Poverty and Underachievement: How High-Performing High Poverty Schools Lead Their Students to Success

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

Menasha School District

February 28, 2011

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Poverty and Underachievement: How Schools/Districts Lead Students to Success

How Are We Doing?

Validate Challenge to Improve

Collaborate / Network!

Teachers  
Principals  
Instructional Coaches / School-Based Certified  
Para Professionals / School Based Classified  
District Office/Superintendents/School Board  
State Dept./Regional Offices/Universities/Consultants

High Performing/High Poverty Schools: Common Characteristics

Rigorous, Values & Beliefs
Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School
Saint Paul, MN

2005 Dispelling the Myth Award Winner

School Demographics

- Student Population:
  - Total Student Population (PK-6th): 315 Students Grades K-6
  - 43% African American
  - 19% Latino
  - 19% Asian
  - 2% American Indian
  - 40% Mobility Index*
    (Students who enrolled or left Dayton’s Bluff after October 1st)
  - 93% 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

2009 MCA-2 Achievement Results
Math Grade 3-6

Dayton’s Bluff Elementary

2009 MCA-2 Achievement Results
Homes vs. OPP

Dayton’s Bluff Elementary Improvement Over Time
Grade 5 Math


Lapwai Elementary
Lapwai, ID

2005 Dispelling the Myth Award Winner

Lapwai Elementary
- 130 Students Grades 3-5
- 78% Native American
- 9% White
- 13% Other Ethnicity
- 79% Low Income
- Native American students outperformed the state in 4th grade reading and math 2003-2009

Making Gains at Lapwai
Grade 4


“If it can happen at Lapwai...it can happen anywhere.”

Brenna Terry
Lapwai School Board Member
2006

Against All Odds
Taft Elementary School
Boise, ID

2003 Blue Ribbon Award Recipient

William H. Taft Elementary

• 362 Students Grades k-6
• 78% Low Income
• 16% ELL/Refugee
• 9% Hispanic

Port Chester Middle School
Port Chester, NY

2006 Disjugling the Myth Award Winner

William H. Taft Elementary

Reading Scores, 3rd Grade

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.

Port Chester Middle School

• 823 Students in grades 5-8
• 73% Latino
• 8% African-American
• 60% Low Income

New York Department of Education, 2009

April 2009
Port Chester Middle School
Language Arts Scores 2009
Grades 5-8

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Port Chester</th>
<th>New York</th>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>73%</td>
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Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High
Elmont, New York
- 1,945 Students in grades 7-12
- 77% African American
- 27% Low-Income

Elmont: Out-Performing the State
Secondary-Level English (2006)

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<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low-Income</td>
<td>55%</td>
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Improvement and High Performance
at Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High

“How many effective schools would you have to see...
...to be persuaded of the educability of poor children? If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that basic pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background...
We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us.”

Ron Edmonds... 1979
And...At District Level?

Caldwell School District
Closing The Achievement Gap Between White & Hispanic Students

Sacajawea Elementary Reading Grades 3-5

Sacajawea Elementary Math Grades 3-5

Caldwell’s Theory of Action

Capacity in leadership, instruction and relationships
Ambitious goals for student achievement and retention of high-quality staff
Partnerships

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

Build Leadership Capacity
Caldwell Academy of Leadership

Strategy:
The Caldwell Academy of Leadership builds relationships and trust, as well as a deep-rooted technical understanding of teaching and learning, to increase student achievement, and improve teacher and administrator retention.

Focus on STUDENT, Professional, and System Learning
Improve Instruction

Strategy:
- Teachers and school leaders develop a teaching and learning standard with tools such as Reading First, DMT, RTI and PEP grant.

Focus on STUDENT, Professional, & System Learning
Don’t Be Afraid of Innovation

Strategy:
- Idaho’s only school for freshmen, the Caldwell Freshman Academy, focuses attention on students who are on a path toward failure. These at-risk students are in a school of only 90 students and class sizes are limited to 15 students per teacher.

Prioritize Retention of High-quality Teachers and Administrators

Strategy:
Make it a priority to improve teacher and administrator retention by building an environment that fosters trusting and caring relationships.

Caldwell Freshman Academy

Focus on STUDENT, Professional, and System Learning

Strategy:
- Idaho’s only school for freshmen, the Caldwell Freshman Academy, focuses attention on students who are on a path toward failure. These at-risk students are in a school of only 90 students and class sizes are limited to 15 students per teacher.
Focus on Student, PROFESSIONAL, & SYSTEM Learning

Coaching and Monitoring Progress

Strategy:
- Provided meaningful (based on data) professional development to everyone.

Foster a Safe, Healthy, & Supportive Learning Environment

Level the Playing Field: School Uniforms

- Caldwell requires a strict dress code to put the focus on student learning. The dress code ensures a unified and premier student body.

Communicate and Celebrate the Good News

Strategy:
- A full-time communication officer updates the web site nearly every day, creates a weekly newsletter and writes stories for the local newspaper. The CSD web site gets more than 4,000 VISITORS AND 10,000 PAGE VIEWS A DAY during school time. Parents, staff and students are regular users of the web.

Take Professional Accountability/Responsibility for Learning

Believe in success for everyone

Strategy:
- Have you asked yourself: “Do you really believe 100 percent of the students can make it?”
“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?”


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

Building Leadership Capacity

- Are we managing material and human resources effectively?
- Are we optimizing time — extending it for understanding 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?

| Low Expectations | Inequitable Funding | Ineffective Instruction | Tracking / Retention Pullouts | Miss-assignment to Special Education | Blaming Students / Families | Mis-assigned Teachers | Teacher Isolation |
Building Leadership Capacity

- Do we have a data system that works for classroom and school leaders?
- Teachers Understand Data
- Teachers Agree on Benchmarks and Common Assessments
- Teachers Use Assessment FOR Learning
- Teach—Assess—Meet Regularly to Discuss and Monitor (PLCs)
- Students Understand Goals / Targets

More Classes in High-Poverty, High-Minority Schools Taught By Out-of-Field Teachers

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<th>High poverty</th>
<th>Low poverty</th>
<th>High minority</th>
<th>Low minority</th>
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<td>Percent of Classes Taught by Out-of-Field Teachers</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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Poor and Minority Students Get More Inexperienced* Teachers

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<tr>
<td>Percent of Teachers Who Are Inexperienced*</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<td>10%</td>
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More Classes in High-Poverty, High-Minority Schools Taught By Out-of-Field Teachers

- High poverty: 34%
- Low poverty: 19%
- High minority: 29%
- Low minority: 21%

Note: High poverty school-50% or more of the students are eligible for free/reduced price lunch. Low poverty school-15% or fewer of the students are eligible for free/reduced price lunch.

High minority school-50% or more of the students are nonwhite. Low minority school-15% or fewer of the students are nonwhite.


Results are devastating.

KIDS WHO COME IN A LITTLE BEHIND, LEAVE A LOT BEHIND.
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?

Reading And Poverty

- 61% of low-income families have no books in their homes
- 43% of adults with the lowest level of literacy proficiency live in poverty
- 55% of children have an increased interest in reading when given books at an early age.
- Children with a greater variety of reading material in the home are more creative, imaginative and proficient in reading. They are also on a better path toward educational growth and development.
- There is only one age-appropriate book for every 300 children in low-income neighborhoods, compared to 13 book per child in middle-income neighborhoods.

Effective Reading Programs for Middle and High Schools: A Best-Evidence Synthesis

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%.”


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?

Focus on Learning: Assessment

A Check-Up...
or An Autopsy?
A Framework for Action in High Poverty Schools

- Poverty and Underachievement: How High-Poverty, High-Performing, Schools Lead Their District to Success (Parrett, Budge ASCD 2011, in press)

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?

Foster a Safe, Supportive and Healthy Learning Environment

What every student wants more than anything else...

...a caring relationship with an adult.

Where’s the time for all of this?

The Full Year Calendar

Less Summer Vacation
Less Weekends, Holidays, & Summer Vacation

Less Professional Development Days & Early Dismissal/Parent Conferences

Less Class Picnic, Class Trip, Thanksgiving Feast, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hannukah, Awards, Assemblies, Athletics & Concerts

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
- Stop releasing students early
- Conduct parent / student led conferences outside school day
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

Compelling Conclusions

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!
We know how to improve any school ...

Every school can become a high performing school

Teachers Make The Difference!

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

What do we choose to do?

...our students are waiting

For the Menasha School District PDF version of “Poverty and Underachievement: How Schools/Districts Lead Students to Success” handout, please visit http://csi.boisestate.edu/ and click on the “Resources” link.
High Performing/High Poverty Schools: Common Characteristics

Focus on Learning (Student, Professional, System)

Build Leadership Capacity

Foster Healthy, Safe, Supportive Learning Environments

Community

Family

District

School

Classroom

Caring
Relationships / Advocacy

High
Expectations and Support

Commitment to Equity

Professional Accountability for Learning

Courage and Will to take Action

NORMS, VALUES & BELIEFS

Poverty and Underachievement: How High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools LEAD Their District to Success

(Parrett, Budge ASCD 2011, in press)
Tough Questions

I t'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
for Tough Times

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 Port 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 Valerie 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.

**Questions About Learning**

**Does our instructional framework guide curriculum, teaching, assessment, and the learning climate?**

Leaders in the schools we studied credit much of their success to a high level of instructional program coherence. Several of the schools began their improvement efforts by adopting a comprehensive school reform model. For example, P.S./M.S. 124 selected Core Knowledge, whose framework emphasizes building students' knowledge base in world history, geography, civics, literature, science, art, and music.

Schools customized the reform models to better fit their needs. Finding the content to be “too Eurocentric,” teachers at P.S./M.S. 124 have added content relating to Africa, Latin America, and Asia. In addition, they have incorporated knowledge about the various ethnicities and cultures represented in their student body.

**Do we have common assessments, and do we embrace assessment literacy?**

High-performing/high-poverty schools establish clear learning targets and engage their students in activities that help them acquire assessment literacy. These activities include selecting individual learning benchmarks, compiling portfolios, making public presentations of work, completing reflective revisions, and participating in student-led 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 use 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.”
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**


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# Eliminate Practices that Manufacture Low Achievement

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<tr>
<td>Blaming students and families</td>
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<td>“Bell Curve” mentality</td>
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<td>Fees for extra-curricular activities</td>
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<td>Settling for anything less than teaching every child to read</td>
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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.