Turning High-Poverty Schools Into High-Performing Schools

A Synthesis of Research on What Works In High-Performing/High-Poverty Schools

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Learner Outcomes

- Emerge with a substantially enhanced knowledge of what works for underachieving students living in poverty.
- Understand how high-poverty schools become high-performing.
- Understand how leaders increase teacher effectiveness.
- Be compelled to take informed action to better meet the needs of underachieving students living in poverty.

Coming From ASCD

January 2012

Collaborate / Network!

Who Are You?
- Teachers
- Principals
- Instructional Coaches
- Para Professionals/Classified
- District Office/School Board
- Parents

What Level?
- Elementary Schools
- Middle Schools
- High Schools
- K-8
- K-12
Part I: Learning Together

- Learning From Others: Stories of Inspiration and Hope
- Assessing What You Know About Poverty: The Importance of Accurate Information
- Constructing a Framework for Action

Part II: Leading Together

- Focus on Learning—What do we do? What do we stop doing?
- Fostering a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment—What do we do? What do we stop doing?
- Building Leadership Capacity—What do we do? What do we stop doing?

How Are We Doing?

Validate Challenge to Improve

How High-Poverty Schools Become High-Performing

Poverty vs. Achievement in Illinois Elementary Schools

Source: Education Trust analysis of data from National School-Level State Assessment Score Database www.schooldata.org Data are from 2002

High-Poverty / High-Performing Schools

Nationally Recognized High-Poverty / High Performing Schools
- Dayton's Bluff Elementary, St. Paul, MN
- Lapwai Elementary, Lapwai, ID
- Molalla High School, Molalla, OR
- Osmond A. Church PS/MS, 124 K-8 School, Queens, NY
- Port Chester Middle School, Port Chester, NY
- Tall Elementary, Boise, ID
- Tekoa High School, Tekoa, WA
Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School
Saint Paul, MN
2003 Dispelling the Myth Award Winner

School Demographics
- Student Population:
  - Total Student Population (PK-6th): 315 Students
  - 43% African-American
  - 19% Hispanic
  - 19% Southeast Asian
  - 18% Caucasian
  - 2% American Indian
- 40% Mobility Index*
  (Students who enrolled or left Dayton's Bluff before October 1st)
- 92% Free and Reduced Lunch Status*
  (Income eligibility based upon Federal Poverty guidelines)
- 30% English Language Learner Students
- 13% Special Education Students
* Note: Statistics taken from 2009-10 School Year

Dayton's Bluff Elementary

William H. Taft Elementary
Boise, ID
2005 Blue Ribbon Award Recipient

- 330 Students Grades k-6
- 72% Low Income
- 18% ELL/Refugee
- 9% Hispanic
Making Refugee Students Welcome

Kathleen Budge and William Parrett

When 58 refugee students speaking little English were transferred to this urban elementary school, the principal set up a team-building summer camp.

Osmond A. Church School
PS / MS 124
Queens, New York

- 1,201 students in grades PK-8
- 97% Low-Income
- 45% Asian
- 31% African American
- 21% Latino

Port Chester Middle School
Port Chester, NY

Source: New York Department of Education, 2010
Port Chester Middle School
- 864 students in grades 6-8
- 73% Latino
- 7% African-American
- 64% Low-Income

Port Chester Middle School
Overall Test Scores Grades 6-8

Tekoa High School
Tekoa, WA
- 110 Students
- 51% Low-income
- 83% White
- 12% American Indian
- 5% Other

Tekoa High School
Reading and Writing
Grade 10

And...At The District Level?
- 6,500 Students Grades K-12
- 78% Low Income
- 56% Hispanic
- 43% White
- 1% African American / Asian

**Caldwell School District**

**Caldwell, ID**

**CALDWELL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**From Sanctions to Success**

Moving from the most severe level of state and federal sanctions to making AYP in 8 of its 10 schools in four years.

**Caldwell I-SAT Data**

**Closing The Achievement Gap Between White & Hispanic Students Reading**

**Closing The Achievement Gap Between White & Hispanic Students Math**

**Today...in 2011...**

"WE KNOW WHAT WORKS IN EDUCATION. THE RESEARCH IS PROLIFIC"

“Amazingly, then, the question today is not about what works, but about why we do not implement what we know works in all schools for all kids?”

Part I: Learning Together

- Learning From Others: Stories of Inspiration and Hope
- Assessing What You Know About Poverty: The Importance of Accurate Information
- Constructing a Framework for Action

Poverty: The Facts

- 21% of all children in the US live in poverty
- An additional 22% live in families considered low-income
- In the past decade (2000-09) childhood poverty rate increased by 33%
- Past 25 years: Income in lowest 1/5 of population increased by 7%--highest 1/5 by 63.5%

How Is Poverty Defined?

- Below $10,830 for a single person--$22,050 for family of four
- Originally coined the “thrifty food plan” –created by statisticians – three times the annual cost of food for a family of 3 in 1963
- Viewed as controversial and excessively conservative

What Do We Mean by Poverty In The Context of School?

Students eligible for free and reduced-priced meal program

- Family of four $40,793 (reduced price)
- Family of four $28,665 (free)

How Is Poverty Defined?

- Generational
- Situational
- Immigrant
High Expectations and Support

Confronting Common Myths

- Poverty is an issue that solely affects people of color.
- People in poverty are unmotivated and have weak work ethics.
- With government assistance people can get out of poverty.
- Education, as a way out of poverty, is readily accessible to everyone.
- People living in poverty are uninvolved in their children’s learning, largely because they do not value education.
- People living in poverty are linguistically deficient.
- People living in poverty tend to abuse drugs and alcohol more than people in other socioeconomic classes.

Gorski (2008); Donna Beegle (2006)

It Takes Skill and Will

Swift, dramatic improvement requires an encounter with the “brutal facts”—those awkward, unpleasant truths that organizations prefer not to address—or even talk about.

-M. Schmoker,
A Chance for Change, American School Board Journal, April 2007

Ten Suggestions for Helping Students That Live in Poverty

1) Assignments/Homework
2) Parent Involvement
3) Access to higher-level curriculum
4) Teach about classism
5) Keep stocks of supplies/basic necessities
6) Make curricula relevant and meaningful
7) Ensure proper placements
8) Continue to reach out to parents even when unresponsive
9) Challenge stigmatization of the poor
10) Educate ourselves and challenge our biases

Paul Gorski, Teaching Tolerance (2007)

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January 2012
Part II: Leading Together

- Focus on Learning—What do we do? What do we stop doing?
- Fostering a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment—What do we do? What do we stop doing?
- Building Leadership Capacity—What do we do? What do we stop doing?
Focus on Learning

- Do we have a common instructional framework to guide curriculum, teaching, assessment, and the learning climate?
- Do we have common assessments and embrace assessment literacy?
- Have we ensured that all students are proficient in reading?
- Do we provide targeted interventions?
- Do we provide job-embedded opportunity for professional learning?
- Are we working to eliminate mindsets, policies, structures, and practices that perpetuate underachievement?

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Student Led Conferences

- Getting clear on the philosophy and purpose
- Defining teacher, student, parent, administrator and support
- Selecting the most appropriate format
- Preparing students to lead
- Preparing parents and colleagues to participate
- Organizing the details
- Anticipating and handling unique situations
- Evaluating the conferences

Traditional Parent/Teacher Conferences

Do These Work?

Focus on Learning

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Elementary Students At Risk

Reading One Year Below Grade Level

Chance of graduating from high school near zero

Low Socio-Economic Background

Attends School With Many Other Poor Students

Increasing Achievement of At-Risk Students at Each Grade Level
US Dept. of Ed., 1989
Effective Reading Programs for Middle and High Schools: A Best-Evidence Synthesis

All kids...
...want to learn how to read!

Reading is when you know what sounds the letters make and then you say them fast. They come out words, and then you are reading.
R. J., age 5

You can read when you look at car and then you look at can and know you drive one and open the other one and there is only one eensy line different.
Shelby, age 6

It’s when you read and nobody tells you the words. But you shouldn’t do it in the bathroom. My daddy does and my mom yells at him.
Paulette, age 5

Words go in your eyes and come out your mouth...but it’s not like puking or anything. You say the words and that means you’re reading.
Loren, age 4
We MUST... Focus On Reading

We will never teach all our students to read if we do not teach our students who have the greatest difficulties to read. Another way to say this is: Getting to 100% requires going through the bottom 20%.

Uncommon Sense

Port Chester Middle School
“Everyone an English/Language Arts Teacher”

- All teachers English/Language Arts teachers
- Provided target professional development with collaborative support from the schools E/LA teachers
- Created a set of bundled E/LA skills to be taught in every course

Focus on Learning

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Target Interventions

- Pre K / Full Day
- Kindergarten
- Tutoring
- Extended Day / Summer Programs
- Homework Clubs
- Home Visits
- Alternative Schools & Programs
- College / Career Readiness

Summer School...

- Every summer for underachievers
- Regular communication between parent / school
- Targeted needs based instruction
- Curriculum / aligned to school year needs
- Provide for daily nutritional needs
- Weekly field trips / recreational activities
- Minimum of 3 weeks - more is better
- Plan for transition / remaining weeks of summer

Don’t Be Afraid of Innovation

Caldwell Freshman Academy

- Idaho’s Only School For Freshmen
- 90 students
- Focused Attention On Students Who Are On A Path Toward Failure.
- Class Sizes Limited to 15 Students Per Teacher.
- 95% Success Rate
Focus on Learning

- Do we have a common instructional framework to guide curriculum, teaching, assessment, and the learning climate?
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Part II: Leading Together

- Focus on Learning—What do we do? What do we stop doing?
- **Fostering a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment**—What do we do? What do we stop doing?
- Building Leadership Capacity—What do we do? What do we stop doing?

A Framework for Action: Leading High Poverty Schools to High Performance

**Actions**

- Focus on Learning
- Fostering Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment
- Building Leadership Capacity

All Students Learning to High Standards

(Parrett & Budge, ASCD, January 2012)
Foster a Safe, Supportive and Healthy Learning Environment

- Have we ensured safety?
- Have we developed an accurate understanding of the influence of poverty on student learning?
- Have we fostered caring relationships and strengthened the bond between students and schools?
- Have we made an authentic effort to engage parents, families, and our community?
- Are we working to eliminate mindsets, policies, structures, and practices that perpetuate underachievement?

Initiate Student Advisories

- “Take care of them like they were your own.”
- Faculty / Student Ratio—20:1
- 30 Minutes / Day – 4 Days / Week
- Four-year Commitment
- Reading, Math, Portfolios, Homework, Careers
- Performance-based Graduation Requirements
- “It’s now cool to do well at Granger H.S.”

Address Student Mobility

- Access and Maintain Accurate Data
- Be Ready
  - Departures—Counseling / Exit Interviews
  - Arrivals—Welcome packets / Diagnostics / Appropriate Placements
  - Catch up—Tutoring / Extended Day
- Build Relationships—Peers / Parents
- Frequent Communication
- Address Transportation Issues
- Engage All Staff—School-wide Support

Engage children

- Strategy:
  - Create meaningful connections between “school learning” and community.

What at-risk children want at school more than anything else...

...a caring relationship with an adult.
### Foster a Safe, Supportive and Healthy Learning Environment

- Have we ensured safety?
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### It’s All About Relationships

- Engage Parents as Authentic Partners
- Hold Frequent Meetings with Food/Childcare
- Offer Parent Education
- Support Learning at Home
- Conduct Home Visits / Caring Outreach
- Initiate Student Led Conferences
- Initiate Student Advisories
- Join the National Network of Partnership Schools [www.csos.jhu.edu](http://www.csos.jhu.edu)

### Building Leadership Capacity

- Are we managing material and human resources effectively?
- Are we optimizing time—extending it for underachieving students and reorganizing it to better support professional learning?
- Do we have a data system that works for classroom and school leaders?
- Are we working to eliminate mindsets, policies, structures, and practices that perpetuate underachievement?

### A Framework for Action: Leading High Poverty Schools to High Performance

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### We will never catch up under-achieving students who live in poverty...

without additional quality instructional time for those students...

and job-embedded time for the professional learning needs of their teachers.
Where’s the time for all of this?
Less State and District Testing

Bottom Line:
Roughly 13-15 8-hr Days of Instruction Per Subject Per Year

Go Back...Find The Time

- Get creative...support professional learning that does not distract from instructional time
- Reduce scheduled / unscheduled interruptions
- Schedule testing wisely
- Extend learning...day / week / summer
- Minimize Pullouts
- Stop releasing students early
- Conduct parent / student led conferences outside school day

Compelling Conclusions

A Framework for Action: Leading High Poverty Schools to High Performance

Traditional Parent/Teacher Conferences

Do These Work?
School Culture? How Did They Get There?

They challenged their own mind-sets...

But BEHAVIOR... CAME BEFORE BELIEFS

Recommendations From “BEAT THE ODDS” Schools

Hold yourselves accountable for a clear bottom line of academic performance:

- Don’t even think about playing a blame game when students aren’t learning. Have the strength to look at the problem and take responsibility.
- Don’t think the solution is “out there”. If students aren’t learning, the school needs to change.
- No one is allowed to lag behind. If every student in every classroom isn’t learning, the school isn’t doing its job.

A Framework for Action: Leading High Poverty Schools to High Performance

Six Key Points to Take Away

- Create a culture of high expectations ... provide the needed support
- Make decisions based on data...select and prioritize strategies based on needs
- Eliminate practices that perpetuate underachievement...start today
- Take action...implement, monitor and evaluate “needs-based” strategies
- Foster positive relationships
- Remember...collaborate...you can’t do it alone!

We must combat hopelessness... and instill in every child the self-confidence that they can achieve and succeed in school.

Any school can overcome the debilitating effects of poverty...

...demographics do not equal destiny!
Teachers Make The Difference!

...They think ... we can learn this **** !!

What do we choose to do?

...our students are waiting

For PDF version of “Turning High-Poverty Schools Into High-Performing Schools” handout, please visit http://csi.boisestate.edu/ and click on the “Resources” link.
Tough Questions

It's cool to do well at Granger," exclaimed a 16-year-old we interviewed during a break in her daily advisory meeting. "It didn't used to be that way here, my sister told me...but that's all different now. I'm hoping to go to the university in two years!"

Located in Washington State's rural Yakima Valley, Granger High School serves 388 mostly Hispanic students, 89 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Over the past eight years, the school's 10th grade reading performance has steadily climbed from fewer than 20 percent of students meeting Washington state standards to nearly 80 percent. Parent attendance at student conferences has grown from a dismal 10 percent to almost 100 percent, and the graduation rate has soared to over 89 percent. As the staff's expectations of and relationships with students have grown, everything about the school has improved.

Two thousand miles to the east, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, 341 elementary students parade through the impoverished neighborhood surrounding Dayton's Bluff Elementary School. They're celebrating having accomplished their goal of
In high-poverty schools, leaders can find the right answers to raising student achievement when they start with the right questions.

William Parrett and Kathleen Budge

reading a million words in the past year. “Twenty-five books read this year by each of our students, and we’re letting our community know about it!” proudly proclaims Principal Andrew Collins, who leads the K–6 march with a bullhorn, while the students follow with noisemakers and banners.

Dayton’s Bluff has risen from being the lowest-performing elementary school in Saint Paul—and one of the lowest-performing in Minnesota—to becoming a school in which nearly 70 percent of students meet or surpass state standards in reading and 75 percent meet or surpass state standards in math.

From Low- to High-Performing
These schools demonstrate that it’s possible not only to reverse historic trends of underachievement but also to sustain their gains. So how did they do it?

Leaders in schools like Granger and Dayton’s Bluff began their remarkable turnarounds by making tough calls—and many of those decisions were about how to use resources. The budget in a high-performing, high-poverty school is a moral document, reflective of the school’s beliefs about the conditions necessary to sustain success for all students and the adults who serve them. As budgets constrict, school leaders maintain their success by working collaboratively with staff to stay focused on the priorities that guide their work. They know that cuts in critical resources can jeopardize their hard-won gains. Countering these challenges becomes their top leadership priority.

On the basis of a growing body of knowledge that has emerged from the research on school effects (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993), coupled with more recent analyses of strategies that have guided hundreds of schools in their successful efforts to reverse historic trends of underachievement (Barr & Parrett, 2006; Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007; Chenowith, 2007; Duke, 2007), we initiated a study seeking to understand how school leaders’ actions influence a turnaround in low-performing schools.

In addition to Granger High and Dayton’s Bluff, we visited four other high-performing/high-poverty schools: Taft Elementary in Boise, Idaho; P.S./M.S. 124, an elementary school in Queens, New York; Lapwai Elementary on the Nez Perce Reservation in northern Idaho; and Fort Chester Middle School in Port Chester, New York. Despite high levels of poverty in their communities, these schools have sustained
improvements on multiple measures of student success (achievement test scores, graduation rates, attendance rates, and behavior measures); and national and state organizations have recognized and honored them for their achievements.

An important message reverberates from these successes: A school can indeed overcome the powerful and pervasive effects of poverty on a student’s learning. Sustained improvements usually began with an individual or a small group of leaders committed to equity and the goal of successfully teaching every student.

**Asking the Right Questions**

The economic downturn and the recent passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act confront many district and school leaders with the confounding paradox of managing both recession-driven budget cuts and new stimulus funding intended to improve the achievement of underserved students.

Leaders in high-performing/high-poverty schools begin by asking questions. The questions leaders ask fall into three interrelated domains: (1) building the necessary leadership capacity; (2) focusing the staff’s everyday core work on student, professional, and system learning; and (3) creating and fostering a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for all. In tough times like these, their questions may provide valuable guidance for other school leaders facing their own challenges and opportunities.

**Questions About Leadership**

*Do we have a data system that works for classroom and school leaders?*

All schools in the study have implemented data systems to guide their work. In fact, using data-based decision making was one of the two most common explanations offered for the schools’ success. (The other was fostering caring relationships.) Professional development in using data-based decision making, coupled with establishing measurable goals and developing aggressive time lines to achieve them, is vital to sustaining Lapwai Elementary’s success. Concerned about the quality and level of teacher-parent communications, Lapwai staff members decided to set a schoolwide goal to have weekly contacts with families. They held themselves accountable by reporting their contacts to the principal, Teri Wagner, who shared the data at the district’s board of trustees meetings.

*Are we eliminating policies and practices that manufacture low achievement?*

Research on the negative effects of low expectations, inequitable funding, retention, tracking, and misassignment to special education are well documented. All the schools studied confronted such policies and practices.

When Richard Esparza came to Granger High as principal 10 years ago, changing beliefs about students’ potential was foundational to all the other actions he took. He began by modeling his belief in students’ ability to meet high academic standards and by stating that he expected the faculty to believe the same thing. He worked with teachers to eliminate a bell-curve mentality—accepting that some students will fail—and a policy of one-chance testing. Instead, students who fall below a C in their coursework are now required to get extra help, and they can retake tests until they earn a C or better.

*Have we extended learning time for underachieving students?*

Underachieving students living in poverty require more instructional time to catch up to their higher-achieving peers. All high-performing/high-poverty schools find a way to extend learning time for students who need it. The schools offer a blend of before- and after-school tutoring, weekend and vacation catch-up sessions, summer school and full-day kindergarten, and sheltered classroom support. At Queen’s PS/M.S. 124, for example, school is in session “pretty much five and a half days per week,” according to principal Valarie Lewis. On Saturday mornings, middle school students who need to catch up attend small learning academies.

*Have we reorganized time to better support professional learning?*

Eighty percent of a district’s or school’s budget is typically allocated toward personnel; becoming a high-performing school therefore requires making significant investments in people. Schools must find their own ways to reorganize time to support the development of communities of practice.
(Wenger, 1998). They can repurpose time traditionally set aside for faculty meetings, reorganize the schedule to accommodate common planning time, bank time for professional development, or locate funds for ongoing release time.

At Dayton’s Bluff Elementary, grade-level teams of teachers use release time to review classroom-based assessment data, discuss instructional strategies, and plan for each upcoming six-week period. As teachers discuss individual students’ performance and specific teaching strategies, the school’s literacy coach and a district-level instructional coach look on and take part. By participating in collaborative planning sessions, coaches are better able to provide just-in-time support.

Leaders in the Lapwai School District use professional learning time to focus on developing assessment literacy and common classroom-based assessments. At Granger High, the initiation of student-led conferences not only improved students’ understanding of their own learning, but also significantly improved parents’ attendance rates at their child’s conferences.

Are all students proficient in reading?
Second only to safety, ensuring that all students develop literacy skills became a priority in most of the schools we studied. Designing a comprehensive approach to reading improvement may entail conducting an analysis of students’ unique needs (for example, those of English language learners); developing an understanding of the influence of poverty on reading achievement (Neuman, 2008); and examining the research base, especially concerning adolescent literacy (see Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008).

All teachers at Port Chester Middle School consider themselves to be English language arts teachers. To sell this idea, school leaders began by helping teachers understand that students’ inability to read proficiently was a significant barrier to learning the content the teachers were attempting to teach. Now all teachers teach 24 bundled key reading and writing skills.

Do we provide targeted interventions?
The schools we studied use data to identify students who need before-, during-, and after-school small-group and individual tutoring; self-paced interventions using technology; one-on-one academic advising and coaching; homework support; or additional assessment time.

Taft Elementary in Idaho focuses on developing literacy skills early. The school offers full-day kindergarten and keeps class sizes small. In addition to the district-adopted reading program, Taft assesses the proficiency of all students and, if necessary, assigns students to one of three different reading interventions that provide different approaches to literacy learning.
Questions About the Learning Environment

Is our school safe?
In all the schools studied, particularly the secondary schools, leaders emphasized safety for students and staff as a prerequisite for learning. At Port Chester Middle School, principal Carmen Macchia explained, “In the beginning . . . kids would hold their bladders all day out of fear of what might happen to them in the bathrooms.” The school established structures, such as the frequent presence of school staff in bathrooms and hallways, to help students become accountable for their actions. The staff’s expectations and modeling of appropriate behavior and other good citizenship practices encouraged students to help promote school safety, which authentically contributed to changing students’ perspectives from one of “ratting out” their friends to one of civic responsibility to their school.

Do we understand the influence of poverty on student learning?
Although the concept of a culture of poverty has been refuted (Gorski, 2008), too many educators continue to believe that people who live in poverty share a common set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors (such as a poor work ethic, alcohol or drug abuse, and apathy toward school). To counter these myths, leaders in the schools we studied used data and research to support high expectations of students. An ethos of professional accountability for learning is tangible in all the participating schools, in contrast to schools that blame students and families for poor achievement.

When Taft Elementary School welcomed more than 60 refugee students one year from 16 different countries, principal Susan Williamson knew the importance of developing an understanding of the cultural and socioeconomic characteristics of the refugee students’ families (Budge & Parrett, 2009). Enlisting the help of a former refugee whom the refugee community trusted, Susan and a small team of teacher leaders conducted multiple visits to each student’s home. Although the purpose of these visits was to invite students to a two-week summer camp designed to familiarize the students with Taft and foster friendships, the visits also helped teachers gain a much better understanding of the cultural and socioeconomic influences on these students’ lives.

Have we fostered a bond between students and school?
The high-performing/high-poverty schools we studied provided “protective factors” that help build a bond between students and school. Paramount among these factors is promoting caring relationships between adults and students as well as among peers.

Although Granger is a small high school serving only 388 students, many students felt disconnected from school. Former principal Esparza’s focus on personalization led the staff to reorganize the school day to include a well-designed advisory program. All professional staff members, including the principal, advise a small group of 18–20 students four days each week and stay with those students for four years.

“Target the lowest-performing kids,” cautioned one principal, “even if the stimulus money doesn’t last forever.”

Navigating their path toward graduation and beyond. The advisory teacher regularly reviews each student’s progress through school-generated biweekly reports, holding students accountable for staying on track. Advisors identify any student who falls behind and work with the student’s teachers to intervene. “It’s all about relationships with the kids,” explained current principal Paul Chartrand, “and the advisory program is key to our continued success.”

Other high-performing/high-poverty schools provide additional protective factors, such as restructuring into small
Second only to safety, ensuring that all students develop literacy skills became a priority in most of the schools we studied.

Learning communities and removing economic barriers to participation in various extracurricular activities. Some schools work to counter the adverse effects of student mobility by dedicating staff to the task of welcoming and placing new students.

Do we engage parents, families, and the community?
High-performing/high-poverty schools do not go it alone. Instead, they build positive and productive relationships with students’ families and the broader neighborhood and community. In partnership with the city of Saint Paul and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, Dayton’s Bluff Elementary provides students and families with a recreational facility and the services of a nurse-practitioner, dentist, and social worker at the school.

Leaders in the schools we studied engage stakeholders in various ways—for example, hiring a school/family/community liaison, offering adult mentoring and community service learning programs, ensuring two-way communication between the school and the family, and using the school as a community center.

Tough Decisions, Tough Times
Leaders in the six schools we studied expressed confidence that the processes they had in place would guide their decisions regarding the use of possible stimulus funding. The principals voiced concern for two top priorities: (1) maintaining and perhaps adding staff, because keeping personnel is key to a low student-teacher ratio and caring relationships in school; and (2) providing targeted support to the students who need it most. “Target the lowest-performing kids,” cautioned one principal, “even if the stimulus money doesn’t last forever.”

Leaders in high-performing/high-poverty schools recognize their efforts and successes as a continuing journey. Whether surviving budget cuts, carefully targeting new stimulus funding, or both, leaders in all schools may benefit from reflecting on the questions leaders ask in high-performing/high-poverty schools to support and sustain student success.

References

William Parrett (wparret@boisestate.edu; 208-426-4343) is Director of the Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies and Kathleen Budge (kathleenbudge@boisestate.edu; 208-426-3758) is Coordinator of the Educational Leadership program at Boise State University in Idaho. They are the authors of a forthcoming ASCD book on leadership in high-poverty/high-performing schools.
A Framework for Action: Leading High Poverty Schools to High Performance

All Students Learning to High Standards

(Parrett & Budge, ASCD, January 2012)
## What Do You Know and Believe About Poverty?

Please review the following statements and mark either true or false.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Childhood poverty rates are higher in the United States than any other industrialized nations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Childhood poverty rates are rising in the United States.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. We are living in an era of increasing inequity between the wealthiest and the poorest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. One in five school-age children live in poverty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The formula for establishing the “poverty threshold” is based on the “thrifty food plan formula” established in the early 1960s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The US Census Bureau has proposed 12 alternative methods for determining the poverty rate in the United States, all of which would result in a greater rate of poverty than does the current formula.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Please rate the following statements on the number line, from -3 meaning highly unlikely to 3 meaning highly likely. Poverty is caused by poor character and poor choices an individual makes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. People in poverty do not work or have a poor work ethic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Education, as a way out of poverty, is readily accessible to everyone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Parents of students who live in poverty are uninvolved in their children’s education because they do not value it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. The bias and assumptions we hold about poverty can pose barriers to effective problem solving and change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Schools can have only a limited effect on students who live in poverty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Schools are only part of the solution to the problem in poverty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Schools are holding up their end of the deal in eliminating poverty in America.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Parrett & Budge, January 2012)
### Are We Perpetuating Underachievement: What Have We Eliminated?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counterproductive Mind-sets and Practices</th>
<th>Setting the Stage Getting Started</th>
<th>Gaining Momentum</th>
<th>Sustaining Gains Refining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progress Indicators / Evidence</strong></td>
<td>No Action Yet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are aware of the counterproductive nature of the mindset, policy, structure, or practice</td>
<td>People are empowered</td>
<td>The counterproductive mindset, policy, structure, or practice has been eliminated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of urgency has been developed</td>
<td>Barriers are being removed</td>
<td>New mindsets, policies, structures, and practices have been put in place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff are beginning to acknowledging the need for change</td>
<td>Commitment to the elimination is increasing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pressure and support for changing continues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counterproductive Mind-sets and Practices</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An inequitable distribution of resources</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low expectations for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low expectations for professionals/staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of courage/will to confront inequities / improper practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of support for effective leaders and teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure to retain effective leaders and teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ineffective data systems</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Parrett & Budge, 2012)
Do We Have Structures and Processes for Focusing On Student, Professional, and System-Level Learning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress Indicators / Evidence</th>
<th>Setting the Stage Getting Started</th>
<th>Gaining Momentum</th>
<th>Sustaining Gains Refining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of urgency has been developed</td>
<td>People are empowered</td>
<td>The improvements have become embedded in daily practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The current status of the school is understood</td>
<td>Barriers are being removed</td>
<td>Collaboration continues</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A vision for how things will improve is understood</td>
<td>Implementation is becoming routine</td>
<td>Refinements are made</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for implementation are selected</td>
<td>Commitment to the change is increasing</td>
<td>Gains are sustained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff is prepared to implement</td>
<td>Progress is monitored</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial gains are being made and celebrated</td>
<td>Pressure and support for improvement continues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**What is my school’s progress?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is my school’s progress?</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do we have an instructional framework that guides curriculum, teaching, assessment, and the learning climate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do teachers understand the attributes and functions necessary to succeed with students living in poverty?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does our instructional framework include specific research-based strategies for students who live in poverty?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we use common formative and summative assessments to measure student learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have we ensured that teachers are assessment literate and can use assessments to guide instruction?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have we developed assessment literacy in students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are we collaboratively analyzing student work and collectively improving teaching?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are we using research-based models for professional learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have we ensured all students are proficient in reading?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we provided targeted interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are we engaging in continuous data-based inquiry as a school?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Parrett & Budge, 2012)
### Barriers to a Focus on Learning

**Are We Perpetuating Underachievement: What Have We Eliminated?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress Indicators / Evidence</th>
<th>Setting the Stage Getting Started</th>
<th>Gaining Momentum</th>
<th>Sustaining Gains Refining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Action Yet</td>
<td>People are aware of the counterproductive nature of the mindset, policy, structure, or practice</td>
<td>People are empowered</td>
<td>The counterproductive mindset, policy, structure, or practice has been eliminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A sense of urgency has been developed</td>
<td>Barriers are being removed</td>
<td>Commitment to the elimination is increasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff are beginning to acknowledging the need for change</td>
<td>Pressure and support for changing continues</td>
<td>New mindsets, policies, structures, and practices have been put in place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Counterproductive Mind-sets and Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of an instructional framework</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misaligned curriculum, instruction, and assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ineffective Instruction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher isolation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misassignment of teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of needs-based, teacher-directed professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student retention</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracking of curriculum and students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inappropriate use of instructional pullouts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of extended learning time</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Misassignment to special education</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Parrett & Budge, 2012)*
1. What new information, insights, and ideas did we gain from this session?

2. Based on our assessment of the school or district, what change needs to occur and what might be our next steps?

3. Are the changes needed in our school or district structural (time, resources), cultural (norms, beliefs, values), or both?

4. What is the magnitude of change this represents for our school – first order or second order? What is the evidence?

---

**Action Planning Template for Developing a Focus on Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Next Steps</th>
<th>Lead Person Responsible</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Do We Have Structures and Processes for Fostering a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress Indicators / Evidence</th>
<th>Getting Started</th>
<th>Gaining Momentum</th>
<th>Sustaining Gains, Refining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Action Yet</td>
<td>Urgency is apparent.</td>
<td>People are empowered</td>
<td>Improvements are embedded in daily practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*School status is understood. *A vision for improvement is shared.</td>
<td>*Barriers are being removed *Implementation is becoming routine</td>
<td>*Collaboration continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Implementation strategies are selected.</td>
<td>*Commitment is increasing</td>
<td>*Refinements are made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Staff is prepared to begin.</td>
<td>*Progress is monitored *Initial gains are being made and celebrated</td>
<td>*Gains continue to be made and sustained</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## What is my school’s progress?

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is our school safe?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we understand the influence of poverty on student learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are we addressing student mobility?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are we fostering a bond between students and school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we provide the following protective factors for students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Caring, trusting relationships?</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Student advisories?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>*Small learning environments?</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Removal of economic barriers to participation?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do we engage parents, families, and the community with our school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we provide a range of social services for our students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we employ school-family liaisons?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we offer adult mentoring?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we provide service learning opportunities for our students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we conduct home visits for all of our students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we ensure effective two-way communication?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we make our school available as a community center?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do we foster trust among our parents, families, and school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is our district’s progress in supporting schools in these areas?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*(Parrett & Budge, 2012)*
William H. Parrett

William H. Parrett is the Director of the Center for School Improvement & Policy Studies and Professor of Education at Boise State University. He has received international recognition for his work in school improvement, small schools, alternative education, and for his efforts to help youth at-risk. His professional experiences include public school and university teaching, curriculum design, principalships and college leadership, media production, research and publication.

Parrett holds a Ph.D. in Secondary Education from Indiana University. Parrett has served on the faculties of Indiana University, the University of Alaska and Boise State University. As Director of the Boise State University Center for School Improvement & Policy Studies (1996 to present), Parrett coordinates funded projects and school improvement initiatives which currently exceed $8.8 million. His research on reducing achievement gaps and effective schooling practices for youth at risk and low performing schools has gained widespread national recognition.


Parrett’s media production, Heart of the Country (1998), is a documentary of an extraordinary principal of a village elementary school in Hokkaido, Japan, and the collective passion of the community to educate the heart as well as the mind. Since its release, the production was nominated for the Pare Lorentz Award at the 1999 International Documentary Awards (Los Angeles, CA); has won the Award of Commendation from the American Anthropological Association, a Gold Apple Award for best of category at the National Education Media Network Festival (Oakland, CA), a National CINE Golden Eagle Award (Washington, D.C.), and a Judges’ Award at the 24th Northwest Film Festival (Portland, OR). In addition, Heart of the Country was an invited feature and screened at the Cinema du Reel festival in Paris (1998) and the Margaret Mead Film Festival (1998) in New York City. This work has received critical acclaim for its cinematography and insight into the universal correlates of effective teaching and learning and the power of community participation in public schools.

Parrett has also served as visiting faculty at Indiana University, the University of Manitoba, Oregon State University, Hokkaido University of Education (Japan), Nagoya Gakiun (Japan), Gifu University (Japan) and Heilongjiang University (People’s Republic of China). His consultancies include state departments, boards of education, state and regional service providers and school districts in 41 states and 10 nations.

Throughout his career, Parrett has worked to improve the educational achievement of all children and youth, particularly those less advantaged. Toward this goal, as director of the CSI&PS, he has overseen the acquisition of over twenty million dollars in external funding to create programs and interventions designed to help educators, schools, communities, and universities benefit from research and best practice. These efforts have positively impacted the lives of thousands of young people.
Kathleen Budge

Kathleen Budge is the coordinator of the Leadership Development Program at Boise State University. She has led the development of this innovative, non-traditional preparation program, the purpose of which is to develop leaders who have the commitment and capabilities to lead schools where all students succeed.

Kathleen also serves as an assistant professor in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Foundational Studies Department where her research and scholarly activity focuses on educational leadership, leadership development, rural education, school improvement, and poverty. She has conducted numerous presentations at national and state conferences as well as provided frequent contributions to educational journals and other publications on these topics.

Kathleen earned her doctorate from the University of Washington in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in 2005. She was selected to participate in Leadership for Learning, an innovative, cohort-based program that emphasized the link between leadership and learning, as well as the development of leaders willing and able to address and redress issues of equity and social justice.

Prior to joining the faculty at Boise State, Kathleen served as the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning at Educational Service District 113 in Olympia, Washington. She provided leadership to forty-five, predominantly rural, school districts serving approximately 77,000 students. She led the development of a highly successful regional job-embedded professional development model and facilitated data-based improvement planning with more than 150 schools. Her leadership was recognized through being awarded the Washington Association of School Administrator’s (WASA) Regional President’s Award, the WASA Award of Merit, and the Washington Association of Educational Service Districts President’s Award for significant contribution to the state’s educational service agencies.

Kathleen also served as a Washington State Distinguished Educator/School Improvement Specialist providing training and consultation to superintendents, central office administrators, building principals and teacher-leaders in schools spanning grades preschool-12, and varying in size, demographics, and geographical location. She also served on the Statewide School Improvement Technical Assistance Council and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s Curriculum Advisory and Review Committee. Additionally she was a contributing author to the School System Improvement Guide and the Washington State School Improvement Planning Guide both published by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in Olympia, Washington.

Kathleen also has worked as a district curriculum director, an elementary principal, and an elementary and special education teacher for 17 years. She continues to maintain that her most important and significant work has been teaching first graders to read.