

A TALE OF TWO EFFECTIVE TITLE ONE REWARD CHARTER SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

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This research project was a study that was based on a prior dissertation study that analyzed student success, as measured by achievement tests, within local communities with high poverty rates. Two Title 1 Reward high schools in the Phoenix area were examined through qualitative case studies to determine what had been implemented to help eliminate the perception of students coming from low income socio-economic backgrounds to achieve success on standardized tests. Five research questions were answered through classroom observation, interviews, and artifact collection and analysis to determine what efforts ensured student success. The aim of this dissertation study was to have provided other high schools whose student populations included low-socioeconomic backgrounds to implement and foster success for their students with possible replication.

Findings from this study included five research questions. Results from research question one outlined evidence that helped to explain how EHS was successful in helping their students be effective on standardized tests. Next, question two results exposed that EHS nurtured a culture of trust amongst teachers and administrators. Thirdly, question three illustrated for the reader more commonalities amongst the schools. Research question four results included that EHS and WHS worked hard to build student attitudes/attributes to have enjoyed success on standardized testing. Finally, question five results indicated that EHS used a shared leadership model having consisted of a principal, federal programs director, and counselor.

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DEDICATION

I'd like to thank my parents, E. and P. Schaffer, my son, B. Metcalfe, and my husband, J. Metcalfe for their continued support while I gathered, analyzed, and wrote this research study. I hope this dissertation journey will be a model for my son so he may choose to follow in my footsteps and become an outstanding educator and fantastic example to young people how hard work and determination can transform lives.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

Poverty in the United States has been a concern of government officials, school administrators, and teachers for decades. It affects all levels of society, directly and indirectly, and becomes more pronounced within public schools as students of impoverished families come to learn and achieve with peers who come from homes where making ends meet isn't a daily struggle. Education has been a discussion point for decades on how schools can equalize educational opportunities for all students, especially those who come from a low socio-economic background. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) provided direct insight as to how schools should operate to ensure that students were achieving and offered specific recommendations on how to measure student success. One such measure was the standardized test given to all high school students prior to graduation to ensure they are on track with learning. No Child Left Behind legislation provided the formal pathway to require states to design and implement standardized testing to formally track all student academic progress and added accountability measures, such as school grading systems and parental choice for school attendance. School grading systems were made public so parents could decide how schools were performing so they can provide the best opportunity for their children's academic success. Oftentimes, the schools with the lowest performance ratings were those with the highest levels of poor children in attendance. Many explanations from authors over the decades have tried to illuminate answers about how to help schools with poor children to

succeed. From parent behavior, to parent education levels, to teacher attitudes towards poor children, to student race, to facilitating standardized tests, to blaming standardized tests themselves, explanations do not point to a single description or answer. What is concluded is that poverty is a complex social issue that provides no direct and single answer to help students succeed academically. The bottom line is that standardized tests are likely to stay as the benchmark measurement of all student academic learning and achievement. Until there is a better way to determine public school student levels of learning, it is imperative that schools and communities find and implement the best measures possible to help those less fortunate to enjoy academic success.

Accountability levels have changed as there is a constant need for students to perform at increasingly higher levels of achievement in core classes, such as math, reading, and writing. Society is also constantly questioning why certain students, schools, and districts do not meet or exceed minimum testing levels of success and others do; high stakes testing is the predominant method to measure these levels of performance. Poverty and its identification criteria is a reason why certain students, schools, and districts do not meet minimum testing levels of success. This is called an achievement gap (Maxwell, 2012). It will be important as a result of this written inquiry to identify the variables as to why poverty and influences of social class affect student standardized test scores.

Statement of the Problem

High school students attending public schools located in the Phoenix, AZ metro area need to perform at or above stated test levels on standardized, high-stakes tests in order to be awarded a high school diploma effective with the graduating class of 2006

(ADE, 2013a). Lower socioeconomic students traditionally do not achieve at high levels of performance on standardized tests (APA, 2013). There are schools located within Phoenix that are breaking this mold and reasons why this is occurring and explaining how this trend is being reduced in these particular schools needs to be discovered and shared. This dissertation study will be the first in Arizona as of this current date, to point out how two high schools classified as a Title 1 Highest-Performing Reward School are helping low socioeconomic students perform at high levels of achievement on standardized tests. The schools that earned the Title 1 Reward School recognition were charter schools and are the schools participating in this study.

It is the aim of this research to formally share this valuable information with other schools that serve this student population to implement these specific efforts to help their students be as successful. American society has determined that educational access and quality of that education is essential for all (USDoe, 2012), and it is imperative that effective practices be shared and duplicated among schools to help all students achieve success, especially those who have multiple barriers to accomplishment.

This study fits into the existing state of research by providing best practices which are currently being implemented and evaluated in schools that are recognized at the state level. These efforts are to bring those students who are stymied by poverty to move to higher levels of productivity within society. Success breeds success and school is the best place to make it happen.

Conceptual Framework Basis

The following are key factors or variables to be studied and to measure the presumed relationship among them:

- Parent socioeconomic status
- Educational environment of student success on standardized tests
- Characteristics in existence within schools that experienced success that may not exist in economically comparable areas
- Student attributes/attitudes that contributed to high test scores
- High scores on standardized tests happen at schools even when social class predicts otherwise

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify, explore, and examine the effects of social class and school efforts on low-socioeconomic student performance on standardized, high-stakes tests in high schools located in the Phoenix, AZ metro area. Specifically, two Title 1 Highest-Performing Reward Schools will be examined, both are charter schools. One charter school is located in western Phoenix metro area and one high school in the eastern metro area will be examined and reviewed. One of the 2012 charter high schools is classified as Title 1 High-Performing and the other charter high school is classified as a High-Performing, High-Progress Reward School. These levels were determined by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) (2012a) criteria and are outlined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act approved Flexibility Waiver.

Research Questions

The research questions this dissertation asks and will be answered include:

1. Do some schools experience success on standardized tests even when social class predictors of academic success forecast differently?
2. What is occurring in these schools that contribute to student of poverty success on achievement tests?
3. What characteristics were prevailing within schools that experienced success that may not exist within economically comparable districts/schools?
4. What specific student attributes/attitudes were in place that may have contributed to high test scores according to high school teacher perceptions?
5. What leadership actions/attributes do the principals have that may have contributed to high test scores?

Significance of the Study

What is the significance of this study? Here are some possible answers:

1. Politicians/legislators may be able to use the results of this study to craft and implement thoughtful, proactive, and reasonable laws that are drawn to support schools and students rather than remove support and punish them.
2. Local area governing boards, administrators, and teachers may be able to use the results to help answer achievement questions in their economic areas and adjust, implement, or delete programs to assist students in attainment of successful standardized testing results.

3. Other high schools classified as a Title 1 Highest-Performing Reward School will be able to directly learn and possibly replicate the efforts that are discovered at these schools to help improve the standardized test results of their own students. Sharing of knowledge and best practices to benefit students may be the greatest benefit of this research study.

Delimitations

Delimitations of the study can be outlined in the following statements:

1. High schools of at least 100 students but not more than 600 students will be included in the study.
2. Time of study will be from January 2014 to March 2014.
3. Location of the study will take place in two charter high schools classified in 2012 as a Title 1 High-Performing and High-Performing High-Progress Reward Schools located in the Phoenix, Arizona metro area; one charter high school in the western portion and the other charter high school is located in the eastern section of the city boundaries.
4. Sample of the study will include high school English and math teachers, and school administrators/leadership team members. Information obtained through small-group, open-ended focus groups/interviews, classroom observations, and artifact collection to include general school demographic data, general attendance data, policies and procedures of the school (i.e., school handbook), general demographic information for the district, any SAT/ACT test scores (with all student identification information removed), school and/or district

newsletters, English and math curricular school and/or district mission and vision statements, administrative policies and/or procedures that may provide insight into actions that have contributed to the school's success on achievement tests: student AIMS scores, SAT 10 test scores, SAT and/or ACT test scores, and/or district-level assessments in math, reading, and writing core academic areas.

Definition of Terms

The following are the most common terms found throughout this document:

Academic achievement: classes in core subjects such as math, English, and reading where a result is gained by effort (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Accountability: an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Achievement gap: the difference in performance between low-income minority students compared to that of their peers on standardized tests (Dictionary.com, 2012).

Achievement test/standardized test: proficiency based on something learned or taught. A test administered by a state to all students to measure specific areas of learning in math reading and writing (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Socioeconomic status: an individual's or group's position within a hierarchical social structure. Socioeconomic status depends on a combination of variables such as: occupation, education, income, wealth, and place of residence (Dictionary.com, 2012).

Title I High-Performing Reward School: schools must earn a letter grade of "A" in the state's A – F Letter Grade Accountability system in 2012; meet 2012 annual

measurable objectives (AMOs) for “all students group” and “student subgroups” (which includes special education [SPED] and English Language Learner [ELL] students); show a student growth percentile (SGP) for the Bottom Quartile subgroup of students higher than 50 in 2012; earn more than 50% of Bottom Quartile student group passing AIMS in math and reading in 2012; high schools must have a 4-year cohort graduation rate of greater than 80% in 2011 (ADE, 2012b).

Title I High-Performing, High-Progress Reward School: schools must earn a letter grade of “A” or “B” on Arizona’s A – F Letter Grade system in 2012; show growth points from A – F Letter grade calculation of 59 or higher in 2012 (points are calculated as an average of Student Growth Percentile [SGP] for the “all students group” and the Bottom 25% quartile student subgroup to include SPED and ELLs); Bottom Quartile student subgroup must show a score of 50 or greater in 2012; at least 35% of Bottom Quartile student subgroup passing AIMS in math and reading in 2012; high schools must show an increase in the 4-year cohort graduation rate of more than 10% between cohorts 2009 and 2011 (ADE, 2012b).

Wraparound services: social services such as health care, drug-abuse prevention and treatment, opportunities for recreation and enrichment provided at the school site.

Organization of the Study

The study will be organized into five chapters and will be a replication from a previous dissertation outlined by Urso (2008). Chapter One provides background and purpose of the study, research questions, why the study is significant, delimitations, and operationally defined terms most commonly found throughout the text. Chapter Two

includes a review of relevant research literature that shows history of standardized testing, possible poverty effects on standardized testing, outcomes facilitating standardized testing, and effects of standardized testing on students and others. Chapter Three explains the research design and methodology of the study. Chapter Four will include an analysis of the data and discussion of findings. Chapter Five will present a summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research based on the results of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The issue of a “broken education system” has long been a topic of discussion in American politics and at American dinner tables. How do we fix it? What resources are available? Who is responsible? Why aren’t all students succeeding? In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education was formed to study the overall health of American education and to make recommendations on its improvement. The commission completed its report to the American people with a document entitled “*A Nation at Risk*” (Gardner, Larsen, Baker, Campbell, Crosby, Foster, & Wallace, 1983). It makes a number of recommendations about what we as a society, individuals, and school systems as a whole should do, but one recommendation, located in the “Recommendation: Standards and Expectations” section of the report, specifically states:

...standardized test of achievement (not to be confused with aptitude tests) should be administered at major transition points from one level of schooling to another and particularly from high school to college or work. The purposes of these tests would be to: (1) certify the student’s credentials; (2) identify the need for remedial intervention; and (3) identify the opportunity for advanced or accelerated work. These tests should be as part of a nationwide (but not Federal) system of State and local standardized tests.... (Gardner et al., 1983)

This strong statement is where the formal call for widespread, mandatory standardized testing begins throughout public education systems in the United States.

Since the turn of the 21st Century, American education has been under the scrutiny of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Renamed and remanded legislation of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act introduced by President Lyndon Johnson, the act's main purpose was to equalize education opportunities for all American students, put particularly those who suffered from poverty. The "War on Poverty" was in full force in the 1960s and the American federal government was intent on winning. Nearly 50 years later, this act and the modern name may not have had the impact on reducing poverty as it was originally intended. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) possesses school labels, mandated, nationwide standardized testing to be administered by each state, and that results tracked to measure student progress with the intended goal of 100% proficiency for all American students in reading, writing, and math by 2014. States have scrambled for over a decade to meet these rigorous demands, but they have not been successful as each year the bar for student academic success, per NCLB and as measured by standardized testing, keep going up, and many schools and districts in America cannot meet those goals. For example, in 2008, nearly 16% of all schools in Arizona were labeled "underperforming" because they did not meet federal NCLB goals for student achievement as measured by the mandated Arizona Instrument to Measure Success (AIMS) test (Arizona Education Network, 2009). This legislation has created a flurry of ongoing sociological, psychological, and academic research to indicate that its goals are not realistic and not achievable in such a short period of time. Poverty is a national and worldwide affliction that has many explanations and sources. Poverty has cast its entangled web on many different subsets of American society and it has been examined

by academic scientists, government specialists, school district administrators and employees, and sociologists for many years. There is no silver bullet to solve the problem, but education seems to be a possible solution. If poverty has been studied and if it researchers agree that education is a possible solution to its elimination poverty still exists? Also if NCLB is supposed to be an educational equalizer, why can students who are afflicted by poverty, not meet stated goals on required standardized tests? The researcher will examine different viewpoints and points of study on the topic of poverty and its effects on student standardized test scores.

Possible Effects of Poverty on Standardized Testing

It has long been noted that students whose lives are racked by impoverishment do not fare well in school, and their achievement suffers tremendously (Maylone, 2004). Despite multiple efforts on the part of education and government to equalize the gap between those people who have financial resources and those people who do not have financial resources, especially in education, poverty keeps rearing its ugly head in the form of achievement gaps, ineffective schools, and a multitude of other issues. This literature review will examine possible, specific effects it has on student standardized testing/achievement. This examination will highlight the growing gap on poverty; poverty's role in schooling; its impact on the school experience, race and socioeconomic status; socioeconomic status and intelligence; and parental behaviors on student academic performance.

Until policy makers and educators take a deep, hard look at an ever-widening economic gap and social disparities between middle class and lower class levels of

society, the children of the lower class will miss out on the path to upper social mobility as reported by Lesli A. Maxwell in *Education Week* (2012). In an article entitled, *Faces of Poverty* prepared by Sean F. Reardon, a Stanford University sociologist, states that family income has a direct effect on student standardized test scores in math and reading. For example, the study by Reardon (Reardon, 2013) states that parents of higher income families spend an average of 1300 hours in enriching places outside of their homes, such as zoos, science centers, and the like. Lower income parents do not spend as much time or are unable to provide their children with such enriching activities, according to Reardon (Reardon, 2013). The differences of income equality and eroding social resources between rich and poor families are to blame for the widening gap, and public schools are not able to keep up with the gaps and disadvantages. He analyzes why richer families are able to provide their children with more cognitive stimulation: Reardon looked more closely at the standardized test scores in math and reading from 1960 to 2007 and reports that achievement gaps widen over time between rich and poor children by 40% (Reardon, 2013). Rich families were earning in the 90th percentile, approximately \$160,000.00 per year in 2008 and those families in the 10th percentile were earning \$17,500.00 per year in 2008. Affluent families are able to organize their lives around cognitive stimulation as compared to those families of low-affluence.

Two education equality groups, known as Broader, Bolder Approach to Education and Education Equality propose their own policy solutions to equalizing the gaps between lower and higher socioeconomic families through the public schools. Broader, Bolder Approach to Education proposes that an expansive view of education policy states

that schools cannot erase the effects of poverty policy to close or lessen the gaps between lower and higher socioeconomic families through the public schools. This organization purports that broader strategies to address healthcare, housing, parenting, and out-of-school time is essential and necessary to improve the outcomes for all students (Maxwell, 2012). Education Equality suggests a “no excuses” ideology that would dramatically change the teaching profession by ending tenure, increasing opportunities for performance pay, and to holding teachers accountable through more rigorous performance evaluations. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has signed on to both of these movements in positive support, as stated by Maxwell (2012).

A solution that may help to schools produce higher achieving students could be to create policy initiatives that include “wraparound services” with the schools being the epicenter (Maxwell, 2012). Social services may include health services, dental and vision screening, drug-abuse prevention and treatment, and more opportunities for recreation and enrichment for children provided free to families. Maxwell (2012) points out that more equal discipline and incentives to boost student attendance are helpful and should include a social worker and/or counselor at each school for daily student support as this direct provision may also be part of the “wraparound support” efforts schools can use to help close gaps of these social concerns that lead to poverty.

Academic Achievement Definition and Resources of Schools of Poverty

The definition of student academic achievement has become convoluted in recent years. Its meaning is so varied that when one speaks to 10 people, one may receive 10 different answers. For the purposes of this literature review, Merriam-Webster online

dictionary (2012) defines academic achievement as: classes in core subjects such as math, English, and reading where a result is gained by effort. This is loosely defined to provide flexibility in its explanation throughout this document. In Arizona, for example, academic achievement on the AIMS test is measured by a rating of “Meets” or “Exceeds”. Students who attain these levels have passed the test and have demonstrated proficiency in the academic/core classes of math, reading, and writing. However, each individual school or district may have different versions of academic achievement. For example, a passing grade in many schools is “D”, but this may not constitute “academic achievement” in other schools. Academic achievement may be measured as a grade of “B” or better.

The article entitled *The Impact of Poverty on the School Experience* written by Alfred L. Joseph, Jr. (2004) and published in the *Journal of Poverty* mentions that students who are victims of poverty often do not experience school to its fullest benefit. He states that the way schools are funded and how poor children are taught and treated in public schools can warp their educational experience. For instance, Joseph (2004) writes that since schools are funded based on the income of the area residents, i.e., student’s parents, resources for students who struggle may not be in place because the school does not have funding to provide such interventions to enable their success. He also explains that tracking in poor schools based on student academic achievement may move students to lower levels of understanding and teacher attitudes towards lower tracked students may not provide them with the rigor and support necessary achieve higher levels. Joseph (2004) spends considerable time reviewing the ramifications of tracking students who are poor. Equal treatment of students in lower tracked curriculum is a problem. Most

disturbingly, the students felt alienation by being in lower tracked classes and this stigma sometimes lead the students to believe that their lower achievements were permanent (Joseph, 2004). Reports of the parents of lower tracked students state they had similar experiences while they were in school. Their solution, as reported by Joseph (2004), was to drop out of school and be trapped in low-paying jobs, if they can find a job at all. The appeal of public schools was to equalize the playing field so all students have a chance to learn and achieve. This is not working, according to Joseph (2004). Public schools are mirroring society in that the continued support of the privileged abounds and the poor linger in their place near the bottom.

Race and Education

Research has also shown that race and socioeconomic status have a negative effect on student standardized test scores. African-American students have been targeted in education as examples to provide equality in education. Montgomery, Alabama, was one of the first locations of the education and race issue with the desegregation of their schools per the United States Supreme Court decision of the 1953 *Brown vs. Board of Education* court case. Since then, race in education has been a topic of research curiosity. Battle and Lewis (2002) researched a modern-day topic, focused on African-American socioeconomic levels and their related standardized testing scores. The authors purport that African-American students do not perform as well as their white counterparts in school. They attribute this to socioeconomic status because their finding conclude that the higher the income level, the higher the student's academic achievement. Battle and Lewis

(2002) explain the following suppositions as to why African-American students may perform more poorly than other students:

- being members of a group that has suffered decades of discrimination and maltreatment and these members may believe that this treatment may continue and they choose not to work as hard as white counterparts
- lower white teacher expectations of African-American students may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies to continue lower levels of achievement
- African-American students are perceived to enter school with work habits and attitudes not conducive to learning and less effort will be exerted to perform well in school.
- it may be that many African-American students live in lower socioeconomic areas and with the two factors of race and poverty the answer equals low achievement as reported by Battle and Lewis (2002).

The results of this study conducted by Battle and Lewis (2002) show that in the 12th grade, white students perform at a higher academic achievement level than African-American students. This study was longitudinal in nature, and two years after high school, contrary to initial findings, black students outperformed their white counterparts while enrolled in college classes. These results puzzled the researchers. They concluded that although research was needed in this area, white students still in high school outperformed black students on standardized tests because they were accustomed to this type of achievement measure and black students were not. Also, standardized tests are an objective benchmark. Black students, on the other hand, outperformed white students in

the college classes due to the subjective nature of college-level curriculum course tests. Standardized testing is not commonplace within a college setting; black students performed well on course-based assessments due to their subjective nature. Socioeconomic status was controlled for both white and black students in this study (Battle & Lewis, 2002).

Intellectual Achievement and Socioeconomic Status

Standardized testing and socioeconomic status is presented in additional research. A study conducted by Croizet and Dutrevis (2004), the researchers looked at the variables of intellectual achievement and socioeconomic status. GRE-like tests were administered to low and high socio-economic status (SES) students in two different testing situations. In testing scenario one, the test was given to strictly measure intellectual ability and in testing scenario two, the same test was given did not to measure intellectual ability. The low SES test participants did poorly given the test to measure intellectual ability compared to their high SES test takers in scenario one. In testing scenario two, the low SES test takers scored as high as the higher SES test takers.

Croizet and Dutrevis (2004) concluded that the lower SES test takers were inhibited by a stereotype that they will not perform well on standardized tests. They doubted their test taking abilities and, as a result, did not succeed on these tests. The stereotype was confirmed. When the test was administered as a non-intellectual measure of ability, the stereotype of low performance for impoverished test takers was not an issue. The stereotype did not distract them from the test, and they performed as well as high SES test takers. Although the researchers determined that additional research is

needed in this area, the results show that the tests themselves corrupt a test taker's ability for success on it. Since test purposes are stated before administration, low SES test takers feel doomed to failure since they believe they cannot achieve on such examinations. Test context has a tremendous effect on how members of low SES groups perform on standardized tests and that standardized testing may be to blame for certain test takers who perform poorly.

Parent Behavior and Student Academic Achievement

Parent behavior may have a positive or negative effect on their adolescent child's academic achievement. Melby and Conger (1996) wished to measure if a certain type of parental behavior would have a positive effect on the success of their child in school. In the article entitled *Parental Behaviors and Adolescent Academic Performance: A Longitudinal Analysis*, the researchers determined that certain traits and attitudes of parents would reduce stress in the family and help increase their student's school achievement. The researchers looked at per capita income, parent education, academic performance, parent hostility, and student academic performance. Throughout their study, Melby and Conger (1996) identified an interrelationship among all of the above-mentioned factors and came to the following conclusion: parental behaviors that were angry, irritating, and controlling disrupted a student's positive achievement in school. Their relationship with their children was often strained which caused a distancing of support from the child. The parents who exhibited angry, irritating, and controlling factors oftentimes had a low education level themselves, did not earn an income high enough to meet basic needs and who had suffered from low academic achievement as a

student in school. On the other hand, parents whose behaviors included appropriate standards of achievement for their children, monitored their student's school performance, and promoted open and supportive communication with their child entered into a strong relationship and the child felt supported to succeed (Melby & Conger, 1996). These parents, conversely, enjoyed a higher level of education, had higher income levels that exceeded the need to meet basic needs, and appreciated relative success when they were in school. Children who felt supported, communicated with, and were in a non-hostile relationship with their parents felt they could attain academic achievement in their studies. Success seemed to breed success in this instance, according to Melby and Conger (1996). Socioeconomic status of parents has, once again, proven to be a significant contributing factor to positive academic achievement.

Outcomes with Facilitating Standardized Testing

Accountability—this is the word schools have been accustomed to using and probably will be for many decades to come. The main determinate of student achievement is accountability in K-12 education through standardized testing. Accountability, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2012) means “an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions”. Verifying student achievement through regular standardized testing was a major recommendation in the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report. Accountability was launched there and schools were responsible for making it happen.

Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) write an article about the flurry of effort to create, implement, and evaluate student achievement and determine accountability in

schools. Lawmakers, administrators, and other leaders were the ones creating these tests that teachers administer and researchers evaluate. The authors state that teachers and researchers should have been involved with the creation of these tests, and their outcomes should have been reviewed before test administration took place because research should inform policy, and teachers should provide feedback (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000). The authors also state that parents should have some part in the test creation and should provide feedback on implementation; after all, they are paying for the tests with tax dollars. The researchers organized and wrote this article with the assistance of teachers, parents, and other researchers. Findings of their interviews concluded that teachers feel immense pressure to ensure continued student success on standardized tests and that “teaching to the test” is not only common, but essential to performance on the part of students and teachers. Since they were not involved with the creation and dissemination of tests, teachers feel they have had to dismiss the notion of developmentally appropriate instruction and best practices that enable them to infuse creativity into their lessons. Parents who were interviewed in the research stated that they were not informed of mandated standardized testing laws and procedures; they felt pressure for their students to do well on the test and were not able to provide such support at home since teachers were not entirely aware of what needed to be covered on the tests themselves; parents misunderstood the far-reaching ramifications of standardized testing on their student’s futures (i.e., graduating from high school, college entrance, applying for scholarships, etc.) and kept their students home because of possible low test scores; parents also felt that the tests were not measuring fairly what students should learn in classes and the tests

were biased against impoverished families. One positive element that came out of the parent interviews is that most of the parents surveyed believed that some form of accountability was necessary (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000). Final conclusions from this research indicate that standardized testing and a high pressure testing culture does not provide adequate accountability for teachers, students, schools, parents, or researchers, and that standardized testing is not the best form of accountability available. The authors suggest that a balance of testing and using different types of measures should be created and implemented by involving teacher and parent input into the process. This, they feel, will help to provide learning from these tests as well as learning from the tests (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000).

Standardized Tests and Helping or Hindering Education

Are standardized tests helping or hindering public education? This question was raised by authors Duncan and Stevens (2011). The results of a survey conducted with educators from the South Texas region of the United States, show that seven of the 10 questions provided answers that were not in favor of standardized testing. Significantly, teachers felt that standardized testing pushed aside classes such as science, physical education, social studies and art (65%), standardized tests are flawed and not a viable measure of a school's performance (75%), and 60% of the teachers strongly disagreed that standardized tests should be a determining factor for teacher bonuses (Duncan & Stevens, 2011). It would appear that teachers are not in favor of standardized testing for some of the reasons outlined. The overall results of educator opinions of whether these tests are advantageous or not is that the assessments are necessary and will not go away

anytime soon, but they don't like the pressure to teach to the test and bonuses tied to the results. Socioeconomic status of students and how students are grouped in different classrooms may influence test results in favor of some teachers and not in favor of others, according to Duncan and Stevens (2011).

Constructivist Learning Theory and Student Achievement

Constructivist learning theory is the learning approach that is a student-centered learning process that is founded on solving problems, according to Berube (2004). Content standards and related skills are taught, but this function is an instructional strategy which also incorporates a student's own experience and beliefs. Clair Berube (2004) mentions in her article entitled *Are Standards Preventing Good Teaching?* that standardized testing affects the way teachers teach. She reports that the higher the stakes of the test, the more it influences the way teachers facilitate classes because there is more pressure to see students succeed; therefore, teaching to the test is common. The standards-based reform movement gave rise to standardized testing and high levels of accountability that spurred four components: content standards, high-stakes tests designed to measure learning on the standards, performance goals, and incentives for students such as high school diplomas and cash for teachers if performance goals are met or exceeded (Berube, 2004). It has also been proven that standardized tests are biased against students with low incomes who may attend schools that are not equal in instructional capacity or support, and that these tests penalize students who already have multiple barriers to equal education and opportunities for social upward movement. Berube (2004) cites a recommendation from Yeh (2001) that high-stakes tests should

emphasize critical thinking. Critical thinking is taught in the constructivist learning theory and that rote memorization of common standardized testing material is often forgotten by students once they pass the test or once testing is completed. Critical thinking skills are used in everyday situations and are essential to building a competent workforce. Additionally, Berube (2004) makes the case that educators need to produce students who can analyze, synthesize, and evaluate in a variety of life's circumstances rather than turn students out who can only memorize and strategize their way in testing success.

Underperforming Districts and Standardized Test Success

Two public school districts who were habitually underperforming found common traits and different strategies to help their disadvantaged students succeed on standardized tests (Jorgenson & Smith, 2002). The first district in El Centro, California, a community located close to the U.S. – Mexican border, is a low-performing district whose residents earn an average yearly salary of \$16,322 with an unemployment rate of nearly 34%. The new superintendent attempted to unite the principals behind a central focus of improvement, and that focus was the inquiry science approach. This instructional strategy was endorsed by the National Academies of Sciences and the National Science Foundation. It focused on hands-on experimentation, and teachers serve as guides and collaborators. There was also a focus on reading, writing, math, technology, and higher-order thinking skills (Jorgenson & Smith, 2002). Four years after its inception, the superintendent reported that SAT 9 math and reading test scores improved significantly. Additionally, infusing an optimistic belief and positive attitude generated by the inquiry-

based science method provided the necessary push to help the teachers and students succeed on state standardized tests.

Twin Falls, Idaho, is the second district suffering from student low achievement, family instability, drug abuse, and an area high in crime. This situation is no recipe for success. Harrison Elementary School principal, Steve Smith, had to do something. He mobilized the teachers to create a school wide system entitled Standardized Timed Curriculum. It comprised of educating students, teachers, and parents about standardized test design and context; teaching test taking skills within the context of the curriculum; curriculum alignment; peer, parent and volunteer tutoring; special attention to struggling populations; individual and group awards; and constant monitoring of student performance (Jorgenson & Smith, 2002). Test scores as a result of this program increased an average of 18% the first year; after three years, scores went up to the 90th percentile in three grade levels according to Jorgensen and Smith (2002). Sustainable achievement is possible for schools and districts with disadvantaged students, and it goes beyond teaching to the test. A unified, multidimensional, strategy across all levels of learning is possible for all students.

Effects of Standardized Testing on Students and Others

High-stakes tests create a set of challenges that range from physical, to emotional, to financial and others. Sloane and Kelly (2003) outline four issues that are a direct result of high-stakes testing. Student motivation and morale are essential to performing in school and in life. They are positive human emotions that help people move in a forward motion. High-stakes testing effects on student motivation and morale can be positive and

negative. On the positive side, Sloane and Kelly (2003) note that testing “provides students with clearer information about their own knowledge and skills” (Sloane & Kelly, 2003), may entice students to work harder in school, identifies to students what to study for, and may align effort to personal goals. On the negative side, the authors point out that testing can have a frustrating effect on students and they may be discouraged from trying to pass the tests, testing makes students more competitive where competition may not be necessary, and students may not value grades and school assessments (they may not be taken seriously). Educators need to understand these effects and plan for possible interventions and motivation builders so students can continue their work with growth on testing (Sloane & Kelly, 2003).

Standardized Testing, Curriculum, and Negative Effects of Testing

Another issue the authors bring to light regarding high-stakes testing includes alignment between the test and the curriculum. Content mastery, as stated by Sloane and Kelly (2003) can become unclear and writing simple and clear standards and then creating an objective, standardized test to determine mastery may not be aligned and easily accomplished. This misalignment may occur with content not covered and some standards left out by teachers as they are more focused on getting students familiar with “big picture” standards and content and preparing students for one format of the standardized test. Students may not be as prepared to take certain sections of standardized tests because the teachers were more focused on teaching to the test which can overinflate student achievement (Sloane & Kelly, 2003).

Every story has two sides to it. On one side are positive effects. On the other side of standardized testing are the negative effects it can have on students, teachers, teachers, parents, administrators, and communities. In the article, *The Lessons of High Stakes Testing* by Abrams and Madaus (2003), the authors looked at seven predictable and undesirable effects standardized testing has on students, parents, teachers, administrators, and communities. The seven principles are discussed below.

Principle 1: If students, teachers and administrators believe that standardized test results are important, the tests become powerful symbols of status. Since schools have to report their test results to the public in the form of a performance labeling phrase or letter grade (for example, Arizona now uses a grading system of A–F to rank/rate schools), teachers may become more concerned with the stigma associated to a poorly performing school than with school-level sanctions in place for poor results (Abrams & Madaus, 2003).

Principle 2: Placing more emphasis on a social indicator used to make social decisions is more likely to distort the process than it is intended to monitor. The authors offer clarity in this principle explaining that greater emphasis on testing will likely produce more classroom emphasis on test taking procedures. These classroom dynamics can affect the credibility and reliability of high-stakes test scores (Abrams & Madaus, 2003).

Principle 3: Teachers will teach to the test if important decisions are based on test results. Curriculum and instruction decisions are often based on test results. If results show a particular area of focus, the curriculum is often narrowed to focus on these areas

of weakness, and teachers will, invariably, teach to the test to increase student scores in weakened areas (Abrams & Madaus, 2003).

Principle 4: High-stakes tests define the curriculum. Abrams and Madaus (2003) explain that intense pressure to perform and the human nature to turn away from negative sanctions results in teachers using the content of past tests to prepare students for a new one. The curriculum is defined by past test results and instructional time is focused around this curriculum itself.

Principle 5: Teachers will focus on the type of standardized test question (i.e., essay, short-answer, multiple-choice) and adjust instructional efforts accordingly. For example, Abrams and Madaus (2003) report that tests that require a great deal of writing in an essay format requires teachers to devote instructional time and efforts on higher order thinking skills. Additionally, if most high-stakes testing questions are multiple-choice, teachers will devote less time to instructing students on higher order thinking skills and focus on rote memorization.

Principle 6: Test results are the major goal of schooling, and society places a high priority on these results. Society places a passing score on standardized tests as a major determinate of local area property values, local press coverage (positive or negative), and the graduation rate for a school or district also determines how successful (or not) they really are. High-stakes testing has become the major goal and focus for schools because not only is society counting on them, but the local economy are as well (Sloane & Madaus, 2003).

Principle 7: High-stakes testing shifts power from local districts to state departments of education and other agencies. Local curricular decisions are removed from teachers and administrators control because the school district must now perform at a specified level on the state mandated standardized test (Sloane & Madaus, 2003).

Yet another effect of standardized tests is the behavior of “Test Think.” Maylone (2004) terms the behavior of test think as one that has produced students who can take tests at a professional level. He explains the characteristics of test think as students who are: fast in spotting correct multiple choice test answers, collaborate with other students and use outside resources to know the material is out of the question (standardized tests are not assessing student resourcefulness), employ test taking techniques which are independent of knowledge and mastery of skills related to the tested topics and these students know what test-makers want (Maylone, 2004). Overall, Maylone (2004) is trying to clarify the fact that the multitudes of standardized tests that students take throughout their K-12 academic career have turned them into test taking professionals. They know how to take tests, but they don’t necessarily know what is on the tests.

One of the last negative effects of high-stakes testing that this manuscript will look at is that of learned helplessness and test anxiety. Learned helplessness and test anxiety, as defined by authors Fincham, Hokoda, and Sanders (1989), includes: learned helplessness: students who are identified by their tendency to attribute any level of failure to external sources rather than personal effort. Test anxiety is defined by the authors as students who experience an unpleasant set of emotions in testing circumstances and then tend to perform poorly on the tests compared to those students who do not experience

such feelings (Fincham et al., 1989). Habitual failure in academic and testing situations are the alleged cause for these afflictions in students. In the study the authors conducted, it was determined that learned helplessness had the strongest relationship to low standardized test scores and related low academic achievement in school.

Fincham, et al. (1989) reported that test anxiety did not have a direct effect on low student achievement test scores or on academic achievement. Test anxiety was correlated to math courses and tests in math, and reading courses and tests in reading. The researchers also report that test anxiety seems to dissipate in students as they age, but learned helplessness does not. Overall, standardized tests seem to create continued negative external feelings of failure on the part of students and test anxiety does not seem to affect standardized tests at all. Fincham, et al. (1989) calls for the need for more research in this area to produce more clarity in explanations and relationships.

A Culture of Poverty does not Prepare Students for Academic Success

Achievement can take on many different meanings. In the academic sense of the word, achievement is typically defined as a certain earned score on a scale of a standardized test. Achievement, on a personal level, can mean getting out of bed, getting dressed, and arriving at work on time to produce a full-days' worth of effort and finishing required tasks. High achievement, according to Burney and Beilke (2008), is defined "as a level of performance that is higher than one would expect for students of the same age, grade, or experience" (p. 176). The authors also elaborate on the definition of high achievement as proficiency by successfully mastering curriculum material beyond what is standard grade-level. Characteristics of high achievement found in students can include

rapid learning, complex thinking, and creative problem solving (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Breaking achievement characteristics down further, the authors explain that students who possess achievement related beliefs, values, and goals and the ability to master tasks, and changes that come along with mastery are also essential to their success (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Students who come from schools with rigorous curriculum, including advanced math and science courses, and who generally have the opportunity to access college-level courses, are more likely to enter college and complete a bachelor's degree in a timely manner than students who do not have such academic opportunities. This type of high school curriculum which offers many advanced options is essential for low socio-economic students to be successful outside of their high school environment. Schools with high minority and low income student populations are less likely to offer such programs (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Conclusions the authors are trying to convey is that the culture of poverty spills over into academic successes, and that high school students coming from such environments are not adequately prepared for college or the workforce. Thus, the culture of poverty continues to perpetuate for these students, and they have offered suggestions to educators to incorporate high level, high achievement programs to help them reduce the effects of their impoverished environment. To incorporate Oscar Lewis' (1998) culture of poverty thoughts, he states that a way to eliminate the belief system found in the culture of poverty is to slowly raise the level of living for those trapped in it and eventually incorporate these people into the middle class. Those who are living in a culture of poverty are perceived to be "shiftless, lazy, and unambitious people" (p. 9) and they should be implanted with higher middle class

aspirations and academic achievement as one way to accomplish their exit from this type of life.

Burney and Beilke (2008) examine further whether a continuous mindset of people living in a culture of poverty pervades over low educational and occupational attainment. They term this as “deficit thinking” (p.182). It appears that deficit thinking is not just limited to racial groups, but it is apparent in all races whose culture is poverty—white, African-American, Hispanic alike can be victims of this type of thinking. Deficit thinking encompasses values and beliefs that influence behavior. For example, the beliefs and values of not needing to succeed in school or go on to further education and training are passed on to children from their parents. Even though parents want their children to succeed, they believe schooling is not the only means to attain it.

Resiliency commonly refers to the ability of a person to overcome adverse or negative situations or circumstances. For example, a student living in culture of poverty may not demonstrate resiliency in seeking out opportunities for involvement in school and succeeding despite what research says or what their home life entails. Burney and Beilke (2008) cite other authors Kitano and Lewis (2005) who have written that there are specific factors that students must possess to enact a high level of resiliency. High ability was not a leading determinate, but rather self-efficacy, optimism, a caring person for support during adverse times, cultural strategies and heritage, and self-confidence were all proven to help students succeed despite trying issues in their lives. The trait of resiliency is not only prevalent in students who desired to succeed academically, but it prevails in personal and professional life as well.

Family support is also essential for academic success. Even though many families who live in a culture of poverty do not pass on multiple positive attitudes to their children, there are families who do support high achievement and success in school and life in general. Burney and Beilke (2008) point out that if low income children who participated in a guaranteed college tuition program alongside their parents, family members were likely to be supportive of the efforts their children were making and were also likely to want to improve their own educational levels. Parental personal experience with academic achievement was also a key factor in moving themselves and their children on to higher levels of success. Parents who participated alongside their children in the guaranteed college tuition program reported that pressure to pay for such an education were relieved and provided a means for more financial resources to be put towards other types of job training or higher education for their personal use. A “will to succeed” was instilled as result of program participation (Burney & Beilke, 2008). The culture of poverty still existed, but some elements of it were relieved.

Students and their families who live in a culture of poverty are often victims of bias-inducing myths. One such myth is the “blame-the-victim” mentality. This form of thinking leads those who are not poor to the idea that parents who live in poverty are drug abusers, lethargic, uncaring for their children or their children’s education, and overall are not able to change their situation (Armstrong, 2010). Class bias, according to Armstrong (2010), is also partly responsible for limiting the use of standardized test scores on measuring low income student achievement. These tests have claims they are created only for the measurement of middle class or higher level students which leaves

the lower class or impoverished student behind in academic achievement. A focus on standardized test scores as the only determinant of student success leaves one group of kids behind while those students who are wealthy move further ahead. Class bias is also presented by Lewis (1998) in that members of a culture of poverty are sensitive to class status distinctions. This is an additional burden students who are members of a culture of poverty must deal with.

Outstanding Instruction is Essential for Low Income Student Success

Research also demonstrates the greatest tool for success for all students, especially those who belong to a culture of poverty, is outstanding classroom instruction. Teachers in low income schools are often lacking experience in their content areas and are placed at these schools to “get their feet wet” with experience and are then transferred out with nearly 77% of teachers leaving low income schools for more affluent campuses. This cycle perpetuates a sequence of poor instruction and poor academic gains for low socioeconomic students (Armstrong, 2010). Positive interaction and outstanding instruction may help relieve the ongoing grip of the culture of poverty which Lewis (1998) states is habitual because the poor have very little sense of history, and they only know their own troubles, their own local conditions, and their own way of life.

Elmore (2006) points out a piece of information in the ongoing challenge of student achievement in high poverty schools. He examined instructional differences of what low performing, high poverty schools that had made impressive gains in academic achievement scores were doing that typically high performing and high income schools were not doing. The pressures to produce ever increasing scores each year on

standardized tests are a reality in both types of schools, but the high-income schools did not feel those pressures as much as the low-income schools. He notes that many of the teaching practices in the high-performing, high-income schools were mediocre and the students were making gains because of the social class of their high-income families. If students were not passing classes or making gains on academic standardized tests, teachers determined it was the student's fault and parents were strongly encouraged to seek private tutoring services to close the gap, whereas teachers in high-poverty schools could not consider that private tutoring was an option. These teachers were closely monitoring progress for each student and implementing interventions as they were needed to help their students move forward academically; low-income parents did not have financial resources to provide their students with private tutors. Teachers at the high poverty schools were assessing their instructional practices on an ongoing basis to identify what wasn't working and instituted continual changes. The teachers Elmore (2006) observed in the high income schools did not make as much of an effort to examine their instructional practices to help their students make further gains – the gains were already in place, overall. He states that constantly examining instructional practices, regardless of the level of affluence of the students who are taught, can provide across-the-board student achievement gains. Just because a school has consistently performed well on tests in the past does not mean that instructional practices are the reason for it, according to Elmore (2006).

*Positive School Culture with Caring Teachers is Essential
for Low Income Students to Achieve*

Urban schools can be centers of societal issues. The location of urban schools is the heart of where the culture of poverty begins. Even though these schools are located in high poverty, high crime, low resource areas of many large cities, the culture of the school can make a huge and positive difference in the learning levels of the students who attend them. In an article written by Osher and Fleishman (2005), the authors outline three elements of positive culture in high poverty schools. Several things are clear from their research: caring connections, positive behavioral supports, and emotional learning are essential for students to thrive.

Caring connections between teachers and students are explained by the authors as teachers who pay attention to their students. These students tend to perform better in classes than teachers who do not pay attention to their students. Strong connections with teachers are likely to resist the influence of gangs (Goldstein & Soriano, 1994). Additionally, harsh discipline in inner city schools does not provide positive behavioral changes in students of poverty. Rather, Osher and Fleishman (2005) state that specific behavioral expectations, direct instruction to students about appropriate behavior, supporting students to meet these expectations, monitoring individual and school wide behavior trends, and offering positive reinforcement for proper behaviors are all powerful contributors to helping decrease overall discipline referrals and increases instructional time.

Social and emotional skills are the third component of a positive culture in an inner city school (Osher & Fleishman, 2005). Social and emotional skills include processes for students to monitor their own behavior and deal effectively with the multiple academic and social challenges they face. The authors state that “teaching students relationship building, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision making, can prevent problem behavior and promote academic success” (p. 84). Inner city schools whose students are a part of a culture of poverty have the power to change their environments while they are at school. A positive learning culture with caring connections with teachers, positive behavioral instruction, and supports and teaching positive social and emotional skills can enhance students who have tough lives to understand that the culture of poverty does not have to continue once they see and feel an environment different from the one they are accustomed.

Cash for Learning

Low income high school students who earned cash money for good grades sustained over time was the focus of a research project designed to instill and measure intrinsic motivation for academic success of students who attended a high school in an urban area. Spencer, Noll, and Cassidy (2005) report on research that measured high school student academic motivation and achievement over a two year period of time while the students received a monthly stipend for continued good work throughout the school year. It is well documented that students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle with family concerns as well as academic obstacles. These obstacles are more than financial much of the time, but providing high achieving, low

income students with monetary rewards for ongoing academic success proved to be beneficial for them. The purpose of this study was to determine if financial rewards, commonplace in business and industry to increase employee motivation, production and attendance, were transferable to high school students in low income areas of an urban location. Spencer, et al. (2005) noted that providing cash to students for continued good grades in school has some ethical considerations, but such a study had not been longitudinally produced and were the result of a non-profit agency who was interested in the data for future considerations of such a program in the area.

The study was conducted in 1999–2001 and involved two groups of high school students in grades 9–12 who were screened for academic achievement and family income levels. The two groups comprised of a Stipend Group and a Delayed Stipend Group. The stipend group was awarded a monthly monetary stipend for grades of As and Bs in core subjects of: 9th grade = \$50.00, 10th grade = \$55.00, 11th grade = \$60.00, and 12th grade = \$65.00. A non-profit agency was responsible for the financial awards and provided the ongoing tracking of student progress to stay eligible in the program. The delayed stipend group (control group) participated in the program with all of the same rules as the stipend group, but did not receive a monthly stipend until the next school year. This is where researchers measured student motivation for keeping up with good grades and monetary benefits compared with those students who did not receive a monthly stipend. Once students were chosen to participate in the program, each student took the Spencer's Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) assessment to explore

how monetary incentives may impact ecological outcomes by influencing or reinforcing identity choices made by high school students.

The results of the study, according to Spencer, et al. (2005), showed that monetary rewards were effective in maintaining motivation to complete high school. Students put forth greater effort and improved academic performance in low income high school students located in an urban area. Good grades were more likely to be maintained after one year for those students who received the stipend than those who did not. The students in the stipend group identified themselves, from the PVEST results, as high academic achievers, but the ongoing receipt of the funds further validated their identity as a scholar, and it motivated them even more to continue keeping up with class work, earn high grades, and continue to stay in good standing with the program (Spencer et al., 2005).

Younger students had difficulty with meeting program requirements possibly due to the fact that a learning curve for underclassmen/freshmen students to adjust to the high school environment is often challenging the first year. Comparatively, Spencer, et al. (2005) found that 10th grade students fared better, academically, than freshmen did during the study.

Another group of students that struggled with keeping up with program requirements were black male students. The results found that these students faced racial discrimination in school which may have negatively impacted their participation. The authors explain that data indicated these students were more often referred for disciplinary actions and special education services. The money may not have been

enough of an incentive to offset the challenges and stress these students encounter (Spencer et al., 2005). In contrast, Asian students who participated in the program had very few challenges as compared with the black students. Their results showed that Asian students may receive early, positive feedback about academic achievement more often and react more positively, more quickly to monetary rewards than black students as noted by Spencer, et al. (2005).

Overall, Spencer, et al. (2005) found that high achieving; low income high school students who scored high on the positive self-concept portion of the PVEST test and received the monetary rewards were more likely to continue maintaining good grades and motivation to reach academic achievement levels than those students who did not receive the monetary rewards. The delayed stipend group was in the process of being analyzed at the time of the writing of the article and further details on whether or not these students could maintain their grades while waiting for a monetary stipend were yet to be measured. The researchers concluded that low income students who perceive themselves as being high achievers would likely continue success without the monetary rewards (Spencer et al., 2005). The research study did not look at the motivation level and financial rewards for low achieving, low-motivated students and concluded that further study should be undertaken to measure whether or not money could increase motivation and sustained grades for underachieving, low income high school students. In conclusion, if teachers and administrators want to ensure that students who are already doing well continue to do so, using cash as an incentive to make them work harder for

achievement—it seems to be effective. The culture of poverty seems to be relieved with cash to students who want to achieve.

Summary

Standardized testing in schools will not be going away anytime soon. The call for the importance of high-stakes testing started in 1983 with the *Nation at Risk* report and was fully operational by law in 2001 with No Child Left Behind federal legislation. Testing for all students in America was not a matter of if, but a matter of when. Researchers have noted that impoverished students suffer the most when it comes to taking such tests. The reasons are varied, but the opinion is clear that if a student comes from a poor family or lives in a poor neighborhood and attends a poor school, then they will likely not succeed on such tests, and the test will be the determining factor to expose them. Gaps between the classes persist and standardized tests don't provide many bridges to close them. High-stakes testing should not be framed as an intelligence test to poor students as their chances of failure will increase.

Teachers and researchers should have significant input into the creation and content of standardized tests since teachers teach and administer them and researchers analyze the effects of these tests. Additionally, high-stakes tests limit the curriculum to only core classes as arts and other electives are not considered when pursuing high scores in reading, writing, and math. In order to break away from the intense focus on core classes, researchers state that standardized tests should measure higher-order thinking skills as these are critical skills needed to be used on a daily basis in the workplace. Districts with very high populations of poor students have found that positive attitudes,

teamwork, and unique instructional methods have provided poor students with an opportunity to achieve on high-stakes tests.

The effects of standardized testing can negatively affect student motivation and morale. Many tests are not aligned with assessed curriculum. Furthermore, the powerful social effect of test scores to determine student and school district performance can shift property values in some areas which encourage teachers to focus on outcomes of these tests and let positive learning outcomes slide in other areas. Since students take so many standardized tests during their K-12 academic career, they are not learning content and skills; rather, they are learning how to take tests only and missing out on becoming well-rounded students as a result of their education. Finally, standardized testing has inflicted a feeling of learned helplessness on many students in American schools.

Poverty is everywhere, almost like a disease that won't go away and no cure can be found. It is proven that poverty's suffocating grasp affects students in different ways and yet has similar outcomes on low income student achievement. Poverty does not prepare high school students for academic success; it tears them down. Impoverished students need all the successful avenues that can be provided to loosen the grips of this societal ill. Research has proven that schools are a critical element in helping high school students succeed. Such examples include providing suffering students with outstanding teachers who care about their students personally and academically. These teachers are the best in their content areas and exude a passion for learning and moving their students forward. Furthermore, a positive school culture with teachers who care deeply about their students is also essential for high school students who are low income to learn

effectively, monetary incentives have proven to keep low income, highly motivated students on track to keep grades up and attend to their studies. Poverty's tight grip can be loosened with research-based efforts on the part of teachers and schools as a whole. It takes a village to raise a child, as the old cliché goes, but it takes a school and its culture and its teachers to increase the academic achievement of the students who attend the school. Furthermore, Lewis (1998) mentions that since poverty is a culture or a subculture, many people want to eradicate it quickly, but to do so would possibly eliminate vast amounts of thinking, acting, and living. To eradicate poverty is to eliminate a culture, and that could pose a difficult transition from one social level to another. An entirely new culture may develop due to the quick turnover of one way of life to another. A gradual rising of the impoverished level of living will eventually incorporate these people into middle class. Additionally, educators need to constantly review research geared towards the learning and successes of what it takes to help those students locked in the culture of poverty to help relieve this ill because school is, oftentimes, the only place where students can enjoy success. The argument is clear that there are steps in place which can be implemented, and educators within the United States need to work together to raise students and families from a culture of poverty to a culture of prosperity. Teachers are the first line of defense to accomplish this.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

This dissertation has examined social class and school efforts on low-socioeconomic student performance on standardized, high-stakes tests in high schools located in the Phoenix, AZ metro area. Specifically, qualitative research endeavors were employed using case study methodology. Data collection included interviews with school personnel, artifact collection, and classroom observations. The dissertation study attempted to answer five research questions that illuminated the efforts the schools took to ensure their student's academic achievement.

Restatement of the Problem

High school students who attended one Title 1 High-Performing Reward School and one High Performing, High Progress Title 1 Reward School located in the Phoenix, AZ, metro area that resided in or came from low income areas needed to perform at or above stated test levels on standardized, high-stakes tests (ADE, 2013a). Lower socioeconomic students traditionally did not attain at high levels of performance on standardized tests (APA, 2013). There were schools located within Phoenix who have broken this mold and reasons why this has occurred, and explained how this trend had been reduced in these particular schools needs to be discovered and shared. This dissertation study was the first in Arizona, as of this current date, to point out how one Title 1 High-Performing Reward School and one Title 1 High-Performing, High-Progress

Reward School were helping low-socioeconomic students perform at high levels of achievement on standardized tests.

It was the aim of this research to be able to formally share this valuable information with other schools that served this student population that implementation of these specific efforts helped their students be academically successful. American law has determined that educational access and quality of education is essential for all (USDoE, 2012). It was important that effective and best practices by effective schools be shared and duplicated among other schools to help all students achieve success, especially those who had multiple barriers to accomplishment.

This study has fit into the existing state of the research by having provided best practices which have been implemented and evaluated in schools that are recognized at the state level as having been academically successful. These efforts put forth by these schools have justified the use of taxpayer dollars to bring those students who are stymied by poverty to move to higher levels of productivity within society. Success breeds success and school is the best place to make it happen.

Restatement of the Research Questions

Research questions the dissertation study attempted to answer included:

1. Did some schools experience success on standardized tests even when social class predictors of academic success forecast differently?
2. What was occurring in these schools that contribute to student success on achievement tests?

3. What characteristics were prevailing within schools that experienced success that may not exist within economically comparable districts/schools?
4. What specific student attributes/attitudes were in place that may have contributed to high test scores according to high school teacher perceptions?
5. What specific leadership actions/attributes did the principals have that may have contributed to high test scores?

This dissertation project was conducted to contribute to existing conversations regarding equality in schooling and understanding of how low income students succeeded in school.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research was used for this dissertation study. Urso (2008) stated that schools were dynamic institutions with ever-changing environments, people, cultures, and projects to help students succeed. Qualitative research methodology provided a unique vehicle by which to explore, understand, and apply these ever-changing variables that were present in schools. There were multiple reasons for the use of qualitative research design to answer the research questions above.

Individual and collective experiences were the product of individual perceptions and interpretation (Urso, 2008). Many of life's experiences were subjective and not always by choice. For example, a situation that one person may have seen as a positive situation, such as attending college and graduating, may not be considered the same by another. Attending college for some people may have been an important accomplishment filled with joy and positive opportunities for the future, whereas the person standing next

to them may have found that the idea of college was a long road fraught with difficulty and expense that provided no guarantee to an improved life or expanded opportunities. This research project was intended to continue and expand conversations regarding equality in schooling and to provide an individualized perspective on how social class and educational opportunity and equality may have influenced standardized test performance. Qualitative research methodology provided the appropriate vehicle by which to examine these elements through the people who lived and worked in school environments every day.

Case Study Validation

Case study methodology was chosen because it best provided a means to examine what two schools were doing to help students achieve high scores on standardized tests. Additionally, case study methodology provided the reader with an authentic means to examine and explain how schools assisted students with attaining high academic achievement through high standardized test scores. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009), case study research was characterized by investigating a specific situation or event to answer specific research questions. Additionally, Yin (1984) defined three different types of case study research. Specifically, they included: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Yin (1984) explained that exploratory case study research may have involved a pilot study to formulate research questions which may have been used to begin looking at a particular topic. Descriptive case study research focused on attempting to describe a situation or set of actions. Lastly, Yin (1984) offered the explanation of explanatory case study research as one that provided explanation on

processes to accomplish goals or answer questions. In the case of this dissertation research, descriptive and explanatory case study research methods were employed. Noor-Mohd (2008) pointed out that case study methodology is not an exhaustive evaluation of the entire organization, but rather a focus on a particular issue or set of efforts and/or events that helped provide examination and understanding of a process that answered a specific set of research questions. Lastly, a case study allowed the researcher to become engaged with the people of the school who assisted students on a daily basis with learning. Patton (1990) explained that “the case study should take the reader into the case situation and experience a person’s life, a group’s life, or a program’s life” (p. 450). Social realities and educational opportunity and equality were the results of careful and complete case study efforts that provided illumination into the justices that were carried out within the school environment over time and on a daily basis.

Methodology Terms and Supporting Rationale

Equality: having been equal in all aspects of learning and achievement. This study looked at how students who were poor can achieve despite the reputation that equality is oftentimes difficult to come by.

Opportunity: a good chance for advancement for success. Examination of how schools with a high percentage of poor students provided opportunities for them to succeed on standardized tests.

Social Class: social class was used in this study to not only explain to the reader what this was, but how this unofficial determination had positive and negative effects on learning and achievement.

Social Justice: this term was used to illuminate and explain what was due to each person. Often the difficulty was defining what was due.

Social Reality: explained the accepted social norms of a community. The study attempted to impart what social reality is within the schools and what it means to be a member of a lower-socioeconomic status within society.

Study Population

The study population consisted of high schools with grades 9 - 12 that were determined by the Arizona Department of Education as part of two Title 1 Reward Schools. The two charter high schools who participated in the study included one Title 1 High-Performing Reward School and one Title 1 High- Performing, High-Progress Reward School in 2012. In 2012, there were a total of 38 Title 1 High-Performing Reward Schools and 68 Title 1 High-Performing, High-Progress Reward Schools awarded this designation from the Arizona Department of Education's Reward, Focus and Priority Schools list (2012c).

There were two charter high schools who participated in the study. Both schools were located in the Phoenix metro area and served students who had low-socioeconomic designations as determined through the federal Free and Reduced lunch program and participation in Title 1 as a school-wide program. Both schools had a high minority student population. EHS held a student demographic breakdown of approximately 79% Hispanic, 24% Caucasian, 9% African-American, 2% Asian, and <1% other (Movato Real Estate, 2014). The WHS student demographic breakdown of approximately 72% Hispanic, 14% Caucasian, 12% African-American, 2% Asian, <1% Native American

(SRHS, 2014). Both schools have fully provided permission to participate and data collection began in January 2014 and concluded in March 2014.

Sampling Procedures

The total sample respondents were comprised of six English language arts and five math teachers, two principals, one assistant principal, one federal programs director, and one counselor from the two high schools which participated in the study. At EHS, a total of two math and three English teachers participated, as well as the school's leadership team members who comprised of the principal, the federal programs director, and the counselor contributed. At WHS, a total of three math and three English teachers along with a principal and one assistant principal joined in.

Principal leadership attributes were also studied as the researcher was interested in identifying how these attributes affected student performance on standardized tests. An additional research question was added by the researcher to look into this topic.

The charter high schools involved with the study were chosen from a list of Title 1 High-Performing Reward Schools and High-Performing, High-Progress Schools from a 2012 inventory compiled and published by ADE (2012c). Exclusion criteria included the fact that other teachers, for example science and social studies, were not included in the state's AIMS standardized tests. There were no AIMS tests measuring these subjects that were directly related to a school having earned a Reward designation; and therefore, these teachers were not included in the study sample.

The sampling procedures used in this study were comprised of a non-random technique with purposive sampling methods. Non-random sampling technique according

to Gay, et al. (2009) did not allow the researcher to specify a chance that each member of sample is representative of the population. Additionally, purposive sampling entailed the researcher choosing sample members based on experience or knowledge of the group (Gay et al., 2009).

Arizona, among many states, needed relief from the annual measurable objectives (AMOs) that were set forth in the ESEA law. For example, 100% of all students needed to be proficient, as measured on state standardized tests, in reading and math. Arizona was not able to meet that measure and applied to the federal government for a flexibility waiver. The flexibility waiver provided relief from required provisions in the act that held states accountable for increased student performance to meet a required 100% proficiency rate for all students by 2014 (ADE, 2012a). States that were approved for the waiver were required to determine and implement a state-wide system with differentiated school recognition, school accountability, and support for all schools participating in the federal Title 1 program.

Differentiated school recognition came in the form of Reward, Priority, and Focus schools (ADE, 2012b). High-Performing and High-Performing, High-Progress Reward Schools were schools using Title 1 funds that Arizona recognized for high student academic achievement or high levels of student academic growth over time. There were two subgroups for Reward school recognition that schools could qualify for. High-

Performing Reward Schools were Title 1 schools that meet all of the following criteria (ADE, 2012b):

- Schools had to earn a letter grade of “A” in Arizona’s A – F Letter Grade accountability system
- Schools had to meet 2012 annual measurable objectives (which changed with approval of the flexibility waiver) for all students and all subgroup of students
- Schools had to show student growth percentile for their Bottom Quartile subgroup of greater than 50 in 2012
- Schools had to demonstrate more than 50% of Bottom Quartile students passing the AIMS test in math and reading in 2012
- Schools that were high schools must possess a 4 year cohort graduation rate in 2011 of greater than 80%

High-Performing, High-Progress Reward Schools must have met all of the following criteria to be recognized by ADE (2012b):

- Schools must have earned a grade of “A” or “B” on the A – F Letter Grade accountability system in 2012
- Schools must have shown growth points for all students and the Bottom 25 quartile from A – F Letter Grade calculation of greater than 59 in 2012
- Schools must have demonstrated student growth points from their Bottom Quartile group of greater than 50 in 2012
- Schools with more than 35% of the school’s Bottom Quartile subgroup passing AIMS in math in reading in 2012

- Schools that were high schools must ensure an increase in their 4-year cohort graduation rate of greater than 10% between cohort 2009 and cohort 2011

Under the ESEA flexibility waiver, Arizona was also required to develop and implement a school accountability system which described and measured student achievement in reading/language arts and math, graduation rates, and school performance and progress over time. The name of this accountability system is Arizona's A – F School Rating System. The school accountability system created included data used to account for all student achievement including subgroups (i.e., SPED and ELL students who are eligible for free and reduced lunches, and students participating in the bottom 25% quartile—those students who do not grow in academic achievement over time) (ADE, 2012b).

Rationale for Sample Selection Criteria

The number of individuals involved in the study included between 7–18 members. These members comprised of English and math teachers and one principal from each school, one assistant principal and other school leadership team members, which comprised of one federal programs director and one counselor from one school. Schools that participated in the study were small, with sometimes only having employed three English teachers and two to three math teachers per site. One site had only had only two school leaders (i.e., principal, assistant principal) and one site used a school leadership team model which included three members (i.e., principal, federal programs director, and a counselor). English and math teachers were chosen because all high school students took the mandatory state standardized test entitled Arizona Instrument to Measure

Success (AIMS). English (i.e., reading and writing) results were measured as well as math. These subjects were chosen and included because they were directly related to the school earning Reward recognition from the ADE. Additionally, these employees were “information rich” (Gay et al., 2009, p. 429) and directly assisted the researcher with insight as to what efforts they did and did not take to help students pass their standardized tests. Purposeful sampling methods were used. This was also the criteria for choosing sample members participation. The number of English and math teachers was determined by the number of enrolled students as each school must plan to hire an appropriate number of high school math and English teachers to meet the student’s educational needs. This number was predetermined by the size of the school, and the researcher had no control over the number of teachers each school needed to hire. The subjects who participated in the study were located at their respective high schools. Each high school was located in the Phoenix metro area with one located in the western part and one high school located in the eastern part of the city.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation according to Roberts (2010) meant the methods used to collect data. Such examples of instrumentation included questionnaires, focus groups/interviews, observation forms, and other forms of factual data collection means. This study used focus groups/interviews, classroom observations, and artifact collection to gather all information. These instruments were appropriate for the population and the setting in that teachers were responsible for providing instruction to students who were required to take and pass standardized tests, and principals were required to provide instructional

leadership to their teachers in order for students to take and pass standardized tests. Student test results alone did not answer the research questions of Urso (2008) as listed previously. An additional research question added by the current researcher looked at what attributes the school leader may have had to positively influence student outcomes on standardized tests.

Instruments were not scored like a questionnaire, rather, they were reviewed and analyzed for content and then coded into categorical areas for evaluation purposes. The information was directly correlated to each research question posed in this study to determine if it had been answered sufficiently or not. Inter-rater reliability procedures were not used due to the fact that open-ended, discussion-type questions were used and each respondent's answer was unique to his/her instructional position and goals that were attained.

Sources of Information

Focus Groups/Interviews

The focus group/interview questions were derived from Urso (2008) as a replication of this study and were all open-ended in nature to allow for deep discussion and reflection on the part of the respondents. With respect to time needed for the focus groups/interviews, and by the request of site principals, the questions were split in half (Appendix A and Appendix B) so two separate focus groups/interviews per participant were conducted. Minor modifications to the original author's questions were made to reflect questions that pertained to high schools rather than elementary schools. Approximately 2–3 questions were added to the original interview questions by the

current researcher. The added interview questions were aligned with the research questions for this study as the original dissertation carried out by Urso (2008) took place in elementary schools. One such question, for example, included:

Test scores indicated that the students of this school compared well with those of students at more affluent schools. Upon high school graduation, do you foresee your students competing for similar jobs and/or college slots/entrance? If not, what do the test scores really say regarding their opportunities in life? (Urso, 2008)

Since high school students take standardized tests in Arizona as a requirement for graduation and being accepted to college or to enter the workforce, this question was slightly altered by the current researcher to include graduation instead of movement to higher level grades. Interview questions were attached at the end of this document for review. The appropriateness of the instruments to the study allowed for the researcher to discuss and learn how and what the teachers and school leadership were doing to help their low-socioeconomic students be successful on standardized tests. A multiple choice questionnaire did not allow for deep explanation or reflection on the specific attitudes, actions, and elements that were in place to help students achieve, and such a document was not used in this study.

Subtopics covered in the first focus groups/interviews (see Appendix A) included a description of the school and the students, what students would see if they came into their room, the teacher's opinion of standardized tests, the teacher's opinion about the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, how outsiders, such as parents and community

members, would find success and in the school, what the best attributes of the school were, a personal definition of success, and what changes the teacher would make about the school. Subtopics covered in the second focus groups/interviews (see Appendix B) included personal and professional contributions to the school, level of trust in the school overall, educational aim of the school, how the students saw themselves at the school, how test scores helped their students gain entrance into college or fare in the job market, what was done within the school to help students be successful on standardized tests, what attributes were present in the school to help students become successful on standardized tests, and what role parents may have played in their child's success on those tests. These focus group/interview questions were open-ended in nature and designed to yield in-depth conversation and reflection on the part of the study respondents.

Delivery of the instruments was in small group settings, called focus groups, with an audio tape present to ensure accuracy of collected information. Approximately one hour of discussion time was allotted for each interview/focus group (there were a total of two focus groups/interviews conducted with participants) to answer the open-ended questions. Focus groups, according to Sagoe (2012) are defined as small group discussions addressing a particular discussion or research topic and can include anywhere from 3 – 12 participants. Participants were grouped on specific characteristics or other information based on researcher needs or wants. Key factors for focus groups included the interaction that took place amongst the participants. This interaction provided the researcher additional data and insight and added depth to the research questions being

investigated. Discussion as a small focus group yielded additional information the researcher was not aware of. Additionally, Sagoe (2012) pointed out that focus groups were used to refine information previously known about a topic and also shedded new light on the same information. Focus groups, when used within or alongside qualitative or quantitative research methods, were able to result in “a much greater efficiency than either method used alone” (Sagoe, 2012). Sagoe (2012) also pointed out the strength of focus group interviews included the influence of the moderator to keep the conversation on track, encourage participants’ engagement without one person having dominated the conversation, and ensured that all necessary material was covered. Furthermore, Sagoe (2012) showed that the strength of focus groups also included a possible high level of participant contribution to the research. The author explained that participants were engaged in a decision-making process and that 100% of their attention was focused on the subject matter throughout the session.

Yin (2014) illustrated this for focus group interview research to be carried out. He stated that the researcher was intruding into the world of the case and that interviewees may not cooperate fully with the intent of the discussion. It would then be the responsibility of the researcher to make special arrangements to alter the delivery method or change course to help the interviewee understand how and why this information was being gathered, even though a previewed and signed human consent form was signed by each teacher. Any interviewee was allowed to drop out of the program which may have caused the researcher to follow IRB protocol and/or make other arrangements to gather data. No such incident took place during the information collection period.

Observations

Other means to determine what and how schools were assisting low-socioeconomic students to be successful on standardized tests included classroom observations and artifacts collection. In the replication of this study, Urso (2008) conducted two to three classroom observations whereby he paid close attention to comparing how ideas were presented within the interviews to how they were aligned with observable actions within the school building. There were only two classroom observations conducted for each teacher for this study. The author paid close attention during the observations of how the ideas presented in the interviews aligned with observable actions within the classroom (see Appendix C). Additionally, Urso (2008) examined structural components of the school to include such areas as: “How were classrooms organized? What material resources seemed to be available? and What was the overall ambiance of the classrooms and school building?” (Urso, 2008, p. 74).

A classroom observation tool was created to guide the researcher to look for certain elements within a classroom that were helpful to answer the research questions of the study. Observations were recorded with written comments on the observation instrument. A copy of the observation tool was attached in this document for review and is located in Appendix C.

Artifact Collection

Artifact collection included such items as student AIMS scores (without identifiable student information), general school demographic data, general attendance data, policies and procedures of the school (i.e., school handbook), general demographic

information for the district, any SAT/ACT test scores (with all student identification information removed), English and math curricular items (blank worksheets, lesson plans, names of resources, course descriptions), school and/or district mission and vision statements, administrative policies and/or procedures provided insight into actions that contributed to the school's success on achievement tests. The researcher worked closely with each school principal and she was provided or suggested to access other artifacts to help answer the research questions. The artifacts listed above were simply an estimate of what was available as each school was different in nature and may have had other items to offer for consideration.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability of the original questions (Appendixes A and B) were already proven by Urso (2008) as his research dissertation was accepted and it has answered many of the research questions posed earlier in this document. Since there were a small number of teachers and school leaders participating in the study, this number of participants did not pose an issue to validity. Rather, the quality and trustworthiness of the data were more a focus of this dissertation and telling the story of the teachers at the schools that were directly responsible for low income student success will be the strength of this study. These study sampling members were located at the participating schools where students have been successful on their standardized tests. Every teacher and the school leaders in every school played a significant part of a student's achievement levels. State and federal measurements, especially for Title 1 Reward School recognition, rested directly on the shoulders of these teachers and the

school leaders. Additionally, this was a replication study, and the original researcher only took a small sampling of elementary school teachers and the principal as test group examples. This study was adjusted, with permission of the original researcher, to accommodate a high school setting and a smaller sampling group by the current author.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection began at the end of January 2014, and was completed within 60 days, concluding at the end of March 2014. This time frame for data collection provided the teachers, principal, and researcher with an optimal time frame before state mandated AIMS testing that took place at the end of February 2014 and again in April 2014. Furthermore, winter break had taken place in December 2013 so teachers and other teachers were rested and ready to begin the last half of the school year. Interview request letters (Appendix D) were sent to potential participants. The IRB approval from NAU was received (Appendix E) prior to focus groups/interviews occurring. Orientation to the dissertation study took place before any data collection began as participants needed to know what the study was about and how it would be conducted. There was a requirement for human consent forms to be signed as participants needed to know all of the information about the study to make an informed and non-coerced decision to participate or not (Appendix F). Once the participants reviewed the study information and human consent forms were signed by participants, focus groups/interviews took place.

Focus groups were conducted with 2–3 teachers at a time and each teacher and school was assigned a code to protect their identity, was ensured confidentiality requirements, and was conducted first in the data collection order of occurrence. Focus

group/interview discussions took place with teachers first. For example, 2–3 English teachers participated together in the open-ended discussions and then 2–3 math teachers participated, separately. The separation of content area teachers was to allow for the researcher to collect data on how each teacher and each academic department carried out their efforts to help their low socio-economic students succeed on their standardized tests. In some cases, due to extenuating circumstances, one-on-one interviews versus focus group participation of teachers had to occur. Focus groups/interviews with leadership team members/administrators took place in the same manner as that of the teachers. One of the schools had a leadership team and one focus group was conducted with all three members followed by individual interviews with the exception of the counselor who was unable to participate in the second phase. Additionally, WHS administrator focus group/interviews were held separately as there was a school requirement for one administrator to be available on campus in the event any challenges, such as a school safety matter, were presented. This measure of separate content areas and leadership focus groups/interviews also preserved data for the researcher to adequately review, analyze, and code information and did not provide cross-sections of information. Teachers and the administrators/leadership team members were audio taped during their small group discussions as this information aided the researcher with attaining more accurate information during the study. Some of the audio tapes were professionally transcribed and this information was helpful to the researcher as it ensured accurate transmission of information. A summative of the focus groups/interviews participation is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Focus Groups/Interviews Participation

EHS	Focus Groups		Interviews	
	1st Questions	2nd Questions	1st Questions	2nd Questions
Math teachers	2	2	1	1
English	3	3	0	0
Leadership Team	3	0	0	2

WHS	Focus Groups		Interviews	
	1st Questions	2nd Questions	1st Questions	2nd Questions
Math teachers	3	3	0	0
English	2	3	1	0
Administrators	0	0	1	1

Classroom observations took place within the 60 days of data collection as well. These classroom observations were 15–20 minutes long per teacher and consisted of two observations per teacher. There was a general observation tool that was created by the researcher to guide collection of information. The researcher paid close attention to how information and ideas were being presented in the classrooms, to the students, and how this information aligned with observable actions within the school building and how observations aligned with questions on the observation instrument (Urso, 2008). Observations also provided the researcher with information on the structural components

of the school. Specific questions on data collection are outlined in the Limitations section of this chapter. All data were collected at the school site.

Lastly, artifact collection took place within the 60 days from start of data collection as well. Such items were collected and evaluated included, but was not limited to: general school demographic data, general attendance data, policies and procedures of the school (i.e., school handbook), general demographic information for the district, any SAT/ACT test scores (with all student identification information removed), school and/or district newsletters, English and math curricular items (blank worksheets, lesson plans, etc.), school and/or district mission and vision statements, administrative policies and/or procedures provided insight into actions that contributed to the school's success on achievement tests. All data were collected at the school site.

Data Analysis and Strategies

A data match-up table were another specific element of data analysis that provided the researcher with an easy way to see exactly where the research questions were aligned to sources of data and corresponding data analysis procedures (Roberts, 2010). The data analysis procedure for this specific study was published in Table 2.

Agreements in the instruments were assessed by analysis and coding according to categories that were directly aligned to the research questions. Categories of respondent answers were re-analyzed and triangulated to determine sufficient depth of information and association to answer the posed research questions. Those data pieces that did not agree or were not in alignment with the research questions were not used since there would be no positive place for that information within the study. Since qualitative study

methods were being used, statistics to determine agreement with a study hypothesis were not determined or employed. As student standardized test scores/numbers were important, but they did not tell the story that lead up to student success on the tests. Teachers and principals were on the “front lines” working with students every day and crafted and built their school environment and programming to determine which met student needs to be successful on high-stakes testing. This information came from these people in a structured, unobtrusive manner such as focus groups/interviews and classroom observations.

Table 2

Data Analysis Procedures

Research Question	Corresponding Sources of Data	Corresponding Data Analysis Procedure(s)
1. Do some schools experience success on standardized test even when social class predictors of academic success forecast differently? (Urso, 2008)	Artifacts: standardized test scores, English and math curricular items, lesson plans, administrative policies and/or procedures that may provide insight into actions that have contributed to the school's success on achievement tests Focus groups/interviews with teachers and principals: Interview #1 Questions: 5, 6, 11, 12 Interview #2 Questions: 9, 10	Pattern Matching Explanation Building Logic Model

Table 2 (continued)

Research Question	Corresponding Sources of Data	Corresponding Data Analysis Procedure(s)
<p>2. What characteristics were prevailing within schools that experienced success that may not exist within economically comparable districts/schools? (Urso, 2008)</p>	<p>Focus groups/interviews with teachers and principals (specific interview questions that answered this research inquiry): Interview #1 Questions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 13 Interview #2 Questions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7</p> <p>Observations of teachers in classrooms: Item #: 2, 3, 4, 7</p>	<p>Pattern Matching Explanation Building Logic Model Cross-Case Synthesis</p>
<p>3. What specific student attributes/attitudes were in place that may have contributed to high test scores? (Urso, 2008)</p>	<p>Artifacts: student AIMS scores (without identifiable student information), general school demographic data, general attendance data, policies and procedures of the school (i.e., school handbook), general demographic information for the district, administrative policies and/or procedures that may provide insight into actions that have contributed to the school's success on achievement tests</p> <p>Focus groups/interviews with teachers and principals (specific interview questions that will answer this research inquiry): Interview #1 Questions: 2, 3, 11, 12, 13 Interview #2 Questions: 12, 13, 14, 15</p>	<p>Pattern Matching Explanation Building Logic Model</p>

Table 2 (continued)

Research Question	Corresponding Sources of Data	Corresponding Data Analysis Procedure(s)
4. What specific leadership actions/attributes do the principals have that may have contributed to high test scores?	<p data-bbox="621 453 1073 919">Artifacts: student AIMS scores (without identifiable student information), general school demographic data, general attendance data, policies and procedures of the school (i.e., school handbook), general demographic information for the district, administrative policies and/or procedures that may provide insight into actions that have contributed to the school's success on achievement tests</p> <p data-bbox="621 963 1040 1178">Interview with principals only (specific interview questions to answer this research inquiry. <i>Interview questions have been modified to reflect principal only responses.</i>)</p> <p data-bbox="621 1222 1024 1253">Interview #1 Questions: 12, 13</p> <p data-bbox="621 1297 1070 1358">Interview #2 Questions: 11, 12, 13, 14</p>	<p data-bbox="1110 453 1386 558">Pattern Matching Explanation Building Logic Model</p>

Nature of Specific Data Analysis Procedures per Research Question

Research Question 1

Did some schools experience success on standardized test even when social class predictors of academic success forecast differently? (Urso, 2008).

Yin (2014) stated that many case study researchers did not have data analytic strategies in place to sort through and make sense of the vast amounts of data gathered.

He stated that there were numerous strategies that were helpful to make sense of the multitudes of qualitative research/case study information collected by the researcher. Yin (2014) suggested the following strategies to get started. *Pattern Matching* was one of the most commonly used strategies. This technique employed comparing the empirically collected information with predictions or research questions created before data gathering began. *Explanation Building* was a second strategy Yin (2014) suggested for case study researchers. Explanation building consisted of analyzing the case study information by “building an explanation about the case” (Yin, 2014, p. 147). This effort was used mainly with explanation case studies. A third data analysis strategy outlined by Yin (2014) stated *Logic Models* was especially useful when conducting case study evaluations. Logic models “operationalizes a complex chain of occurrences or events over an extended period of time. The case study events are staged in repeated cause-effect-cause-effect patterns, whereby a dependent variable (event) at an earlier stage becomes the independent variable (causal event) for the next stage” (Yin, 2014, p. 155). These data analysis models were used with question one, and subsequent questions of the study, so that the “raw” qualitative data collected was “boiled down” to determine key emergent themes. Additionally, a qualitative research software package was also employed to help code and align information into logical categories to make data analysis easier and more accurate.

Research Question 2

What was occurring in these schools that contribute to student success on achievement tests? (Urso, 2008).

This question employed the same data analysis techniques as research question one, but also add *Cross-Case Synthesis*. With the Cross-Case Synthesis technique, Yin (2014) asserted the case study researcher needed at least two or more case studies to review while using this strategy. This dissertation study used two schools as case study examples. Word tables are created from information collected from the case and the information was cross-referenced with categories created from the data. The words located in the word tables were then analyzed as to whether or not they had a strong correlation to the category or not. If not, word or words were removed and the amount of terms was narrowed down to form a more aligned organization of information (Yin, 2014).

Research Question 3

What characteristics were prevailing within schools that experienced success that may not exist within economically comparable districts/schools? (Urso, 2008).

This question employed the following data analysis models: Pattern Matching, Explanation Building, Logic Model, and Cross-Case Synthesis. These analysis models allowed for the researcher to determine specific characteristics within the school and amongst the teachers compare with economically similar schools. A case study of a similar type of school that did not employ the identified characteristics was presented in the literature review of this study in order to show evaluation. Cross-Case Synthesis data analysis model was instrumental here.

Research Question 4

What specific student attributes/attitudes were in place that may have contributed to high test scores? (Urso, 2008).

Similar data collection models were used for question four. The specific techniques were: Pattern Matching, Explanation Building, and Logic Model. In order to determine and sort the specific student attributes and/or attitudes that were in place and contributed to high test scores, the pattern matching allowed the researcher to identify patterns that emerged amongst the schools involved in the study and explanation building allowed the researcher to use key emergent themes and to explain them into a deductive manner and compare them. The logic model also allowed the dissertation author to identify and explain how the emergent themes had impact over time on the student's standardized test scores. A qualitative software program was employed to help make the sorting and analysis of data more accurate.

Research Question 5

What leadership actions/attributes did the principal have that may have contributed to high test scores?

Similar data collection models were used for question five as this question pertained directly to the school leader instead of students. The specific techniques were: Pattern Matching, Explanation Building, and Logic Model. In order to determine and sort the specific school leader attributes and/or attitudes that were in place and contributed to high academic test scores, the pattern matching allowed the researcher to identify patterns that emerged amongst the principals involved in the study and provided additional

explanation allowed the researcher to use important promising topics and explained them into a deductive manner and compare them. The logic model also allowed the author to identify and explain how the themes had impact over time on the standardized test scores. A qualitative software program was also employed to help make the sorting and analysis of the data more accurate.

Validating the Findings

Triangulation was employed to validate the findings of the data collected. Triangulation, according to Glesne (2006), stated that using multiple methods of data collection and different types of data to reduce the threats of invalidity to the information. She went on to explain that multiple data collection methods increased confidence and trustworthiness of the data and in the researcher who has collected it. The data collection efforts explained in this section of the dissertation, focus groups/interviews, observations, and artifact collection, were sufficient enough to yield enough data to answer the research questions of this study, but also contributed different perspectives on how the schools involved with the study were able to help their students succeed on their standardized tests (Glesne, 2006). Additionally, Urso (2008) also used triangulation in the original dissertation study that this researcher attempted to emulate. Furthermore, the author of the study used a qualitative research software package to help sort, categorize, and synthesize the information to assist with making accurate organization of information.

Limitations

Limitations of this study were several. The relatively small sample size posed an issue with generalizability of the results as the small number of language arts and math

teachers per school site was limited. The Title 1 Reward schools involved in the study were small in nature and had a limited number of enrolled students. School leadership and school budgets were only allowable for the limited number of teachers due directly to student enrollment. The schools, the school districts, and the researcher did not have control over the number of enrolled students or; therefore, the number of core, language arts and math teachers, which were hired to teach at each site. Additionally, this information may have affected the generalizability of the study to other schools that have a similar student population as the schools used in the study.

Another limitation was the number of classroom observations. Observations were limited to two visits per classroom for a short period of time, approximately 15–20 minutes per classroom, due to each school system's requirements. Furthermore, there were only a small number of teachers per participating school, so observation data were limited and narrow in focus.

Lastly, overall exact study replication limitations were present. The replication of the original dissertation could not be exactly implemented from the original dissertation conducted research in a mid-western state using elementary schools. High schools were used in the current study and the research was conducted in a southwestern state. Urso (2008) was the original author of this study and even though this research was a replication of an original study, replication studies must have adhered to consistency and trustworthiness of data. Krefting (1991) stated that data findings used from one research study to another may not be consistent unless replications with the same subjects in a similar context are used. Kreftling (1991) went on to state that a replication study should

not necessarily provide equivalent results since not every study was the same, but rather, studies repeated in different contexts and situations added to an ongoing conversations on the same or similar subject and the data findings from each subsequent study was trustworthy. It was the intent of this dissertation study to provide additional information on how high schools with a high number of poor students continue to “beat the odds” and provide these students with success after success despite their diminished odds of doing so. Repeatability of research was used in this particular example. Additionally, the researcher of this dissertation used Urso’s (2008) research as a guide rather than attempt to replicate it exactly.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

How were students who were poor doing well in schools who were serving them? What were the schools doing to ensure student success on standardized tests? How were schools helping each student up to the next step on a ladder that lead them out of poverty and into opportunity? As mentioned in chapter one, this study focused on the examination of components found in one Title 1 High- Performing Reward school and one Title 1 High-Performing, High-Progress school located in east and west Phoenix. This chapter was organized by each of five research questions that were answered via focus groups/interviews, artifacts, and classroom observations. This evidence told the story of how each school has enjoyed successful outcomes for its high poverty students.

Demographic Profile of Schools

Title 1 High-Performing Reward and High-Performing, High-Progress Schools in Arizona were the highest ranking schools that held documented student success on standardized tests and other criteria. High-Performing Reward Schools were Title 1 schools that met all of the following criteria (ADE, 2012b):

- Schools must have earned a letter grade of “A” in Arizona’s A – F Letter Grade accountability system
- Schools must have met 2012 annual measurable objectives (which changed with approval of the flexibility waiver) for all students and all subgroup of students

- Schools must have shown Student Growth Percentile for their bottom quartile subgroup of greater than 50 in 2012
- Schools must have demonstrated more than 50% of bottom quartile students passing the AIMS test in math and reading in 2012
- Schools that were high schools must have possessed a four year cohort graduation rate in 2011 of greater than 80%.

High-Performing, High-Progress schools were also Title 1 Reward Schools and must have met the entire criteria below:

- Earned and A – F letter grade of “A” or “B” on Arizona’s A – F letter grade accountability system in 2012
- Earned growth points (an average of Student Growth Percentile) for All students and bottom 25% quartile) from their A – F letter grade calculation greater than 59 in 2012
- Showed progress by having a Student Growth Percentile for their Bottom Quartile subgroup of greater than 50 in 2012
- Showed more than 35% of their bottom quartile subgroup passing AIMS mathematics and reading (averaged) in 2012
- High schools must have shown an increase in their 4-year cohort graduation rate of greater than 10% between the cohort 2009 and cohort 2011. (ADE, 2012b, p. 2)

Additionally, a Title 1 HPRS and HPHP schools must also have held at least a student population that qualified for the National School Lunch Program’s Free and Reduced

Lunch Program of at least 40% or higher (ADE, 2014). The two schools outlined in this research study exceeded this percentage.

EHS Demographics

EHS was a charter high school located on the eastern edge of Phoenix and was located approximately six miles east of Phoenix's central corridor (MapQuest, 2014a). The school's population served students in grades 9 – 12 with an enrollment figure of approximately 300 students. In school year 2011 – 2012 (the year of receiving Title 1 HPHP designation), nearly 83% of students enrolled in the school were of Hispanic origin, 8% were African-American, and 6% were Caucasian. Almost 41% of the student population was male and 55% were female. Furthermore, the school's Free and Reduced Lunch participation rate was 94% in 2012 (Arizona Department of Education, 2021e).

As shown in Table 3, EHS AIMS scores for the years 2011, 2012, and 2013 showed that the lowest math results were found in 2012 at 56, the lowest reading in 2011 at 77, and the lowest writing results in both 2012 and 2013 at 71. EHS highest AIMS scores for math were in 2011 with 75. Additionally, EHS showed its highest scores in reading were earned in 2013 with 83 and students earned their highest writing scores in 2011 with 78. EHS students earned their highest AIMS math and writing scores in 2011 and reading scores in 2013.

Table 3

EHS AIMS Scores for Years 2011, 2012, and 2013

Year	Math	Reading	Writing
2011	75	77	78
2012	56	82	71
2013	71	83	71

The school used its Title 1 funding in a school-wide program meaning that “schools enrolling at least 40% of children from low-income families are eligible to use Title I funds for school-wide programs designed to upgrade their entire educational programs to improve achievement for all students, particularly the lowest-achieving students” (USDoE, 2011, p. 1). The school was unique in that its educational program was termed as an “early college model” in that the campus resided on a community college site and delivered high school diploma courses as well as college-level courses, to qualified students who were in the 10th grade and higher were also eligible to enroll in college classes to obtain an Associate of Arts degree or earn transferable college credits to a university upon graduation from high school at no charge. High school classes were held on an alternating schedule whereby classes were 80 minutes long on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Classes that were held on Tuesday and Thursday lasted approximately 100 minutes in length. The school opened in 1995. The mission statement for EHS was: “To provide effective, accessible, and responsive educational services in a multicultural environment resulting in student development and success” (ADE, 2013b).

The school administration of EHS was comprised of one principal, one federal programs director, and one counselor.

WHS Demographics

WHS was also a charter high school located in west Phoenix. The school's approximate location was nine miles west of Phoenix's central corridor (MapQuest, 2014b). The leadership of WHS was comprised of one principal and one assistant principal. The WHS student enrollment was approximately 450 students with nearly 81% of families living below the federal poverty level and nearly 19% of student families living at or above the federal poverty level. WHS Free and Reduced Lunch participation rate was 78% in 2021 (Arizona Department of Education, 2012e). This school showed a student demographic breakdown of 72% Hispanic, 12% African-American, 14% Caucasian, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 1% Native American. Most of the students who attended WHS were first or second generation citizens of the United States and their families were employed in the service industry, construction, or small family businesses (Rivers, 2014).

As shown in Table 4, WHS AIMS scores for the years 2011, 2012, and 2013 show that the lowest math results were found in 2011 at 48, the lowest reading in 2011 at 78, and the lowest writing results in both 2011 at 71. WHS showed its highest math scores in 2013 at 65. Students earned high marks in reading and writing in 2013 with 89 and 85 respectively. The school year 2013 was the most successful year for WHS regarding all AIMS scores.

Table 4

WHS AIMS Scores for Years 2011, 2012, and 2013

Year	Math	Reading	Writing
2011	48	78	71
2012	56	86	83
2013	65	89	85

WHS teachers and administrators stated they had in place a college preparatory curriculum and activities that prepared students for college and beyond. Course scheduling for this school was on a block schedule whereby each class was approximately 90 minutes long and was taught for nine weeks. Students took part in four classes each nine-week block to earn credits every quarter rather than waiting until the semester break to accumulate credits. Additionally, WHS also participated in a school-wide Title 1 program as part of its federal Title 1 grant. This school’s participation requirements were the same for EHS per the United States Department of Education. The school mission statement stated that the school:

...is a small, dynamic college-preparatory high school that fosters a cohesive populace of enlightened learners who give back to their communities. ...offers a demanding program with an emphasis on student learning and achievement. Students receive rigorous instruction from highly qualified faculty who are experts in their field. ...is a school where best practices and the latest educational research are used to create an optimum learning environment for each of its

students. ...features a comprehensive curriculum with opportunities for honors, advanced placement, and dual enrollment classes. (Leona Group, Inc. SRHS, 2013).

Coding

Through focus groups/interviews with study school teachers and administrators/leadership team members, site locations, study participants, classroom observations, and artifact information findings, were all coded to specify how the information was provided. This coding system was used to ensure the anonymity of the participants in this study.

Two types of focus groups/interviews took place: those with teachers and those with administrators/leadership team members. As appropriate, finding information was coded to include the teacher's location and a number indicating who was being cited. For example, when presenting specific information from EHS, IT2 would indicate the quote was from information provided in a focus group/interview with teacher 2.

Administrator/leadership team member focus groups/interviews are coded in a similar fashion. For example, IP would indicate information received from the principal in a focus group/interview. When information is presented for both schools within a section the letter representing the school (E or W) was also included. Table 5 listed the codes used throughout the findings to identify who or where the information being reported was collected.

Table 5

Identifying Codes

Code	Represents
E	EHS
W	WHS
T	Teacher
P	Principal
AP	Assistant Principal
FD	Federal Programs Director
C	Counselor
I	Information from Focus Group/Interview
O	Observation
A	Artifacts
1	Webpage
2	Curricular Item
3	Policies and Procedures

Findings: Research Question 1

Did some schools experience success on standardized tests even when social class predictors of academic success forecasted differently?

The gathering of data from one Title 1 HPRS and one HPHP charter schools located in the Eastern and Western Phoenix areas provided the researcher and reader with

answers how low-socioeconomic students succeeded and progressed in these schools. Both schools that participated in this study were located in high minority, low-socioeconomic, inner-city areas of this municipality and provided these students with opportunities that were not present in other similar-type high schools. It was the aim of this dissertation research to have been able to provide teachers, administrators/leadership team members of other schools and other groups of people who work with similar student demographics the tools and information necessary to assist their students with academic success and opportunities for accomplishment. The researcher used a combination of pattern matching, logic model, cross-case synthesis, and explanation building to analyze the collected data from the two school sites. The data showed that there were a variety of efforts being played out in each school that positively confirmed research question number one and subsequent research questions.

Research has shown that socio-economic status may play an important part in determining educational achievement for students (Battle & Lewis, 2002; Hedges & Nowell, 1999). An explanation for this may be that students with parents whose incomes were high had financial resources to provide academic supports, such as academic summer camps and tutoring, to help their children be more academically successful (Battle & Lewis, 2002; Kozol, 1991). Additionally, according to Hamermesh & Rees (1993) and Battle & Lewis (2002), an economic model entitled “signaling hypothesis” (p. 23) stated that there may be a positive relationship between educational levels earned and income. According to the authors of the hypothesis, education served as a signal to employers that a potential applicant may be a productive employee. After all, in order to

achieve academic levels high enough to complete an educational program (i.e., graduation), an applicant must possess certain skills. These skills were those that employers valued. Finishing an educational program may have lead employers to pay these potential employees a higher salary than those who had not completed an educational program. Schooling was an important factor in economic success and mobility, according to the authors. The teachers and administrators/leadership team members who worked in the schools that participated in this study provided their low-socioeconomic students with having experienced success on standardized tests even when social class predictors of academic success forecasted differently.

Research Question 1: EHS

EHS was located on a community college campus and approximately 300 students who came from low-income households. Specifically, information that follows explicitly outlined the standardized test data and the socio-economic participation of students from this campus in the Free and Reduced Lunch program in 2012.

As shown in Table 6, EHS has experienced success on standardized tests even when social class predictors of academic success have forecasted differently according to research question one. This was confirmed.

The Federal Free and Reduced Lunch rate as related to Title 1 for EHS was 94% for school year 2012 (Arizona Department of Education, 2012e). Furthermore, this school earned AIMS scores for years 2011 – 2013 as follows:

Table 6

EHS AIMS Scores for Years 2011, 2012, and 2013

Year	Math	Reading	Writing
2011	75	77	78
2012	56	82	71
2013	71	83	71

Small School. This campus was designed for no more than 400 students, but approximately 300 students were usually enrolled according to all of the EHS leadership team members. As shared by the principal, federal programs director, and counselor, the idea behind not maximizing the campus enrollment was to preserve the small school and student-centered atmosphere that was conducive to high student academic achievement. Focus groups/interviews with teachers and the leadership team members, along with classroom observations, revealed that all teachers were able to know each student’s progress in his/her class well and was able to meet student needs as they developed rather than waiting for a student to “fall through the cracks and end up in academic trouble” according to math teacher one from EHS.. Additionally, as observed by the researcher, each class averaged approximately 16 students in enrollment. All EHS teachers reported in focus groups/interviews that small class sizes were critical to their instructional effectiveness, and they increased their dedication to pushing students to work hard and meet their goals.

Table 7 presents a summation of the different themes that surfaced during classroom observations and focus groups/interviews conducted to help answer research question one relative to EHS.

Table 7

Research Question 1 Summative: EHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Small School	Flexibility to help students, individualized student assistance when needed	Programs have been implemented to help students, all students are able get help to graduate

Research Question 1: WHS

WHS was located in a free-standing building and was not associated with any community college but provided its students a college preparatory curriculum taught by highly qualified teachers who were experts in their content areas. WHS also enrolled approximately 450 students, and most of the students came from low-income households in the Western part of Phoenix. Specifically, WHS standardized test score data and the Free and Reduced Lunch Program outline the social class levels of the students who attended the campus.

WHS had experienced success on standardized tests even when social class predictors of academic success have forecasted differently according to research question one (see Table 8). This was confirmed.

The Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program rate as related to Title 1 for WHS was 78% for school year 2012 (Arizona Department of Education, 2012e). Furthermore, this school earned AIMS scores for years 2011 – 2013:

Table 8

WHS AIMS Scores for Years 2011, 2012, and 2013

Year	Math	Reading	Writing
2011	48	78	71
2012	56	86	83
2013	65	89	85

Small school. A definition of a small school (a small school can also be a school district), according to Arizona Revised Statute 15-901 (2013) included

‘Small school district’ meant a school district that met all of the following:

1. Has a student count of fewer than six hundred in kindergarten programs and grades one through eight or grades nine through twelve.
2. Contains at least one school that is fewer than thirty miles by the most reasonable route from another school that teaches one or more of the same grades and is operated by another school district in this state.
3. Is designated as a small school district by the superintendent of public instruction. (p. 5)

As the principal shared, WHS was a ninth through twelfth grade high school with a maximum capacity of 450 students and the school was at full-enrollment. All new students attended an interview with administration and then an orientation with their parents to be made fully aware of the expectations, both academically and behaviorally, on the campus (IP). The orientation was also held to provide information about the many extra-curricular activities and academic supports available. Administrators reported that this effort has had implications for providing students and their families with a clear picture of expectations before students may find they do not like the school or if he/she does not fit in. According to the principal, “We are a college prep school with high expectations for all. We build and provide strength, wisdom, and honor. We help students be more than they thought”. Being a small school also has allowed teachers and administrators to identify and implement programs and interventions that were specifically designed to meet student and teacher’s needs (IT & P). An example of this included homework detention, tutoring contracts, peer tutors, study hall, workshops, and teachers having opened their classrooms to after-school tutoring two days per week. Table 9 provides a summary of findings regarding Research Question 1 for WHS.

Table 9

Research Question 1 Summative: WHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impact
Small school	Provided an opportunity for teachers and administrators to know each student personally afforded interventions and supports to be put into place to meet student needs before challenges became pronounced	Teachers and administrators were close to the academic progress of all students, students were able to benefit from targeted interventions and supports to meet possible academic challenges which may have had impact on passing classes and AIMS tests

Findings: Research Question 2

What occurred in these schools that contributed to student success on achievement tests?

Programs and efforts that have been discovered in the Title 1 Reward schools to help their low-socioeconomic students enjoy academic success have been in place prior to the Reward Schools honor being earned. With constant data analysis, the teachers, leadership team members, and administrators of each school reviewed, discussed, analyzed, and made modifications to their programs and efforts to meet constantly changing student needs. This has been a cornerstone effort for these schools to remain viable and successful year-after-year. From culture and climate, to programs and academic interventions, these schools have constantly evolved to make sure their students perform well in an academic atmosphere.

The following information was collected from each school participating in the study and the information will be used to answer research question two. The collected information outlines specific efforts to help students reach high academic achievement on standardized tests.

Research Question 2: EHS

Triangulation of the data to gather the most current efforts the teachers and leadership team members of this school has produced a culture of trust, professionalism, caring for each other, the students, and their families. A culture of trust, professionalism, caring for each other, the students, and their families was the foundational data for this research question.

Leap. As shared by both teacher and leadership team members during focus groups/interviews, Leap was a school-wide, involuntary, after-school tutoring program that was held every Wednesday to assist struggling students to pass their high school classes. Students who were failing high school courses were assigned to attend this program. It was facilitated by teachers and peer tutors from within the school to help increase student classroom achievement. According to math teacher two in teacher focus group/interviews at EHS, Leap was “a school-wide system which is for kids who are struggling in the classroom. Many teachers stay after school and tutor. It’s basically created for the bottom 25% of students who need extra help”. The same teacher, math teacher 2, stated in focus group/interviews “I have seniors who come to my Leap class and are there to help with the students” (who attended).

Voluntary after-school tutoring. Discussed by both teachers and the principal, tutoring in a variety of high school classes was held throughout the week. English teacher one mentioned in focus groups/interviews that voluntary tutoring was available.

I'm always telling my students if you leave Monday and you don't know what is going on, you can't wait until Wednesday to ask for help. You have to come in on Tuesday when you don't have class to see me for assistance.

This program was valuable for those students who wished, on their own, for more support in their high school classes, but they were not mandated to participate. This program was widely attended, and the teachers and principal reported that it helped to motivate students to solve problems and increase learning in high school classes. For example, English teacher three stated in a focus group/interview that students "are going to have to take that initiative and speak up and show up if they don't know something". Students who were enrolled in college classes also received assistance here, but the college also offered voluntary tutoring in its own facilities for students who needed focused assistance in specific college courses. According to the community college website, college course tutoring took place in the Learning Center. Additionally, the website stated "The Learning Center offers free academic support services for enrolled students including academic and study skills tutoring, writing workshops, learning aids and group study rooms" (Gateway Community College, 2014).

Check and Connect. Check and Connect was a program based on a research program model created by the Institute on Community Integration (ICI) from the University of Minnesota (2014). The Check and Connect program was an intervention

program for K-12 students who were not engaged in school and learning. The goal behind the program was to create trusting relationships with a mentor (in the case of EHS, a teacher). The mentor/teacher supported the students in their caseloads/classes and built bridges between learning, family, school, and community helped each student stay connected to these elements and excel in school (ICI, 2014). According to the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration website (2014), the “Check” in the name referred to continuous monitoring of the student through avenues such as attendance, tardies, grades, and behavioral referrals. The “Connect” in the program name stood for a more personalized and timely intervention to student difficulties based on skill building and problem solving which included increasing academic achievement (ICI, 2014). As discussed during the focus groups/interviews, Check and Connect was held every Friday where students were grouped with teachers to be able to “check-in and connect” with each other. The principal also disclosed that this intervention program had been helpful in ensuring that students felt welcomed and were known on a personal basis by their peers and teachers. Additionally, this was an opportunity for the teacher to be able to offer any personal assistance to a student who may have been struggling with either academic or personal issues. Furthermore, as shared by the principal, if there were economic needs, such as housing, food, or medical concerns, for example, the teacher also was able to contact the student success liaison who was also able to help a student and their families obtain needed social services. The principal also discussed how the Check and Connect had been a foundational element of the “family-like” culture that was in place at this school.

Family-like culture. The principal and teachers shared during focus groups/interviews that the family-like culture at EHS was collegial, supportive, and positive; it lent itself to a learning environment that was focused on the student. Teachers and leadership team members reported that they strived not only to encourage their students to meet high academic expectations in all of their high school and college classes, but that they carefully ensured that all students and their families were welcomed and supported while attending school. According to the principal, all teachers made an extra effort to connect with each student in a scheduled event entitled Check and Connect during the school day, there were weekly teachers meetings to ensure information was current and challenges were identified, corrected and monitored, there was collaborative course planning time amongst all department teachers (i.e., Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)). Leadership team members, including the federal programs director and the counselor, also reported going to great lengths to value each teacher as a professional by not micro-managing their efforts, allowing them to make suggestions and implement solutions in a timely manner, enact scheduled teacher appreciation events, and other such efforts to keep the culture supportive, professional, and family-like. As mentioned by the federal programs director in an interview, “I noticed very quickly there was collaboration and teamwork. Because of the small staff, you are going to be working with everyone. It is almost family-like”. Also, as shared by the principal and observed by the researcher, since this high school was located on a college campus and was part of a large, urban community college district, financial resources for “salaries were able to be higher than other school systems”, fringe benefits such as health care and other employee

assistance programs were affordable, college resources such as tutoring for students enrolled in college classes, and technology were plentiful. As a result, the principal discussed with the researcher that her teacher turn-over rate was lower than other area high schools due to a higher job satisfaction level which kept teachers on staff and motivated to help students achieve. She also shared that the teachers also seemed to enjoy the culture of support and student-centeredness that lent itself to increased job satisfaction, according to the principal.

Seminar class. The Seminar class was part of the high school course offerings and was a required class for all high school students. As reported by the principal and evidenced in the course description artifact entitled “2011 – 2012 Seminar Class Description”, each student had to complete it before being able to enroll in community college classes. Additionally, as identified by teachers, the principal, and in the course description artifact entitled “2011 – 2012 Seminar Class Description” noted that students received high school elective credit for this class, and that the class was a preparation course that outlined successful test-taking strategies, vocabulary acquisition, and organizational skills such as time management and technology use. This course was held every Monday and Wednesday during regular instructional hours and all teachers participated in facilitating this class at different times of the school year.

Advancing Via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID was a “college readiness” system for elementary through higher education that was designed to increase school wide learning and performance. “The AVID College Readiness System (ACRS) accelerates student learning, uses research-based methods of effective instruction,

provides meaningful and motivational professional learning, and acts as a catalyst for systemic reform and change” (AVID, 2014a, p. 1). According to the AVID website, the program was available for all students but focused on the least served students in a school setting. The AVID program was simple: raise expectations of students using the AVID support program, and they rose to the challenge. AVID stated on its website that a nearly 90% success rate of students reported that they attended post-secondary institutions (AVID, 2014a). Students involved with an AVID program learned organizational and study skills, engaged in critical thinking and asked probing questions, interacted with their peers and college students with tutoring, and become involved in enrichment and motivational opportunities that helped to make college attainable (AVID, 2014a). EHS utilized an active AVID program for all students to participate in, and they emphasized high expectations for all of their students. They mentioned that this was a solid program that has helped their students reach academic goals. EHS English teacher three went on to state in an interview that the various interventions used at the school to help their students reach high levels of academic achievement included “a lot of commonalities that are used, especially AVID strategies that everyone uses”.

Critical thinking skills. All English teachers agreed in focus groups/interviews that students who were able to think critically were achieving far more than using rote memorization and simply completing assignments and moving to the next one. Classroom observations by the researcher revealed that teachers did not simply ask students for answers to questions in their classes, but asked them to explain why, to justify their answers, and asked for peer feedback to ensure that their answers were

correct and deeply thought out. Dialogue ensued amongst many of the students in multiple classrooms over different topics teachers presented. During focus groups/interviews, teachers from EHS revealed that students needed to be able to “think on their feet” (ET2). In observations, several teachers asked students to justify and explain reasons for supporting their answers. English teacher three stated to the students that if they were to successfully engage in higher education courses and pass college classes with high grades, justification of their answers was a necessary skill for success. The EHS teachers and principal discussed in focus groups/interviews how critical thinking skills were traits necessary for all students to use not only in their high school and college classes. Critical thinking skills were also an essential skill necessary in the workplace. For example, English teacher two mentioned that “we do a lot of critical thinking skills here and we emphasize how they (students) can write things and attach things from different perspectives. They haven’t been asked to do that a lot and it is important for their lives”. Critical thinking skills were also partly why students have been so successful on their standardized tests, according to the EHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook (GWECHS, 2013) which explained the AVID class all students participated in. Students were taught critical thinking skills in this class. As the researcher observed and was evidenced by curriculum artifacts (2013 – 2014 Student Handbook, Course Descriptions), these skills were embedded in all courses and were not only part of AVID, but were taught in each course students took while enrolled in the school.

Culture of trust. Leadership team members described that in order for their students to be successful, teachers needed to be successful. As the principal stated,

“Teachers get what they need and we trust them and give autonomy to them”. The principal went on to discuss further how teachers were treated as professionals and were trusted to provide suggestions for improvement, but were also supported to make decisions to help their students as soon as problems developed. New teachers were welcomed for their fresh ideas and experience to lend to the overall goals and efforts already in place. The principal mentioned that new teachers were “welcomed and given the opportunity to be collaborative from the start”. Focus groups/interviews with teachers also confirmed the statements of being trusted, treated as professionals, and supported. English teacher two stated, “I feel as though, as a department, we support other departments, but I feel they do the same thing for us, like with reading and writing”.

Student success liaison. The principal shared in focus group/interviews that this position involved a full-time front office member whose responsibility it was to contact students and parents if students were showing difficulty with attendance, grades, motivation, and other academic concerns. For example, the student success liaison contacted and spoke with parents if their student was tardy or absent. The teachers and principal discussed how the student success liaison tried to identify problems and seek solutions (IT & P). The federal programs director shared how the student success liaison was also responsible for coordinating and teaching the on-campus parent education classes (IFD). Focus groups/interviews with the principal and federal programs director revealed that the idea behind these classes was not only to provide parents with an opportunity to gain skills, but to involve them in the school and in their student’s education (IP & FD). These classes were held on the high school campus. The student

success liaison was also responsible for helping organize the required twice-yearly student-lead conferences (IP). The principal and teachers discussed in focus groups/interviews how student-lead conferences were organized by the students to prepare a presentation to their parents outlining how they were progressing in their classes. Students explained the assignments and grades they had earned, outlined any behavior issues, attendance concerns, and presented any other information needed to inform parents of their progress. These student-lead conferences were a requirement for all students to participate in (GWECHS, 2013, p. 10).

AVID Parent Night. As shared by the teachers, the student success liaison and the teachers organized the first event of the school year that included an overview of the program entitled the “AVID Parent Night”. Parents were invited not only meet the teachers, but to view student work progress to hear how the program helped them to become responsible learners through strategies learned throughout the school day, and to plan for college and the workforce. For example, the AVID program being facilitated at EHS included leadership conferences (IT). Workplace and academic skills such as time management and goal setting were part of the AVID program (AVID, 2014b). EHS also opened volunteer opportunities for parents to come and help in a variety of capacities on the high school campus. For example, the AVID program encouraged parents to participate on an AVID site team or in AVID Family workshops (AVID, 2014c).

High expectations. The principal and teachers discussed in focus groups/interviews how students were held to a higher level of academic expectation upon entry into the school. For example, in a focus group/interview with the principal and

counselor, she and the counselor stated that pre-enrollment interviews were carried out with parents and students in small groups, and clear communication was ensured which outlined specific expectations of behavior and academic performance (IP & C).

Additionally, the principal said all students were enrolled in the Seminar class offered by EHS. As discussed in the teacher and principal focus groups/interviews, this class was designed to help prepare all high school students for college level classes (GWECHS, 2013, p. 11). Since high school students took college classes, the level of rigor in high school classes was increased so they may be successful in college courses. Orientation took place with parents and students and they were introduced to the academic expectations and behavioral requirements. These initial registration interviews took place at the high school campus and were conducted in a small group format involving the student and his/her parents (IP). Furthermore, the principal shared that she outlined the goals and academic and attendance expectations the student was required to adhere to. The required twice-yearly student-lead conferences were also discussed in pre-enrollment interviews with students and parents. For example, as evidenced in curriculum information (EHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook, p. 7), parents and students had to sign a compact of understanding (see Appendix G) that showed they understood what type of school EHS was and that hard work and dedication to self-responsibility and learning were critical for learning and enjoying success (GWECHS, 2013). There were no surprises when families decided to enroll their students in EHS, according to leadership team members which included the principal, federal programs director, counselor and teacher focus groups/interviews. For example, the counselor, a member of the leadership

team of EHS, stated “I interview every incoming freshman prior to the start of the school year. Students and parents know fully what is expected at the school and the possible outcomes if there was sufficient effort exhibited by the student”. The student/parent compact (Appendix G) outlined in the student section, as shown in the policies and procedures artifacts stated, “I know I am responsible for my own success; therefore, I agree to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of my abilities...” Each student had to be ready to take on college classes as a teenager if they were qualified to take such courses. The EHS 2013 – 2104 Student Handbook outlined eligibility for college classes by a student demonstrating growth or achievement in “attendance; willingness to take on challenging academic coursework and to participate productively in the college community, commitment to demands of the program” (GWECHS, 2013, p. 7). Also, the opportunity to take college classes while in high school was a benefit and privilege of enrollment at EHS. As the principal discussed, college classes (GWECHS, 2013, p. 21) held their own level of rigor and high expectations as well (IP).

Furthermore, classroom observations conducted by the researcher revealed that students worked hard to meet goals teachers had set forth for them. For example, in a math class, the teacher wrote the goal for 100% of all students to pass a quiz with a grade of 100%. Since the goal had not been realized when students returned to class the next day, the teacher organized an interactive review that involved students to work together on similar quiz questions, and the students presented their answers along with an explanation to the class of how each problem was solved. Math teacher one handed out an assignment guidesheet to help students focus on the activity (Math Teacher one, math

class assignment handout). Also observed was a discussion amongst the students, and the teacher who then presented a more difficult math question to the entire class to solve individually. The quiz was retaken, graded in class, and the original goal was achieved.

Positive school climate. Leadership team members also reported during focus groups/interviews that they had very few incidents of bullying, fights, or general intolerance amongst their student body. Students who had been rejected on other school campuses by their peers found comfort and community in attending EHS, according to the principal. The counselor, a member of the EHS leadership team mentioned, “There is tolerance with our students that I did not see at my last school. You know our students are very accepting of everybody that might come in with any sort of differences”. It was further discussed by teachers and the principal that EHS is a safe and inviting campus where caring teachers and students allow for each student to be themselves and this, as reported, has allowed for a foundation of academic success to flourish.

College environment. During focus groups/interviews, the principal and English teacher three discussed that having a high school on a college campus also had a positive impact on ensuring student success. Students were in the company of adults who worked with them in college classes at high levels of planning, communication, and classroom performance. Additionally, as discussed in teacher and principal interviews, college professors have held students to the same levels of performance as adults and this has enlisted, in some students, quick maturation and focused learning equaling those of adults (GWECHS, 2013, p. 16). During the leadership team focus group/interviews, the federal programs director shared, “Students here seem to be a lot more mature than I’ve seen in

other high schools. As the conversation continued, the counselor stated “Research on the early college model talks a lot about the power of the site” and the principal stated, “Kids don’t want to be viewed as the youngest odd ball out. They want to be seen as college-age and mature. They take cues from other people around them”. Having confidence and learning to advocate for themselves have been skills that high school students learn early on while enrolled at EHS, according to the principal. English teacher two reported that students also “learn to be independent and empower themselves and learn to use resources on their own to better themselves”. For example, English teacher two described that students needed to “know how to speak with adults in the college and learn how to advocate for themselves in the adult world to solve problems”. Additionally, for example, the skill of self-advocating had also contributed to their academic success as they were able to ask questions, speak up with their concerns, and identify needs and seek resources for assistance, as mentioned in leadership team and teacher focus groups/interviews. Lastly, as the principal shared, the opportunity to earn a college degree and a high school diploma at the same time, usually by age 18, was also a chance most of the students wished to take advantage of. However, not all students could participate in taking college classes (IP). Some students enrolled in EHS were only able to earn a basic high school education/diploma due to Proposition 300 being passed by Arizona voters in 2009. Students without state residency status were not privileged to participate in programs such as taking college courses for free using state funds (Arizona Revised Statutes §§1-501 and 1-502, 2009; MCCCCD, 2009). This meant that students who were undocumented could not take community college classes while enrolled at EHS unless they paid Out-of-

County or Out-of-State tuition rates due to residency restrictions tied back to Arizona Revised Statute §§1-501 and 1-502 (2009). These students were eligible to pay for the much higher tuition rate with their own funds, but this educational opportunity was limiting for many students (MCCCD, 2009).

Parent learning opportunities. As shared by the federal programs director and principal, EHS offered classes for student's parents to also learn. The student success liaison arranged and taught English, computer, and financial literacy classes that were free for parents to attend two days per week. These classes were held on the high school campus and were taught during the day and evening. Math teacher two stated that these classes were often full and parents not only were able to gain skills to better themselves, but were able to be involved with their student's education and the school as a whole which was also an advantage. For example, parents who learned basic English skills could communicate with their student's teachers and learned how students were doing in their classes. Additionally, parents who learned basic financial literacy skills could better track income and make decisions on how and where to spend the money they earned. Parents were also exposed to the college campus, and teachers and leadership team members mentioned that many parents didn't have a high school diploma. Motivation was encouraged complete their GED and move on with college, oftentimes alongside their children (IT, P, & FD). Table 10 presents summative information from EHS for Research Question 2.

Table 10

Research Question 2 Summative: EHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Culture of professionalism	New teachers were welcomed	Teachers felt supported and students achieved
Leap (mandatory tutoring for struggling students)	Increased skill base in class, students feel more confident in class	Better grades, passed high school classes and pass AIMS test
Check and Connect	Teachers and students communicated regarding personal and academic needs, student-to-student communication	Relationships of trust with teachers were built, trust built amongst students, acceptance of each other amongst students
After-school tutoring (voluntary)	Increased skill base in high school classes, students felt more confident in their learning	Students earned better grades, students passed high school classes and AIMS test
Family-like culture	New teachers felt welcomed upon starting at the school, existing staff was supportive of new teachers and other teachers on the campus, teachers looked out of students and other teachers	Supportive environment that helped with identifying challenges and implementing solutions in a timely manner, trust amongst staff to meet academic goals, increased willingness to help students succeed
Seminar class	Preparation for college classes, increased student confidence in taking all levels of college classes	Students earned college credits, students could graduate from high school with a college degree

Table 10 (continued)

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Student Success Liaison	Got parents on board with education, increased communication with parents regarding student attendance and academic progress in high school classes	Parents felt engaged and students achieved, there was an extra layer of support for teachers to help students and communicate with parents
High expectations of students	Student success in high school coursework	Students succeeded in high school classes, college classes, and on AIMS tests
AVID program	Organized learning with note taking and study skills, self-responsibility for learning, critical thinking skills taught and used in each high school class	Passage of AIMS test, preparation for college and workforce
Critical thinking skills	Students had higher self-esteem	Students passed AIMS test, higher high school graduation rate
Parents attended adult classes on campus	Parents became involved in education of their students and start to build their own skills	More support of education, student takes it seriously & learns, parents gained skills and value education and increase motivation to participated in their student's learning and are exposed to college campus and may further their own educations
College Environment	Students learned with adults and higher expectations in college classes through professors and college culture	Students took their learning seriously and wanted to work to the same levels as their adult peers, they also saw advantages that college held in earning a college degree while in high school, a jump start on college after high school

Table 10 (continued)

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Positive student culture	Students felt safe and secure while learning, they were comfortable and accepted for who they were	Feelings of safety and security lend to focusing on learning and producing high academic results
College Classes	Students qualified and interested may be able to take college classes with no tuition or fees charge while in high school; this increased high school rigor and motivation to excel	Students may earn concurrent college and high school credits for successful completion of college credits; this increased student motivation to learn and achieve as student is earning high school and college credits at the same time; opportunity to earn college degree and high school diploma at same time; eases college transition as student was already familiar and prepared for such classes and the environment

Research Question 2: WHS

The WHS campus was a free-standing building with a college preparatory curriculum. Additionally, academic success was a priority for the teachers and administrators, and this campus offered an extensive array of extracurricular activities such as sports, cheerleading, community action committees, and theater that supported the motivation levels for learning and school involvement on the part of students, teachers, and administrators (IT & P; WHS 2013 – 2104 Student Handbook, [SRHS, 2013, p. 11]; school web site).

Tutoring. Tutoring at WHS was helpful to their students. WHS teachers who taught English language arts and math held after-school tutoring sessions twice per week

for students to access them for needed support and enhanced learning to pass their classes and excel on classroom tests and quizzes (IT). As shared during focus groups/interviews, both teachers and the principal discussed that make-up work was also completed by students during this time frame, and teachers were available to assist them with it.

Teachers and the principal shared that tutoring was both voluntary and mandatory in nature. Students, who sensed the need for extra assistance by their own decision, visited a teacher after school as necessary, Mandatory tutoring was provided for students falling below 70% in at least one class. English teachers one and two discussed that a tutoring or homework contract was usually drafted by the principal for students who fell behind in classes and who were mandated to attend after-school tutoring until the grade in the class or classes reached a passing level (IT & P).

Peer tutors were also involved in after-school tutoring. To qualify, each student interested in helping had to have passed the same class with a grade of B or better, showed an attendance rate of at least 95% or better, and showed a willingness to help others succeed, according to the principal in focus groups/interviews from WHS. This was an added benefit to the teacher and the struggling student by having been offered the opportunity to learn from another student who had already mastered the same course content. “I have a student. He’s good at math and he enjoys the subject. He has no problem helping, willingly, gladly”, as stated by math teacher one from WHS. Tutoring at WHS appeared to be a positive situation for the teacher, the peer tutors, and the struggling students who attended. Tutoring provided an opportunity for struggling students to make-up work and to obtain extra help needed so they understood the

topic/lesson (IT & P). It was also accommodating to those students who chose to have attended on their own so they might move ahead and master topics they sensed a need to excel in. As quoted from math teacher one in focus groups/ interviews “I’ve helped several students last year study and master the test because that’s what they wanted to do”.

Math Topics 1 and 2 and Essential Elements A and B (English language arts) classes. As part of the school curriculum and as stated in the WHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook which specifically explained the courses students were to take (SRSH, 2013, p. 17 – 24), these were classes that all freshmen and sophomores enrolled in during their first two years at WHS to become prepared for the AIMS test. Math Topics 1 and 2 covered fundamental math concepts to help students prepare for the AIMS test.

Algebra topics included: number properties, algebra concepts, equations, word problems, matrices, graphing, systems of equations, relation and functions. Geometry topics included: angle properties, parallel lines, congruent triangles, transformations, nets, perimeter, area and volume. Probability and logic topics included: data collection, graphical representation, probability permutations, combinations, algorithms, inductive and deductive reasoning. (SRSH, 2013, p. 20)

As discussed in teacher focus groups/interviews, Essential Elements of English A and B were classes designed for incoming freshmen and sophomores to build necessary language skills in beginning English classes and usage of the English language in other classes as well. Freshmen enrolled in Essential Elements of English A. As stated in

curriculum artifacts, “A strong emphasis is placed on the student’s ability to grammatically structure responses and understand the various purposes and forms of writing in the first year of high school” (SRSB, 2013, p. 19). The intent of Essential Elements of English B was to help sophomores pass the AIMS test. This class focused on “sentence fluency, conventions, decoding various types of text for meaning and is one year long” (SRSB, 2013, p. 19). Additionally, English teacher one reported in focus group/interviews that Essential Elements of English A and B classes “were cleverly disguised AIMS review and the classes were taking our kids back to basics, reviewing persuasive techniques, reviewing how to analyze, and that year we had our highest Passing and Exceeds results ever”.

Workshops. Students enrolled at WHS took three benchmark tests per year that were generated from Galileo, a testing program that was aligned to state academic standards, and results were able to provide teachers and administrators with real-time data to determine student areas of weakness (IT, P, & AP). Students who were required to take the AIMS test and who had shown lower-than-expected scores on at least one or more state academic standards in English language arts and/or math as a result of benchmark testing. These students had to participate in this mandatory after-school program for two weeks prior to each AIMS test administration (fall and spring) (IT & P). Students did not receive elective or academic credit for participating in these classes. Workshops were conducted by each of the highly qualified math and English language arts teachers. As presented in teacher and principal focus groups/interviews, instruction was individualized for each student and was geared directly on areas of weakness each

student has shown as a result of benchmark testing (IT & P). Teachers and administrators reported during their focus groups/interviews that this program had been extremely effective in helping struggling students increase their test taking confidence and helped them with having developed an “intrinsic motivation and pride” in being successful on the tests , according to English teacher two. Consequently, as reported by math teacher one and the principal, students also learned to take the tests seriously by learning test taking strategies, understanding where their areas of academic improvement were, and overcoming them with an intensive, personally focused instruction before the AIMS test. According to English teacher two, students “test well” not only to please their teachers, but to “pass to get to the next level”. Teachers reported during focus groups/interviews that the attitude across the school in the workshop classes was one of deep support, high expectations, with determination to succeed. English teacher two shared, “I’d like to bring up the close knit factor. The fact that students aren’t going to fall under the radar, that we have a connection with our students”. Student attitudes, according to English teacher one included a mantra of “you beat the test and do not let the test beat you”.

Personal potential attitude. Teachers and the principal described that many of the students registered at WHS stated their future goals were limited in scope. For example, they stated that students only saw themselves working in similar industries or jobs as their parents. Teachers and the principal reported they worked hard to help change that mindset and to provide students with a vision of more opportunities than what they saw in their immediate families. According to the teachers and principal, having expanded student goals was accomplished through the achievement of high standardized test scores,

helping them with prepare for college by providing college readiness seminars which introduced parents and students to the financial aid process, assisted them with completing FAFSA forms, college applications, dorm applications, and help with having earning acceptable college entrance exam scores and writing essays (IT & P). The principal shared in focus groups/interviews that WHS alumni also came back to campus and spoke to the students who were preparing for their college entrance process and provided real-life experience and motivation to help existing students move forward to attend and graduate from college. Many students, according to teachers and the principal in their various focus groups/interviews, did not have this type of support or family understanding at home (IT & P). For example, math teacher two responded,

I think we also have some students who still haven't quite figured out that we're setting them up for more potential than they see in their lives growing up. I still have some students say that their dad was a mechanic, so I'm going to be a mechanic.

The principal and teachers discussed that many times, students did not have parents who attended college or few family members who attained a high school diploma. As a result of this low education attainment level, families were not experienced or confident in assisting their children with preparing for the college entrance process. Parents were strongly encouraged to attend these college readiness seminars, but few did.

Future freshman academy. Each summer, students who were incoming freshman to WHS attended the Future Freshman Academy. The purpose of this program, as shared by the principal in focus group/interviews, was to help each student identify and build

his/her skills for high school success. Every new student took a placement test to determine academic strengths and weaknesses, and each student's class schedule was customized around the results of this entrance exam. Additionally, the principal shared that students learned how to build on existing skills and learned new ones such as time management, communication, teamwork, and understanding of the different support services available at the school, becoming aware of extracurricular offerings, and were afforded an opportunity to get to know their teachers and other classmates (IP). Teachers and administrators conveyed that this week of orientation had been very helpful to incoming freshmen and as the principal stated, the academy was "to prepare for high school through facilitation of remedial classes in writing, and math, teaching scientific method, and how high school works".

WHS teachers and administrators described that their student's success had been directly responsible for the efforts outlined above. Examples included: constant contact with parent, tutoring program, celebratory climate, Math Topics 1 and 2, and Essential Elements of English A and B classes, workshops before AIMS tests, personal potential attitude, college entrance assistance, constant adjustment of curriculum based on data, and Future Freshman Academy. Information gathered from the focus groups/interviews, classroom observations, and artifact answers research question one. Table 7 provided a summary of findings for research question one for WHS.

Culture of hard work and caring. Teachers who were employed at WHS have willingly worked hard every day to serve their students. Math teacher two, English teacher three and the principal discussed how new teachers were oriented into the culture

of the school that included why the school and students are successful is hard work on the part of the teachers. Additionally, it was shared by math teacher one that teachers on the campus usually give up personal time to meet student needs, support student extracurricular activities, and meet rigorous professional development expectations. The principal stated, “Teachers are here from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.”. On the other hand, the culture of WHS amongst the teachers was caring and helpful. Teachers were not left to fend for themselves as teacher and administrator focus groups/interviews revealed and that a collective effort of student and teacher support was in place. A quote by English teacher two asserted,

I want to start by saying I feel great solidarity with the other teachers, and I think that is one of the keys to our success is that we are unified. We are unified in our approaches; we’re just a great support system.

Examples of solidarity included collaborative lesson planning, teacher and student interventions, department-wide after-school tutoring, and facilitation of AIMS testing workshops before exams were given, teachers sponsored extracurricular activities, and attendance at sporting events the students participated in. Both teachers and the principal discussed how these efforts had not only enabled the instructional teachers to work closer and work harder, but to be more engaged and focused on the students and their successes.

Data analysis. Teachers and the assistant principal discussed how they were constantly engaged in data analysis which drove necessary instructional and curriculum adjustments which met specific student needs (IT & AP). The assistant principal further mentioned, “We constantly use data to modify curriculum”. As shared by both the

teachers and administrators, these needs have constantly changed and the teachers and administrators sensed a deep responsibility to be keenly aware of changes and challenges and wanted to meet them before there were major problems. The increase of workshops and after-school tutoring were two such efforts that were created as a result of data analysis and the further result of improved student academic success. Using Galileo benchmark testing of all students three times per year, a placement exam upon enrollment, and collective teacher-created exams provided ample amounts of data from which teachers and administrators gathered and analyzed to determine student needs (IT, P, & AP).

Open communication. The teachers and administrators discussed they were adamant about having provided not only school employees, but students, their families, and the community with an open-door/open communication policy. English teacher two mentioned, “I’m a very big advocate of leaving my door open after school. My door is open Monday – Friday, even for most of lunch and prior to the first bell ringing, as well”. Anytime a student or fellow teacher had a concern, they had been welcomed and encouraged to speak with the best person they sensed would be supportive of concerns or challenges that had been identified. In turn, the principal and teachers shared that this had also developed a culture of trust amongst the instructional teachers. This was indicated by English teacher three; she stated the WHS teachers were “a close knit faculty who know each other and what is going on in their student’s lives”. English teacher two stated, “It really is communication. We push our kids, but teaching them to communicate with adults so they’re not afraid of it. I think that’s another thing we do really well here”. This

feeling of collaboration amongst the teachers also provided strong bonds that extended to the students in their time of need. For example, if a teacher was out sick, the principal mentioned she would “jump in and teach a workshop for the ill teacher”.

Celebratory climate. Students and teachers constantly looked for positive achievement from students and celebrated them accordingly. As discussed in the teacher focus groups/interviews, celebrations have come in the form of classroom-wide high-fives, announcements of accomplishments, brief classroom parties, student appreciation days and events, teacher’s recognition, and tokens of appreciation. Classroom observations revealed that students were extremely respectful of teachers and each other while learning in the classroom was taking place. For example, when each teacher started classes, students immediately became on task and helped each other as the teacher finished with attendance taking and reading daily class-related announcements. At the beginning of class, typically celebrations of student accomplishments took place (IT). As observed by the researcher, students seemed to enjoy the opportunity to support one another and also appeared to enjoy the positive classroom environment, per classroom observations. Math teacher one reported that students were more focused in the class and wanted to communicate their successes as well. As math teacher three shared, teachers sensed students were “intrinsically motivated to learn and are committed to learning on their own”.

Limited parent involvement. As discussed by the teachers and principal, WHS parents were not very involved on the campus or their student’s educations. Even though the school provided multiple opportunities for parents to visit and become involved

through curriculum nights, open houses, meet-the-teacher events, and extracurricular opportunities, it seemed to fall to the responsibility of the teachers to fill-in when parents were missing (IT). For example, math teacher two asserted “we don’t have any, really that much parent involvement. I mean open house. I don’t think I’ve ever had more than five show up”. Math teacher one mentioned teachers often attended sporting events and cheered on the participating students and were usually the ones making calls home to report student challenges, but calls requesting meetings were often not returned or meetings participated in by parents. Math teacher three stated:

I’ve hardly ever had significant interaction with a parent. Most of my emails about grades go unanswered. I have the refreshing few who email me back and I have, I can think of two parents this whole year who have actually voluntarily reached out to talk to me on the phone about their student, about wanting to do well, about motivating them to succeed.

Additionally, math teacher two said,

Our parents are so busy working and taking care of younger siblings and trying to keep things afloat, that I feel it has been passed onto us to make that excellence. I mean, parents don’t help out with prom, they don’t chaperone dances. If someone’s going to watch a spirit bus, it’s probably one of us. That’s the thing I wished we had more of at this school (parent involvement).

This was an area the teachers and administrators would like to see improved to not only help their students excel further in their studies, but to show support for the school as a whole (IT & P).

Advanced placement classes. WHS offered optional Advanced Placement (AP) classes for all interested students to take during their time at the school (WHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook, [SRHS, 2013, p. 17], and school website). AP courses were created and monitored by the CollegeBoard, a non-profit organization that “connects students to college success and opportunity” (CollegeBoard, 2014b, p.1). The organization helped students prepare for college through the AP program which consists of college-level classes and associated exams. Students who successfully passed the classes and their exams may be able to earn credits towards college (CollegeBoard, 2014a). As presented in the curricular artifact, the WHS Student Handbook (SRHS, 2013, p. 17-22), WHS offered the following AP classes: AP English, AP Statistics, AP Biology, AP U.S. History.

Dual enrollment agreement with Grand Canyon University. According to the principal, WHS had in place a dual enrollment agreement with Grand Canyon University to advance interested and qualified students the opportunity to earn high school and college credits while still enrolled in high school. The principal mentioned in an interview, “we work with Grand Canyon University for our dual enrollment offerings” The principal also shared that class offerings differed from semester-to-semester and were based on student enrollment levels. For example, the principal outlined in focus

group/interviews that if a class was offered and there weren't enough students who signed up, the class would not be held.

Student acceptance of each other. As discussed by the teachers and both administrators, amongst one of the most reported factors that made WHS so successful was the culture of acceptance amongst the students. Math teacher two reported,

We have just the most random group of kids that I've ever seen in my life.

They bond really well with each other and I haven't seen kids that would have never talked to each other, ever. They get along and hang-out at this school which is awesome.

Yet another teacher, English teacher two, discussed, "we don't have as many of those cliques as you would in a large school. A least I've experienced in the past".

The researcher observed in more than one classroom that students truly cared for each other, from not only providing necessary supplies to use during class, but lending assistance to those who were struggling on their assignments. Math teachers two and three shared that tolerance for different personalities of students also made for a safe and comfortable environment for all students. In another focus group/interview, math teacher two outlined, "They get along really well. I feel in my high school kids were mean; they were cruel, and here, everybody gets along and it's really like a big family". The principal also stated that she has seen "the valedictorian hanging-out with a freshman who wasn't the highest performing student".

High expectations. Teachers and the principal at WHS held high academic expectations for their student. For example, the principal mentioned, "We have high

expectation of our students”. Teachers instilled this level of performance and confidence in their classes on a daily basis through the execution of lessons, tests, tutoring, make-up work, communication home to parents, and opportunities for goal setting, and preparing for college entrance processes. During one of the focus groups/interviews, English teacher three stated,

I love how we push our kids even through they’re not used to being pushed. Eventually, I’d say, about 90% of them will rise up and they’ll meet our expectations, especially that junior or senior level student. We have a way of pushing our kids to go to college and do things they may not get anywhere else or from another adult figure.

Both the teachers and administrators discussed how passing the AIMS test on the first attempt was a standard effort as a result of after-school tutoring, workshops before AIMS test administration, opportunities to make-up work, and a celebratory classroom environment that were all part of the high expectations environment of the school.

Table 11 provides a summary of findings regarding Research Question 2 for WHS.

Table 11

Research Question 2 Summative: WHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Tutoring program	Increased grades, higher test scores	Higher high school graduation rates, better college entrance results

Table 11 (continued)

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Workshops	Focused preparation on standards not met in math and English Language Arts benchmark tests, held two weeks before AIMS testing	Increased AIMS test scores on standard in math and English Language Arts
Math Topics Classes and Essential Elements of English Classes	Prepared students for AIMS tests, math and English Language Arts, 9 th and 10 th grades	Improved AIMS test scores and earned elective credits, increased high school graduation and college acceptance
Personal potential attitude	Increased motivation to learn and achieve at high levels, specific goals for college and careers are highlighted and presented by teachers to show students can accomplish more than just what they currently have seen within their families	Students wanted to pass tests/graduate from high school and move onto college, confidence to go to college and succeed
Future Freshman Academy	Helped incoming freshmen to improve academic skills, results of entrance exam help teachers to determine student academic strengths and weaknesses	Increased student confidence coming into high school campus, more accurate placement of student in high school classes and better class grade point average
Culture of hard work and caring	New and existing teacher success	Student learning and success due to dedication
High expectations for students	Student success/teacher success	Increased graduation, AIMS scores
Data analysis	Curriculum adjustment	Increased instructional effectiveness, high AIMS scores

Table 11 (continued)

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Celebrating successes	Positive school culture	Relaxed and confident students and teachers
Extra-Curricular Activities	Increased student dedication to school	Higher grades to play in sports, camaraderie with students
Limited parent involvement	Lower student dedication to school	Lower confidence, lower grades, lack of education values
Students acceptance of each other	Respect for each other, strong bonds with others	Safe and caring environment, willingness to learn
Open Communication	Increased trust amongst teachers and students, teachers, and parents	Students felt supported and confident to learn, they were known for who they were and became more confident in learning and attaining goals
AP Classes	Increased high school curriculum rigor	Opportunity for students to earn college credits while in high school upon successful passage of a national exam in each content area class
Dual Enrollment with Grand Canyon University	Increased rigor in classes; opportunity to earn high school and college credits while still enrolled in high school, access to college classes	College-level classes offered to high school students; makes for college transition easier; jump start on college degree

Research Question 2: Cross-Case Synthesis

The purpose of the cross-case synthesis was to provide the reader with the opportunity to see commonalities of programs and supports that were present in both

schools (see Table 12). The cross-case synthesis was derived from the triangulation of the data of focus groups/interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts information.

Table 12

Research Question 2: Cross-Case Synthesis

East High School	West High School
Data analysis/usage – benchmark testing	Data analysis/usage - benchmark testing
High expectations of students	High expectations of students
Leap (required tutoring), voluntary tutoring	After-school tutoring (required and voluntary)
Small campus	Small campus
Individualized support for students	Individualized support for students
Safe campus	Safe campus
Hard working teachers	Expectations that teachers worked hard and give most of their time
Respectful students	Respectful students
Caring students	Students cared for one another
Culture of professionalism	Culture of professionalism

Findings: Research Question 3

What characteristics prevailed within the schools that experienced success that might not exist within economically comparable schools?

In research question three, the data showed that EHS and WHS were different from schools in the areas where they were located. Every school, no matter where it was

located or who worked there, had individual and distinguishable characteristics that had made each unique and applicable to the students who attended and to the communities in which they resided. For example, a school located in a rural portion of Arizona may be the only school in the area. It served children and families located in the area and provided not only education for the students, but a place of entertainment for the community through musical performances or sporting events (FB Rural Development, 2010). Additionally, the school may have also been a place where the Town Council may have met and may have served as a local shelter in time of an emergency (FB Rural Development, 2010).

Research Question 3: EHS

In the case of EHS, there were distinguishing characteristics that may not have existed in economically comparable schools.

Charter school. EHS was a charter school that opened in 1995 and was one of the first charter schools in Arizona. At the time of its opening, the school's focus was as a credit recovery program for students who were considered to be at-risk and who needed to earn high school course credits to transfer back to their home high schools (IT & P). EHS was a "credit recovery school prior to 2003", according to focus group/interviews with English teacher one. Also, it was found to be performing poorly in school audits that something had to be done quickly (IP). EHS was transformed into its current focus as an early-college model school in 2004, and its teachers conducted traditional instruction in high school classes and combined college classes for those students who were qualified to attend, as mentioned in focus groups/interviews with English teachers one, two, and

three. Additionally, in 1994 the Arizona legislature allowed for charter schools to begin operating as a means to provide an opportunity for increased student achievement and allowed parents more choices in where to send their children for an education (ADE, 2014b). Furthermore, charter schools did not have geographic boundaries like traditional public schools did. They could cap class sizes within a school. If the number of applicants exceeded a capped class size, the charter school must provide an equitable system, such as a lottery, to admit students (ADE, 2014b). EHS has provided a lottery system in the past in the event the number of students exceeded the number of openings (GWECHS, 2013, p. 12). Additionally, EHS had not provided its own bussing of students to its site, but provided each student with a public transit bus pass to attend its campus (GWECHS, 2013, p. 17).

EHS was located in an area that was more commercial and had only limited number of residential neighborhoods located within its immediate boundaries. The school was not far from a major airport, so hotels, restaurants, and commercial businesses surrounded the college campus it was located on (Smith & Halstead, 2014). The principal mentioned that the area where the college campus was located was also considered to be an “inner-city location” as its geographic location from downtown Phoenix was within six miles (MapQuest, 2014a).

Early college model. Another unique characteristic of EHS was that it was located on a community college campus and its charter sponsor was a large, urban community college district (ADE, 2012d). The school also focused its curriculum around preparation for college classes with a Seminar course required of all freshmen and newly

enrolled students (EHS 2011 – 2102 Course Description). College classes were worked into qualified high school student schedules, and they were able to earn not only community college credits and concurrent high school credits. Students may also have worked towards earning a college associate's degree, and graduating with both this degree and a high school diploma at the same time (IT &P; EHS 3013 – 2014 Student Handbook, [GWECHS, 2013, p. 8, 21]). Additionally, college tuition and other fees were not charged to the student as the charter school was able to pay for these courses for qualified students (IP &.E; EHS 2013 – 2104 Student Handbook, [GWECHS, 2013, p. 21]). The early college model was also another characteristic not found in economically comparable schools.

Governing board structure. In Arizona, each charter school was required to have its own appointed governing board (ASBCS, 2009), but in the case of EHS, the community college system's governing board served as its ruling body (ADE, 2012d). Additionally, the community college governing board members were elected persons from locations within a large metropolitan county located in Arizona and were not appointed (MCCCD, n.d.). The responsibility of the Maricopa County Community College Governing Board was:

Governing Board Make-Up: The Governing Board of the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) is currently made up of five persons elected from geographical districts within Maricopa County. The Board will expand to include two At-Large positions in 2014. Board members are elected in staggered years to four-year terms*. Board members routinely meet on the second

and fourth Tuesdays of each month to maintain the colleges of the District under powers given to them pursuant to Title 15, Chapter 12 of the Arizona Revised Statutes. Current members of the Governing Board are: Mr. Doyle Burke, Mr. Alfredo Gutierrez, Mr. Randolph Elias Lumm, Mrs. Debra Pearson, and Mr. Dana Saar. At-Large Members to be announced (MCCCD, n.d.).

The governance of the Maricopa County Community College Board was:

Maricopa Governance is a leadership model adopted by the Governing Board in 1996 that establishes a framework for accountability to its constituents. One of the most important roles of the Governing Board is to identify outcomes for the purpose of better serving and being accountable to its constituencies, which include the People of Maricopa County, Students, Private and Public Sector Employers, Universities, and Primary and Secondary Schools. The Board governs the District on behalf of its stakeholders. (MCCCD, n. d.)

Small school. EHS held an enrollment of approximately 300 students in grades 9–12. Economically comparable public schools have held several thousand students in these grades. For example, a close proximity Phoenix Union High School has an enrollment of 2,667 in grades 9 – 12 (North High School, 2014). Class sizes, as determined via classroom observations, averaged approximately 16 students whereas many large public schools classrooms averaged 30 or more students (OE). Information gathered also determined that teachers of EHS sensed a small school environment was advantageous to the students who attended as each one was well-known by the teachers

and the administrative team. For example, English teacher one stated, “We’ve never reached the capacity of 100 (students) per grade level. We try and cap it at 75 to keep the campus small”. If challenges have arisen, bureaucracy “layers are few and efforts and resources can be mobilized quickly to meet student needs without waiting for time wasting approvals”, according to the principal.

Research Question 3: WHS

Prevailing characteristics that were in WHS that set it apart from economically comparable schools in its geographical location were numerous.

Charter school. WHS was also a charter high school that opened in 2007 (ADE, 2012d). It was unique in that the charter was held by a corporation that provided K-12 education to students in multiple states which included Arizona (Leona Group, 2014). WHS was in a free-standing building that enrolled students in grades 9 – 12 and utilized a college preparatory curriculum (WHS 2013 - 2014 Student Handbook [SRHS, 2013, p. 3]; school website). Students who attended the school also were able to participate in sports, theater, clubs, and multiple other extracurricular activities (WHS 203 – 2104 Student Handbook [SRHS, 2013, p. 11 -13]; school website). WHS was located just south of a major interstate freeway in the western area of Phoenix that was heavily industrial. Due to its location near the interstate, the school’s location was surrounded by multiple corporations, such as Ferguson, AirCold Supply, and Arizona Discount Movers, whose corporate focus was distribution of goods and services within the state of Arizona and beyond (Google Maps, 2014a). WHS had more dense residential neighborhoods located south of its campus (Google Maps, 2014b).

Governing board. The governing board for WHS was an appointed body, as was the case for many charter schools in Arizona (Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, 2009). Traditional public school districts have held periodic elections for the members of a specific geographic community the school district was located in to elect members to serve the interests of the families within a particular local school district (ASBA, 2013). In the case of WHS and its corporate charter holder, the school was established as a non-profit foundation with its own governing board. The foundation that was responsible for overseeing WHS was entitled American Charter School Foundation and originated in Michigan in 1998 (American Charter Schools Foundation, 2012). There were five governing board members who lived in different parts of the United States including Michigan, Hawaii, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Arizona (American Charter Schools Foundation, 2012). The mission of the American Charter School Foundation was:

The mission of the ACSF is to promote the charter school movement in the United States with the goal of improving the public school system by creating a more competitive environment, providing parents and students with freedom of choice, and striving for higher academic standards. To assist in the accomplishment of this goal, the ACSF will do any or all of the following:

- Apply for charter school applications
- Provide supplemental educational services
- Operate as an educational management company
- Serve as a governing body for charter schools

- Acquire property for school sites and facilities
- Provide startup funding and capital investment”. (American Charter Schools Foundation, 2012)

All governing board meetings were held in Phoenix, and they abided by Arizona open meeting laws by posting their board agenda at least 24 hours in advance for public viewing. The public was also invited to attend the meetings and become familiar with the operations of the foundation and the schools it manages. Board members who were located out-of-state call into the meetings to participate (American Charter Schools Foundation, 2012).

College preparation. The WHS mission was to ensure that all of their students were prepared for college, as stated by the principal, assistant principal, and teachers in focus group/interviews and mentioned on the school’s website. The curriculum was college level; teachers helped students with college applications, entrance interviews, financial aid and scholarship applications, dorm applications, resumes, and cover letters, and any other tasks needed to help them feel confident about graduating from high school and making a seamless transition into the college of their choice (IT, P, & AP). WHS offered AP classes for interested students and had an agreement with Grand Canyon University for students who wished to participate in dual enrollment and earn university credit while in high school. The principal mentioned in an interview, “We work with Grand Canyon University for our dual enrollment offerings” These efforts were part of the academic focus of the school, as mentioned in focus groups/interviews with the math

and English teachers, principal and assistant principal, and artifact, WHS 2013 – 2104 Student Handbook (SRHS, 2013, p. 17-22).

Table 13 presents the cumulative summary of data from research question three for both schools.

Table 13

Research Question 3 Summative: EHS and WHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Charter School	More flexibility in school design, allowed for competition with public schools, differentiation in school choice for students and parents	Increased student achievement based on school choice and school programs that fit better with student and family needs/desires, unique school programs to promote different types of learning environments
Governing Board	Governing boards were appointed for one school and elected for another school, they were focused on a particular school program environment, more flexibility in school operations and were not bound by tightly regulated laws and processes like public school districts	Flexibility to make decisions to meet student market needs and desires, possible higher student achievement because students choose to attend schools with different programmatic elements, higher student motivation to learn and achieve
Small School	Flexibility in meeting student needs more quickly than in large public schools, increased ability to get to know students on a more personal level due to small size, increased trust and professionalism amongst teachers as they know each other and students	Increased student achievement due to more personal learning environment, motivation to attend schools with small class sizes due to increased individual learning models, ability to meet student academic needs and increased student achievement

Table 13 (continued)

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Parent Involvement	Parents learned by attending classes that met their needs, they began to understand what the school was about and how they may help their own student's achievement, first time at a high school setting	Personal increased learning, application of skills to their lives to improve it and their family's wellbeing, confidence to help students in their coursework, increased student learning and achievement, parents may find confidence to attend school and obtain high school or college degree as well
College Preparatory/Early College Model	Early exposure to college while in high school, advanced high school classes to prepare for college transition, opportunity to earn college credits while in high school, seamless transition to college due to intense preparation	Increased motivation for college attendance and graduation, ease of transition to college, confidence to compete and learn at the college level, increased motivation to graduate from high school, high standardized test scores in high school and increased performance in high school classes, better behavior on high school and college campus due to rigor of curriculum and high student expectations

Research Question 3: Cross-Case Synthesis

The cross-case synthesis was a way to disaggregate the data. It showed the commonalities of each school (see Table 14). This was a side-by-side comparison of similar elements found in each school that directly attributed to the academic success of their students.

Table 14

Research Question 3: Cross-Case Synthesis

EHS	WHS
Small school/small classes	Small school/small classes
Trust amongst students and teachers	Trust amongst students and teachers
High expectations	High expectations
Campus on college campus, students able to take college classes while in high school	Free standing building, college preparatory curriculum, dual enrollment college classes with Grand Canyon University, AP classes
Flexibility to meet student needs	Flexibility to meet student needs
Safe campus	Safe campus
Mission statement to create college-ready students	Mission to create college-ready students
Low-socioeconomic students attended	Low-socioeconomic students attended
High rate of minority students attended	High rate of minority students attended

Findings: Research Question 4

What specific student attributes/attitudes were in place that may have contributed to high test scores?

Student attributes and attitudes that were in place at the Title 1 Reward schools was also a topic of research. Although no students were directly involved in the research study, classroom observations and focus groups/interviews with teachers and administrators/leadership team members were the primary means by which this question was answered. Additionally, both schools added or changed teachers since the Reward

designation was presented to them in 2012. New teachers have added their perspectives on how they helped students either to have developed or extended attitudes or attributes which helped ensure their success on high stakes achievement tests.

Research Question 4: EHS

Attitudes and attributes built via relevant courses. EHS math teacher one and English teacher three and administrators mentioned that they made every effort to ensure that courses taken at the high school and college were applicable to have built skills, attitudes, and attributes to become academically successful in each student's current lives and future (IT & P). For example, each student's Education Career Action Plan (ECAP) outlined occupational goals and related classes they needed to prepare for a chosen career, and the ECAP was a requirement for all students to have while they were in high school. "Arizona law now requires students from class of 2013 and beyond to complete an educational career plan to be updated yearly" (EHS 2013 – 2104 Student Handbook [GWECHS, 2013, p. 11]). The counselors and teachers created classes that not only ensured that high school requirements were met, but that courses like personal finance, computer applications, and other college-level courses were built into the document having provided a clear and concise path the student could have rely upon to help meet their career and academic goals, according to the EHS 2013 – 2104 Student Handbook [GWECHS, 2013, p. 11] and EHS 2011 – 2012 Course Description Guide [GWECHS, 2013].

Attributes and attributes built via critical thinking skills. Teachers and administrators spoke often of the need for students to learn critical thinking skills while in

high school (IT & P). Math teacher one replied, “I think if we are sending them out after they leave here, whether it’s post-secondary or not, their education needs to be functional. We teach critical thinking”. They sensed that students who were able to solve problems and who looked critically at various situations would perform better in their classes at the high school and college, and “on all different types of standardized tests, including the AIMS, SAT, and ACT, for example”, as stated by English teacher three in focus groups/interviews. Students participated in learning these critical thinking skills as part of the AVID program and then applied them in each of their classes. English teacher two replied in focus groups/interviews, “We have never done test prep strategies, never gave them books and bored them to death with menial little tests like that. We do critical thinking work inside the classroom”. Demonstration of critical thinking skills were exhibited in classroom observations through teacher-student and student-student discussion about a current classroom topic. Additionally, a school debate team was one area that English teacher two sensed would be beneficial for students to formally put their critical thinking skills into a competitive practice, English teacher three stated to the researcher while conducting a classroom observation.

Attitudes and attributes built via student-lead conferences. An essential part of each student’s experience at EHS was to participate in student lead conferences, as mentioned in focus group/interviews with the principal, federal programs director, and counselor. This was also revealed in the EHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook, (GWECHS, 2013, p. 10) and on the school’s website. These were required for students to organize samples of work, tests, projects, and scores of the assignments, projects, tests,

and to outline and explain progress in all of their high school classes to present to their parents in partnership with the teacher and student success liaison, if needed. Again, this information was presented in focus groups/interviews with all teachers, the principal, federal programs director, and counselor and was` stated in the EHS 2013 – 2104 Student Handbook, (GWECHS, 2013, p. 10) and on the school’s website. Students learned the skills and developed the attitude and attributes to be responsible for their academic success by having learned to track and communicate their progress in each of their high school classes (EHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook [GWECHS, 2013, p. 7]). Student-lead conferences took place twice per year and all students and parents were required to attend (EHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook [GWECHS, 2013, p. 10]). The teachers and leadership team members reported that students who knew exactly how they were progressing in each high school class had a higher level of personal responsibility of what needed to be accomplished to improve or expand their learning. For example in the student compact that was signed by students and parents prior to enrollment it stated in the student section “I am responsible for my own success” (EHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook, [GWECHS, 2013, p. 7]). Students, having communicated their academic performance in a formal presentation to their parents provided even more depth of understanding on their part. As stated by math teacher two, “Whether it is academic behavior or attendance, we make sure the parent knows what is going on so we can come up with a game plan, whether it’s tutoring or whatever is needed”. This event also required parents to participate directly in the classroom rather than indirectly through a

written progress report sent only from the teacher through the United States Postal Service (IT & P; EHS 2013 – 2014 Student Handbook, [GWECHS, 2013, p. 10]).

Attitudes and attributes built via college degree opportunity. Teachers and the principal mentioned the opportunity for qualified students to earn a college degree at the same time as earning a high school diploma also contributed to student attributes and attitudes to excel academically (IT & P). According to math teacher two, as summarized from focus groups/interviews,

It's an early college school which means we try to get the student to start taking community college courses while they're attending high school. So we consider it pretty rigorous and we set the bar high and try to push post-secondary education on the students.

Furthermore, administrators stated in their focus groups/interviews that the school was an "environment that provides students of diverse backgrounds with an opportunity to acquire an AA degree alongside a high school diploma" (IP). The principal sensed that high school students who worked alongside adults matured more quickly, saw their future more clearly, and worked to impress their college professors as they did not want to be viewed simply as a "high school student or just a kid" (IP). Students wanted to earn the respect necessary to be taken seriously at the same level as their adult peers, and many of them worked hard to earn that (IT & P). The principal stated, "Kids don't want to be viewed as the youngest odd ball out. They want to be seen as college students and mature". Students demonstrated they should be taken seriously. Their motivation for knowledge and personal responsibility were quickly learned and implemented to have

met the high expectations put into place in the adult world they were a part of. As summarized from focus groups/interviews with the EHS leadership team which comprised the principal, federal programs director, and counselor. Table 15 provides a summative for EHS.

Table 15

Research Question 4 Summative: EHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Made learning relevant to life	Students learned more and appreciate their classes	Higher student motivation to learn and clearer picture of future
Critical thinking skills	Increased student learning and application of skills in different situations (i.e., college classes, part-time job, problems/challenges, etc.)	Increased graduation rate, AIMS scores, higher rate of entering college
Student-lead conferences	Teachers and student success liaison worked with parents and students to succeed, student is fully aware of progress in each class	High graduation rate, AIMS scores, personal responsibility in learning and progress, parent involvement in student's education
Opportunity to take college classes in high school and earn a college degree	More motivated students to achieve, students want to be taken seriously by adult peers and college professors, high degree of personal learning accountability	Higher high school graduation, attendance, and college attendance and completion, higher motivation to score well on high stakes tests to prove worth to compete and learn at the college level while in high school

Research Question 4: WHS

WHS teachers and administrators also noted numerous student attributes and attitudes that were in place to help students achieve high scores on academic achievement tests. English teacher two mentioned students possessed “intrinsic motivation and pride”. Classroom observations and teacher and administrator focus groups/interviews were the primary means by which this information was derived. Again, no students were directly involved in this study, but the teachers at WHS had made it a point to focus on every student not only to know each one well, but to put forth a positive and strong culture of learning and achievement that helped all students, even those who may not be sure of their futures, that they could achieve their goals. English teacher three mentioned in an interview/focus groups that,

Everyone’s out to do their best individually, but there is that sense of upholding a legacy. They know we had a year with 95% reading, 92% writing, and they want to do as well or better or get as close as they can.

They don’t want to be the class that dropped it to a 70 something. There is a desire to uphold that excellence.

Attitudes and attributes built via student acceptance of each other. Amongst one of the most reported factors that made WHS so successful was the culture of acceptance amongst the students, as summarized from focus group/interviews from math and English teachers, the principal and assistant principal. Math teacher two reported

We have just the most random group of kids that I’ve ever seen in my life.

The bond really well with each other and I haven’t seen kids that would

have never talked to each other, ever. They get along and hang-out at this school which is awesome.

Math teacher three discussed, “We don’t have as many of those cliques as you would in a large school. A least I’ve experienced in the past”.

The researcher observed in more than one classroom that students truly cared for each other, exhibited by providing necessary supplies to use during class, and lending assistance to those who were struggling on their assignments. Tolerance for different personalities of students also made for a safe and comfortable learning environment for all students (IT). In another interview, math teacher two said, “They get along really well. I feel in my high school kids were mean, they were cruel and, everybody gets along and it’s really like a big family”. Research conducted by the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California (n.d.), stated that,

Most teenagers naturally seek out connections with their peers. Some of these connections are based on common interests while others are based on a desire to belong. College preparation programs can fulfill both of these roles for students; by gathering college-bound students together, they create a peer group in which students can support one another and motivate each other to succeed. College preparation programs should create environments that unite students based on a common academic identity and allow them to support one another to achieve the ultimate goal: admission to the college of their choice. (p. i)

WHS seemed to have cultivated a culture of connection with its college preparatory program to help students support each other while studying for high school graduation and college entrance admission to the college of each student's choice, as deduced from focus groups/interviews with math and English teachers and the principal.

Attitudes and attributes built via celebratory climate. Teachers and administrators at WHS made it a point to celebrate even small accomplishments for all students (IT).

They sensed this climate contributed to student confidence by recognizing accomplishments within and outside of the classroom (IT). English teacher two discussed

I see success with each student individually. I will celebrate the little successes. When kids who struggle with turning in work on time or if one kid that's always getting Cs and they finally get a B, I'm huge on celebrating that with them" (ITW). Another teacher stated "I consider success growth. I think as long as you're constantly going and constantly learning, turning yourself into a person that you can be more and more proud of. I think that's what it means to be successful as an individual and that's something I try and emphasize with my seniors.

Research stated that positive classroom climate, in this case a celebratory climate within the WHS classrooms, showed that students were "more engaged are attentive, participate in class discussions, and exert efforts in class activities, and exhibit interest and motivation to learn" (Fredricks, Blumenfield, & Paris, 2004; Marks, 2000; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Additionally, Reyes, et al. (2012) mentioned that classrooms where teacher-student relationships were "warm,

caring, nurturing, and congenial” (p.701) delivered positive classroom environments where students were provided with the mental space and confidence for learning to occur (Reyes, et.al., 2012; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Lastly, students who were enrolled in emotionally supportive classrooms usually choose more “complex cognitive activities (Howes & Smith, 1995; Reyes, et.al., 2012, p. 7 01) and performed better academically as evidenced through grades and standardized test scores” (Reyes et.al., 2012, p.701). Classroom observations also revealed that some teachers left time at the start of every class period for students to self-announce some of their own accomplishments. In a few classrooms, the researcher noted students reported they had passed a particularly difficult test, some obtained jobs, and some were able to help other students through the school’s peer tutoring program to exceed on classroom assignments and exams. Celebrating alongside students who wanted to accomplish and who have done so continued to be a part of the school culture of learning and achievement.

Attitudes and attributes built via student motivation to pass achievement tests.

Students at WHS wanted to pass their AIMS tests and other standardized tests on the first try. Math teacher three reported the following in an interview about her classes

I want nothing more than for you guys to get this out of the way because this AIMS isn’t going to teach you everything you need to know. We need to get through it. I do stress to them as much as I possibly can to get their buy-in to what I’m saying so they don’t have to keep trying (to pass).

Math teacher one discussed, “In order to leave my four walls, you need to pass this test. You need to graduate”. Students did not want to have the issue of failure and being

prohibited from moving forward toward their goals. Teachers made it a point to help students master the standards that were questioned on the AIMS tests through workshops that were held two weeks before exams. These workshops provided targeted and customized instruction and support for students who did not successfully pass benchmark tests (IT & P). Additionally, teachers adjusted curriculum and instruction with the use of benchmark test data analysis in each of their math and English language arts classes to meet current student skill levels. They then worked hard to increase the rigor to meet high levels of expectations (IT, P, & AP). English teacher two replied, “I had to review how to write a thesis with my seniors this week” (IT). Additionally, English teacher one said,

I like that I can legitimately have my students adapting Hamlet into skits as an activity that my administration understands and sees the benefits of the adaptation process, the creativity. I think we have a little bit more freedom that a lot of other schools would.

There was also a school-wide attitude, as reported by the principal of “you beat the test and don’t let the test beat you” (IP). For example, during the spring 2014 administration of AIMS, teachers and administration placed eye-black (like that found on football players) under their eyes and the eyes of willing students which ensured all involved had a “game face” on to “beat the test” (IT & P). As stated by math teacher one during a focus group/interview,

Our English teacher went around and put black warrior marks on all of the student’s faces and I know they gave them a little treat with some sayings on it for the English AIMS. I did that last year for my first year of AIMS

students and just that encouragement of I know you can do it. We have your back.

This celebration of winning has been in place since 2012 when the school was awarded the Title 1 Reward School designation.

Attitudes and attributes built via college focus. Teachers collectively sensed that through their curriculum, instructional efforts, and attitude that it was their mission to prepare students for more than a high school diploma. This was accomplished by English teacher three having reported, “I’m getting them ready not only academically for what they’re going to move on to, but socially and emotionally for what they’re going to move onto after they leave this school”. College preparedness was essential for the low-socioeconomic students that attended WHS to move past their current lives and into productive, enhanced lifetimes that were filled with opportunities that only an education can provide (IT & P). The teachers and administrators understood that each student must make the personal choice of whether or not to attend college, but it was the teachers’ and administrators’ mission to prepare students to make the best choice possible. Nearly all of the students at WHS had applied to a college of their choice, were admitted, and flourished in college settings, according to a summation of focus/group interviews with the principal and assistant principal. For example, math teacher two discussed, “A lot of them kind of have the idea that ‘I’m going to do what my dad does or I’m going to do what my mom does – she is a stay-at-home-mom, and I’ll do that of the rest of my life’”. The researcher clarified what the teachers were saying by asking them if the purpose of their school was to help each student change their current situation by looking at broader

opportunities. All of the teachers in the interview collectively answered “yes” to the clarification statement. This was evidenced when many school alumni came back to visit their teachers and the current student body, according to math teacher two. For example, the principal mentioned in an interview that former students of WHS have visited the campus in the past to talk to current students on their experiences at the school and about their experiences in college. Table 16 presents the summative information for WHS.

Table 16

Research Question 4 Summative: WHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Celebration of accomplishments	Increased student motivation to learn, positive learning environment shared by teachers and all other students	Increased confidence, passage of classes and attendance at school, increased learning levels, and graduation rates
Students care about passing tests	Motivation to achieve, teacher support to pass tests	Increased AIMS test scores, graduation rates,
Focus on college	Students understood their work and studying was for a purpose beyond earning a high school diploma	Belief in self and confidence to move past high school into college to meet personal goals, increased motivation to achieve high scores on achievement tests, make a better life for oneself and family

Table 16 (continued)

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Student acceptance of one another	Student peer groups helped to relate with each other in a similar academic setting	Greater chance of graduating from high school with high enough achievement to gain entry into college of choice
Student acceptance of one another	Peer groups assisted each other with meeting academic goals and staying focused on them	Focused actions on graduating from high school and being accepted into college of choice

Findings: Research Question 5

What specific leadership actions or attributes did principals have that may have contributed to high test scores?

A critical component of student achievement was the role of the instructional leader. This research uncovered answers that may have been a part of the success of the two schools involved in this study. Specific research questions were dedicated in each of the two focus groups/interviews with the leadership team at EHS which comprised of one principal, one federal programs director, and one counselor. The focus groups/interviews at WHS included one principal and one assistant principal only. Having identified what attitudes and/or attributes of each school leader and team was examined in research question five.

Research Question 5: EHS

The principal at EHS had chosen to operate her school in a leadership team format. This team was comprised of her, (the principal), one federal programs director,

and one school counselor. Decisions were collective in nature and were discussed and reviewed as a team on a continuous basis. Teachers had an open door to reach any of these school leaders (IP). As mentioned in focus groups/interviews, each of the members of the EHS leadership team was open, professional, and timely. For example, the principal regularly solicited “input and acts on it and seeks common solutions all can live with and feels that all teachers own the school”, according to English teacher two. The principal mentioned in focus group/interview that “teachers and office personnel along with parents and students all provided the EHS leadership team with input on any changes that may be needed to help students become more successful academically throughout the school year”. For example, teachers suggested implementing the Check and Connect program throughout the campus. Additionally, teachers had stated that the leadership team was welcoming, the culture was positive, everyone was professional “allowing us to learn new topics as professional development’s really big here” (English teacher one). It was the foundation of EHS leadership team to have been proactive in nature and professional in demeanor with all teachers and teachers. The federal programs director stated,

Teachers always get what they need; we trust them (teachers) and give them autonomy to have open dialogues about what is going on in the classroom and to (feel safe) to ask for help when needed. As a leadership team, we sensed we were supported by the college leadership to do our jobs, and this helped with my own motivation to lead.

The federal programs director also mentioned that the principal was “laid back and relaxed and ensures that the job at hand gets done”. Each member of the leadership team held separate responsibilities and tasks to help the school and its students be successful, but it was the collective decision making and efforts that had contributed to student and school success.

Quick response time. The leadership team discussed that due to cohesive teamwork, they were more responsive to meeting challenges in a timely and effective manner – they took input and acted accordingly. The counselor stated they worked well together and that communication was open. For example, she stated it’s “hey (to the principal) can I talk to you really quick? I have an idea” (IC). There were few layers in place that prevented solving problems due to bureaucracy (IC). They credited the open communication and a culture of professionalism and trust that provided the opportunity for teachers to have collaborated confidently and comfortably while communicating student and teacher needs. English teacher three stated,

We don’t have to spend our own money on things that you need for the kids here. This is the first school that I’ve gone to where there are actual real workshops where I’m sent to learn best practices. I’ve never had that before.

The EHS leadership team sensed that there were very few, if any, layers of bureaucracy in place that would have slowed down the understanding and action needed in the cases of student achievement. The principal pointed out “we are a small school because there are not all these layers to go through to get approval for something like an

afterschool tutoring program. It was about identifying and being able to respond” (IP). For example, one of the signature programs in place was Check and Connect. This was a socio-emotional program that broke the entire student body down into small groups of approximately 20 or fewer students led by one teacher. These groups met every Friday during the instructional day. The goal behind Check and Connect was to be able to get to know each student personally and foster open and trusting communication between student and teacher to identify, for example, academic and sometimes personal issues that may be hindering the student’s progress in school. This comprehensive explanation came forth in focus group/interviews with the principal, federal program’s director, and counselor. It was also mentioned in focus groups/interviews with both math teacher one and English teacher three. Check and Connect was a suggestion by English teacher three to bring this level of personal support forward as they noticed that students were sometimes simply attending school and really didn’t feel connected to the teachers, or the school itself (IT). The principal added, “I think our Check and Connect, our whole culture is about resiliency as well (IP).

Dedication to all students. The administrative team identified and worked hard to provide a means to allow every high school student to take college classes. Specifically, the principal mentioned that “we’ve done what we can to fundraise independently to try and bring funds in so these guys can have access to college classes. It isn’t enough”. Due to proposition 300 having been passed in 2009, students without state residency status were not privileged to participate in certain programs, such as those using state funds, to pay tuition and fees for community college classes. These students were only able to earn

a basic high school education/diploma. The principal shared that the leadership team and teachers have worked hard raising funds through private sources to pay for the out-of-state tuition charged to these students so they may be able to enjoy the same college benefits and opportunities other documented students have enjoyed (IP). Dedication to an education in high school and community college for all was one other strength the team mentioned had contributed to overall student and school academic success. The principal explained “as an early college high school, I know we are put into a unique situation, but for an early college school, I feel like we should be able to provide the same educational opportunities for all students” (IP). This was an ongoing effort of the leadership team to allow all students, especially those who don’t have legal state residency, to enroll and enjoy community college classes while in high school

Shared leadership model. The leadership team at EHS held each other in high regard in order to meet the demands of students and teachers. As stated by the federal programs director in focus group/interviews, “We are a collaborative team with a positive, family-oriented culture for all”. They also expressed gratification towards each other as they have not asked another person within the school to do something they would not do themselves. For example, the principal mentioned in focus group/interview, “No job is too small or too big to let people struggle”. The leadership team for EHS collectively expressed in focus groups/interviews that going above and beyond what was expected built ownership in the school, and it worked well to get teachers what they needed to do their jobs. The leadership team was able to respect all teachers; the leadership team expressed sincerity in communication with all levels of employees, and

the effort has been instrumental for all teachers to show up for work every day knowing that there was someone “who had your back” (IP).

Support from the top. The principal and the leadership team also have noted that communication with the college president had been instrumental in how they function as a cohesive leadership unit. For example, the principal mentioned that the college president asked her “why the school isn’t larger due to its success”. The principal responded that “it was successful because it was small, and it is best to keep it that way” (IP). The principal stated that there was open communication and trust from the college president which allowed the entire EHS leadership team the latitude and a high level of confidence and cohesion to do their jobs as they saw fit. As mentioned by one of the principals, “The college provides support to the team to pay teachers well” (IP). The college system was also supportive in not charging EHS rent for the space they used as this saved their budget for other needs. Teachers were paid a higher-than-market rate for a salary, and this helped with attracting and retaining teachers, and the leadership team has enjoyed very little teacher turnover in recent years. The principal also spoke about “We have the ability to pick good teachers and they stay with us” (IP).

Table 17 delineates specific findings to the research question 5 for EHS.

Table 17

Research Question 5 Summative: EHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Input and action	Bottom up communication and effort	Respect of teachers, satisfaction of teachers to solve problems
Shared leadership model	Multi-level of success for teachers, students	Higher student achievement, supported teachers
College classes for all	Fairness and equality in educational opportunities for all students regardless of status	Increased opportunity for academic achievement and motivation to excel, increased AIMS scores, increased graduation rate
Support from the top	College administration supported high school leadership team to do what is necessary to meet daily demands and goals of the school	Leadership team mentioned being supported and motivated to complete their jobs as a team and individuals

Research Question 5: WHS

School leadership at the WHS seemed to be more traditional in nature. There was a principal and an assistant principal on site. They worked closely, cohesively with and through each other to support teachers and students, but the principal was clearly the campus leader. The assistant principal mentioned “she (the principal) is the school leader and she sets the tone and my job is to be supportive of her and the teachers” (IAP). School leaders were trusted by their corporate entity to operate their schools as they saw

fit, so the principal enjoyed autonomy to take care of the needs of the students, teachers, and teachers as she sensed a need to do (IP).

Tough, but fair. The principal at WHS identified that her leadership ability was clearly communicated, and that she was tough but fair in nearly all situations that came her way. She stated in an interview, “I am tough but fair, and I make sure teachers know that they won’t be asked to do something I won’t do. I have high expectations for myself and others” (IP). She reported that this was a critical element in getting efforts started in the school, and it allowed the teachers to know exactly what to expect in different situations. A signature element of her leadership attributes was that she communicated clearly on issues that have presented themselves. For example, a procedure or policy change was communicated in clear and concise terms so that all of the teachers clearly understood it (IP). She also mentioned that she has constantly reminded her teachers why they exist – for the students and to prepare them for college, as mentioned by the principal in focus group/interview. She also mentioned that “teachers won’t be asked to do something she won’t do” (IP).

High expectations for teachers and self. The principal stated that she was very clear about her expectations for students and the same went for teachers and her. She stated “I have high expectations for myself and others” (IP). Achieving was a way of life at WHS and all teachers and front office personnel were willing to do whatever it took to make the school successful (IP). For example, she mentioned that teachers “arrive at their classrooms as early as 6:30 a.m. and many leave at 6:30 p.m. or later” (IP).

Cultivating a culture of caring. The principal has stated that she has worked extremely hard alongside the assistant principal to cultivate a culture of caring. The principal mentioned, “We are a big family, and we are here for each other” (IP). She noted that not only was the teaching teachers extremely supportive and trusting with each other, but this trust and support were carried down through all levels of the student. For example, she explained in focus group/interview, “We have amazing students and teachers who rise to high expectations in all they do for the school”. She was quick to note that she has seen students who are new to the school being invited to eat lunch with existing students. She also stated, “Our kids truly care about each other, and it is an accepting, family-like atmosphere - the valedictorian hanging out with a freshman who isn’t the strongest student” (IP). The culture of caring conversation caused the principal to stop briefly and reflect during one interview on the work that she had started and the deeply profound effects it had on teachers and students. She stated the reason “I come to work every day is for the students” (IP).

Use of a mentor. The WHS principal specified that she was in contact with her own high school principal, and this person had been a significant force in her career (IP). She spoke highly of this person, and she had attributed much of her attitudes and attributes as a school leader to the support, guidance, and advice this mentor has shown her over the years. She referenced in focus group/interview “my high school principal is still a mentor to me” (IP).

Table 18 provides summative information for Research Question 5 for WHS.

Table 18

Research Question 5 Summative: WHS

Activities	Outcomes	Impacts
Tough Attitude, Fair Results	Everyone knew what to expect, clear communication	High student achievement, work progresses towards school goals
High Expectations for Self and Teachers	Everyone worked hard for the benefit of students and school reputation, teamwork is key	High student achievement, dedicated teachers with a clear focus on helping all students meet goals and be successful in life
Culture of Caring	All levels of teachers felt supported and confident in doing their jobs, low teacher turnover	Students met each other's needs and teachers knew students on a personal level to help them with academic concerns, having been student centered increased student achievement levels on standardized tests and increases graduation rates
Mentor	Direct guidance, information, and assistance from a trusted colleague	Attributes of fairness, clear communication and expectations were in place to motivate teachers and students to meet goals and exceeded expectations

Summary

Five research questions for this research study uncovered multiple levels of evidence to illuminate how these Title 1 Reward schools successfully helped their low-socioeconomic students to excel on standardized tests.

Question one revealed that EHS had a 94% Free and Reduced Lunch program (ADE, 2012e) participation level within its student body. EHS has also shown high standardized tests results on the AIMS exam. This school had also been recognized for its academic success of high-poverty students through having won the Title 1 Reward School designation as presented by ADE. This evidence had settled research question one.

WHS had also shown a high percentage of its students came from low-income households. This school's Free and Reduced Lunch participation level in 2012 was 78%, according to the ADE (2012e). WHS had also shown high standardized test scores in years 2011 – 2013. ADE had also recognized this school for its outstanding academic achievement with high-poverty students by having won the Title 1 Reward School designation in 2012.

The findings of research question two demonstrated EHS had worked hard to instill a culture of trust amongst its teachers and administrative team, they had employed a student success liaison, and the school had an active AVID program which allowed teachers to help students meet high academic expectations. Furthermore, EHS teachers administered and encouraged a positive student climate and provided parent learning opportunities that involved various personally relevant classes which were held on a community college campus.

WHS provided students with a culture of hard work and caring amongst its teachers which included open communication with the administrators, constant data analysis, and curriculum adjustment. Furthermore, all students were provided with high

learning expectations and teachers who had fostered a celebratory climate that was focused on student academic achievement. WHS was a small high school campus which lent itself to high student achievement. At WHS, student acceptance of each other regardless of personal background provided for a campus that was focused on learning and not on social issues. Limited parent involvement was something the WHS teachers and administrators continued to work hard at overcoming.

Question three illustrated that both schools were charter high schools, but each had a different governing board structure. The EHS governing board had an elected body and operated as a community college governing board whereas the WHS governing board was part of a corporation that had divided its various schools under the control of a non-profit foundation. The foundation had its own board that was appointed (i.e., not elected by a local community) and followed all Arizona open meeting laws. Both schools were small campuses, fewer than 450 in enrollment in grades 9 – 12, and they both focused on high expectations for all students through college preparation programs. One school provided their high school students with an opportunity to take college classes through AP courses and a dual enrollment agreement with a local university prior to high school graduation. The other school offered community college classes to qualified students to begin their college careers while in high school. The goal behind the college classes was for high school students to have earned college credits or an Associate's degree while in high school and have earned a head start on their college career.

Research question four was answered by the information uncovered through focus groups/interviews, observations, and artifact review. It focused on what student attitudes

and attributes were in place at each school and how each school helped to develop these in their students. EHS provided students with relevant courses that had meaning for their futures. For example, EHS required every student to have enrolled in a college preparation class entitled Seminar so they were prepared for college classes. This class covered such topics as time management, study skills, and note taking. Lastly, a requirement of EHS students and parents was to participate in twice-yearly student-led conferences. These conferences were designed to provide direct communication of student progress to parents. This effort increased student responsibility in their own educations. The answer to research question four at WHS included: having instilled a climate of celebration for student accomplishments, student motivation and academic support to pass AIMS exams on the first attempt, and a continuous focus on college that was designed to help each student plan their futures.

Research question five addressed the leadership at each school. Information uncovered what leadership actions or attributes were in place to provide high student achievement on standardized tests. EHS used a shared leadership model which included the federal programs director, school counselor, and the principal herself. Members of the leadership team stated they were able to be successful in their jobs because of support from the college administration. Additionally, the EHS leadership team sensed their quick response time to solve problems. This timeliness to problem solving was a key attribute due to their operating as a collective unit. Finally, their dedication to each student and his/her academic achievement through the ability to personally know each one seemed to have positively impacted student and school success. WHS leadership

showed that the principal was the instructional leader of the campus but clearly worked well with the assistant principal in all aspects of school operations and goals. The principal reported that her attitude of “firm, but fair” provided all teachers with consistent expectations in varying situations. Additionally, the principal stated that she would not ask her teachers to do something she would not do. This attitude tied into her high expectations for herself and the teachers. She also explained that a culture of caring for students had been an ongoing effort for everyone on her campus. Finally, she stated that a mentor had been instrumental in her own success as a school leader.

CHAPTER 5

Implications and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter presents the reader with a summary of major findings as a result of the dissertation study conclusions and also provides important inferences and implications derived from the evidence collected and presented in chapter 4. A discussion of the implications for action was presented here and a recommendation for further research was outlined.

Summary of Major Findings

Research question one outlined evidence that helped to explain how EHS was successful in helping their students be effective on standardized tests. Each school, EHS and WHS, was a small school campus. EHS had a total enrollment of approximately 300 students and WHS had a total enrollment of approximately 450 students. Each campus also had high Free and Reduced Lunch participation. Those Free and Reduced Lunch participation rates were 94% and 78%, respectively and students who shared in this lunch program came from high poverty households. Despite the high levels of poverty found in each of the schools, the teachers and administrators for each campus were able to assist those students with earning high scores on standardized tests. Question one was answered.

Question two results exposed that EHS nurtured a culture of trust amongst teachers and administrators. For example, the administration team hired a full-time student success liaison to support students, parents and teachers; parent learning classes

offered were a strong motivator for families to learn alongside their students and to become involved on the school campus. Teachers were instrumental in identifying challenges and making suggestions for solutions on the EHS campus. One program suggested by teachers was the Check and Connect program. Additional efforts included voluntary and involuntary tutoring (Leap), socio-emotional programs such as Check and Connect, and college skill building courses entitled Seminar and AVID.

WHS focused efforts on tutoring programs held after-school, AIMS preparation classes (entitled workshops) for all freshmen and sophomores to hone their academic skills, and workshops held two weeks before AIMS tests that were designed for students to prepare for standards not met on school benchmark tests. Furthermore, WHS fostered a culture of hard work amongst all teachers and students. They stated constant data analysis was a major factor and the teachers and administrators demonstrated a strong philosophy of caring for students and teachers that was evident.

Question three illustrated for the reader more commonalities between the schools. For instance, major findings included that both schools were charter high schools, but with differing governing board structures. Both schools were small in nature, with fewer than 300 students in enrollment at EHS and only 450 students in enrollment at WHS. A small school environment was foundational to both schools. According to Bloom and Unterman (2012), small schools of choice have demonstrated “markedly improving academic progress and substantially improving graduation prospects, especially for disadvantaged students” (p. 1). The EHS and WHS small school environments seemed to help their students achieve high scores on standardized tests which increased their

graduation rates as most of the student body was comprised of low-socioeconomic and disadvantaged youth.

Major research findings related to question four included that EHS and WHS worked hard to build student attitudes/attributes to have enjoyed success on standardized testing. Specifically, EHS developed these student attitudes/attributes by providing every student with classes that were relevant to their lives; teachers taught critical thinking skills, and the teachers and leadership team members implemented high expectations for all students which were embedded in all classes. Additionally, every student was required to produce and share their class progress with their parents at student-led conferences which took place twice per year. WHS developed student attitudes/attributes through a collective climate of celebration in every classroom. This celebratory climate established high student motivation to pass standardized tests on their first try, and the teachers and administrators continuously emphasized that attending college was important. The teachers and administrators concentrated their efforts and not only helped students to prepare academically for attendance to college, but offered assistance to each student with college-related paperwork such as entrance applications, dorm applications, and financial aid forms. Access to college had been a major focus of efforts for teachers and administrators of both of these schools. The teachers and administrators at these schools put forth efforts that have built student attitudes/attributes that enabled students to achieve academic success on their standardized tests.

Finally, question five results indicated that EHS used a shared leadership model consisting of a principal, federal programs director, and counselor. There was support

from the community college administration to high school administrators to carry out their jobs as they felt necessary, and each teacher and administrator demonstrated a strong and ongoing dedication to every student's academic success. The WHS leadership included the principal who clearly was the campus instructional leader as she held a "firm, but fair" attitude in all of her work. Additionally, she exuded high expectations for herself and all of her teachers; she used a mentor to provide guidance and support in her duties and career as a school leader.

Findings Related to the Literature

Some of the findings from this dissertation study do not support long held ideas that students who live in low-socioeconomic areas have not succeeded in school. Moreover, the results found at EHS and WHS have both supported and not supported the literature discussed in this study by having splintered patterns traditionally held of typical high poverty schools—which included low student attendance, low academic achievement, and low graduation rates. The following pages provide results of evidence from this study as they related to each school and the literature outlined in Chapter 2. The information in the following pages identified whether the research findings affirmed or contradicted the literature. There were four literature articles that contradicted the dissertation study outcomes and four literature articles that affirmed the dissertation study findings.

The following literature items disagreed with the dissertation findings via the multiple outcomes derived from having looked at EHS and WHS efforts to move their students to positive student achievement levels.

Not Supported – Achievement of Poor Students

Contrary to the findings of Maxwell (2012); Maylone (2004), and Reardon (2013), whose different study results showed that students who are poor do not do well in school, EHS revealed that their students have increased student achievement on standardized tests through two tutoring programs: one, a mandatory tutoring program entitled Leap and a second voluntary tutoring program where peer tutors were used to help struggling students. The teachers and administrators delivered high expectations for students and provided a disadvantaged youth college preparation program entitled AVID. Their teachers had taught critical thinking skills in every high school class. Furthermore, the school had an enrollment of approximately 300 students which was considered to be a small school. Results of these efforts have yielded the school a four-year graduation rate of 91% in 2012, an AIMS scores increase over 2012 & 2013 school years, and an attendance rate of 95.3% in 2012.

WHS had increased student academic achievement on standardized tests through teachers and school leadership who concentrated on communication with parents and students. Furthermore, WHS built a celebratory climate in its math and English classes. The principal of WHS scheduled Topics of Math A and B and Essential Elements of English classes for all 9th and 10th grade students which were designed to increase skills in these core academic areas.

WHS teachers facilitated workshops, held two weeks before AIMS tests, which provided students with focused support on core class standards they were not successful on as a result of benchmark testing, WHS teachers and school leadership provided

college entrance support to all seniors who correctly completed college applications and financial aid information. Moreover, WHS held a Future Freshman Academy which improved chances that incoming freshmen would have made a successful transition from elementary/junior high school into high school. These elements helped WHS earn a 97% four-year graduation rate in 2012, increased AIMS scores for 2012 & 2013 school years; and an increased attendance rate of 99.4% in 2012.

Both schools had also received the Arizona Title 1 Reward School designation; EHS received the High-Progress, High-Performing award and WHS earned the High-Performing designation in 2012 from the Arizona Department of Education. Each school was awarded this honor for having met specified criteria which outlined increased student academic achievement on standardized testing, increased graduation rates, and improved academic achievement in student sub-populations (ELL and SPED students). Each school had demonstrated increased academic growth on the AIMS test.

Not Supported – Intervention Affordability

In another Chapter 2 section titled Academic Achievement Definition and Resources of Schools of Poverty, Joseph (2004) surmised that schools in poor areas could not afford interventions and programs due to low property taxes and local incomes. These schools cannot afford to help students succeed; rigor was missing due to tracking low achieving students into lower levels of understanding and lower achievement persists.

Charter schools in Arizona were funded at a higher rate per student of \$6,134.00 versus district per student funding at \$5,081.00. Charter schools received approximately \$1,053.00 more per student than public schools districts (Arizona Legislature Joint

Legislative Budget Committee, 2014). With the increased funding available for charter schools, EHS and WHS for example, were able to afford more interventions and programs for their low income students to show increased academic achievement levels on standardized tests.

EHS has broken this pattern through efforts on its campus such as having provided students with a voluntary and involuntary (Leap) tutoring program and the teachers and administrators having implemented an AVID program designed to help disadvantaged students learn skills necessary for college. Furthermore, teachers and administrators launched a Check and Connect class held every Friday whereby teachers and students were able to check in with each other to discuss any concerns or challenges they were having in high school or college classes or to determine if there was a need for social services or academic supports.

A required college preparation class entitled Seminar had been in place to ensure student success in college classes, and the administration had hired a full-time employee with the title of student success liaison to assist all students. The student success liaison's role was to help students and their families reach and maintain academic achievement by checking on attendance issues or having arranged for social services in case of need. Additionally, for qualified high school students, each had an opportunity to have taken college classes on the community college campus where EHS was located. High school class rigor had been increased and qualified students (i.e., those students who qualified via holding legal state residency status) had the opportunity to earn college and high school credits while enrolled in high school at no cost.

WHS had helped low income students enjoy academic achievement through having offered AP classes and standardized testing preparation classes entitled Topics of Math A and B and Essential Elements of English courses for all 9th and 10th grade students. Furthermore, WHS had provided a dual enrollment agreement with Grand Canyon University which offered students an opportunity to earn college credits while in high school; they had hosted college entrance support programs for parents and students to help with financial aid forms and college applications. Lastly, WHS had in place involuntary and voluntary tutoring programs having used peer tutors, and they launched a Future Freshman Academy program designed to help elementary/junior high school students make a successful transition into high school.

Not Supported – Impact of Race and SES on Test Scores

Yet in another Chapter two section, Battle and Lewis (2002) suggested through their research findings that race and socio-economic status have a negative effect on student standardized test scores. There were lower teacher expectations of poor minority students, and these students were also perceived to enter school with low motivation levels and skills and attitudes not conducive to learning.

EHS eliminated this perception through high school teachers and administrators having held high student expectations for academic achievement and college professors (for students enrolled in college classes) having expected these high school students to perform at adult levels. Additionally, high school students had been taught critical thinking skills by their high school teachers and all students enrolled in a Seminar class which prepared them for college classes. Lastly, an opportunity for qualified high school

students to enroll in and earn college credits while still in high school existed. Students who were enrolled in community college classes held the attitude of performing at an adult level so they could meet the expectations outlined for them by their college professors.

WHS abolished this insight through demonstrating high student academic expectations and launching a Future Freshman Academy which was a program for incoming freshmen to make a successful transition to high school. Additionally, the teachers and administrators had enrolled all freshmen and sophomores in Math Topics 1 and 2 and Essential Elements of English A and B classes for 9th and 10th grade students to increase academic skills to pass standardized tests. Students possessed the attitude to pass the AIMS test on their first try.

Not Supported – Standardized Test Achievement by Poor Students

Another section in chapter two titled as *Intellectual Achievement and Socio-Economic Status* included a discussion by Croizet & Dutrevis, 2004 who summarized there was a stereotype that poor students would not perform well on standardized tests.

EHS and WHS negated the research finding in chapter two as both schools were awarded the Arizona 2012 Title 1 Reward School designation. EHS earned a High-Performing, High-Progress designation and WHS earned a High Performing designation. The teachers and leadership team members of EHS had proven through data to the Arizona Department of Education that graduation rates, attendance, student achievement levels on AIMS tests showed students reached academic achievement as shown on standardized test scores between years 2011 - 2013.

The following literature sections from chapter two affirmed the dissertation findings on high poverty students who succeeded on standardized tests. EHS and WHS had proven this through their efforts to help their students succeed despite their high-poverty designations.

Supported – Negative Effects

In the Chapter 2 section entitled, Standardized Testing, Curriculum and Negative Effects of Testing, multiple studies outlined by a variety of authors including Abrams and Madaus (2003), Fincham, et al. (1989), Maylone (2004), and Sloane and Kelly (2003) outlined that alignment of curriculum to state standards was part of standardized testing. Abrams and Madaus (2003) presented seven predictable and undesirable effects standardized testing has on students, parents, teachers, administrators, and communities.

1. If test results are believed to be important, results become symbols of status.
2. Greater emphasis on testing increases classroom emphasis on test taking procedures.
3. Teachers will teach to test if decisions are based on these results.
4. High stakes tests define curriculum.
5. Teachers will focus on one type of standardized test question.
6. Test scores are a major goal of schooling and society places a high priority on these results.
7. High stakes tests shifts power from local districts and schools to state departments of education.

The seven principles from this literature were not measured in each school in this dissertation study, but each of the schools in this study, EHS and WHS, showed alignment with some of the principles discussed. Specifically, EHS won an award, entitled Title 1 Reward School HPHP for demonstrating high student achievement on AIMS tests (principle number 1). Next, EHS students were taught a rigorous curriculum that was aligned to state standards (principle number 4). Moreover, the school had their AIMS test scores publicized on the Arizona Department of Education web site and in local newspapers for public viewing (principle number 6).

WHS also showed association with some of the principles via having won an additional high performance award from the ADE, entitled Title 1 HPRS for demonstrating high student achievement on AIMS tests (principle number 1). Secondly, students at WHS were taught a rigorous curriculum that was aligned to state standards and was constantly adjusted as a result of data analysis tied to benchmark testing results (principle number 4). Thirdly, WHS has had their AIMS test scores publicized on the Arizona Department of Education web site and in local newspapers for public viewing (principle number 6).

Supported – College Success

Another area in Chapter 2, Culture of Poverty does not Prepare Students for Academic Success, that included a discussion about studies from Armstrong, (2010), Kitano and Lewis (2005), Lewis (1998) and Burney and Beilke (2008) was affirmed in the dissertation findings. The authors derived their results from studies that showed students who are poor and come from schools with rigorous curriculum and who have

access to college classes are more likely to enter college and complete a bachelor's degree.

EHS had provided the following for its low-socioeconomic students with access to rigorous curriculum and to college classes through participation in AVID, a program in place to help disadvantaged students prepare for college. Such topics taught included time management, organizational skills, and note taking. Secondly, EHS was structured as an early college model. This was a high school campus housed on a community college campus with access to college classes for qualified students to earn college credits while still in high school. Thirdly, all students were enrolled in a Seminar class providing students with an opportunity to prepare for college classes before they are enrolled in such classes.

WHS offered the following for its low-socioeconomic students with access to rigorous curriculum via having offered its students AP classes. These were classes that provided students with the opportunity to learn college-level topics and that have associated tests that students may take to earn college credit upon passage. Next, WHS put forward to its students a dual enrollment agreement with Grand Canyon University. There was an opportunity for students to take university-level classes while in high school and to earn college credit. Thirdly, WHS provided college entrance assistance. Teachers and administrators had provided senior students with personalized assistance with preparing college entrance forms, dorm applications, and financial aid forms.

Supported – Quality Instruction

The Chapter 2 section, Outstanding Instruction is Essential for Low Income Student Success, provided a discussion of works by Armstrong (2010), Lewis (1998), and Elmore (2006) who found that schools with poor students often lacked outstanding teachers as they often only use these schools to “get their feet wet” and then move on to better schools. This perpetuates poor instruction and low academic gains.

EHS had shown they had provided quality instruction to its students by having built a culture of professionalism and trust amongst the teachers and students. Teachers and administrators had known each of the students personally which had provided each teacher the opportunity to identify how each student learned best. Next, the school leadership team members supported its teachers. Leadership team members demonstrated to teachers they were trusted, and they are treated as professionals. Additionally, the school leadership team members provided quick response time to identify and solve challenges before they became large. Leadership team members mentioned in focus groups/interviews if change was needed, they were able to respond in a timely manner without having layers of bureaucracy in place.

WHS had revealed they had provided quality instruction to its students through having built a culture of trust amongst teachers and students. This culture of trust helped to reduce teacher turn-over on the campus. Teachers and administrators support each other. Next, administrators had taken a “firm, but fair” attitude with teachers in order to meet goals of the school and for each student. Lastly, administrators had high expectations of all teachers to meet student needs.

Supported – Impact of School Culture

The Chapter 2 section, Positive School Culture with Caring Teachers Essential for Low Income Students to Achieve, included a review of studies by Osher and Fleischman, (2005) and Goldstein and Soriano (1994) who stated that a culture of a school can make a huge and positive difference on student learning levels in high poverty schools. Three elements were needed for a school culture to make a positive difference on learning levels for high poverty schools (Goldstein and Soriano 1994):

1. Caring connections between teachers and students
2. Positive behavioral supports
3. Social-emotional skills for students to monitor own behavior

EHS worked to build a positive and supportive culture with its teachers and students, included positive behavioral supports, and included socio-emotional skills for students to monitor their own behavior through efforts outlined via Check and Connect. This was a weekly program whereby teachers got to know students in small groups in a classroom setting. The purpose of this program was to help identify any academic or personal barriers to academic success. This included helping to arrange social services needed for the family (element number 1 and 2). Next, EHS required student-led conferences. This was an opportunity for students to present their classroom performance to their parents on a twice-yearly basis. This provided students with the responsibility to track their own learning and come up with ideas to solve any academic problems that may have occurred (element number 3). Furthermore, EHS had built a culture of trust amongst teachers and students. Teachers and administrators had known each of the

students personally. This provided each teacher with the opportunity to identify how each student learned best (element number 1). Lastly, EHS instituted high expectations by teachers and administrators for students to be successful in college and high school classes (element number 1).

WHS had labored to build a positive and supportive culture with its teachers and students, included positive behavioral supports, and included socio-emotional skills for students to monitor their own behavior through efforts which built a culture of caring and trust amongst teachers and students (element number 1). Moreover, WHS provided a college-level curriculum via AP classes and a dual enrollment agreement with a local university (element number 3).

Conclusions

The Title 1 Reward schools researched in this study had used many different elements and programs that had assisted their students with academic success. These schools had shown success for their students on standardized tests. The schools' teachers, leadership team members, and administrators created a culture of trust and family-like support which was the first element that was uncovered. This positive and supportive culture was crucial to gathering teacher buy-in to add other elements that were successful in each school site. Culture allowed for motivation to implement and measure outcomes of additional programs and carry-out the levels of success these schools and their students enjoyed.

Tutoring, both involuntary and voluntary, was also another positive element that both schools implemented to assist their students with success. Minority, low income

students may come to school with low skill levels in their learning that can only be addressed through small-group and one-on-one tutoring supports. These schools recognized this and executed such services to meet student academic needs.

Communication amongst teachers, parents, and students alike was also critical to the student success levels these schools enjoyed. If students, parents, and teachers were not sure how students were progressing on their goals, both personally and academically, it was difficult for teachers to keep abreast of possible developments in student academic progress. This communication was fueled by data analysis and constant monitoring of student progress in classes, benchmark tests, and teacher-generated exams and quizzes.

Furthermore, a small campus for each of the schools provided for personalized learning, and getting-to-know each student on a more individual level also made for successful students and campuses. Teachers and administrators offered preparation for college on both campuses. Support was provided through seminar classes on one campus and AP and dual enrollment agreements on another campus. Both schools offered their students multiple opportunities to earn college credits while in high school. This was especially powerful for students to understand and experience, first-hand, the need for a strong attitude towards learning and success.

A commanding element for each school's student academic success was high expectations for all students. Expectations that were set low for students yielded low effort and low levels of accomplishment (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2008). These schools had demonstrated this element with deep

understanding and dedication that ensured students reached high levels of academic achievement as evidenced through scores on standardized tests.

Students who participated in AVID and learned critical thinking skills were able to apply learned strategies not only in high school classes, but community college classes as well. AP classes were also evidenced to help students reach academic achievement on the WHS campus. Critical thinking skills learned in a classroom setting assisted students with “increased academic rigor and a greater depth of understanding” (McCollister & Saylor, 2010, p. 42; Paul & Elder, 2007).

Support classes such as Math Topics 1 and 2 and Essential Elements of English A and B along with workshops, the Seminar class, and other courses helped students build skills necessary to have successfully passed standardized tests and transition to college. Both schools used such classes to identify and build student academic skills that helped students to score well on standardized tests (ADE, 2014c, 2014d).

Both schools were charter schools and, by design, schools with this designation had more flexibility to help increase student achievement and provide parents with school choice (ADE, 2014c). Additionally, these schools offered an opportunity for students and their families to choose a learning environment that aligned best with their needs and goals. Moreover, school choice for families was believed to be a natural school improvement model that has swept the nation since 1992 (Allen, 2004). The focus of these schools had been on a college-based curriculum, opportunity to take college classes while in high school, and the opportunity to earn a college degree at no charge if a legal citizen of the State of Arizona while in high school. The teachers, school leadership team

members, and administrators had created a celebratory atmosphere tied to student achievement and built a culture of hard work, acceptance, and trust amongst teachers, leadership team members, administrators, and students all while taking place on small campuses with enrollments between 300 and 450 students for each school. Additionally, a responsive and supportive administration provided teachers at these schools with resources they needed, such as professional development and a focus on data analysis. Students had proven by their AIMS scores that programs and efforts that have taken place on these campuses had helped them succeed academically. This was evidenced by both schools having earned the 2012 ADE Title 1 Reward School designation (ADE, 2012c).

In recent months, research on the effectiveness of charter schools has surfaced. Charter schools, at least in Arizona, were created to increase academic achievement for the students who attended these schools. Additional schools allowed for parent choice as to where to send their children. Academic achievement in charter high schools that favored diverse student populations, specifically those schools that focused on Hispanic, African-American, and low-income students and that were located within large cities, showed these student groups performed better academically than the same groups did in traditional public schools in 2011 (Chudowsky & Ginsburg, 2012). Specifically, data reported showed that class sizes in charter schools were smaller than those of public schools and this may have led to higher charter school math and reading scores for students of diverse backgrounds than those in traditional public schools, especially for grades 4 and 8, according to Chudowsky & Ginsburg, 2012.

EHS and WHS charter schools outlined in this dissertation study employed nearly all of the above common elements within their schools. Research written here was limited to charter schools, and it appeared the findings that have been outlined were unique to charter schools only.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice as a result of this dissertation study were numerous. First, schools with high minority, low income students should have looked closely at the programs and elements that each of these schools applied to determine what they thought worked best in their environments. Not all efforts presented in this research may work effectively in every school environment, but having learned from the results of EHS and WHS programs, other schools may then be able to carefully analyze and modify what has been implemented. Secondly, teachers, parents, and administrators from other schools may need to re-examine, on a continual basis, how they are able to help students whose lives were affected by poverty. School administrators were able to achieve this by implementing outstanding and effective programs and efforts to have helped these students rise above their socioeconomic challenges. These schools have made the conscious choice not to allow poverty to be the defeating factor in their student's learning. Since these were schools of choice for families, these schools have measured up to the desires and needs of the families whose students attended. Thirdly, such schools that used a student-centered education model pay "deliberate attention to supporting positive relationships between teachers and students that characterizes a student-centered school" (Dix, 2012, p. 5). Having created a culture of trust, caring, and family-like

support, EHS and WHS had proven to be successful with teachers who have been collectively dedicated to their students' success through the efforts of hard work, program implementation and evaluation, communication, and targeted focus on improving their instruction and curriculum for the betterment of students enrolled in their schools. Other schools may wish to take careful note of what EHS and WHS have successfully accomplished in this study.

Fourth, and finally, reviewing research was imperative for identifying what may be helpful and necessary to implement on other high school campuses with this type of student population. Seeing the actual implementation and reviewing the hard data results of these schools was also essential for creating a plan and executing it with positive realization.

Educational practitioners, teachers, parents, and policy makers may want to consider the list of actions and next steps that may be useful in their or other educational sites/districts to help increase student academic achievement:

1. Programs and efforts that delved into the personal aspect of each student were critical to student success in these schools. Each teacher and administrator not only implemented research-based programs that assisted them with getting to know each student on a personal level, but they went to great lengths to understand the student's family, their community, and their socio-economic situation to locate and implement needs to remove barriers for each student's learning.

2. Student success was also a result of targeted and focused academic assistance in the form of tutoring, standardized test preparation and support, college preparation classes on a high school campus and a college campus, opportunity to earn college credits while in high school, and programs, such as AVID that provide critical thinking and other skills necessary for college transition success should be considered.
3. Student success was also a result of dedicated teachers and administrators whose mission, vision, and action it was to assist each other while working with challenged students. Rather than working in silos, there was active and ongoing support for each other through the creation of a culture of personal and professional supports, collegiality, and professionalism that allowed each teacher and administrator to feel reinforced and motivated to continue their work with each student which ensured student, teacher, and administrator success.
4. Student success was also a result of exceptional efforts to reach out to each student's family to ensure timely communication regarding student academic progress and the opportunity to become aware of and involved in each school's extra-curricular offerings.
5. Data driven decision making that allowed for quick, timely, and ongoing adjustment for programs and curriculum to be altered to meet each student's academic needs was also part of student success.

6. Flexibility of operating on a small campus provided each teacher and administrator in these schools an opportunity to implement programs designed to meet their specific student population needs helped with student success. The structure of a charter school, as outlined in Arizona law, was designed to increase student academic achievement.
7. Opportunity to earn college credit while in high school came in two forms on each campus assisted with student success. One campus built college courses into each student's schedule since the campus was housed on a community college campus; this allowed for each student to access college classes easily. The other campus provided for AP and university-level dual credit options for students to earn these college credits while in high school.
8. High expectations for student academic performance and teacher instructional effectiveness were also instrumental in student success. Both campuses expected their students, despite their personal and academic challenges, to perform at high levels and to achieve their academic goals. When students understood what was expected of them, they rose to the occasion and performed individually and collectively to reach and exceed stated academic achievement goals. The same was expected of the teachers on each campus. Teachers on both high school campuses not only worked together to support each other and the students to meet and exceed academic goals, but were personally involved in their instructional effectiveness to be actively involved

in data-driven decision making, professional development, student tutoring, and extra-curricular activities.

9. Critical thinking skills were found on both campuses as these skills were taught by teachers and reinforced by attendance and involvement in college-level classes, again, also helpful to student success.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research are a way for prospective researchers to look at areas that may strengthen the ongoing research conversation on this topic. To illustrate,

1. Further research may include a comparison between charter schools, traditional district high schools, and private schools with similar student demographics that receive Title 1 funding.
2. Future research may also entail involvement in and observation of the various programs that were dedicated to student success in Title 1 Reward schools, such as AVID, workshops, Seminar classes, and others.
3. The researcher may wish to include discussion or interviews with high school students who participated directly in, and benefitted from, intervention programs such as AVID, workshops, Seminar classes, tutoring, and others programs.
4. Interviews and observations with high school students who attend college classes to note their opinions and experiences may be constructive and useful in future research efforts.

5. Interviews with parents to determine how they came to choose the schools their students attended may also be advantageous.
6. Research in facilitation of this study of small schools that have used Title 1 funds in comparison with large schools have also used Title 1 funds and that have been equally successful in student achievement may also be beneficial.
7. Facilitation of a quantitative research study as related to these findings may provide additional information on how specific school-based programs have been correlated to student standardized test results.
8. Tracking of students who have graduated from successful high schools to ensure they had been admitted to and were successful while in college. This information would provide a longitudinal means to track high school graduates.

Concluding Remarks

Student success and school accountability were nothing new for educators. Teachers, school leaders, governing board members, parents, and legislators should be focused entirely on student success and should have eradicated their focus on political agendas, personal biases and objectives, and other distractions which diverted motivation and efforts from high levels of student achievement. Even though schools, districts, teachers, and school leaders are bound by the outcomes of student progress and growth on standardized tests, results from these standardized tests are only a snapshot of a young person's possibilities and opportunities in life. Programs, school culture, classes, and support from adults are essential and important for high poverty, high minority students

to be successful, but it takes more than test scores to set these students up for long-term, lifelong achievement. It is only the beginning for them. A new mindset and culture needs to begin for students who enjoy positive, rewarding, and successful high school experiences as a result of supportive teachers, school leaders, and programs that were designed to focus on high academic expectations and high standardized test results. It is hoped that the reader will take the information from this study and apply it in a beneficial, positive set of efforts to help all current and future low income students.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR FIRST FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEWS

1. How would you describe your school?
2. How would you describe the students who attend this school?
3. Suppose I am a new student who just came into your school and I asked you what I should do to succeed here. What would you tell me?
4. Suppose I am in your school at the beginning of the day when the students first come in. What would I see happening as the students entered the room? Take me to your classroom and let me see what happens during the first 10 to 15 minutes as students arrive, what you would be doing, what they would be doing, what the start of the classroom is like.
5. What is your opinion of achievement tests?
6. What have learned from your school's achievement test results?
7. How do you feel about No Child Left Behind (or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act)?
8. Has No Child Left Behind (or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) influenced the way your school operates?
9. Suppose I was a new teacher that was hired to work at this school and I asked you what I needed to do to find success here. What would you tell me?
10. Suppose I am a community member that walked into the school and I asked you what the best attributes of this school are. What would you tell me?
11. If I were a student who was struggling in your class or in the school as a whole, what would you do for me to help me be successful?
12. What is your definition of success (i.e., student success, classroom/instructional success or overall school success)?
13. What would you do change about the school? Why?

(Urso, 2008)

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR SECOND FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEWS

1. How would you describe the level of trust that is experienced within the school community?
2. What do you think is your most important contribution to the school?
3. What do you think is the principal (or teacher's) most important contribution to this school?
4. How do you feel about the structural components of this school (such as size, age, resources, location?)
5. What do you think students learn at this school?
6. What do you think administration has prioritized for student success in this school setting?
7. What is the educational aim of this school?
8. How do you think students of this school see themselves?
9. Test scores indicate that the students of this school compare well with those of students at more affluent schools. Upon graduation do you foresee your students competing for similar jobs and/or college slots/entrance? If not, what do the test scores really say regarding their opportunities in life?
10. What is specifically done or carried out in the school to help students be successful on standardized achievement tests? Why?
11. What do you feel is the largest (*or leadership*) contribution to the success of the students at this school? Why?
12. How do you feel your instruction (or leadership) is helping to contribute to the outcomes of the students of this school? Why?
13. What characteristics do you feel are present in this school that makes it comparable with other similar schools?
14. What student (*or leadership*) attitudes, attributes, or other elements are in place that you feel help them be successful on standardized tests?
15. What role do you feel parents have played in the school and/or student success? Why and what?

(Urso, 2008)

APPENDIX C

NAU DISSERTATION STUDY CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

DATE: _____ Observation Number: 1 2

SCHOOL CODE: _____

TEACHER CODE: _____

1. How is/were classrooms organized?
2. What material resources seemed available?
3. What was the overall ambiance of the classrooms, school buildings?
4. What instructional methods (or combination thereof) are employed in the classroom?
5. How many students are in the room?
6. What is the layout of the room?
7. What is occurring, instructionally, to help the students stay focused on the material?
8. Other observations relating to research questions?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW REQUEST LETTER

December 1, 2013

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this dissertation study! You have been chosen to participate in this exciting journey due to your dedication to helping students achieve their potential on the AIMS test. Your school was chosen by ADE to receive designation as a 2012 Title 1 Reward school. Congratulations on your tremendous efforts to help students learn and achieve!

My name is Laura Metcalfe and I'm a Northern Arizona University doctoral student and public school administrator, and my passion is finding out how schools help low-socioeconomic students learn and achieve. To assist these students, this may be one of the most difficult tasks schools can undertake, and your efforts may be of assistance to other schools to help continue the pattern of high achievement. I'm conducting my dissertation on this subject. I'm interested in knowing how English language arts and math teachers in grades 10, 11, and 12 make this happen.

You are cordially invited to participate in this study by participating with me, at your own free will, in two one-hour interviews, one classroom observation, and a collection of artifacts that will help me tell your story. This data collection effort will begin in January, 2014, and conclude in March, 2014, approximately. You can be assured that your information will remain confidential and at no time will any personal information be asked for or published in the study. I will be working with your principal in this endeavor as well, and I'll be presenting a PowerPoint with further details and handing out an Informed Human Consent form for your review and signature. Additionally, during the upcoming PowerPoint presentation, I will be available for questions, and you may also email me personally for questions you would like to ask at a later time or in privacy. You are not obligated in any way to participate, and if you choose to do so, you may discontinue your involvement at any time without any question or retribution. I will be sure to go over this in further detail during the PowerPoint presentation.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions before the PowerPoint presentation at my email of: lauram973@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration in this study!

Warmly,

Laura Metcalfe, NAU Doctoral Student

APPENDIX E

NAU IRB



Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Northern Arizona University
PO Box 4087
Flagteachers, AZ 86011-4087

928-523-4340
928-523-1075 fax
www.research.nau.edu/vpr/IRB

To: Laura Metcalfe
From: Donna Goldberg
Date: October 2, 2013
Subject: New Project
Review Type: Expedited
Project: "A Tale of Two Schools: What Factors are in Place to Help Students of Title 1 Reward Schools Exceed on Standardized Tests?"
Project Number: 518830-1
Expiration Date: October 1, 2014
Review Category/ies: 6) Recordings and 7) Survey procedures

Your application of New Project materials has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at NAU. Your approval will expire on the date listed above. If you need to **extend** your research beyond the approval expiration date above, you must file an Application for Continuing Review at http://www.research.nau.edu/vpr/IRB/irb_forms.html.

If your project **changes** in any way, you must file a Research Amendment form (also available at website above) PRIOR TO implementing any changes. You may not implement the changes until you have written approval for the change from the IRB, unless the change is necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to participants. Failure to do so will result in noncompliance and possible suspension or termination of your research project.

Any unanticipated problems or unexpected **adverse events** must be reported to the IRB within 5 business days (within 24 hours for serious adverse events) of your becoming aware of the event by filling out an Adverse Reaction or Event Reporting form (also available at website above).

Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement Program: In an effort to improve quality and consistency across human subjects research at NAU, you may be contacted by the IRB Director to meet and discuss your procedures and methods of recruiting participants, providing informed consent, collecting and storing data, and other details of your research protocol.

Two copies of your informed consent form, which has been approved and stamped by the IRB, must be given to each study participant - one for them to keep and one for them to sign and return to you.

As you conduct your research, please remember that:

1. Participants are volunteers or are involved in regular educational programs; they are free to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.

2. Participants must be informed through written or oral explanation and must sign or approve electronically or verbally an informed consent form (for minors and children the parent or guardian must sign, and, in medically related cases, a physician must sign for consent).

3. Unless the participants agreed to an alternative arrangement, the participants' anonymity and confidentiality must be protected. They should not be able to be identified through the responses. The presentation of the data should not put them at risk of any negative consequences. Access to the data is specified and restricted by the researcher and the department.

Additional IRB information may be found at <http://www.research.nau.edu/vpr/IRB/index.htm>.

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT

NORTHERN
ARIZONA
UNIVERSITY



NAU IRB Approved: 10/2/2013

Valid until: 10/1/2014

Page 1 of 3

Human Subject Informed Consent

Educational Leadership,
801 South Knoles Dr. PO Box: 5774 Flagteachers AZ 86011, 928-523-3202

Project Title: "A Tale of Two Schools: What Factors are in Place to Help Students of Title 1 Reward Schools Exceed on Standardized Tests"?

Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through **Educational Leadership Department** at Northern Arizona University by **Laura Metcalfe** that involves research. The researcher is required to receive your informed consent before you participate in this project.

Laura Metcalfe will explain to you in detail: (1) the purpose of the project; (2) what you will be asked to do and how long your participation will last; (3) how your personal information, if collected, will be kept confidential; (4) if you will receive any compensation; (5) the benefits; and (6) potential risks of participation.

Your participation in research is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there are no penalties or loss of benefits or services that you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate and then withdraw or skip a question there are also no penalties or loss of benefits or services. Whether or not you choose to participate in this project will have no effect on your relationship with NAU now or in the future.

A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss it with the **Laura Metcalfe**. Feel free to ask questions to help you understand the project. After any questions you may have are answered and you decide to participate in the research, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

1. PROJECT PURPOSE:

I'd like to provide information to other schools and districts who are Title 1 involved to learn from other similar schools on how internal and external efforts were made to help students who may struggle with poverty to succeed on standardized tests and become successful academically.

2. EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES:

I will be conducting small group, oral interviews with teachers who instruct English language arts and math courses at the high school level and who teach grades 10, 11, and 12. If permission is granted from all participants, the interviews will be recorded. There will be two interviews, the first with approximately 13 questions and the second with approximately 16 questions. Each group will consist of approximately 2 – 5 teachers and each interview should take no more than one hour – one hour for each small group interview. There will be an estimated total of 2 hours of small group interview time. I will also be conducting classroom observations. I will visit your classes either once or twice for approximately 15 – 20 minutes each. I will be looking for structural components in the school which may include: how were classrooms organized?, what material resources seemed available?, what was the overall ambiance of the classrooms, school building, etc.?

3. CONFIDENTIALITY:

Safeguards that are in place to protect your confidentiality include not collecting any personally identifying information, such as your name or address. I will assign a study code to each of you that will identify only the school you work at and your instructional area (such as “EE 1” for “EHS, English, teacher 1). The purpose of the study code is to ensure your confidentiality and anonymity and to ensure that I don't mix data, and mix interview questions.

If you agree to a recorded audio of the interview, each of you will be given a copy of it and any paper transcripts for your review. Each of the interviews and any paper transcripts will be locked in a filing cabinet located at my home office, which is also locked. I am the only researcher involved in this project, so there will not be any teachers involved with it. Additionally, all information will be destroyed once the dissertation is accepted through the university and the estimated time frame for complete destruction is by or before May, 31, 2014. Additionally, each of you are welcome to a copy of the dissertation for your records and you are invited to the defense, once I have a confirmation of its time and location.

4. COMPENSATION:

There is no compensation for your participation.

5. BENEFITS:

Benefits of the research for you as an individual subject includes the opportunity to see what a similar high school is doing to help low socio-economic students achieve academic success. Oftentimes, school teachers members do not have the opportunity to network with similar schools to determine what is working and what is not. This will be a learning opportunity for these two schools to view and possibly choose other means to implement successful efforts into their curriculum, school culture, or activities to help their specific students achieve further. For society, benefits may include the opportunity to see specific examples of how students who struggle with economic challenges are able to succeed academically. Schools located in low

economic areas may be perceived by society as enrolled with students who are difficult to teach and who may not achieve high enough scores to graduate from school or gain admission to college. Schools such as these don't always have resources, personnel, or budget to communicate their achievements and this study is an excellent way to promote and communicate the economically challenged students attending economically challenged schools break the mold of habitual failure and thrive and succeed despite the odds.

6. RISKS:

Some of the risks may include some discomfort of an outside (i.e., external researcher) visiting your classroom to observe the structure of your room. You may feel some discomfort sharing information

related to the interview questions with an external researcher.

Contingencies to reduce this risk can include your desire to not participate in either or both of these portions of the research study or to completely withdrawal from the study. Additionally, a trained school district observer may use the interview instrument or make notes on the areas of observation during the classroom visit that you have built trust and confidence in, may substitute for the external researcher.

7. CONSENT:

I have read the above information about **“A Tale of Two Schools: What Factors are in Place to Help Students of Title I Reward Schools Exceed on Standardized Tests”?** and have been given an opportunity to ask questions. I agree to participate in this project, and I have been given a copy of this consent document.

I agree to be audio recorded for this research. ___YES ___NO

_____ Date _____
Signature of Participant

_____ Date _____
Printed Name of Participant

_____ Date _____
Signature of Research Representative

_____ Date _____
Printed Name of Research Representative

The dated approval stamp in the header of this consent form indicates that this project has been reviewed and approved by the Northern Arizona University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. Contact the Human Research Protections Office at 928-523-4236 if you have any questions about: (1) the conduct of the project, or (2) your rights as a research participant, or (3) a research-related injury. Any other questions about the research project should be directed to:

Laura Metcalfe
Educational Leadership
lauram973@gmail.com
Dr. Walter Delecki, Faculty Sponsor
Educational Leadership
walter.delecki@nau.edu
928-523-9202

APPENDIX G

PARENT SCHOOL COMPACT

rev. 1/2013

This compact recognizes the need for on-going communication with teachers and parents to discuss student achievement through: conferences, frequent reports, classroom visits and observations, and reasonable access to staff.

School Section

We understand the importance of the school experience to every student and our role as educators and models. It is the responsibility of the entire to provide high quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables students to meet the state standards. Therefore, we agree to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of our ability:

- Teach grade level skills and concepts
- Strive to address the individual needs of our students
- Communicate frequently with families regarding student progress
- Provide a safe, positive, and healthy learning environment for your student
- Correct and return assignments in a timely manner
- Clearly communicate expectations in a course syllabus

Student Section

I realize that my education is important. I know I am the one responsible for my own success; therefore, I agree to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of my ability:

- Wear Early College ID AT ALL TIMES
- Get to class on time every day
- Use my planner to record all due assignments
- Return completed homework on time
- Participate actively in mandatory student-led conferences twice per school year
- Be responsible for my own behavior
- Be a cooperative learner
- Ask for help when I need it
- Approach all my studies with college as a goal

Parent Section:

I understand that my participation in my student's education will help his/her achievement and attitude; therefore, I will continue to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of my ability to support my child's learning:

- Encourage my student to complete his/her homework assignments for high school and college courses
- Review all Principal's Newsletters
- Participate in mandatory student-led conferences twice per school year
- Attend Early College Orientation evening, Back to School Event, Open House and other school events
- Encourage my student to engage in reading activities for at least 30 minutes every day
- Provide a quiet place and time for my student to do homework
- Make sure my student gets adequate sleep and has a healthy diet
- Support both school and college discipline and attendance policies
- Support my child in participating in community service hours required by each grade level