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Lessons from Principals of High-Performing Ethnically Diverse High-Poverty Schools

Elizabeth T. Murakami
University of North Texas, elizabeth.murakami@tamusa.tamus.edu

W Sean Kearney
Texas A&M University San Antonio, wkearney@tamusa.edu

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The most stressful job in the U.S. is the principalship. It is a tough job. Everybody has a lot of demands for you. So, do not forget that going in. Take time to laugh, take care of you, take care of your family, and then it is all good. –Ms. Dee, principal.

In 2019, a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (de Brey, Musu, McFarland, Wilkinson-Flicker, Diliberti, Zhang, Branstetter, & Wang, 2019) examined the educational status and trends of racial and ethnic groups in the United States (U.S.) recognizing that public schools serve a wide range of racial/ethnic student diversity. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the challenges faced by students, especially in high poverty schools--with the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2020) reporting that one in ten students (11.3 percent) in the state disengaged or were not contactable during the crisis.

Prior to the pandemic, deBray and colleagues (2019) showed that the percentage of Hispanic school-age children increased from 16 to 25 percent between 2000 and 2017. Hispanic and Black children also showed the highest percentage of families in poverty in the country (26 and 31 percent respectively) in comparison to White children (10 percent). In relation to academic achievement, NCES data measured the White-Hispanic and White-Black gaps in Reading and Mathematics for students in grades 4 and 8. The indicators show that Black and Hispanic students continued to lag behind Whites by at least 19 points, showing little improvement since 1990 (de Brey et al., 2019).

In this study we examine the experiences of three principals in south central Texas serving a large Hispanic student population. Our research questions were twofold: RQ1: How do leaders build individual and organizational capacity in high-needs schools? and RQ2: What can principal preparation programs do to better prepare aspiring principals to successfully lead high-need schools? This study focuses on the importance of school leaders generating high performance among students in schools with a high representation of students of color, and a high number of families with low-socioeconomic circumstances. Although concerns related to underperforming students in high-need schools have been a priority in past decades, little has been documented about how school leaders can foster successful performance among students in these specific schools.

Conceptual Framework

Reeves (2004) theorized that schools with 90/90/90 characteristics (90% ethnic minority, 90% economically disadvantaged, and 90% academically successful) may be worth researching. He and his research group observed over

200 schools and 130,000 students primarily in Wisconsin. He challenged the "inextricable relationship between poverty, ethnicity, and academic achievement" (p. 2), stating: "I do not claim that the 90/90/90 research and its many counterparts in the literature are perfect. I only suggest that the risks of this research being wrong are minimal…while risks if the research is correct and ignored are grave" (p. 19).

Since we prepare principals to serve in a high-need region, (authors, 2011, 2012, 2018, 2019), we have explored Reeves' work as part of our principal preparation program. This framework has been used for our research for the past 10 years. Once every 3 years we conducted an analysis of approximately 700 public and charter schools in south central Texas to identify schools with high poverty rates who serve students of color and have demonstrated high levels of student achievement. We have repeated this study 3 times. In the first study, 15 schools met the 90/90/90 threshold as established by Reeves (2004). In the second study 12 schools were identified that met these criteria. For each of these studies, school leaders of identified campuses were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. The current research represents the third cycle of our investigation into high performing high poverty schools serving students of color in south central Texas.

Review of Literature

Principals have faced challenges related to improving educational outcomes for students of color in poverty (Almy & Tooley, 2012; Author, 2012), and struggle in establishing sustainable conditions for student performance. Currently, 50.7 million students are enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the United States according to NCES data (Hussar et al., 2020). Fourteen percent of the U.S. population has income below the poverty level, and approximately 21 percent of school-age children are identified as coming from families living in poverty (Hussar et al., 2020). American Indians and Alaska natives are among the poorest (27 percent of American Indians and Alaska natives had income below the poverty level), followed by African Americans (25.8 percent) and Hispanics (23.2 percent) (Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013).

Poverty and equitable educational opportunities have long been an area of concern, given that about 25 percent of schools in the United States serve student populations in which 75 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (Authors, 2014, 2018; Anyon, 1981; Rist, 1970). Even though free or reduced lunch is not a precise indicator of poverty, states like Texas continue to show a higher average of poverty (NCES, 2015). Poverty also reflects a generational lack of education. The Condition of Education report in 2020 (Hussar, et al., 2020), showed that nineteen percent of students around the nation had families who completed only high school, with nine percent of children living in households where no parents completed high school. Principals serving high-need schools in

Texas are likely to work in schools receiving Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) (Texas Education Agency, 2016b), a grant supporting schools with 40 percent of students or more are from low-income households. All schools in this study received Title I funds.

Leadership of high-poverty schools include research focusing on schoolwide results (Chenoweth, 2007; Herman, et. al, 2008), as well as the performance and satisfaction of these professionals (Gurr, Drysdale, Clarke, & Wildy, 2014). There are many areas in which educational leaders can positively affect change including: student and community characteristics, student performance, parental involvement, professional development, and teacher retention. Duke (2014) stressed that leading a high-needs school requires such a multifaceted and diverse approach where principals communicate a clear vision and work with teachers to improve school climate and instruction--with variables based on campus need and leader's knowledge and skills (Duke, 2014; Author, 2012).

Interventions to address the priorities of high-need schools include strong data-based decision-making, performance monitoring, professional development, enhanced community engagement, improvement of staff, examination of learning time, and the improvement of English Language Learning (ELL) strategies (Hess & Kelly, 2007; Orr, 2006). Many interventions include investments in recruiting, preparing, or changing leaders' skills and practices. Considering the important role educational leaders play in leading change initiatives, the preparation of school principals is a key element in the improvement and sustainability of schools.

Methods

We employed a case-study approach (Geels, 2002) seeking innovative practices to inform patterns across similar schools to inform the preparation of leaders. We examined documents, conducted campus visits, and interviewed principals recruited from high performance, ethnically diverse, high poverty schools. Ten out of 709 schools fit the criteria. Data from the state accountability reporting instrument entitled, "Accountability Ratings by Region: Region 20: San Antonio" (Texas Education Agency, 2016a) informed the preliminary screening of schools.

Through a criterion sample (Maxwell, 1996) we examined the testing and demographic data for 709 schools in this region to search for high performing, high poverty, campuses serving students of color. We found that among the 709 public and charter schools within ESC 20, no schools presented 90 percent academic success when they had 90 percent poverty rates and 90 percent non-white student populations between the years 2017-2018. The only variable missing in the equation was the 90 percent high-performing index. However, when adjusting all categories to 85 percent (we similarly adjusted the threshold for high student of color population and high poverty to 85%), we identified 10 schools that met the

selection criteria. Each of these principals was invited to participate in interviews and campus visits and three (N=3) agreed to do so.

Participants

The participants represented a cross section of gender and ethnicity and represented the gender/ethnic demographic characteristics of their school communities. School visits included one interview with each principal (3), a snowball sample of teachers (N=7) in corresponding high-performance subjects (reading, science, or math), and parents (English speakers) from corresponding teachers' classroom students (N=6). For this study, we report on the interviews conducted individually among principals. Table 1 shows some characteristics of the schools and principals included in this study:

Table 1. Selected High-Need Schools principals in the south-central Texas region

Principal	Type of School	Gender	Principal Ethnicity	Number of Students	Ethnicity of Students	Econ. Disadv.	High Performance Subjects	Title I Federal Funds
Ms. Agnes	Public Elementary	F	Hispanic	390	Hisp 98.7% A.Am .5% White .5%	94.4%	Reading/ Science/Math	Yes
Ms. Dee	Public Charter Middle School	F	African American	188	Hisp 69% A.Am 26.6% White 3.2%	93.6%	Math	Yes
Mr. Cobb	Public High School Magnet	M	Hispanic	379	Hisp 92.% A.Am 4% White 2%	86%	Reading/ Science/Math	Yes

Source: Texas Education Agency (2016a).

Ms. Agnes has been principal on her campus for 3 years. She grew up in the same neighborhood which her campus serves. The school has 390 students in kindergarten to elementary grades. The average years of experience for teachers on this campus is 13 years (Texas Education Agency, 2016a). Hispanics are the majority population in both the school (98%) and the community (89%). The estimated median household income among families is $30,153; however the cost of living index in the area is 14 percent lower than the US average (City Data, 2017). Only 12 percent of the population over 25 years of age hold a bachelor or higher degree.

Ms. Dee has been the school principal for 15 years. She was previously a teacher in the same attendance zone and saw leading a charter school as an opportunity to make a difference as a campus instructional leader. The average years of experience for teachers on this campus is 8 years (Texas Education Agency, 2016a). The school is 69 percent Hispanic and the community, 65 percent

Hispanic. The cost of living index in the area is lower than the US average. The estimated median household income is $41,430. Twenty one percent of the population over 25 years of age hold a postsecondary degree or higher.

The principal at the public/magnet high school, Mr. Cobb, has been a principal for 12 years in the same district with experience in Middle and High Schools. This school is public, but it is set up to focus on targeted subject disciplines. They accepted applications from students from any area of the city. The school ranks number 13 in the city with its current focus on pre-law and pre-med career paths. The average years of experience among teachers on this campus is 7.5 years (Texas Education Agency, 2016a). The school is 92 percent Hispanic, but the community is a broader mix with 49 percent Hispanic, 36 percent White, and 11 percent African American residents. The estimated median household income is $224,753, reflecting a wide disparity in this zip code between multi-million-dollar homes in a Historic district juxtaposed with low-income rental housing.

Data Analysis

Interview and observations as well as a collection of school and state documents were analyzed separately by each researcher (i.e., using first and second coding processes that included the promotion of success among students, structures for learning, and opportunities for learning among teachers, students, and parents). The interviews and observation notes were cross analyzed to inform themes that emerged endemically from the data for reliability and trustworthiness. Common themes in the analysis considered: (a) the principals' acquired knowledge in leading ethnically-diverse, high-poverty environments; (b) how to hire, train and recruit teachers that can be successful principals in high-need schools; (c) models of expectations for teaching quality, structures and policies; and (d) leadership strategies and structures for student learning. Codes were woven together, following Saldaña's (2009), *integrative theme* concept "weaving various themes together for a coherent narrative" (p. 140), where each school leader's contribution was reported in the findings in relation to his/her ability to generate innovation related to high performance in highly diverse, high-poverty schools. Due to the study's design, generalization is limited to schools in similar contexts. Following we share the findings related to learning and leadership.

Findings

The principals talked about the importance of setting the tone for high expectations early and creating a culture of learning on campus. They did not emphasize changes based on academic disciplines. Instead, they had a broad perspective about learning. Hattie (2009) supported this idea when analyzing the multiple ways required to organizing the environment for learning. As Mr. Cobb put it: "My initial intentions when I entered not only this campus but all the campuses I worked on, is to set the tone and the expectations for what I'm looking

for as a principal." Mr. Cobb perceived the need to generate a campus culture with articulated and shared core values:

> As a leader working with adults to make change happen, I need to be collaborative, but at times, just cooperative. I am a teacher at heart, but I treat teachers in core and elective disciplines, the same--as professionals. I value *Respect, Integrity, and Teamwork*, and I create a culture of learning to meet and exceed any goals that are set for us.

Setting structures conducive to learning are paramount, especially in providing a guiding vision and goals for the campus. Mr. Cobb emphasized that in relation to student academic success, "you know what needs to happen before getting district support. You don't have to have the district tell you what to do." Indeed, Hattie (2009) confirmed the importance of developing supporting structures for learning, especially for teachers. Ms. Agnes' reputation for creating structures, especially with student safety or discipline preceded her. Teachers who knew she was going to be the school's new principal had heard that she was very supportive of teachers and enforced structures. She stated: "You cannot get to the instruction or to the academic part of things until you get to the order of your campus. You are going to think, 'Well that did not have anything to do with learning or improving your scores, but it does!" One of Ms. Agnes' first changes related to student safety during dismissal:

> I had to mediate with a parent because…I had organized dismissal…well that's a long line. I said, "Ma'am, but you know what? I would want to stay in line if I knew that my kid was in a safe spot. I would be ok with being in the line." I don't think that line is really an issue. I think that safety comes first. I know that sounds silly and you're thinking: How does that help academics? —but it helps with order, it helps with structure, it helps with your teachers trusting you.

The principals saw the importance of setting the tone through structures that would promote learning. Indeed, [Author], (2014) argued that high-need areas require leadership that brings in "pride, high expectations, and positive motivation" (p. 94). Principals were proactive in creating structures for student support. These principals were also focused on involving teachers in establishing the school as part of the community.

Adapting Structures and Policies

School change cannot be accomplished on the shoulders of the principal alone. The support of school and community constituents is key. One principal discussed her concern as teachers begun to lose touch with their school community. The neighborhood had changed, with more affluent families having moved out. Ms. Dee involved teachers in small advisory groups of families. She said:

> Each teacher has a small group. We try not to have more than 13 per teacher. That's your family. You know their birthdays, and you plan for their future based on their needs, whether physical, sometimes academic.

Many of the parents were once students in the school and participated in the lives of current students. Parents shared a sense of pride and recognition towards dedicated teachers. One parent recognized how, "attentive and caring the teachers were to the children and the community." Teachers were supportive of the principal's initiatives, especially in relation to safety. Ms. Agnes talked about strategies planned during Professional Learning Communities in relation to changing schedules to accommodate student needs:

> We changed the schedule so that teachers have a 90-minute break as a team to look at data. How do we know our kids are learning? How do you truly know whether they're getting it or not? Now we follow up on teaching strategies for specific student challenges and monitor plans for the nine-week benchmarks. The teamwork generated excitement and we can't wait until the end of the nine weeks.

Mr. Cobb added, "I am not afraid to fight to change things that need to be changed in policy or procedures." In order to rebuild processes for school improvement, the principals invested in small structural and policy steps that had been either not enforced or abandoned. Their work included faculty members, central office leaders, and their community, creating a collective movement focused on school improvement.

Building Relationships

Principals showed intentionality in building relationships, which they described as essential in improving high-need schools, especially in promoting teachers' knowledge. Teachers in Ms. Dee's school were recognized by parents for their dedication, especially when learning was challenged by the parents' limitations. Teachers demonstrated dedication to supporting children with socioeconomic needs. These principals were actively involved not only in teacher development, but also in individual students' lives in order to understand their academic and family needs. Ms. Agnes said:

> I try to lead by example and when people ask me where I'm from, I get kind of excited cause I came from poverty, and I came from probably a chance of nothing and I'm able to show my kids and be an example.

Mr. Cobb emphasized building authentic life experiences with students:

> It's important for you to talk to your students, it's important for them to hear you on the PA, it's important for them to see your car in the parking lot, it's

> important for them to see you, to know that you're available to listen and serve their needs. Relationship building is key.

Mr. Cobb's office was decorated with students' and parents' notes, testimonies of parental and student recognition for different events in their academic life. Parents could see the many cases in which teachers and principals supported students in challenging situations. For the principals, leadership with an intentional relationship included collaborating with teachers in building processes and procedures, building parents and community collaborations, providing high quality professional development, creating familial groups with teachers and students, and sustaining authentic connections with the community.

Developing a Learning Culture

A school culture that advocates for students provided an environment conducive to learning and positively affected academic performance. Mr. Cobb said that oftentimes the emphasis is on failure, with many students coming in already expecting to fail:

> Students call themselves dropouts! (They would say), 'Well sir, we're just dropouts.' (And I would say), 'You're a drop IN because you're here. As long as you're here in this building, you're going to make it.'

Mr. Cobb was the principal of a magnet high school – where an intentional vision of success was articulated for students. One of the teachers stated that, "Having students succeed is necessary in order to promote them to college and develop a passion for learning." Mr. Cobb did not state testing pressures or limitations to explain the success. Instead, he was looking to remove policies that did not work, which he then worked to change in order to enhance teachers and students' learning. Building trust was crucial to changing the campus culture. As Ms. Agnes put it:

> One of the cool things that I like about one of my 5th grade teachers is that she just goes full force, talking to parents to put excuses aside. We have to be careful with coming on too strong, but at the same time we can't nurture complacency. "What are your expectations?" What do you want for your child?" She can get almost every one of our kids to pass the state tests, but you have to allow her to be assertive, you have to trust her and you have to stop making excuses for children.

Principals in these schools demonstrated advocacy when working in high-need schools. Ms. Agnes emphasized how easy it is for students to conform to a culture of low expectations. It was important to break away from conformity.

Lessons for the Preparation of Aspiring Leaders

The findings provided leadership lessons about building individual and organizational capacity in high-needs schools. Four themes emerged in the findings, with lessons that can be transferred to the preparation of principals (Table 2.). Following we expand on the findings as they relate to lessons for the preparation of leaders.

Table 2. Lessons for the preparation of aspiring leaders

Findings	Principal Preparation Programs should prepare aspiring leaders to:
1. Principals created structures conducive to the promotion of learning	a. Hire and recruit for high-need schools b. Articulate non-negotiable requirements with teachers and parents when serving students in high-need schools c. Generate cohesion and teamwork to build an asset-based culture of learning
2. Principals employed a collective effort toward adapting structures and policies:	d. Set clear structures and policies to support teachers and high expectations for learning e. Examine and modify structures and policies in order to improve the experiences of teachers, students, and parents. f. Involve teachers in small student advisory groups for enhanced social and academic support
3. Principals focused on building relationships	g. Establish strong principal/student relations for academic or non/academic needs h. Promote and model an understanding of families' needs among parents, teachers, and students i. Relate intentionally and support student/parent experiences of discrimination and poverty
4. Principals developed a learning culture	j. Confront stigmas and low expectations among teachers and students k. Examine ways to change policies that do not work l. Push stakeholders to break away from conformity when needed

Firstly, when focusing on principals creating structures towards the promotion of learning, we learned about the importance of training aspiring leaders how to hire and recruit for high-need schools. Ms. Agnes showed the importance of hiring for commitment, "In this campus, teachers are not afraid of work. They know things are hard, but they are not saying, 'Oh my gosh it's going to be hard.' Their attitude is more towards, "Ok, what do we need to get it done?" Ms. Dee and Mr. Cobb perceived hiring of teachers as a skill to be developed.

The success of a school campus is dependent on collective relationships, according to Ms. Dee: "You may have one teacher that is really great and successful in the classroom, where 100% of those kids pass at the end of the year, but if the rest of the teachers do not perform at the same level, you are still a low performing campus. It is not one person who does it, it is the team." It is important to note that in Texas teachers are re-assigned to campuses by central office personnel. Nonetheless, whether principals selected the teacher or not, they highlighted the importance of cohesion and a mission towards a collective culture of learning.

Principals demonstrated the importance of articulating non-negotiables when serving students in high-need schools. They shared that limitations for students in high-need areas cannot be an excuse for a lack of learning (i.e., less parental involvement, societal problems, attendance, or mobility issues). Similarly, restrictive context or policies were not an excuse for a lack of agency towards students' success.

Secondly, principals were not afraid to adapt structures and policies to meet their school needs. We recognize that there is value in contextualization in preparation of principals, especially in highly vulnerable areas. The principals highlighted the importance of knowing how to generate cohesion and teamwork to build an asset-based culture. They provided examples of high expectation and support. They established teacher and students' advisory groups to provide not only academic, but social support. Reflecting on high levels of learning, Ms. Agnes also emphasized the importance of establishing support for teachers: "Teachers in the school already had established a culture of learning… The only thing they were lacking was support… So that was my big thing, working to support the teachers."

Ms. Dee set a cohesive PLC structure in place to improve teaching quality: "The first thing I started was to develop an understanding that we are a family and you cannot do it all by yourself-- so teachers were divided into small groups." Developing a structure conducive to the promotion of a learning culture was important when setting the tone for high-need school change. As in Klar and Brewer's (2013) study, these principals were successful in generating local structures to encourage the adaptation of practices within their context.

Thirdly, principals in this study focused on building relationships. We agree with Herman et al. (2008) that principals can intentionally build relationships with all school stakeholders and develop a culture of learning so that every student has

the opportunity to reach his/her full potential. Establishing strong principal/student relations for academic and non-academic needs, as well as developing structures connecting teachers to the realities of student lives was a priority for all three principals. Ms. Dee, for example, provided a way to involve teachers in small student advisory groups for enhanced social and academic support. Mr. Cobb had an open-door policy and interacted with his students every day, and Ms. Agnes regularly shared her own story of growing up in poverty. By making connections and intentionally focusing on building relationships with students, parents, and faculty, these principals were able to create a sense of family on each of their campuses.

Finally, the principals in this study emphasized the importance of establishing a learning culture. In considering how best to train aspiring leaders to effectively lead ethnically diverse, high-poverty campuses, the principals emphasized the importance of field experience. Mr. Cobb put it this way, "You've got to require that internship experiences be held at an inner city high-poverty campus, to see what it looks like, what it feels like." Mr. Cobb also emphasized the internship experience saying aspiring leaders should, "Dive into their practices, what the principal is doing, what the teachers are doing. I really feel that the internship should require future leaders to know what is really going on in a Title 1 campus." The experience of specific strategies principals in high-need schools may complete the state expectations to prepare future leaders to develop skills applicable to high need schools.

When focusing on the importance of positively impacting students and breaking away stigmas and low expectations among teachers and students, the principals seemed to indicate the importance of being advocates. Ms. Dee said, "I'm African American, but a large percentage of my campus population is Hispanic, so it was really important for me to learn about my students' culture." Ms. Dee went on to say that she remembered the benefits of attending training sessions in which her professor provided assignments focused on the analysis of a local neighborhood's demographic data. Most concerning was recognizing poverty and discrimination as inherited variables threatening students and their families, to teachers and principals to whom a responsibility to improve this scenario is given. The findings showed principals emphasizing the trust in order to help stakeholders break away from conformity.

Discussion

The principals' lessons demonstrated a need to examine how best to equip future principals for the most challenging schools. The preparation of principals needs to improve the intellectual knowledge while meeting the educational demands in the nation schools. Hess and Kelly (2007) write that, "school principals are asked to lead in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities,

challenges, and managerial opportunities" (p. 2). Thus, in order to create change, it is important to tailor principal preparation programs to meet the needs of individual schools and their communities.

The data provided by the participants highlight how leadership preparation programs must be aware of the current realities on the job as principals. Principals in high-need schools demonstrated "a commitment to developing a learning community for teachers, students and staff, with the primary focus of the school on learning and with staff and students working together toward that goal" (Herman, et al., 2008, p. 10). Based on the lessons learned within this study in relation to building capacity in high-need contexts, with consideration to families, and the students' needs, we further propose the following strategies in the preparation of aspiring leaders:

1) Design pedagogical modules based on concepts of high-performing, ethnically diverse, high-poverty schools. Class discussion can be facilitated with principals of high-needs schools and professors sharing high-needs school's needs, and practices;
2) Assign extensive reviews of the existing research regarding correlates of effective schools and challenges faced by high-needs schools;
3) Examine neighborhood data and state reports such as the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), for a high-needs campus in order to identify an area of need.
3) Conduct site visits in order to identify leadership strategies specific for high-need areas, with on-site discussions with the campus leadership team;
4) Promote opportunities for aspiring leaders to build strong relationships with teachers in local school communities; and
5) During the internship, require on-site experiences at a high-poverty ethnically diverse campus. During these assignments, students could first observe and reflect on the practices of various staff members including the principal, school counselor, and classroom teachers. Subsequently they could be required to lead or co-lead an activity with the principal designed to serve the needs of the school community.

Future research examining structures to building a culture of learning are considered, as well as longitudinal research to examine the needs of program graduates. Finally, ways to best support leadership alumni and fostering university partnerships with highly diverse schools seem relevant—in order to increase opportunities to authentically engage principals with practices that support children in high-poverty, highly diverse schools, and sustain leaders in their effectiveness.

Conclusion

I love what I do. I enjoy every day, and the day that I do not enjoy it, I cannot do it anymore. I love the kids, I love seeing their light bulb turn on. I love working with students and families, I love working with teachers. That is what it means to be an educator – Ms. Dee, principal.

Ms. Dee and her colleagues did not see themselves as highly effective leaders. Interestingly, they did not talk about scores in separate disciplines. Instead, they talked about the importance of fostering a school culture of learning in these high-need schools, in order to build individual and organizational capacity. Individual capacity was demonstrated by promoting responsibility from all involved in the students' performance. They focused on strengthening teachers, advocating for improvement in teaching, learning, and leading—with student success as the ultimate outcome.

In this study, we learned that rather than blaming society, educators, or a lack of organizational structures, principals implemented structures, worked collectively with the community, and adapted structures and policies to the unique campus' needs. They focused on high expectations instead of specific disciplines, and the task of preparing students under variables out of their control, such as poverty and discrimination. They considered their leadership responsibility to improve the experiences of students, parents, and teachers as rewarding, and significant.

We believe it is important to prepare principals to lead--not utopian schools--but schools in the most challenging areas. A principal that can lead a high-need school may be well prepared to lead successful schools. We hope that scholars reviewing this study will consider whether the findings can prepare school leaders to promote the success of students in the most challenging contexts.

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