

# CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS IN HIGH-POVERTY SOUTH CAROLINA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS\*

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## 2 Sumario en español

Debido a los estándares altos del NCLB, que escuelas son valoradas "poco satisfactorio". Hay pocas alto-pobrezas, las escuelas alto-realizando dentro de nuestro estado basado en datos de cartilla de notas de escuela. Este estudio identificará las características de directores, cuyas escuelas fueron identificadas como la pobreza alta, alto-realizando según el Departamento del sur de Carolina de la Educación.

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### 3 Introduction

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) changed the landscape of education nationally. The purpose of this law is to provide a high-quality education to children regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, ability, or background. Effective School Research suggests that successful student learning is linked to the following school characteristics: alignment of instruction and assessment, focused professional development, effective monitoring of instruction, reduction of teacher attrition, and a positive school culture. Successful school principals are closely involved with the teachers' instruction and student learning in their schools.

#### 3.1

Doll (as cited in Johnson et al., 2000), reporting on his effective schools research, indicated that effective principals are both physically and psychologically involved with individual classrooms and the school. Effective principals either are given their freedom or take their freedom to decide how to spend funds, decide what teachers to hire, and decide what is to be taught. (Carter, 2000)

Due to the high standards of the NCLB, which schools are rated "Unsatisfactory." There are few high-poverty, high-performing schools within our state based on school report card data. This study will identify the characteristics of principals, whose schools were identified as high poverty, high-performing according to the South Carolina Department of Education.

### 4 Rationale for the Study

The theoretical foundation for this study is based on the belief that school principals who demonstrate high performing qualities in high-poverty schools are determined among other factors, by correlates of effective school characteristics. Schools across the state of South Carolina receive ratings based on their overall performance and improvement. According to the South Carolina Department of Education website ([www.sc.gov](http://www.sc.gov)) school and district report cards are part of the state's education accountability system. These report cards provide schools and communities with information on the progress of schools and districts measured against the 2010 goal of having South Carolina student achievement ranked in the top half of the states nationally. In some cases, schools in high-poverty areas have a difficult task of finding effective principals and highly qualified teachers. According to Ferringo and Allen (2006), "Hard to staff schools—those with low accountability test scores, limited resources, high staff turnover, poor school leadership—are located in urban, suburban, and rural areas alike" (p. 1). South Carolina school districts that are considered "high-poverty" are generally in rural or urban areas. These districts have the highest number of students on free and reduced-price lunch. Most of the schools in these districts are judged negatively by the media, community members, and even fellow educators because of poor performance data on school report cards. However, school principals who focus their time and energy on student learning and school improvement find present and future success for their schools regardless of the school's student composition. Even in a comparison of national to international school leaders, the key for the success of principals remains the same. Despite the differences among the different nations, "instructional leaders have organizational capacity building, and must use culturally responsive practices" (Jacobson & Day, 2007, p. 9). If this is the case, poverty cannot be used as an excuse for underachievement. Investigators of effective schools have identified several school and leadership characteristics in high-achieving schools that are common regardless of the schools' socioeconomic status. These characteristics include alignment of instruction, supervision of teacher behavior and student achievement, professional development, and a positive school culture. In South Carolina, there are numerous high-poverty school districts and schools which struggle to retain certified teachers but improve instruction despite their lack of resources and positively impact student achievement in this age of accountability.

Two issues must be addressed concerning high-poverty, high-performing schools in regard to accountability. First, the NCLB legislation requires that teachers and principals of K-5 schools meet certain achievement levels of *proficient* and above for children despite their background. Schools are charged with the difficult task of ensuring that in the confines of the school that their students' needs are met; therefore, reviewing and assessing current and historical data are critical to the success of any K-5 school. Second, in most literature

that mentions successful and failing schools, leadership is the one component that is the most praised or examined. Principal responsibilities go far beyond the previously mentioned characteristics. Principals must provide safety for their students, faculty, and staff, as well as handle other important administrative duties. Principals are judged on many facets of their schools, but the number one concern of stakeholders is the academic success of their school. It is important to understand the correlation between achieving schools and their principals. Leadership characteristics are an important factor to the success of schools because K-5 principals make the vital decisions, establish the vision, and influence the culture in elementary schools. Student achievement results are impacted by the characteristics of schools and their leaders. It is essential to determine the characteristics of these high achieving schools. This study will examine the correlation of high-poverty, high-performing schools' characteristics, and their principals' influence.

## 5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the characteristics of principals of high-poverty, high-performing schools in urban and rural South Carolina. The principals were identified by school awards received from the State for their perceived effectiveness.

## 6 Research Question

What are the leadership characteristics of principals who promote student achievement in high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools?

## 7 Theoretical Framework of Effective Leadership

In effective schools studies, an influential, involved principal is one of the most important components, thus the effective schools research is the first theoretical framework for this study. Effective schools are led by effective principals. Edmond's (1979) research into school effectiveness is considered the starting point for examining educational leadership and its impact on student outcomes. The results of his research state that educational leadership is an important component to school success. Hallinger and Heck (1996) found that principal leadership has measurable influence on student achievement, but the effects are indirect and occur when principals manipulate internal school structures, processes, and visions that are directly connected to student learning. Research by Bossert et al. (1982) differed from the findings of Edmonds' study. They discovered an alternative model in which the characteristics of leadership were not the central focus. Instead their study detailed how instructional leadership is strategically shaped by the principal's belief that instruction is of utmost importance in their schools. According to Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003), "The principal is highlighted as acting intentionally and from an overall perspective, taking the school context into account" (p. 401). The principal is responsible for the organization of the school in regard to professional development, supervision of teachers and achievement, and most importantly instructional leadership. Witziers et al. also stated, "The principal's routine behaviors create links between characteristics of school organization and instructional climate, which in turn affect student achievement" (p. 401). Liethwood (1994) made two assertions concerning transformational leadership in schools. First, transformational leadership in schools directly affects such school outcomes as teacher perceptions of student goal achievement and student grades. Second, transformational leadership indirectly affects these perceptions of school characteristics, teacher commitment to change and organizational learning which in turn impacts the outcomes.

Transformational leadership in schools directly affects such school outcomes as teacher perceptions of student goal achievement and student grades. It also indirectly affects these perceptions of school characteristics, teacher commitment to change and organizational learning which in turn affect the outcomes. According to Bass (1998), transformational leaders are proactive, raise the awareness levels of followers about inspirational collective interests, and help followers achieve unusually high performance outcomes. Transformational leaders motivate followers by raising awareness of organizational goals and by inspiring them to

transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the school. Liethwood (1994) described and assessed the effectiveness of transformational leadership in schools. He has distinguished nine functions of transformational leadership:

1. Developing a widely shared vision for the school
2. Building consensus about goals and priorities
3. Holding high performance expectations
4. Providing individualized support
5. Supplying intellectual stimulation
6. Modeling organizational values
7. Strengthening productive school culture
8. Building collaborative school culture
9. Creating structure for participation in school decisions

## 8 Effective School Characteristics

During the 1960s and 1970s, the research reported that most schools are not effective. The study was commissioned by the National Center of Educational Statistics in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 1966, James Coleman's equality assessment was the second-largest study ever conducted in the United States. Coleman and his associates investigated schools across the nation, including rural, urban, and suburban settings. "The variable that had the greatest relationship with student achievement was the composition of the student population" (Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, 2005, p. 40). Students from low-income families did considerably better when they attended schools with majority middle to upper income populations. When students from low-income families attended schools that were a majority low income population, they did not perform as well. Coleman et al. (1966) concluded that "the stronger variable impacting student achievement was the parent's socioeconomic class" (p. 21). In 1972, Jencks and associates reexamined Coleman's research and issued a report entitled *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*. This study differed from Coleman's by examining the employment of students once they left public school, instead of using achievement test results to measure success of public schooling. The reassessment of Coleman's study data reiterated that school success was largely a result of socioeconomic status, and neither the teachers nor the school had any impact. Jencks concluded that public schools not only did not help alleviate inequality in the United States but, in fact, contributed to such inequality. There was a similar study to those of Coleman and Jencks conducted by Silberman. Silberman (1971) and his colleagues observed classrooms and interviewed teachers, principals, and administrators. They studied classroom practices and what students were learning. In Silberman's book (1970) *Crisis in the Classroom; The Remaking of American Education*, "he concluded from his lengthy studies that schools were not only ineffective but mindless as well" (p. 41). Silberman (1971) asked teachers and principals to articulate the reasons they organized their schools or classes in certain ways, used particular instructional materials, or grouped their students as they did. Silberman's study in 1971 contradicted earlier findings about ineffective schools. Edmonds' research focused on individual schools that were exceptional and consistently achieved academic results compared to other similar schools. Similarities included composition of the student body, location, socio-economic setting, and per-pupil expenditure. Edmonds (1979) conducted studies in two inner city schools in Detroit, 55 effective schools in the Northeast (discovered by reanalyzing the Coleman study), and 20 schools in inner-city New York. His research was conducted in schools where the majority populations were poor and minority. He concluded, "We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us, we already know more than we need to do that, and whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far" (p. 33). He further said that effective schools have a climate of expectations in which the personnel seek to be instructionally effective for all children and no child is allowed to fall below minimum achievement standards. Effective schools frequently monitor student progress through classroom assessments and standardized tests in order to relate instructional objectives to student progress. Edmonds' findings were that effective schools are

identified by seven traits of effectiveness that promote higher student achievement within schools with high populations of poverty. These traits that Edmonds attributed to effective schools were distinguished by the presence of strong leadership, safe and positive environment, high expectations for students and frequent monitoring of student progress.

## 9 Methodology

A mixed-method approach was applied to gather and analyze the data for the study. A grounded theory case study approach was conducted of two different elementary schools. These schools were identified as South Carolina Award Winners. One of the schools was a Palmetto Gold and Silver winner, and the other was a Title I award winner. These schools were chosen for the study due to their low socioeconomic status based on a sixty percent or more free and reduced-price lunch population, awards achieved, and the location of the two schools. The first selected school is located in a rural county in South Carolina, which, for the purpose of this study, is identified as Countryside Elementary. The second selected school is located in an urban area located in South Carolina and for the purpose of this study is identified as Metro Elementary. These two sites were selected based on their success on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT) test and the South Carolina School Report Card data. PACT is a standards-based accountability measurement of student achievement in four core academic areas: English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies. The PACT items are aligned to the South Carolina academic standards developed for each discipline. An accountability system and a statewide test, such as the PACT, are mandated by the South Carolina Education Accountability Act of 1998 and the federal NCLB. These schools won their awards due to their improvement on PACT. The schools selected for this study were identified through data provided by the South Carolina Department Education. The criteria for school selection are described as Title I and Gold and Silver award winners with high percentages of students on free and reduced-price lunch. The National Association of State Title I Directors' (NASTID) Distinguished Schools Program recognizes Title I schools from each state that hold their students to high standards and take seriously their charge to improve student learning. Each year schools are selected in two categories (*Achievement and Closing the Achievement Gap between Groups*) for national recognition. These schools become part of our State System of Support by providing technical assistance and professional development opportunities at state-wide meetings and by allowing other Title I schools to visit and observe their programs. South Carolina Department of Education gives the Palmetto Gold and Silver Award for sustained academic achievement and improvement, exemplified characteristics as variables contributing to their success based on PACT scores. The Gold and Silver Award program was established by the Education Accountability Act of 1998. As an important part of the education accountability system in South Carolina, the Awards program is designed to recognize and reward schools that attain high levels of absolute performance and schools that attain high rates of improvement rating. Several factors were identified as the criteria for assessing the principals' effectiveness. These factors include (1) instruction and assessment, (2) supervision of teacher behaviors and student achievement, (3) professional development, (4) teacher attrition; and (5) school culture - Effective School Correlates.

## 10 Gathering Data from Principals and Teachers

The case study research examined high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools that have been recognized by the South Carolina Department of Education. Grounded theory allows the research to generate theories and attempts to connect the principals to the effective school characteristics that impact student achievement. The research design is a mixed-methods study. The quantitative method included the use of teacher questionnaires given to the faculty of the schools. The teacher questionnaire collected data concerning teachers' feelings about professional development effectiveness, alignment of instruction and assessment, and school culture. The qualitative method of observation was used to document the occurrence of the process and interactions that created a culture of student achievement. This study used mixed methods because the surveys can collect important data that cannot be secured through observations and interviews. The responses were weighted as *Always=5, Almost Always=4, Sometimes=3, Almost Never=2, and Never=1*. The

mean was then calculated for each effective school correlate. Observations and interviews were conducted with the principals and teachers of the high-performing schools as well.

## 11 Findings and Discussion

Effective schools researchers have made a strong attempt to determine particular characteristics in high-performing schools. Leadership characteristics are especially important to the success of high-poverty, high-performing schools. School principals in this age of accountability face numerous challenges and increasing responsibilities due to their roles as school leaders. This case study focused on the effective schools characteristics and how leaders ensure that these characteristics exist in South Carolina high-poverty, high-performing schools. The following six characteristics were used to research the roles of each principal in their high-performing schools.

### 1. The high-performing principal’s role in the alignment of instruction and assessment in high-poverty, high-performing schools.

There were six questions within the survey that measured the level at which the instruction was aligned with assessment. The mean for Countryside Elementary School was 4.51, and the mean was 4.54 for Metro Elementary School. As evident by the descriptors within the survey, the teacher respondents agreed that alignment of instruction almost always occurs within their schools.

#### *Alignment of Instruction*

Alignment of Instruction Questions	Countryside Elementary	Metro Elementary
Understanding of how to build commitment to school’s mission is conveyed (7)	4.57	4.5
teacher assignments are made in relation to student needs (16)	4.21	4.42
student achievement results are used in planning (24)	4.5	4.5
the principal collaborates with teachers in developing instructional, school based programs (27)	4.43	4.5
Performance standards for students are identified and measured (35)	4.71	4.75
<i>continued on next page</i>		

a conscious effort is made to align the course content with states-standardized test (36)	4.64	4.58
Teacher Survey Means	4.51	4.54

**Table 1**

The principals were asked what functions of a principal are most important. The principal of Countryside Elementary school stressed (a) “Instructional leadership, we can have management down, everything can run like clockwork,” (b) “If effective instruction is not there then we are wasting our time,” and (c) “It’s important to know what is going on in classrooms.” The principal of Metro Elementary responded, (a) “Being an instructional leader,” (b) “Knowing the curriculum,” (c) “Being a good communicator,” (d) “Teachers need to know that they are the leaders and are empowered to do whatever they need to do within their classroom to raise academic achievement,” (e) “Really look at those scores and be able to plan instruction for the boys and girls,” and (f) “Make sure that the teachers are planning the right instruction to meet the individual needs of the students.”

The goal of every school leader, whether elementary or secondary, should be to improve instruction through supervision. According to Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2005), the goal of an effective instructional program is to find a variety of “strategies to learning goals and students, and assess the effects of instruction for the purpose of continuous improvement” (p. 112). Effective instruction is the teacher’s ability to use various approaches of teaching to a range of learning goals and diverse learning styles of students. Glickman et al. (2005, p. 113) also stated the following:

### 11.1

Instructional improvement can be defined as helping teachers acquire teaching strategies consistent with their instructional goals and compatible with their general teaching styles that increase the capabilities of students to make wise decisions in varying contexts with regard to peers, adults, academics, and life.

Teaching in high-poverty schools brings more barriers than teaching in schools with populations of higher economic status. Teachers in failing schools teach in classrooms in which they are not adequately prepared to teach. Stresses such as “unsafe climates, poor attendance, low achievement, rundown facilities and material scarcity also make it difficult for such schools to attract and retain good teachers qualified to teach at high levels in core subject areas” (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003, p. 10). In order to improve their situation, failing schools seek to improve standardized test scores and close achievement gaps. Many of these districts use “carrot” awards and penalties for schools that do not show improvement. For example, the schools that show improvement receive more attention and more benefits for their success.

Leaders in high-poverty schools have to monitor instruction, assessment and student achievement closely. According to Comer et al. (1996), the “coverage is important enough that all administrators in a school need to keep track whether what we plan to teach actually gets taught” (pp. 102-103). Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is vital to the schools’ achievement regarding accountability and improvement no matter the socioeconomic status of the schools’ populations.

## **2. The high-performing principal’s role in the supervision of teacher behavior and student achievement in high-poverty, high-performing schools.**

There were eight questions that measured the level at which the monitoring of teacher and students occurred in each school. The mean for Countryside Elementary School was 4.43, and the mean of Metro Elementary School was 4.47. The teachers’ responses indicated that the school leader almost always frequently monitors teacher and student behaviors within the schools.

### ***Monitoring of Teacher Behaviors and Student Achievement***

Monitoring of Teacher Behaviors and Student Achievement	Countryside Elementary(Mean)	Metro Elementary(Mean)
teacher performance feedback and evaluation provides information to help improve instructional strategies and effectiveness (19)	4.28	4.33
the principal monitors student achievement on performance/teacher made tests. (21)	4.42	4.58
the principal monitors student achievement on report cards (22)	4.57	4.41
the principal develops action plans to accomplish the school's vision (25)	4.64	4.83
the principal is knowledgeable about effective teaching strategies (26)	4.71	4.66
interruptions rarely occur during instructional time (28)	3.85	3.75
the instructional program is related to district-wide goals (30)	4.57	4.75
Teacher Survey Means	4.43	4.47

**Table 2**

According to the Countryside Elementary School's principal, (a) "We have MAP scores and DRA scores," (b) "Classroom assessments are looked at," (c) "That is what I want our teachers to do, look at the data to guide their instruction," and (d) "But not to the point that they are so focused on the test scores and forget that there is still the child."

Metro Elementary School's principal responded, (a) "Displaying student work," (b) "Students are able to be risk takers within the school. They are not afraid to answer questions," (c) "Really take part in their learning, be very active learners in their learning," (d) "With the testing Dominic and Stanford Eight, I had to learn how to do those assessments as well, really look at those scores and be able to plan instruction for the boys and girls," and (e) "PACT scores."

Two variables that profoundly influence student achievement are the quality of instruction provided by teachers and the quality of leadership provided by school principals. The teacher is the most significant component to student achievement. Teachers spend more time with the students than any other person spends with them during the school year. There are several essentials to influencing the effectiveness of instruction: management of time and resources, organization, content and pedagogy knowledge, and differentiation of instruction based on student need. Therefore, appropriate pacing for starting and finishing time of lessons, with little or no loss of times to administrative duties, disciplinary interventions, and instructional transitions are imperative to improving student results. Additionally, teacher preparation of lessons aligns the meat of instruction to state standards, and design of appropriate pacing for student learning is essential to success. Quality questioning, establishment of routines and practices, and maintaining a task-oriented, safe, and welcoming environment are essential to the success of teachers.

It is the responsibility of the principal to monitor and ensure that these practices are occurring in each classroom within the school. Glickman et al. (2005) noted that supervision is guarding the honesty of

the classroom which “is the function in schools that draws together the discrete elements of instructional effectiveness into whole-school action. Research shows that those schools that link their instruction and classroom management with professional development, direct assistance to teachers, curriculum development, group development, and action research under a common purpose achieve their objectives” (p. 9). Bernauer (2002) noted the following about supervision:

**11.2**

the best teachers are those who continually observe, try out, and evaluate the effects of instructional methods on student outcomes. The best administrators focus on providing an orderly and nurturing environment that stimulates and supports these efforts. Through the influence of teacher leaders and administrative leaders, the entire school can become a place where inquiry and learning is a renewable commodity. (p. 90)

According to Barth (2001), “In addition to performing administrative and managerial duties, instructional leaders are responsible for overseeing teachers’ instruction, professional development, the implementation of curriculum, and the availability of instructional resources” (p. 444). In these times of accountability, principals have more responsibility and principals are increasingly “asked to facilitate instructional collaboration between teachers as well as the subject matter and teaching strategies” (Glickman, et al., 2005, p. 11). As the instructional leader, the principal is responsible for ensuring that effective instruction and learning take place in the school.

**3. The high-performing principal’s role of ensuring that professional development activities are aligned with the needs of students and teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools.**

There were three questions within the survey that addressed the effectiveness of professional development within the two elementary schools. The mean for Countryside Elementary School was 4.26, and the mean for Metro Elementary School was 4.39. The responses of the teachers indicated that effective professional development almost always occurred within their schools.

***Professional Development***

Professional Development Questions	Countryside Elementary(Mean)	Metro Elementary (Mean)
activities that encourage the development of teacher self-esteem areSupported (5)	4.07	4.25
teachers pursue professional development opportunities (14)	4.43	4.5
parent and community support are elicited for high studentachievement (20)	4.29	4.42
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Teacher Survey Mean	4.26	4.39
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**Table 3**

In this study, the school leaders were asked, “What is your role in professional development?” According to the Countryside’s principal, (a) “That varies; I’m very big into the technology end. That part of it I am very involved as an instructor, and I do some workshops with my staff,” (b) “The reading initiative, I have been very involved with it through taking graduate courses,” (c) “As for training our teachers, my literacy coach is the leader there. I try to be in on it because, not because I am a micromanager, I don’t feel I can be an effective principal if I don’t know what to look for when I go inside of a classroom,” and (d) “Like with our balanced literacy program, if I don’t know what shared reading looks like, then how do I give honest feedback.”

Metro’s principal said, (a) “In our district we are involved in a lot of initiatives to raise academic achievement,” (b) “We are now looking at response to intervention, which I have to be trained in so that I can come back and train the teachers” (c) “Also, for the last five years we have been a Reading First school,” (d) “Along with K-3rd, I had to participate in professional development, learning research based strategies, that helps our boys and girls be proficient in reading by the time they reach 3rd grade,” and (e) “We worked on the five components of reading; we did workshops, and we even did projects.”

School leaders play an important role through their planning of professional development. According to several different researchers (NEA, 2003), school leaders can more effectively plan what needs to be targeted through professional development by using readily available student achievement data. Professional development is vital to high performing, high-poverty schools because it targets specific areas of needs for teachers to tailor instruction to the specific needs of their students. In a study conducted by Johnson (2002) on high-poverty, high-performing schools, the principal of one of the schools made sure that the school’s professional development plan was partly based on the students’ results on the state standardized tests. Schools can use these important data to make vast improvements to student achievement. For example, this can include improving phonics and reading fluency or improving proficiency of a certain skill of a school or group of students within the school.

Principal leadership is instrumental to the success of an effective professional development program. Research from Hallinger and Heck (1996) suggested that “school leaders affect student achievement indirectly through their influence on school organizational conditions and instructional quality” (p. 253). Principals’ indirect way of influencing student achievement and the culture of the school is through professional development. According to Youngs & King (2002), “School leaders can connect their schools to sources of professional development that concentrate on instruction and student outcomes. These provide opportunities for feedback, and assistance in teachers’ classrooms” (p. 644). Effective principals provide school structure and conditions that encourage teacher learning, which in turn improves instructional quality. Effective principals provide opportunities for collaboration for their teachers through planning meeting times.

As school leaders, principals must provide teachers with effective professional development opportunities. These enhance teacher knowledge, skills, and outlook on the direction of the school in regard to internal structure, trusting relationships among staff, and expertise in instruction. A collegial attitude is present and strengthened when the principal works with teachers to establish shared goals for student learning. Conley and Goldman (1994) found that program coherence is increased when school leaders align such goals with school wide professional development and buffer their schools from conflicting external influences.

The difference between strong and weak professional communities is the effectiveness of the principal as a leader. The principal must establish relationships with teachers, rather than have their position defined as a manager of teachers. When principals establish trust between themselves and staff members, competence among the staff members is likely to be strengthened. Trust develops between principals and teachers when school leaders’ beliefs and actions are consistent with school goals, when principals support teachers’ work on a consistent basis, and when they manage conflict proactively and effectively (Smylie & Hart, 1999).

#### **4. The high-performing principal’s role in the retention or attrition rate of teachers in high-poverty, high-performing schools.**

Countryside Elementary School had over 92% of its teachers return for the school year. The teacher attendance rate was over 96% for the previous school year. Over 72% of the teachers were on continuing contracts. Over 66.7% of the teachers possessed an advanced degree. Metro Elementary School had over 88% of its teachers return for the school year. The teacher attendance rate was over 95% for the school year. Sixty-six percent of the teachers were on continuing contracts. Approximately 66% of the teachers possessed an advanced degree. There were six questions within the survey that addressed teacher attrition and satisfaction within the two schools. The mean for Countryside Elementary School was 4.11, and the mean for Metro Elementary School was 4.21.

#### ***Teacher Satisfaction and Attrition***

Teacher Satisfaction and Attrition	Countryside Elementary (Mean)	Metro Elementary(Mean)
staff members are recognized for a job well done (10)	4.14	4.33
the teachers have influence over school policies (17)	3.79	3.58
teachers are satisfied with the amount of autonomy and control that they have over their classrooms (18)	4.07	4.25
the principal monitors student achievement on performance/teachermade tests (21)	4.42	4.58
resources and materials are sufficiently available (23)	4.21	4.41
required professional development activities usually closely matchmy professional development goals (32)	4.00	4.08
Teacher Survey Means	4.11	4.21

**Table 4**

The principals were asked, “What is the attrition rate for teachers in your school?” According to the high-poverty rural school’s principal teacher turnover rate is, “Real low. In five years, I have hired three teachers. Retirement is the biggest deal and teachers having to move away due to their husbands being relocated because of their jobs.” The high-poverty urban school’s principal stated,

### **11.3**

“When our teachers get here they don’t leave; we have teachers who have been here 25 years. We have teachers; some teachers come here straight out of college and have not left. The average teachers have been here for 10 or more years. I do have three new teachers due to retirement. There was an opening at third grade, second, and first. We had teachers who left to be closer to home due to their drive from a nearby county. They were here for five years or more. We don’t have a big turnover rate. Right now we do know what is going on in our state. We have to let first year teachers go because of no funding, I think that is going to be hardships for all schools in the state of South Carolina.”

#### **5. The high-performing principal’s role in promoting a positive school culture within high-poverty, high-performing schools.**

There were ten questions that addressed school culture within these schools. The mean of Countryside Elementary School was 4.49, and Metro Elementary School was 4.49. As a result of the survey, teachers indicated that a school culture of achievement is prevalent within their schools.

**School Culture**

School Culture Questions	Countryside School(Mean)	Elementary	Metro Elementary School(Mean)
school-wide discipline policies for all students are consistently supported by staff (1)	4.29		4.33
students are provided with opportunities to gain coping strategies (such as getting along with peer-pressure) (2)	4.00		4.16
activities that encourage the development of student self-esteem are supported (3)	4.14		4.42
students are expected to master basic skill (4)	4.78		4.75
activities that encourage the development of teacher self-esteem are supported (6)	4.57		4.5
we take pride in the school's culture and appearance (8)	4.71		4.64
a positive impression of the school and its programs is projected within the school and community (9)	4.64		4.5
there is awareness that the school is held in high regard by parents and members of the community (12)	4.78		4.75
there is awareness that the school is held in high regard by parents and members of the community (13)	4.50		4.36
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Teacher Survey Totals	4.49	4.49
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**Table 5**

The principals were asked, what is your role in promoting the school's culture? According to the Countryside's principal, (a) "I probably play a bigger role in it than I want to," (b) "If I think it's important, then it is going to be important to my staff; if I blow it off, then they're going to blow it off," (c) "There is a big role there and I know that I'm not intentional with it sometimes. I sometimes let things happen, that it is something I am working on. Doing more intentional things to affect morale," and (d) "When I came here the culture was already set. This school is very service oriented. March of Dimes and a student council which is totally service oriented. That piece I have tried to keep going."

Metro's principal responded, (a) "Very important for a principal," (b) "because the principal takes on the role of being the instructional leader," (c) "I have to role model what I expect for my teachers to do," (d) "I have to model how to handle parents and role model how I interact my students," and (e) "I let them know that there is nothing I won't do, I will work as a custodian if I have to and work in the cafeteria if I have to."

## 12 Conclusion and Reflection

When the No Child Left Behind Act was passed into law in 2002, it changed the educational landscape of education. The government's effect on education was made evident in both elementary and secondary schools alike. This legislation places a focus on the implementation of programs and practices to impact student achievement but with an emphasis on improving achievement for minority and impoverished populations. Its emphasis is to hold districts, schools, principals, and teachers accountable to assess and review the academic growth of students. New criteria of "highly qualified" personnel were established by the NCLB Act. States were charged with the task of establishing rating systems for schools. In South Carolina, the rating system is based on PACT scores that include *Unsatisfactory*, *Below Average*, *Average*, *Good*, and *Excellent*. These ratings apply to overall ratings and improvement ratings as established by South Carolina Department of Education as result of NCLB.

This research was based on the school principals' influence on the success and effectiveness of their schools, more specifically high-poverty schools. Through the use of the survey and principal interviews it was apparent that each Effective School Characteristic was present in both schools. The design of this study provided evidence that the principals' influence on their organizations affirmed by the awards each school received. The literature indicates there are several factors related to high-performing principals. The effective schools correlates presented found common characteristics and behaviors associated with these two high performing principals in South Carolina. Based on the interviews with high-performing principals conducted by the researcher, the common factors that emerged in the interviews were teacher empowerment, relationships, and setting the example for all stakeholders. The leaders belief in serving their school guides their thinking and overall leadership.

The principals' philosophies on the importance of instructional leadership and collaboration created cultures of team effort which translate to student success. Leaders who establish this type of relationship with their teachers give them a sense of empowerment of teamwork. Also, Maxwell (1999) stated in his book, *21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, "The ability to work with people and develop relationships is absolutely indispensable to effective leadership" (p. 77). Teachers with effective leadership focus on the byproduct of a shared vision, mission, and beliefs among school stakeholders. Sergiovanni (2001) recognized the importance of the principal to the success of a school. The author described the conditions of the organization in high-poverty high-performing schools.

The principals' belief in empowering their teachers to take ownership at the two selected schools was evident in their actions and interview responses. According to Harris (2007), these principals "pointed out the importance of creating, nurturing, and sustaining relationships with students and faculty" (p. 18). Evident in both high-performing schools was this philosophy the principals' willingness to share the responsibility

created an environment that fosters teamwork. Accountability is shared by the principals and the teachers within their schools. This was evident based on the results from the surveys and interviews. Teachers in both schools felt a sense of empowerment within their schools. The researcher concluded that the selected high-performing school characteristics were influenced by both principals' willingness to support collaboration and teamwork.

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<sup>3</sup><http://ed.sc.gov>