining characteristic (parent involvement) was rated at a 3.3. What this indicates is that all ten of these characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools were all very important. Also, another observation was that no

participant rated any of the characteristics as a 0. This meant that none of the participants felt that any of these characteristics were not displayed in their schools. In addition, very few participants rated questions below a two, which also indicates that few participants felt that these characteristics were not displayed in their schools.

The researcher also made some additional observations from the open-ended responses to question number eleven of the on-line survey. The first observation was that 23 out of the 54 respondents provided additional comments to question number eleven. This seemed to indicate that they had strong feelings about what they were doing in their schools and wanted to share their ideas. The second observation was that the comments reflected the same characteristics as in the first ten questions of the survey. These comments solidified the fact that the characteristics in the first ten questions were indeed being displayed by Wisconsin schools. A third observation was that many of the comments made reflected the attitudes and beliefs of the staff, which was that they all had one vision, to do whatever was in the best interest of the children. A fourth observation was that some of the comments indicated characteristics that were not mentioned at all in the first ten questions of the survey. An example of one of these characteristics was focusing on all the child's needs, truancy and behavior issues. These additional comments indicated that some schools are doing unique things that are also pertinent to their school's success. Lastly, the researcher found that it was difficult to understand the context of some of the additional comments without speaking with the person face to face. Further understanding of some of these comments would require a phone call to clarify the meaning of some comments.

Summary

The results of this study were very interesting. The biggest revelation from the results may have been that the characteristics identified within the 32 high-performing, high-poverty Wisconsin schools, matched that of the known data from the literature review. The principals and teachers of the 32 schools either agreed with the 10 most common characteristics, or added to them in a certain way. It is an important finding that both the literature review and the data from the survey were similar to each other. This indicates that what has been successful for schools across the country is also proving to be successful for some Wisconsin schools.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

This research study focused on what experts had to say about high-performing, high-poverty schools and collected new data in order to find out the common characteristics of these types of schools in the state of Wisconsin. The previous results chapter discussed the findings from the online survey. The results found that many high-performing, high-poverty Wisconsin schools share the same characteristics. These characteristics are also similar to those found in other states. The conclusion of this study is that these ten common characteristics are most frequently found in high-performing, high-poverty schools. The identification of these ten characteristics are listed in the conclusion section below. A list of recommendations for the use of these characteristics is also presented in this chapter.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify the common characteristics of Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition at the elementary school level. Observations from the analysis of the survey results provided the basis for the identification of these common charactheristics. These common characterics are:

1. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have a high percentage of parent involvement in very specific ways to improve student academic achievement.
2. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to develope creative and flexible teaching schedules in order to devote an above average amount of instructional time to academic subjects.

3. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have a clear vision and measurable goals with a very high level of accountability for goal attainment.
4. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have principals who display the ability and the willingness to make timely decisions in order to maximize the ability of the school to improve student academic achievement.
5. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to devote a large portion of available funding to professional development opportunities that are valuable and directly related to improving academic achievement.
6. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to conduct frequent assessments of student progress with immediate intervention to make improvements when needed.
7. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to use academic standards to guide all of the schools activities towards focusing on academic achievement.
8. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to display a relentless focus and commitment to academic achievement & student success throughout the entire school.
9. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to devote a great deal of time, effort and resources to attracting and developing high quality teachers.
10. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to display frequent collaboration and team work between teachers & throughout the school to improve academic achievement.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was also to share the identified characteristics and hopefully give guidance to schools that have high-poverty and minority levels like "Wisconsin Promise Schools", but have not been able to reach the same high levels of achievement.

In the examples listed below, there are many ideas given for each characteristic in order to help non-flourishing schools succeed. However, these are only some examples to help principals and teachers alike. It is not the intent that schools begin to change their whole format all at once, for that would be much too overwhelming. It is suggested that schools sit down as a team, decide which characteristics they are strong in, and also look at which characteristics need more focus. Then, individual schools can take a look at how to best meet the needs of their students, and possibly use some of the recommendations listed below.

Examples of how to improve or implement each of the ten characteristics were found in the open-ended responses from the participants in this study and also from what the experts said in the literature reviewed. These examples are presented below to give schools ideas of how to implement or enhance these characteristics in their own schools.

1. Having a high percentage of parent involvement in very specific ways to improve student academic achievement.

   Examples from the survey:

   a. providing services to parents beyond the regular school curriculum(breakfast, after school, summer school programs)
   b. continued parental communication and support

c. parent education and support

d. building strong school and community relationships/partnerships.

Examples from the literature:

a. Help parents learn more about the new standards expected of students. Some schools establish contracts with parents to read to their children, check homework, and keep in touch with their assignments (Chaddock, 1999).

b. Principals of high-performing schools establish contracts with parents to support their children's efforts to learn. Effective principals teach parents to read to their children, check their homework, and ask after their assignments (Carter, 2000).

2. Developing creative and flexible teaching schedules in order to devote an above average amount of instructional time to academic subjects.

Examples from the survey:

a. Grouping teachers that work well together and who put in extra time

b. Creative use of staff to maintain small class sizes

c. Interacting with students at all grade levels outside of instructional time

d. Utilizing special education teachers when needed.

Examples from the literature:

a. Interacting with students at all grade levels outside of instructional time

b. Utilizing special education teachers when needed.

c. Schools looking to match resources to student and staff needs could consider the use of part-time positions and varied job schedules. Schools

could consider ways of more effectively matching resources to teaching and student needs for better ways of matching daily schedule to learning requirements (Miles and Darling-Hammond, 1998).

d. The schools made dramatic changes in their schedule. Although they had the same budget, state requirements, teacher's union contract, and other restrictions as other schools in the system, these schools made remarkable schedule changes that resulted in a genuine increase in instructional hours of math and english (Reeves, 2004).

3. Having a clear vision and measurable goals with a very high level of accountability for goal attainment.

Examples from the survey:

a. Continuity in a K-5 staff

b. Having a low staff turnover in the elementary grades

c. Sharing a common mission in the whole school district, this becomes the driving force behind the "strategic plan"

d. Continually reflecting upon the same goals and beliefs

e. Structure the academics around this common plan using "what's best for children" at the heart of all that is done

Examples from the literature:

a. Tangible goals are the focus of high-performing schools. Once the principal sets a clear vision for the school, every teacher has to be held personally responsible for enforcing it (Carter, 2000).

b. High-performing schools agree on a plan that provides a common mission and purpose for the work of the school. This plan spells out a building–wide course of action – what the school intends to accomplish and what steps it will take to succeed. Everything that happens in the school – how time is spent, teachers are trained and resources are allocated – supports the plan (Education Commission of the States, 2001).

4. Principals who display the ability and the willingness to make timely decisions in order to maximize the ability of the school, and to improve student academic achievement.

Examples from the survey:

a. Principals giving teachers the freedom to develop curriculum and programs to best suit students' needs

b. Developing a strong school/community partnership

c. Having a positive attitude in the face of challenges

d. Following up from year to year on students

e. Building the staff commitment and loyalty

f. Helping to establish after-school and summer programs.

Examples from the literature:

a. Effective principals reject the notion that teaching is an 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. job. They expect the same of their teachers," notes the Heritage Foundation. "Schools serving low-income children are often poorly funded. Even on shoestring budgets, effective principals make their schools work, but innovation and flexibility are the keys to their success…

Effective principals either are given their freedom or take it for themselves," concludes the Heritage Foundation (Chaddock, 1999).

b. Federal, state, and local education agencies should promote efforts to build the capacity of principals to provide the quality of instructional leadership demonstrated by the principals in the nine schools studied (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

c. Principals made decisive moves in teacher assignments. Effective leaders know that they should seek not to "fix" the person, but rather find a job (and accompanying set of standards) that best meets the teacher's abilities and backgrounds (Reeves, 2004).

5. Devoting a large portion of available funding to professional development opportunities that are valuable and directly related to improving academic achievement.

Examples from the survey:

a. Consider outside funding sources or own funding within the building

b. Making the best possible use of the little monies allotted

c. Resource mapping to address individual needs

d. Using grants to provide additional monies for professional development and/or programs

Examples from the literature:

a. The Education Trust found that schools in its survey spent more than 10 percent of their federal dollars on professional development – nearly double the national average for comparable schools. Master teachers can

help faculty implement the curriculum, direct peer evaluations, or head team-teaching (Chaddock, 1999).

b. Changes in the 1994 Title I law require schools to provide for thorough professional development for teachers in high poverty schools. The schools in this study seem to be moving faster than their less successful counterparts to company with this provision. As important is that the focus of professional development seems to be centered on helping students meet specific academic standards (Barth, et al., 1999).

c. Professional development needs to be completely rethought in a way that results in more effective teaching and improved student achievement. State and federal resources should support the costs associated with the provision of high-quality, school-based professional development that increases the amount of time educators spend working with and learning from each other (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

6. Conducting frequent assessments of student progress with immediate intervention to make improvements when needed.

Examples from the survey:

a. Having a literacy coach to help implement assessments

b. Following up from year to year on students and their assessments

c. Using hands-on methods to assess, not just paper and pencil

d. Using other forms of evidence for best practices for interventions

e. Meeting as teams of teachers to see how best assess the students' progress.

Examples from the literature:

a. Testing is used for diagnostic purposes to adjust teaching and define outside tutorials to meet student needs. Some schools provide weekly reports to parents (Chaddock, 1999).

b. Four out of five of the top performing, high-poverty schools had systematic ways to identify and provide early support to students in danger of falling behind in their instruction (Barth, et al., 1999).

c. Because they use multiple and frequent measures of student achievement, teachers can pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of each child, review progress regularly with other teachers, and the principal and teachers can intervene when a student is struggling (Education Comission of the States, 2001).

7. Using academic standards to guide all of the schools activities towards focusing on academic achievement.

Examples from the survey:

a. Teachers can provide as many field trips as possible to enrich the curriculum

b. Use updated technology to enhance curriculum

c. Focus on other evidence based best practices for instruction

d. Create new programs based on not only standards, but needs of children as well

e. Use hands-on methods for new concepts

f. Use background knowledge of many teachers and plan programs as a team

g. Provide more one-on-one attention to students in a smaller class size

Examples from the literature:

a. The Education Trust reports that nearly every school in its survey (94 percent) uses standards to assess student progress and 77 percent offer regular ways for teachers to measure student work against state standards (Chaddock, 1999).

b. In considering requirements for adequate yearly progress, states and districts should set ambitious requirements but also provide high levels of support. One of the most important supports is time for school personnel to engage in processes that align instruction to standards and assessments (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

8. Displaying a relentless focus and commitment to academic achievement and student success throughout the entire school.

Examples from the survey:

a. Having a close knit faculty and staff that work towards the same goals

b. Using the same common language throughout the school

c. sharing the same beliefs and continually reflecting upon them

Examples from the literature:

a. A 78% majority of top performing, high-poverty schools reported providing extended learning time for their students. This time was primarily focused on reading and math (Barth, et al., 1999).

b. A well-implemented, research-proven curriculum was key in determining student performance. The schools used a research-proven curriculum, supported teacher-directed instruction, and had well-planned strategies to ensure that students acquired standards-based knowledge (Izumi, 2002).

c. Time on task is the key to success in school. Extended days, extended years, after-school programs, weekend programs, and summer school are all features of outstanding schools (Carter, 2000).

9. Devoting a great deal of time, effort and resources to attracting and developing high quality teachers.

Examples from the survey:

a. Developing a staff/faculty that have the same goals in mind

b. Having a positive attitude even in trying and challenging times

c. Using teachers that work well together and will be there to put in extra time and effort

d. Having teachers that will go the extra mile to develop special programs for their students and who love their jobs!

Examples from the literature:

a. Master teachers are the key to improved teacher quality. Master teachers often head peer evaluations, lead team teaching, devise internal assessment measures, and keep the mission of the school focused on academic achievement (Carter, 2000).

b. High-performing schools are focused clearly on teacher quality. These schools select their own professional development opportunities for

teachers to reinforce the school's instructional priorities. These efforts are based on scientific research about what helps students learn, not on fad or fashion, and student assessment data help gauge their effectiveness (Education Commission of the States, 2001).

c. Workshops, peer coaching, and time for planning and reflection all help build instructional capacity in core subject areas at each grade level (Education Commission of the States, 2001).

d. Teachers engaged in successful action research and mid-course corrections. They asked the central office for permission to change goals and strategies that were not effective and start new ones that held promise, even during the school year. Moreover, these faculties and leaders learned from one another (Reeves, 2004).

10. Displaying frequent collaboration and teamwork between teachers and throughout the school to improve academic achievement.

Examples from the survey:

a. Developing a team of teachers from all areas, whether regular education, special education, Title I, etc, to see how to best fit a student's needs

b. Using older and younger students that are involved in buddy classrooms

c. Using community members to come support the school by reading with children each week

d. Focus with the support team on issues such as attendance/truancy, and interest level of children.

Examples from the literature:

a. Schools rethinking resources could consider how remedial, special education, Title 1 and bilingual education resources might work together to support an integrated plan to benefit these students in the regular education environment (Miles and Darling-Hammond, 1998).

b. Teachers coordinate with each other across subject areas and grade levels, making sure students are learning what they need to as they progress. The result is a school wide team, not a collection of individuals working independently (Education Commission of the States, 2001).

c. The schools devoted time for teacher collaboration. Collaboration meetings were focused on an examination of student work and a collective determination of what the word "proficiency" really means (Reeves, 2004).

The characteristics identified and examples presented are proven ideas that need to be implemented in order to improve student academic performance in a high-poverty school. These are only some of the ideas that schools implemented in order to make their schools high-performing, high-poverty schools. There are many more ideas found on various websites, listed in the reference section. Each website listed can link you to other websites for even further information on this subject. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website also lists more ways to help children become proficient in the various subject areas, like reading and math. It is the hope of this researcher that school administrators, faculty, staff and parents take the initiative and put in the time and effort to make these ideas work.

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Appendix A: Email Survey Request to Participants

>>> <lseanor@wausau.k12.wi.us> 03/19/06 09:38PM >>>

Dear _____ _____,

A few days ago I spoke to you on the phone or left you a voice mail =
message about participating in my thesis study on Wisconsin Promise =
Schools of Recognition. At this time I am asking you take only 5 minutes =
and complete this short online survey. After completing the survey, =
please forward this email to at least one teacher in each of your K-4 =
grades. Your participation would mean a lot to me and to other educators =
who can learn from your success.

The link to the survey is:
http://www2.uwstout.edu/GeneralSurveys/TakeSurvey.asp?EID=3D52MB682B865BH2
6=2B39mB214BJ16=20

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the =
Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46. If you would like to have =
more information about this study, please email me and I will send you an =
official consent document. If you do not wish to respond to this survey, =
please click on the link below to decline:
http://www2.uwstout.edu/GeneralSurveys/DeclineSurvey.asp?EID=3D52MB682B865B=
H262B39mB214BJ16=20

Thanks in advance for responding to the survey,
Laura

Appendix B: Survey of Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition

Survey of Wisconsin Promise Schools of Recognition

Thank you for agreeing to complete this short survey. Your participation is very much appreciated. Simply answer the eleven questions below then submit your answers by clicking the "Done" button.

1. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have a high percentage of parent involvement in very specific ways to improve student academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

1 2 3 4 5

2. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to develope creative and flexible teaching schedules in order to devote an above average amount of instructional time to academic subjects. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

3. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have a clear vision and measurable goals with a very high level of accountability for goal attainment. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

4. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to have principals who display the ability and the willingness to make timely decisions in order to maximize the ability of the school to improve student academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

5. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to devote a large portion of available funding to professional development opportunities that are valuable and directly related to improving academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

6. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to conduct frequent assessments of student progress with immediate intervention to make improvements when needed. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

7. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to use academic standards to guide all of the schools activities towards focusing on academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

8. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to display a relentless focus and commitment to academic achievement & student success throughout the entire school. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

9. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to devote a great deal of time, effort and resources to attracting and developing high quality teachers. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

10. High-performing, high-poverty schools are known to display frequent collaboration and team work between teachers & throughout the school to improve academic achievement. On a scale of 0 to 5, how well does your school display this characteristic?

(A rating of 0 means your school does not display this characteristic and a rating of 5 means your school always displays this characteristic.)

Rating Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5

11. Please indicate if your school possesses any characteristics that are different from the ten nationally known characteristics listed in the previous ten questions. If your school does not display any additional characteristics, then leave this question blank.

(You are provided with five spaces for which to describe and explain up to five additional unique characteristics that have helped your school to improve academic achievement.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Appendix C: Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research

Title: The identification of the key characteristics of 90/90/90 schools in the state of Wisconsin

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Description:
The objective of this study is to identify the common characteristics of 90/90/90 elementary schools in the state of Wisconsin. 90/90/90 refers to schools in which 90 percent of their students are below the poverty level and 90 percent are classified as minorities, yet 90 percent are achieving at high proficiency levels. The significance of this study is that it will serve to identify the key characteristics of these schools and will allow for the sharing of this knowledge with schools who are similar to 90/90/90 schools but have not been able to reach the same high levels of achievement. The methodology of this study involves the identification of all of the 90/90/90 schools in the state of Wisconsin. Once these schools are identified I will work to gain the participation of each school and will develop a contact person who will act as a representative for each school. These representatives will be asked to complete a survey, which will attempt to identify the specific characteristics that enable each school to achieve high proficiency levels. The survey will be developed based upon what current research has proposed to be the characteristics that these type of schools exhibit on a national level. The survey questions will be made up of both multiple choice questions to identify how each school matches the characteristics identified in previous research and also open ended questions that will seek to identify the additional things that these schools are also doing. The surveys will be conducted online and each contact person will be sent an invitation to complete the survey via email. The data collected from the online surveys from each school will be compared in order to identify the common characteristics exhibited throughout the 90/90/90 schools in the state of Wisconsin. The culmination of this study will be a list and detailed description of the characteristics that 90/90/90 schools in Wisconsin have in common.

Risks and Benefits:
There does not seem to be any risk to participants of this study. The nature of this study is very positive and any responses given about each school will be complimentary in nature. Just to be sure participants are not put at any risk, there have been precautions taken to protect the participants identity and their responses.

The are many benefits to the participants of this study and society. Participants will be able to gain notoriety for their school and obtain greater recognition for their accomplishements. Society will benefit from this study in that it will lead to a greater

understanding of what it takes for low income minority schools to achieve high proficiency levels. If these type of schools learn from and implement the findings of this study, it could lead to a marked improvement in not only education but in society as a whole.

Time Commitment and Payment:
Participants of this study will be asked to fill out an online survey which should only take between 30 to 60 minutes depending upon the amount of information the participant shares about their school. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants will not be paid for their time.

Confidentiality:
Your name will not be included on any documents. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of this information. This informed consent will not be kept with any of the other documents completed with this project"

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

IRB Approval:
This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

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Statement of Consent:
By signing this consent form you agree to participate in the project entitled, The identification of the key characteristics of 90/90/90 schools in the state of Wisconsin.

_____

Signature..... Date