Twelve Secrets of Success: Proven Interventions to Increase Student Achievement of Poor and Minority Students

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

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12 Secrets of Success…
12 Practices That Matter…
12 Questions That Count

Research on High Poverty / High Performing Schools

- 18 Studies / Reports / Data Analyses
- Representing Thousands of Schools Nationwide
- What They Did
- How They Sustain Remarkable Results

How Are We Doing?

Validate
Challenge to Improve

Our “Kids” World Has Changed

Technology
Economics
Diversity
Policy
All students must succeed in school... period.
... or live out their lives unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable.
In 2010... an education represents the ONLY door of opportunity...
... the ULTIMATE Civil Right.

“...or live out their lives unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable.
In 2010... an education represents the ONLY door of opportunity...
... the ULTIMATE Civil Right.

Closing the Achievement Gap
Lessons from Illinois' Golden Spike High Performing Schools

McGee, Glenn W. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 2004

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

Poverty vs. Achievement in Illinois Elementary Schools

When I Turn 50

“When I’m 50 I will be married and I will have two kids and I will make it a point not to be like the other men I know. I will help my wife raise my kids and I will be a good Daddy. I will get myself a good job and buy my kids everything that they need. I am going to work at a store and be the manager. I am going to be very nice to people and help people who need help. I am only going to be married once. I am going to have a nice life.”

Victor R., Grade 4


Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School
Saint Paul, MN

Dispelling the Myth... Over Time

May 2002

www.edtrust.org/edtrust
School Demographics

- Student Population:
  - Total Student Population (PK-6th): 375 Students
  - 40% African American
  - 25% Hispanic
  - 20% Southeast Asian
  - 13% Caucasian
  - 2% American Indian

- 40% Mobility Index* (Students who enrolled or left Dayton’s Bluff by October 1st)

- 91% Free and Reduced Lunch Status* (Income eligibility based upon Federal Poverty guidelines)

- 35% English Language Learner Students

- 12% Special Education Students

* Note: Statistics taken from the 2008-09 School Year

Granger High School
Granger, WA

- 390 Student Grades 9-12
- 84% Hispanic
- 92% Low Income
- 100% Parent Attendance / Student Led Conferences
- 91% Graduation Rate

Granger High School
Granger, WA

Grade 10 Reading Scores

Granger High School Improvement Over Time

- Graduation Rate 2001: 30%
- Graduation Rate 2007: 91%
- 10th Grade Reading Proficiency 2001: 20%
- 10th Grade Reading Proficiency 2007: 80%
- 10th Grade Writing Proficiency 2001: 8%
- 10th Grade Writing Proficiency 2007: 74%
- 10th Grade Math Proficiency 2001: 6%
- 10th Grade Math Proficiency 2007: 46%
- Parent Conference Participation 2001: 10%
- Parent Conference Participation 2007: 100%
Aldine School District

2009 Broad Prize Award Recipient for Urban Education

Aldine School District
Aldine, TX

- 62,055 students Grades k-12
- 80% Low Income
- 67% Hispanic
- 28% African American
- 3% White
- 3% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 11th largest school district in Texas

http://www.aldine.k12.tx.us/sections/about/fast_facts

Aldine, TX: Raising Achievement for All While Narrowing Gaps

2009 Broad Prize Award Recipient for Urban Education

“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

What Leaders In High Performing/High Poverty School Do...
- Build Leadership Capacity
- Focus on Student and Professional Learning
- Foster A Safe, Supportive, and Healthy Environment

#1 Leadership
- Confront brutal facts
- Create effective data systems
- Establish measurable goals
- Monitor progress
- Conduct Audits
- Everyone held accountable

“The foundation of all effective school improvement is leadership: vision, honesty, planning and a can do attitude.”

Parrett & Budge, ASCD 2010, In Press
Building Leadership Capacity

Eliminate Practices That Manufacture Low Achievement

- Low Expectations
- Inequitable Funding
- Inappropriate Teacher Assignments
- Ineffective Instruction
- Tracking / Retention Pullouts
- Miss-assignment to Special Education
- Blaming

Understanding Poverty

- Poor Health Care/Nutrition
- Few Books/Computers
- Limited Vocabulary
- High Mobility
- Externally Controlled
- Often Single Parent
- Unchallenging Summer Vacation

Critical Policy Questions

- Are we working to eliminate policies and practices that manufacture low achievement?
- Have we reorganized time to better support professional learning?

# 2 High Expectations

- Every Child / Every Day
- Challenging Curriculum
- Challenging Assignments
- Monitor Student Progress
- Safety Nets

“Students live up to… or down to our expectations. There is nothing as powerful as high expectations”

SEEDS OF HOPE

- PRIDE: I am a worthy person, I am proud of my family and my heritage.
- CONFIDENCE: I can learn.
- BELONGING: I can find my place of strength, support and acceptance.
- SELF RELIANCE: I can influence my future
# 3 Extend Learning
- Start early: Preschool / full-day Kindergarten
- Extend day, week, year, graduation
- Summer catch up / acceleration
- Homework clubs / tutoring

“If a student is behind, they will never catch up without additional quality instructional time.”

# 4 Ensure Effective Basic Skills Instruction
- Provide common instructional framework
- Intensive emphasis on basic skills, especially reading
- Re-organize K-3
- Use research based programs / strategies
- Elementary → loop teachers / use data
- Secondary → interventions / student advisories / use data
- Targeted professional development for teachers

“Basic skills are the foundation of all learning, and nothing is as important as reading.”

# 5 Teach Kids To Read
- Schools must stop “teaching reading” and teach students to read
- Students need to learn quickly and well
- Teachers must “name them” and “claim them”; they must monitor progress and do everything possible to elevate each student to the next level
- Employ literacy coaching

“It is not enough to double the amount of time that reading is taught.”

Elementary Students At Risk

Reading One Year Below Grade Level
Have Been Retained

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

Long Term Effects of Illiteracy and Learning Disabilities
- Low levels of literacy are powerful predictors of welfare dependency and incarceration—and the high costs associated with these interventions.
- More than 1/2 the adult prison population has a literacy level below those required by the labor market.
- Nearly 40% of adjudicated juvenile delinquents have treatable learning disabilities that were overlooked and undiagnosed in school.

Barr, R.B. & Parnell, W.B. Hope Fulfilled for At-Risk and Violent Youth (2001)

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

Best Evidence Encyclopedia
www.bestevidecence.org
www.bestevidecence.org/words/mha_read_sep_16_2008_sum.pdf

Instructional Focus
A Thought...

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%.


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

Don’t tell me you believe all kids can learn. Tell me how our district monitors student learning and responds to students who struggle.

Rick Dufour

# 6 Remediation/Re-Teaching

- Create a time each day for enrichment, remediation, and re-teaching
- Create a time each week
- Accelerate!

“Every time we teach, some get it, some almost get it, and some do not get it at all and must be re-taught immediately.”

Critical Policy Questions

- Do we have common instructional framework to guide curriculum, teaching, assessment, and the learning climate?
- Have we ensured that all students are proficient in reading?

# 7 Ensure A Personal Connection

- Ensure a personal adult connection for each student
- Develop a safe / welcoming atmosphere
- Student Advisories
- Create small learning communities
- Individually connect with each student...each day

“What at-risk children want at school more than anything else is a caring relationship with an adult.”

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

...a caring relationship with an adult.
# 8 Engage Families/Parents/Communities

- Two-way communication with families / home visits
- Hold family meetings regularly, provide food, childcare, recreation, computer use...whatever needed
- Teach families how to help their children learn
- Student led conferences

“Families living in poverty are often intimidated and/or uncomfortable in schools. Yet, when families and the community are involved, a significant spike in learning will occur.”

# 9 Enrich Curriculum

“If a student is placed in a college prep curriculum and adequately supported: they will succeed.”

- A rigorous college prep curriculum for all students
- Enrich secondary curriculum with career explorations/career themes / service learning
- Post High School Plans

“ If we teach students algebra, they will learn it”

Critical Policy Questions

- 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?

# 10 Employ A Proven Process of Improvement

- Effective grade / department level teams
- Intensive focus on data to identify problems / establish goals
- Plan interventions / monitor progress
- Meet regularly to review data / refine interventions
- Conduct audits

“If schools use data, establish goals, monitor progress, meet regularly to collaborate, and conduct audits immediate and dramatic gains can be expected.”

Leading Improvement

Start With Data

Set 3 to 5 Goals / Targets
Meet Frequently / Monitor
Mid-course Corrections
Celebrate Progress

# 11 Teachers Make A Difference

- Teachers have an enormous impact
- Teachers must hold high expectations
- Teacher attitude makes ALL the difference; students will live up to or down to expectations.
- Support teachers with targeted professional development
- Organize for teacher collaboration

“I could not let that teacher down.” “I had to get that teacher off my back”
# 12 Support Teachers

- Underachieving poor / minority students must have experienced, well-qualified teachers.
- Effective Instruction needs supervision / accountability
- Support lesson study
- Provide classroom coaches / support
- Foster teacher leadership

"The key to all students learning effectively is the classroom teacher. There is a massive gap between effective practice and actual practice."

12 Critical Policy Questions That Count

Build Leadership Capacity

- Do we have a data system that works for classroom and school leaders?
- Are we working to eliminate policies and practices that manufacture low achievement?
- Have we extended learning time for underachieving students?
- Have we reorganized time to better support professional learning?

Focus on Student and Professional Learning

- Do we have common instructional framework to guide curriculum, teaching, assessment, and the learning climate?
- Do we have common assessment and embrace assessment literacy?
- Have we ensured that all students are proficient in reading?
- Do we proved targeted intervention?

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?

Compelling Conclusions
For PDF version of the 2010 NSBA Conference Handout of Catching Up The Kids Left Behind... 12 Practices That Matter... 12 Questions That Count http://csi.boisestate.edu/ and click on the “Director’s Presentations” link.

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 **** !!

“I am going to have a nice life.”
Victor R., Grade 4

What do we choose to do?

...our students are waiting
# Eliminate Practices that Manufacture Low Achievement

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<th>What is my school’s or district’s progress toward eliminating:</th>
<th>BEGINNING</th>
<th>EMBEDDING</th>
<th>SUSTAINING</th>
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<td>“Bell Curve” mentality</td>
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*The Kids Left Behind © 2007 Solution Tree • www.solution-tree.com*
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
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 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 Queens’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.”
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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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 $7.9 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 is the co-author of, Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools, 2nd edition, (Corwin Press, 2008, Honorable Mention, National Education Book of the Year 2009), The Kids Left Behind: Catching Up the Underachieving Children of Poverty (Solution Tree, 2007), Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools (2003), Hope Fulfilled for At-Risk & Violent Youth (2001), How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work (1997), Hope at Last for At-Risk Youth (1995), Inventive Teaching: Heart of the Small School (1993), The Inventive Mind: Portraits of Effective Teaching (1991), and numerous contributions to national journals and international and national conferences.

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 Gakui (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.
Robert D. Barr

Dr. Robert Barr has gained national and international recognition for his research on at-risk children and youth, teacher education and alternative schools. He is a nationally recognized speaker, consultant, and scholar in the areas of at-risk youth, school improvement, and alternative education. He has appeared twice on PBS’s nationally televised “Firing Line,” featuring William F. Buckley, been interviewed on ABC Evening News with Peter Jennings and on Fox TV’s “The O’Reiley Factor.” He has been quoted in the New York Times, USA Today and the Wall Street Journal, served as an expert witness at many state and federal trials, and presented testimony to sub-committees of the U.S. Congress.

Previously, Dr. Barr was Professor and Director of Teacher Education at Indiana University (1970 – 1981), Dean of the Oregon State University College of Education (1981 – 1990), Dean of the Boise State University College of Education (1991 – 1998), served for two years as a board member of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, and been appointed by five governors in three states to various commissions. He served as an Idaho delegate to the Education Commissions of the States. He has received three national awards for excellence in teacher education: AACTE, Distinguished Achievement Award; AASA Showcase of Excellence Award; and the Theodore Mitou Award. He is currently a Senior Analyst with the Boise State University Center for School Improvement. Barr has had extensive international experience in Indonesia, China, Japan, Chile, and was a visiting professor at the University of Innsbruck in Austria.

Dr. Barr has worked as a consultant in school districts and Departments of Education in over forty states. Since 1995, he has keynoted over a dozen national conferences and been a featured presenter at the American Association of School Administrators and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development almost every year during the past decade. And, with co-author, William Parrett, the National School Board Association has selected them four times since 1996 for their prestigious “Meet the Expert” sessions.

Barr has been widely published in almost every educational journal and is the author or co-author of eight books. Barr and Parrett have co-authored four books: The Kids Left Behind: Catching Up the Underachieving Children of Poverty, (Solution Tree 2006), Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools: 50 Proven Strategies for Revitalizing At-Risk Students and Low-Performing Schools (Pearson Skylight 2003); Hope Fulfilled for At-Risk and Violent Youth (Allyn & Bacon 2001); How to Create Alternative, Magnet and Charter Schools that Work (NES 1997); and Hope At Last for At-Risk Youth (Allyn & Bacon 1996). Welcome to Middletown, a reality-based training simulation (Solution Tree 2006) co-authored by Deb Yates, was nominated by the National Staff Development Council as “Book of the Year.” Barr’s editorial, “Who Is This Child” (Phi Delta Kappan 1996) was reprinted in French for distribution internationally and was nominated for a national award by the Educational Press Association. Other books authored by Dr. Barr include Alternatives in Education (Phi Delta Kappan 1976); Values and Youth (NCSS 1971); The Nature of the Social Studies (ETC Publications 1978); and Defining the Social Studies (NCSS 1978). Defining the Social Studies has been identified as the “single most influential book in the field of social studies.”