

Gardner-Webb University

## Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

---

Doctor of Education Dissertations

College of Education

---

Summer 2021

# Identification of High-Performing School Characteristics in Successful Low-Wealth, Rural North Carolina Elementary Schools

Tammie Padgett Ash

Gardner-Webb University, [tash@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:tash@gardner-webb.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations>



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), and the [Elementary Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ash, Tammie Padgett, "Identification of High-Performing School Characteristics in Successful Low-Wealth, Rural North Carolina Elementary Schools" (2021). *Doctor of Education Dissertations*. 65.  
<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations/65>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

IDENTIFICATION OF HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS IN  
SUCCESSFUL LOW-WEALTH, RURAL NORTH CAROLINA ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOLS

By  
Tammie Padgett Ash

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2021

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Tammie Padgett Ash under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

---

Laura Boyles, PhD  
Committee Chair

---

Date

---

Stephen Laws, EdD  
Committee Member

---

Date

---

David Sutton, EdD  
Committee Member

---

Date

---

Prince Bull, PhD  
Dean of the School of Education

---

Date

## **Acknowledgements**

I am appreciative of the encouragement and support so many people have given me during the dissertation process. I would first like to acknowledge Dr. Laura Boyles, my faculty advisor. Your patience, guidance, and steadfast confidence have pushed me to achieve more than I ever thought possible.

I would like to thank my school family. It has been inspiring to work with a powerful team of educators. The quiet way each of you loves and encourages children to meet both personal and academic successes has carried me through the many days when I wanted to put this work permanently on hold.

I would also like to thank Jennifer Guffey and Karen Glover. Jennifer started this journey with me, and Karen helped me find my way to the finish line. I could never repay either of you. I consider you two the bookends who have held me together during this process.

In addition, I am thankful for my family. The faith my mom (Patsy), mother-in-law (Joan), and daughter (Beth) have placed in me has given me the strength to complete this work. To my grandchildren, Kaylee, Maddison, and Asher, you have inspired me. I dedicate this work to you as an example to never give up. My prayer for you is that you will first hold fast to God, for with Him you will accomplish much and apart from Him you will accomplish nothing.

Finally, I am forever grateful to my love, Kevin Ash--always know Kaylee and I need you for everything because nothing works without you! In the words of The Avett Brothers, "Always remember there was nothing worth sharing like the love that let us share our name" (Avett & Avett, 2008).

## **Abstract**

IDENTIFICATION OF HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS IN SUCCESSFUL LOW-WEALTH, RURAL NORTH CAROLINA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. Ash, Tammie Padgett, 2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

Poverty has been identified as an obstacle to educational success. In 2003, Washington state researchers, Shannon and Bylsma (2007), conducted a study to uncover the commonalities found in schools outperforming their socioeconomic indicators. Their work identified nine characteristics of high-performing schools and determined all successful schools had five or more of the characteristics firmly in place, although no characteristic was rated most important (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). The desired outcome of this research study was first to determine if the nine characteristics identified by Shannon and Bylsma were still aligned with current research. Second, I sought to determine if five of the nine characteristics were found in a successful low-wealth, rural school district in North Carolina and which of the nine characteristics were most likely and least likely identified. The school staff perception surveys were administered to elementary classroom teachers who were employed for at least 1 year at their current school. I determined less than half of the schools within the district met this criterion; nonetheless, I clearly identified the presence of three characteristics within most of the schools in the district. The characteristic found most often in the district was a clear and shared focus, while family and community involvement was not found to be present in any school. The conclusion is the nine characteristics of high-performing schools are still aligned to current research, but a district can outperform its socioeconomic indicators and be deemed successful without five of the nine characteristics solidly identified, based on

the opinions of classroom teachers.

*Keywords:* high-performing schools, common vision, high standards, school leadership, collaboration, communication, standard alignment, monitoring teaching and learning, professional development, learning environment, family and community involvement

## Table of Contents

|  | <b>Page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| Chapter 1: Introduction .....  | 1           |
| Federal Expectations: Every Student Succeeds Act .....                               | 1           |
| The Cost of Education .....  | 4           |
| Poverty Defined .....  | 6           |
| Low-Income Household.....  | 7           |
| Poverty in Education.....  | 7           |
| Effects of Poverty on Student Performance.....                                       | 8           |
| School Administration Challenges .....   | 8           |
| Washington Research, 2003 Initial Report .....                                       | 9           |
| The Nine Characteristics Revisited 2007 Second Edition .....                         | 11          |
| Statement of the Problem.....  | 13          |
| Purpose of the Study .....   | 13          |
| A Successful Low-Wealth, Rural North Carolina District .....                         | 13          |
| Hypothesis.....  | 17          |
| Research Questions.....  | 18          |
| Delimitations .....  | 19          |
| Definition of Terms.....   | 19          |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review .....   | 21          |
| Southern Regional Education Board.....   | 21          |
| Education Evaluation Systems.....  | 22          |
| Education Evaluation Systems Alignment.....  | 24          |
| The Nine Characteristics.....  | 24          |
| Monroe Study.....  | 76          |
| Conclusion .....   | 77          |
| Chapter 3: Methodology .....   | 78          |
| Introduction.....  | 78          |
| Research Rationale.....  | 78          |
| Research Methods .....   | 80          |
| Role of the Researcher .....   | 80          |
| Participants.....  | 80          |
| Instrument .....   | 81          |
| Research Design.....   | 85          |
| Procedures.....  | 86          |
| Data Analysis .....  | 87          |
| Chapter 4: Results .....   | 89          |
| Introduction.....  | 89          |
| Results.....   | 90          |
| Summary .....  | 102         |
| Chapter 5: Discussion .....  | 104         |
| Research Findings .....  | 106         |
| Research Findings Summary .....  | 111         |
| North Carolina School Report Cards by Prevalence of the Nine<br>Characteristics..... | 112         |
| Limitations .....  | 113         |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Implications for Practice .....  | 115 |
| Primary Recommended Action .....   | 121 |
| Recommendations for Further Research .....   | 122 |
| Conclusion .....   | 124 |
| References .....   | 127 |
| Appendices   |     |
| A Historic Distribution of School Performance Grades .....                                       | 140 |
| B Historic Distribution of School Performance Grades by Poverty Level .....                      | 143 |
| C School Staff Survey of School Characteristics .....  | 146 |
| D AdvancED Performance Standards Domains/Standards .....   | 150 |
| E North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report–School Indicators .....                                 | 153 |
| F Google Form Survey .....   | 164 |
| G Research Base Summary .....  | 175 |
| H Citi Certification .....   | 176 |
| I Permission from District of Interest .....   | 177 |
| J Invitation to Participate in the Survey .....  | 178 |
| K Reminder to Participate .....  | 180 |
| L Principal Memorandum Regarding the Survey .....  | 181 |
| M Response Rates by Characteristic .....   | 182 |
| Tables   |     |
| 1 2018-2019 Elementary School Performance .....  | 17  |
| 2 Number of Survey Respondents by School .....   | 91  |
| 3 Years Working in Current School for Survey Respondents .....                                   | 91  |
| 4 Historical and Current Grade Levels Taught for Survey Respondents .....                        | 92  |
| 5 School Response Rates .....  | 93  |
| 6 Characteristic 1 Response Rates by School .....  | 94  |
| 7 Characteristic 2 Response Rates by School .....  | 95  |
| 8 Characteristic 3 Response Rates by School .....  | 96  |
| 9 Characteristic 4 Response Rates by School .....  | 97  |
| 10 Characteristic 5 Response Rates by School .....   | 98  |
| 11 Characteristic 6 Response Rates by School .....   | 99  |
| 12 Characteristic 7 Response Rates by School .....   | 100 |
| 13 Characteristic 8 Response Rates by School .....   | 101 |
| 14 Characteristic 9 Response Rates by School .....   | 102 |
| 15 Overall School Response Rates .....   | 103 |
| 16 Overall Prevalence of the Nine Characteristics .....  | 107 |
| Figures  |     |
| 1 Distribution of North Carolina School Performance Grades .....                                 | 15  |
| 2 Distribution of School Performance Grades by Economically Disadvantaged<br>Students Band ..... | 16  |



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Students of poverty face academic challenges unique to their socioeconomic status. School administrators face leadership challenges crafting quality educational settings to meet these particular needs, as the number of children who live in poverty increases annually. However, some schools meet and exceed both of these demanding expectations.

Almost 15 years ago, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) took a deep look into schools in Washington state and other schools nationwide that were routinely successful in outperforming their socioeconomic predictors and uncovered nine common characteristics. This work culminated with the creation of a research-based publication designed to guide school leaders who strive to provide a quality teaching and learning experience for their growing numbers of students in poverty.

School leaders today continue to grapple with educating students living in poverty. One low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district is currently meeting with success, despite the challenges associated with educating students living in poverty. A look into their practices and perceptions determined if the characteristics of high performing schools identified by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) were also common in a successful low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district.

### **Federal Expectations: Every Student Succeeds Act**

The Every Student Succeeds Act was signed into law in 2015 by President Barack Obama, essentially replacing the No Child Left Behind Act signed in 2001 by President George W. Bush. The Every Student Succeeds Act kept many of the same components as the No Child Left Behind Act, “such as state plans and report cards” (Workman et al.,

2016, para. 1), but provided discretion and more flexibility to states over their own educational policies. “Lawmakers have touted the new law [ESSA] as a more flexible approach to student testing and school accountability, once again making states responsible for fixing under-performing schools” (Korte & Troyan, 2015, para. 2). Both educational acts were reauthorizations of a 1965 law signed by President Lyndon Johnson.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was a civil rights law that was crafted to require congressional reauthorization every 3 to 5 years. While standing in the one-room schoolhouse from his early years, President Johnson (1965) stated,

By passing this bill, we bridge the gap between helplessness and hope for more than five million educationally deprived children...I know that education is the only valid passport from poverty (and) as a former teacher--and, I hope, a future one--I have great expectations of what this law will mean for all of our young people. (p. 1)

He went on to add, “As President of the United States, I believe deeply no law I have signed or will ever sign means more to the future of America” (Johnson, 1965, p. 1). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act has only been reauthorized eight times since that day in 1965, and with each reauthorization, there were changes to the program.

Education was not a new issue in 1965, and President Johnson was not the first leader concerned with the United States education system. In 1785, United States President John Adams wrote,

The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it. There should not be a district of one-

mile square, without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves. (Kober et al., 2007, p. 5)

Great schools are environments where students thrive and are well prepared for the future; in addition, “education should help to promote the knowledge and skills needed for thoughtful citizenship” (Hytten & Bettez, 2011, p. 19). In the United States, education had humble beginnings, being supported by local churches or towns. Education efforts were often limited by location, financial status, gender, and race. In 1779, the inadequacies of this system were brought to light by several leading politicians of the time. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson supported the development of schools funded by the public. Jefferson’s proposal attempted “to create free elementary schools across the state for all white boys and girls, regardless of family income...but the conservative legislature did not want to assume the burden of educating the poor, and the bill was defeated” (Kober et al., 2007, p. 4). Adams and Jefferson argued that publicly funded schools would lead to children who were “moral, literate, and productive citizens; eliminate poverty and crime; quell class conflict, and unify a population that was becoming more ethnically diverse” (Kober et al., 2007, p. 5).

Katz (1976) outlined five social issues that, according to educational proponents of the time, would be conquered through the establishment of a publicly funded school system:

1. Urban crime and poverty
2. Increased cultural heterogeneity
3. The necessity to train and discipline an urban and industrial workforce

4. The crisis of youth in the nineteenth-century city
5. The anxiety among the middle classes about their adolescent children. (p. 392)

While these issues have not been eradicated, with increased political and social concerns, the idea of a national public education system did take hold. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “In the fall of 2018, about 56.6 million students will attend public elementary and secondary schools and...before the school year is out, an estimated \$654 billion will be spent related to their education” (Wilkinson-Flicker, 2019, para. 3). However, “the growth of public education during the past two centuries has been fueled by high ideals about advancing the common good, but the realities of public schools have sometimes failed to live up to these ideals” (Kober et al., 2007, p. 6).

Today, the U.S. Department of Education’s mission “is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, Mission section). This mission statement is not unlike those of Adams or Johnson, nor is it greatly varied from thousands of other mission and vision statements from school districts across the country that tout the belief that all children can learn and will be prepared for college or career choices they will tackle as young adults.

### **The Cost of Education**

The belief that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can learn is backed annually with billions of dollars from federal, state, and local governments. President Donald Trump’s Fiscal Year 2019 Education Budget allocated “\$59.9 billion in discretionary funding for the U.S. Department of Education” (Fiscal Year 2019 Budget

Summary and Background Information, 2018, p. 2). In addition, state and local governments are spending over \$650 billion annually on public K-12 education (Chantrill, n.d.). These funds are often supplemented with grants, endowments, and fundraising efforts of tireless parent and teacher organizations nationwide. “Nearly all public-school teachers report digging into their own pockets to pay for school supplies” (Danilova, 2018, p. 1).

These monies total staggering sums that would seem to fulfill the need for public education identified by President Adams over 200 years ago. The funds are spent with the intent to provide the best education possible as schools strive to implement the latest educational trends and/or curriculums. While educational laws do not directly distribute funds, the annual spending bills they guide allocate money.

School systems across the United States are spending these funds to address the needs of current students through the use of ever-changing trends and/or curriculums. Despite Every Student Succeeds Act revisions and continued political and social pressure, a primary focus of public education has remained: removing educational inequalities that hinder opportunities and successful outcomes for students living in poverty. However, the most successful schools in the United States have been and continue to remain comprised of the most affluent children. Educational leaders face the challenge of ensuring all students are receiving a quality education despite their financial circumstances.

Coleman (1966) published the now seminal work known as The Coleman Report. Coleman’s work concluded that schools themselves did little to change a student’s academic trajectory in relation to what the students themselves brought with

them to school; and these inequalities “imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school” (p. 325). Since The Coleman Report’s publication, additional studies have added to the knowledge base and discussion of this important topic. It is now *de rigueur* to include the socioeconomic environment of both the student and their school as important contextual factors in gauging growth and achievement (Thomson, 2018).

In light of The Coleman Report and other studies, there are successful schools that outperform their socioeconomic status. Schools that serve students of poverty “know that creating equitable classrooms and schools requires multiple layers of strategies and initiatives. Instructional strategies represent only one of those strategies” (Gorski, 2017, p. 25).

### **Poverty Defined**

There are two guiding poverty measures in the United States, and each is updated annually. These two metrics are the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services federal poverty guidelines and the United States Census Bureau poverty thresholds. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services federal poverty guidelines are used to determine eligibility for federal assistance such as Medicaid. These guidelines vary by family size and geographic location (there are separate guidelines for Alaska and Hawaii). The poverty line for a family of four within the 48 contiguous states in 2020 is \$26,200 (2020 Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2020). The more detailed U.S. Census Bureau’s poverty thresholds “are used mainly for statistical purposes — for instance, preparing estimates of the number of Americans in poverty

each year” (2020 Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2020, para. 6).

### **Low-Income Household**

Although students who live below the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Census Bureau poverty lines face many challenges, they are not the only children who are affected by their economic situation. Low-income households, defined as less than 200% of the poverty threshold amount, comprised a staggering 44% of children in the United States in 2014, which represented a 5% increase from 2008 (Jiang et al., 2016). “There are more low-income working families today than there were at the onset of the recession in 2007 (9.5 million)” (Jarosz & Mather, 2018, p. 1).

### **Poverty in Education**

According to the Southern Education Foundation’s January 2015 *Research Bulletin*, low-income children now comprise the larger part of our nation’s K-12 public school students (Suitts, 2015). The Southern Education Foundation’s publication reported that 51% of United States students were from low-income homes in 2013 (Suitts, 2015). Furthermore, students who qualified for free or reduced breakfast and/or lunch were the majority in almost half (21 states) of the country. Of these 21 states with high levels of low-income families, 19 are located in the western and southern areas of the United States. Western states comprise six of the 19 states, while the remaining 13 are from the south. Mississippi ranks first with 71% of students living in low-income households, and New Mexico is second with 68% (Suitts, 2015).

High numbers of students and families living in poverty have not always been the norm. The University of California at Davis Center for Poverty Research reported the

number of low-income students has steadily increased over the past 30 years; “In 1989, less than 32 percent of the nation’s public-school students were low-income” (Suitts, 2015, p. 2). During the 11 years between 1989 and 2000, the number of low-income students increased to 38% of the K-12 student population. Six years later, in 2006, the rate grew to 42%; and by 2011, it was 48%. “In 2013, the rate crossed the threshold of one half so that in 2013 low-income students became a new majority in the nation’s public schools” (Suitts, 2015, p. 2).

### **Effects of Poverty on Student Performance**

School staff who serve students in poverty have additional obstacles to overcome in the quest to reach high academic achievement. Poverty creates a barrier between the student and successful outcomes. Students of poverty often fail to reach high academic performance levels, and they generally have poor or average grades. These educational deficits provide a serious hurdle to overcome (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Instructional strategies must be adapted to meet their unique learning needs, as “poverty has (a) destructive impact on children’s basic brain development, learning, and academic performance” (Dike, 2017, p. 67).

### **School Administration Challenges**

The purpose of education has been brought into focus for educational leaders with the increased push for standards-based education and uniform outcome expectations. “New accountability demands have forced the restructuring of school leadership, both in terms of form and function” (Holloway et al., 2018, p. 1). The spotlight has been directed most intensely toward middle and high school leaders, with pressure being applied not only from bodies of higher education but also community stakeholders in both



professional and trade fields. This high bar demands increased rigor and relevance to ensure high school graduates are prepared for all aspects of their adult lives: higher education, occupations, and family demands within an ever-increasing global economy (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 33).

The path of school improvement for each institution will be different; however, it will take school leaders on a journey to craft institutions filled with commonalities found in successful educational settings. The ingredients outlined by respected organizations require stakeholders to exhaustively examine the goals, expectations, leadership, collaboration, curriculum framework, assessment, professional development, school culture, and stakeholder involvement at their own educational institution. Their work is often evaluated for accreditation or evaluative purposes and therefore measured against high standards, thus opening the door for authentic change and growth.

### ***North Carolina***

The pressure to perform has also made its way into the salaries of North Carolina administrators. In 2017, lawmakers restructured their principal pay scale with the new salary structure based only on student enrollment and a bonus system based on student performance. North Carolina leaders are potentially eligible for “up to \$15,000 a year in bonuses depending on whether their students show growth on state exams” (Keung Hui, 2017, para. 18). This increased emphasis has intensified the need for building-level leaders to effectively assemble all needed components to create high-performing schools. This is not only an issue in North Carolina, but it is also a nationwide concern.

### **Washington Research, 2003 Initial Report**

To uncover indicators of academic success in the midst of poverty, the state of Washington conducted a research study to uncover the commonalities among schools that

were identified as successful because they outperformed their socioeconomic indicators (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Despite the growing socioeconomic challenges increasing numbers of students face, successful schools do exist. Undeterred by The Coleman Report and multiple other reports of achievement gaps and failure to thrive academically, many schools have shown sustained progress in educating children.

In 2002, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) research staff, led by senior researcher G. Sue Shannon and Pete Bylsma, former Director of Research, Assessment, and Accountability compiled a research-based guide for schools and districts to assist with improving student learning (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Their original team examined “more than twenty studies that focused on schools in which students were achieving at greater levels than would be predicted based on their demographic characteristics” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 3). The ability of a school to outperform its predicted levels became Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) definition of a successful school.

Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) study examined not only schools within Washington state, but schools around the country. The OSPI researchers discovered nine characteristics were found most often in high-performing schools. While no single characteristic directly equated to school success, researchers ascertained all schools identified as successful had five of these nine characteristics firmly in place.

The nine characteristics found most often in high-performing schools were

1. A clear and shared focus
2. High standards and expectations for all students
3. Effective school leadership

4. High levels of collaboration and communication
5. Curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards
6. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
7. Focused professional development
8. A supportive learning environment
9. High levels of family and community involvement. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, pp. 3-4)

In addition, the report stated success requires more than cursory attention to these characteristics and “reaching that level (of success) takes years of sustained school commitment, affecting values, attitudes, beliefs, and instructional practices” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 4).

### **The Nine Characteristics Revisited 2007 Second Edition**

The initial research was reevaluated and critiqued by “practitioners in schools and districts in Washington” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 5) beginning in 2006 when “about 120 new references were reviewed and added” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 5) to the original collection of work. Their task was to “indicate what has been most useful, what should be revised or eliminated, what implementation suggestions were missing, and what additional resources should be added” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 5).

This review confirmed the validity and continued relevance of the earlier work and only led to additional suggestions to provide clarity. These additional enhancements served to deepen school improvement implementation. During the second research study, attention was directed at identifying common vocabulary and concepts that crossed the nine characteristics of high-performing schools. These allowed a more focused approach

for educational leaders as they developed a systematic cycle of improvement directed to school improvement teams. They also served to illustrate the intricate art of crafting a high-performing school through interconnected disciplines. Concepts/vocabulary added in the second edition were

- A. Effective processes for improving schools
- B. Expanded perspectives on effective leadership
- C. Relational trust (i.e., trusting relationships among people in an organization)
- D. Quality instruction, grading practices, and monitoring
- E. Professional learning communities
- F. Cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching
- G. Family and community engagement in schools
- H. High school improvement
- I. District improvement
- J. Need-based allocation of resources (funding, staffing, and support). (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 6)

Since the 2003 initial release, the nine characteristics have continued to be the roadmap for school reform plans in the state of Washington. The “Center for Educational Effectiveness [CEE] for OSPI and more than four hundred Washington schools support the use of the nine characteristics...which has shown a positive impact on students’ learning and achievement” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 5). As a result of the work of Shannon and Bylsma (2007), nine characteristics were discovered to be common across these educational settings. To be exact, all high-performing schools had five of the nine characteristics firmly in place, although no characteristic was determined to be more

important than any other.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Educating low-income students is challenging and in addition to the increasing pressure placed on school administrators by both state and federal stakeholders to create high-performing schools; today's school leaders face an overwhelming task. This responsibility is given with no regard to a population of students who bring with them increasing levels of poverty that are proven to adversely affect their educational outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the characteristics of the high-performing schools studied by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) in Washington state were also prevalent in the successful low-wealth, rural school district in North Carolina. This comparison has the potential to help other school leaders when working to improve their own school systems, thus providing that excellent educational foundation the U.S. Department of Education intends for all students to receive. The western North Carolina school district selected for this study was a low-wealth system and had a number of schools that would be identified as successful according to Shannon and Bylsma's definition of a high-performing school. This study replicated the perception surveys created by Shannon and Bylsma and determined if the schools identified as successful in this North Carolina school system also had five or more of the nine characteristics present.

### **A Successful Low-Wealth, Rural North Carolina District**

A successful low-wealth school system in rural North Carolina spans a

geographical area of almost 600 square miles. The North Carolina Department of Commerce estimated the county's population at just over 66,000 residents in 2018, with approximately 20% of the population under the age of 18.

The district is comprised of one prekindergarten program center, 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, three comprehensive high schools, one alternative learning center for middle and high school students, and one early college high school located on the campus of the local community college. The school system's superintendent is under the authority of a seven-member, locally elected, partisan board of education. Total student enrollment is just under 8,000 students. This school system has outpaced the state and region in student achievement gains. Student performance continues to grow in multiple academic areas, and the graduation rate is at an all-time high.

### ***Poverty Level***

The students of this North Carolina school district daily bring poverty to the classroom. For whom poverty status is determined, 20.3% of the population in this county live below the poverty line. This number is 1.5 times higher than the national average of 13.1% and 1.4 times higher than the North Carolina average of 14%.

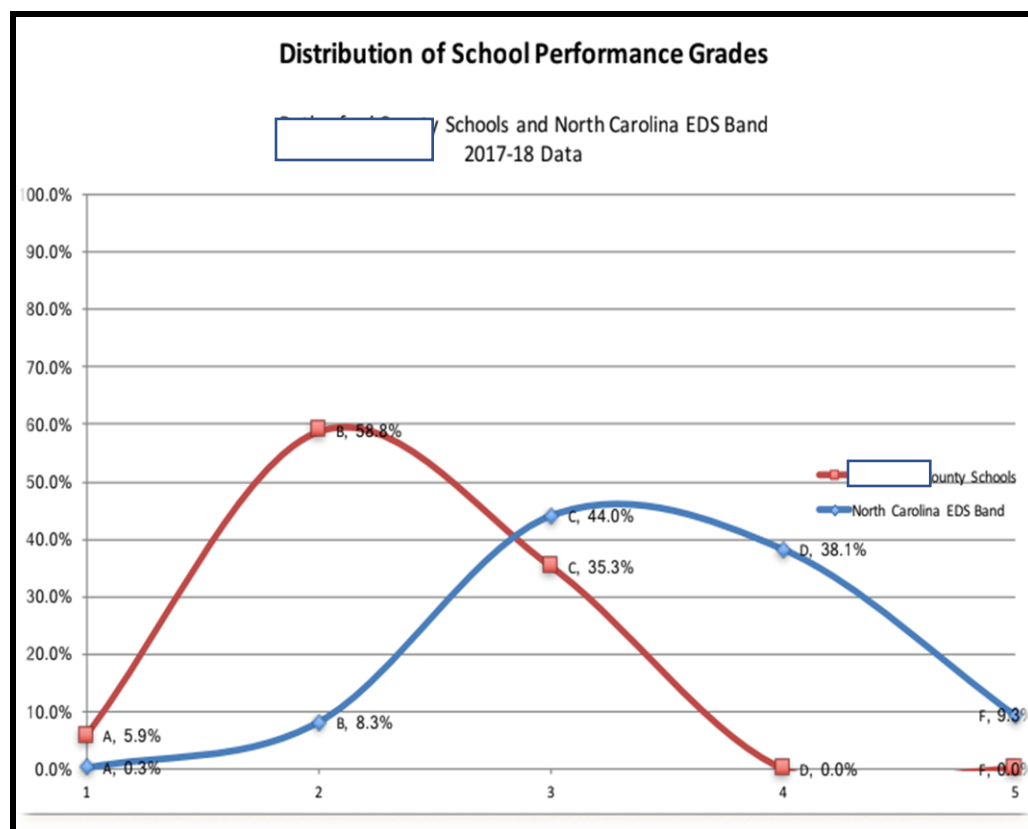
### ***Performance Level***

Figure 1 illustrates the statewide distribution of North Carolina school performance grades for economically disadvantaged students for the 2017-2018 school year in comparison to students in the same bands who attended school in this county school system. In Appendix A, there are additional charts for school years 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017 based on students of poverty. Beginning with the

2018 school year, the state stopped reporting this statistic and transitioned to reporting only by economically disadvantaged student bands.

**Figure 1**

*Distribution of North Carolina School Performance Grades*

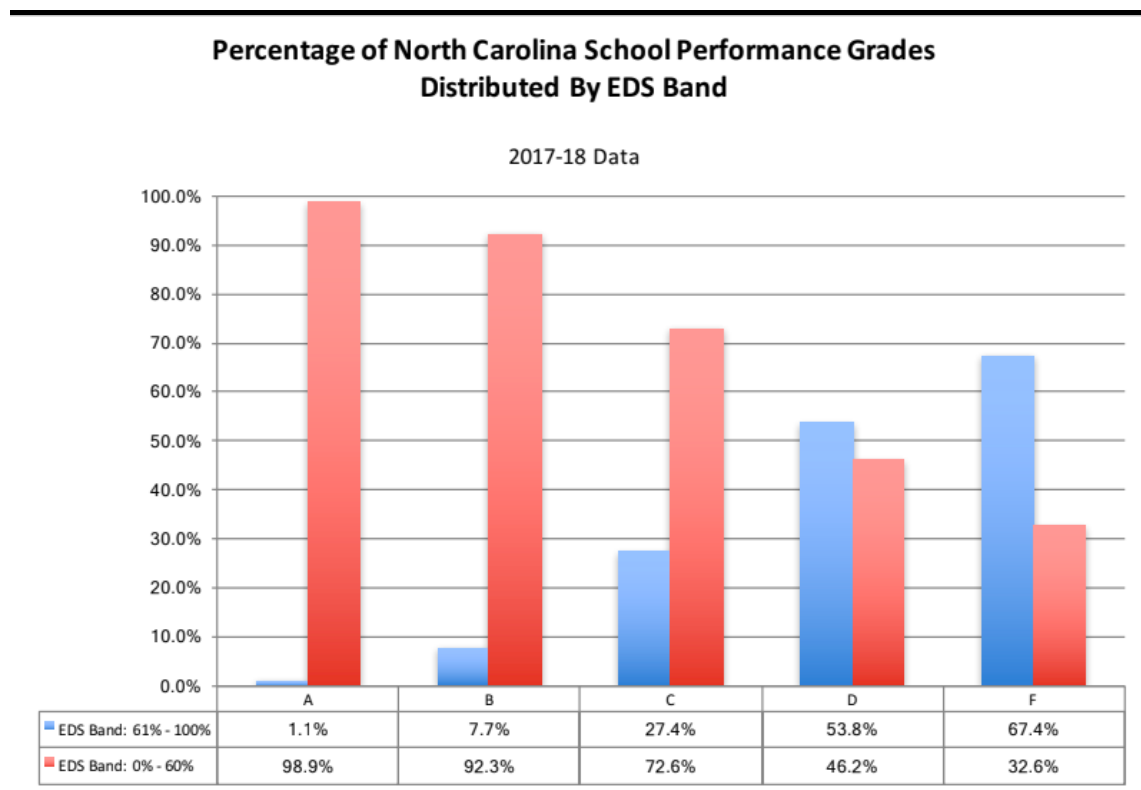


(Collins, 2019).

Figure 2 displays the distribution of school performance grades in the North Carolina school district against the statewide distribution for economically disadvantaged students during the same 2017-2018 reporting cycle. Additional graphs dating back to 2013 can be found in Appendix B. These graphs show the distribution of North Carolina school performance grades in juxtaposition to those of this county based on students who live in poverty. Beginning in the 2018 school year, the state stopped reporting this statistic and transitioned to reporting only by economically disadvantaged students.

**Figure 2**

*Distribution of School Performance Grades by Economically Disadvantaged Students Band*



(Collins, 2019).

The Accountability Services Division of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported for the 2018-2019 school year, the majority of schools with higher than 60% economically disadvantaged students earned D school performance grades. All 10 elementary schools within the school system of interest were awarded performance scores outside of this majority. Eight of the 10 earned a B performance score, and two earned a performance score of C. All 10 are considered successful as determined by Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research study definition of success. The 2018-2019 school performance grades, scores, and school growth statuses as reported by the



Accountability Services Division are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*2018-2019 Elementary School Performance*

| School | Grade span | Enrollment | Classroom teachers | School performance grade/score | School growth status |
|--------|------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| A      | Pk-5       | 236        | 12                 | B/78                           | Exceeded             |
| B      | Pk-5       | 429        | 27                 | C/66                           | Met Expected         |
| C      | Pk-5       | 541        | 22                 | B/73                           | Did Not Meet         |
| D      | Pk-5       | 356        | 19                 | B/75                           | Met Expected         |
| E      | Pk-5       | 428        | 22                 | B/73                           | Met Expected         |
| F      | Pk-5       | 208        | 12                 | B/74                           | Exceeded             |
| G      | Pk-5       | 250        | 12                 | B/76                           | Met Expected         |
| H      | Pk-5       | 329        | 17                 | B/73                           | Met Expected         |
| I      | Pk-5       | 383        | 19                 | C/61                           | Met Expected         |
| J      | Pk-5       | 180        | 10                 | B/80                           | Met Expected         |

### **Hypothesis**

The North Carolina school district selected for this study is a low-wealth, rural district that satisfies the definition of a successful, high-performing school district as defined by two research studies. All schools in this school district are anticipated to have at least five of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools in place as

found in the 2007 state of Washington research study led by Shannon and Bylsma.

Success is defined by schools that are performing at greater levels than their demographic characteristics would predict.

### **Research Questions**

Shannon and Bylsma (2007) found that high-performing schools have five of nine characteristics in common. The research questions for this study explored those characteristics and their relationship to Shannon and Bylsma's findings. The research questions were

1. Do Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research study findings hold true for elementary schools identified as successful low-wealth schools in a rural North Carolina school district, in that at least five of nine characteristics are present?
2. Which of the nine characteristics of high-performing elementary schools are more likely to be found in schools identified as successful in a low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district?
3. Which of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools are less likely to be found in schools identified as successful in a low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district?

These questions were examined using the survey question set published in Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research study. The school staff survey question set can be found in Appendix C. The results were used to evaluate the level of implementation for each of the nine characteristics of high performing schools identified by Shannon and Bylsma.

**Delimitations**

This study was restricted to one public school system in North Carolina and did not represent all of North Carolina. It was further restricted to nine of the 10 elementary schools within this system and did not represent any other level. One elementary school in the district was not included since I was the administrator at this elementary school. The information was obtained exclusively from elementary classroom teachers who volunteered to participate and were employed at the same school for both the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) survey was created to gather information from classified employees, students, and community stakeholders; however, this study did not include these groups. There was the possibility that the perceptions of those who volunteered to participate may be different from the perceptions of nonparticipants. The study only gathered information related to the Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Schools Survey.

**Definition of Terms*****Economically Disadvantaged Students***

Applies to students who qualify for free or reduced lunch status as determined by the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program.

***Essential Academic Learning Requirements***

Learning standards students should have learned by the end of each grade, course, and/or grade level.

***Elementary and Secondary Education Act***

Provided federal funding for students in high-poverty areas, signed in 1965.

***Every Student Succeeds Act***

Passed by Congress in 2015, this replaced No Child Left Behind.

***Expectations***

Confidence that students will meet both the content and performance standards that have been set.

***No Child Left Behind***

The 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

***Professional Development***

Process of providing training for employees to learn new skills or improve current ability levels.

***School Performance Grade***

Grades given to North Carolina schools based on proficiency and growth.

***Standards***

Content standards typically outlined by the state or federal government for students, learning targets performance standards.

***Successful School***

Success is defined by schools that are performing at greater levels than their demographic characteristics would predict.

***Title I***

The section of the law providing federal funding to school districts to educate disadvantaged children. The Title I program was initially created under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to discover if the same characteristics that were indicators of success in Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research almost 2 decades ago are still considered indicators of success, specifically in a successful low-wealth, rural North Carolina school system. Three educational resources are available for North Carolina school systems. A broad overview of each is provided.

The second section of the literature review is organized by the nine characteristics. These sections detail each of the nine characteristics identified by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) and are organized in the following manner. The characteristic is defined, Shannon and Bylsma's research is highlighted, recent research on each characteristic follows, and the alignment of the characteristics within two current education evaluation systems is developed. Finally, a brief overview of a school in Washington state and its use of the stakeholder perception survey created for schools and districts as a result of the 2003 and 2007 work led by Shannon and Bylsma concludes the chapter.

### **Southern Regional Education Board**

A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that provides educational services on many fronts from preschool to the doctoral studies level is the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). The successful low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district of interest in this study is served by SREB's work. To improve public education, SREB supports the work of educators to "strengthen student learning with professional development, proven practices and curricula" (SREB, n.d.a, para. 1).

SREB has a 16-state compact to provide core services to each state funded

through annual appropriations. For example,

SREB's Learning-Centered Leadership Program partnered with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to prepare principals to lead schools in 11 rural districts. The Principal Preparation for Excellence and Equity in Rural Schools (PPEERS) program received 59 of 60 possible points from an external evaluator and graduated its first cohort of 19 school leaders in June 2018.

(SREB, n.d.c, para. 1)

There are other services available through grant- and fee-funded sources. SREB services range from school improvement and professional development to research data analysis and resource allocation leverage discounts. SREB has conducted research on each of the nine characteristics outlined by Shannon and Bylsma (2007). The alignment of their research and the nine characteristics are referenced within the nine characteristics sections later in this chapter.

### **Education Evaluation Systems**

Almost 15 years have passed since the release of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) for the Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction. However, these nine characteristics are still found today in educational practice recommendations and within the assessment criteria for multiple education evaluation systems. Two organizations educational leaders look to for accreditation and guidance are AdvancED and NCStar (the North Carolina division of the larger Indistar). The successful low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district of interest in this study has been accredited by AdvancED and some of the district's schools are served by NCStar.

AdvancED is “an (international) non-profit, non-partisan organization that conducts rigorous, on-site reviews of a variety of educational institutions and systems to ensure that all learners realize their full potential” (AdvancED, n.d.a, About Us). Schools that meet AdvancEd’s standards receive accreditation as an endorsement of their acceptable level of quality and commitment to continuous school improvement.

AdvancEd is currently the largest group of its kind and works with over 34,000 schools.

AdvancED annually collects data to create an analytical basis to develop a deep understanding of educational practices and processes. These data are comprised of classroom observations in addition to numerous stakeholder surveys. AdvancED outlines three domains for school systems seeking to receive accreditation. The three domains are “Leadership Capacity, Learning Capacity, and Resource Capacity” (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 2). There are support standards to enhance understanding for each of the three domains (AdvancED, n.d.b). Each of the domains and standards is outlined in Appendix D.

Indistar is an online platform composed of evidence-based practices used to direct and evaluate progress during the continuous school improvement process. Schools in North Carolina currently use the state-specific version of this product, NCStar. This web-based resource is used to direct school leadership towards improving student outcomes. “Since school improvement is a unique process for each school, NCStar contains over 100 research based effective practices (indicators) and allows schools (the) flexibility to personalize their school improvement plans to meet their distinct needs” (Montanari & Vecchione, 2016, p. 3). Several schools in the successful low-wealth, rural school district of interest in this study utilize NCStar for school improvement guidance.

The NCStar school improvement platform includes five dimensions and 130

clarifying subdimension indicators. Each of the dimensions and indicators is outlined in Appendix E. The five dimensions are

Dimension A – Instructional Excellence and Alignment

Dimension B – Leadership Capacity

Dimension C – Professional Capacity

Dimension D – Planning and Operational Effectiveness

Dimension E – Families and Community. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 1-4)

### **Education Evaluation Systems Alignment**

The AdvancED Accreditation System and the NCStar school improvement platform recommendations both align with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) nine characteristics of high-performing schools research. In the following sections, the nine characteristics are defined, and the alignment between both AdvancED and NCStar recommendations is identified.

### **The Nine Characteristics**

#### ***Characteristic 1: A Clear and Shared Focus***

**Definition.** Everybody knows where they are going and why. The focus is on achieving a shared vision, and all understand their role in achieving the vision.

The focus and vision are developed from common beliefs and values, creating a consistent direction for all involved. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 27)

**Shannon and Bylsma (2007) Research.** Shannon and Bylsma found that “the core purpose of an organization is a critical element of effective school systems” (p. 27). Shannon and Bylsma cited Jim Collins’s book, *Good To Great*, and specifically



referenced his now-classic Hedgehog Concept. This business theory asserted that “a single organizing idea, a basic principle or concept that unifies and guides everything” (Collins, 2001, p. 91, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 27). is likely to lead an organization to success. The team lead by Shannon and Bylsma stated, “high-performing schools succeed in establishing shared, data-driven goals, which resonate with the stakeholders” (p. 28).

Additionally, their review resulted in four implementation recommendations to guide schools in their efforts to create a clear and shared focus.

1. Rooted in the work of Professional Learning Community experts Richard and Robert Eaker, Recommendation 1 suggested educational leaders start “with a whole staff study to build a foundation of research and background” (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p. 28). This study allowed leaders to uncover the common “behaviors, attitudes, and interactions” (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p. 28) of the organization and assisted in the development of a clear and shared focus.
2. Recommendation 2 was based on the work of Richard Sagor. Stakeholders used his “scenario writing as a means for creating a shared vision for a school” (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p. 28). These scenarios revised and gathered over time “become a composite scenario that expresses a vision for a school and helps develop a common, schoolwide focus” (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p. 28).
3. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory created a research-based guide which suggested collecting opinions, analyzing the information, and creating commonly agreed upon “narrative statements as part of the process

for selecting school goals and for building consensus” (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p. 29).

4. Recommendation 4 dealt with action research. Calhoun’s (1994) guide was the foundation for implementation Recommendation 4. They suggested schools use action research when “creating vision and goals, taking action, reviewing progress, then renewing or revising efforts” (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p. 29).

**Recent Research.** Current research has continued to align with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) report and the concept of a clear and shared focus. The need for a unified goal was the first of six core elements used to drive a 10-state partnership based in Long Beach, California, better known as the Redesign PD (Professional Development) Community of Practice. This collaborative followed the design theory belief to improve educational practices. Twal (2018) outlined how this 22-school system partnership “has been a catalyst for understanding and accelerating...innovation efforts to address the changing education landscape” (p. 14).

Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis (2010) outlined a set of seven strategies to support school leaders. The key strategy from their report was to “establish a clear focus and a strategic framework of core beliefs, effective practices and goals for improving student achievement and the learning environment” (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010, p. 11).

McKnight and Glennie (2019) presented a research-based strategy for successful change capacity. McKnight and Glennie concluded that sustainable wide-scale change is often challenging and fragmented. To mitigate these difficulties, “school leaders and education policymakers would benefit from implementing

successful change leadership practices, starting with a systematic assessment of readiness for change” (McKnight & Glennie, 2019, p. 5). Based on their interview and survey data, McKnight and Glennie outlined four key findings. The second of the four asserted the importance of a common direction for change and how it could impact the school (McKnight & Glennie, 2019).

In the spring of 2017, the American Educator Panel surveyed a nationally representative sample of administrators and teachers regarding the subject of a clear and shared focus. The first item stated, “The principal at this school communicates a clear vision for the school” (Tosh & Doss, 2019, p. 1). The survey revealed that 98% of school administrators agreed they were successful, while only 79% of teachers felt their administrators were successful at communicating a clear vision. Additionally, the research report concluded, “effective principal leadership practices improve school organization, teaching, and student achievement outcomes...(and) these practices included framing and communicating a school’s goals and mission” (Tosh & Doss, 2019, p. 1). They went on to report, “the quality of principal leadership is the second-most influential school-based effect on student achievement (after classroom instruction)” (Tosh & Doss, 2019, p. 1).

### **Evaluation Systems.**

***AdvancED.*** There are three specific support standards from AdvancED’s Domain 1, Leadership Capacity, that align with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) study regarding the importance of a clear and shared focus. Those standards are

Standard 1.1: The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.

Standard 1.2: Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.

Standard 1.8: Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction. (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 3)

These standards require the definition of beliefs that outline a common understanding of quality teaching and learning expectations. The actions of all involved parties support these collective beliefs as they work together to achieve a common goal (AdvancED, n.d.b).

**NCStar.** There are eight indicators aligned to a clear and shared focus from Shannon and Bylsma (2007)'s findings within the NCStar platform. The indicators are spread across three of NCStar's five dimensions. The indicators are

A1.01 The principal models and communicates the expectation of improved student learning through commitment, discipline, and careful implementation of effective practices.

A1.10 All teachers use online curricula with content, assignments, and activities clearly aligned to identified standards (state or national).

A2.01 Instructional Teams meet regularly (e.g., twice a month or more for 45 minutes each meeting) to review implementation of effective practice and student progress.

B1.02 The Leadership Team serves as a conduit of communication to the faculty and staff.

B1.04 The principal effectively and clearly communicates the message of change.

B1.06 Yearly learning goals are set for the school by the Leadership Team,

utilizing student learning data.

B2.04 The principal makes sure everyone understands their role in continuously elevating professional practice.

E1.07 The school's documents (Parent Involvement Guidelines, Mission/Vision Statements, Homework Guidelines, and Classroom Visit Procedures) are annually distributed and frequently communicated to teachers, school personnel, parents, and students. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 1-4)

In summary, these indicators reveal a clear focus can become the foundational basis for common goals driven by required federal, state, and/or local standards. The methods to achieve these goals are created by, agreed upon, and understood by all stakeholders. The organization's course is frequently monitored through the use of multiple data sources against the common focus of the organization (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

### ***Characteristic 2: High Standards and Expectations for All Students***

**Definition.** Teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and meet high standards. While recognizing that some students must overcome significant barriers, these obstacles are not seen as insurmountable. Students are offered an ambitious and rigorous course of study. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 33)

**Shannon and Bylsma (2007) Research.** Shannon and Bylsma rooted Characteristic 2, high standards and expectations for all students, soundly in the work of Saphier (2016). Saphier founded and is the current president of Research for Better Teaching, Inc. Saphier's organization has provided educational guidance around the

world for over 3 decades. The focus of Research for Better Teaching, Inc. can be summed up by “two core principles: every child deserves a quality education regardless of the circumstances of their birth; and all children are capable of growing their ability and learning” (Saphier, 2016, para. 2).

According to Saphier’s (2016) current website, it is critical for educators to believe in their ability to teach and learners to believe in their potential to reach rigorous academic standards through the use of robust and challenging instructional practices. This belief must continue, regardless of present levels of academic performance. This is not a new belief; Saphier (as cited in DuFour et al., 2005) defined the idea of “effort-based ability (as) helping each student develop his or her abilities...at high standards, even if they are far behind academically and need a significant amount of time to catch up” (p. 86). Saphier (as cited in DuFour et al., 2005), further added,

Educators who carry this belief into their practice are not unrealistic about the obstacles they and their students face. They simply have not given up. And we know for sure that they will get results if they translate this belief into appropriate practice. (p. 86)

This analysis led by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) led to the recommendation that high expectations set by teachers should be supported “by instructional practices and teacher behavior that demonstrate that teachers believe in the students, believe in their own efficacy to teach students to high standards, and that they will persist in teaching them” (p. 39).

**Recent Research.** Current research aligns with Shannon and Bylsma (2007) and the concept of high expectations for all students. Saphier (2016) is not the only

researcher to tout high expectations. Brooke (2017) examined research directed towards school leadership. Brooke identified four common or key requirements for effective school leadership: “(1) Organizational Knowledge, (2) Use of Data, (3) Scheduling, and (4) Positive Beliefs and High Expectations” (p. 1). Brooke concluded, “Positive beliefs and high expectations may be the most important factor in high-achieving schools” (pp. 4-5). Brooke continued, “high-performing schools often have a stated, school-wide belief in their students’ abilities to achieve, despite significant obstacles...the belief in reaching these high expectations becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy” (p. 5).

SREB published *Florida Gauging Progress, Accelerating Pace* as part of their Challenge to Lead 2020 to address the need for high standards and expectations for all students (Hite & Daugherty, 2016). Lord (2016) stated, “Since 2002, states have learned a lot about what it takes to help all students. High-quality school programs and high-quality teachers matter” (p. 2). This included “rigorous standards that prepare students for the next level of education and careers; teachers who engage students in learning and lead them to deep understanding; and curriculum that supports standards and links to the previous and next levels” (Lord, 2016, p. 2).

In the spring of 2017, the American Educator Panel surveyed a nationally representative sample of administrators and teachers. The information gleaned from this survey provided a valuable guide for building-level principals seeking to increase their own effectiveness regarding setting high expectations. The results showed that 99% of school administrators and 84% of teachers questioned agreed that “the principal at this school sets high standards for teaching” (Tosh & Doss, 2019, p. 3).

The accompanying research report concluded, “the degree to which leaders rate themselves more highly than do subordinates correlates with diminished organizational outcomes” (Tosh & Doss, 2019, p. 1).

Sweeney and Mausbach (2019) outlined three practices for principals: (a) connect coaching to school improvement, (b) set expectations for high quality learning, and (c) develop a coherent coaching model. Additionally, Sweeney and Mausbach referenced a report from the Wallace Foundation which explored the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. According to the Wallace Foundation study, “effective school leaders set clear expectations for instructional practice” (An Overview–The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning, 2013, p. 10). Sweeney and Mausbach further added, “setting and monitoring expectations means a leader has a firm grip on effective practices in curriculum and instruction” (para. 13). Both sources align with Characteristic 2 from Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) study regarding high standards and expectations.

### **Evaluation Systems.**

***AdvancED.*** There are two specific AdvancED standards aligned with the work of Shannon and Bylsma (2007) regarding the characteristic of high standards and expectations for all students. Those standards are

Standard 2.1: Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.

Standard 2.5: Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels. (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 4)

School districts seeking to receive accreditation must provide evidence of both creating



and holding high expectations. The creation of a common focus provides teachers and students with a clear target for their outcome goals. “The establishment of a learning culture built on high expectations for learning, along with quality programs and services, which include an analysis of results, are all key indicators of the system’s impact on teaching and learning” (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 4).

**NCStar.** There are nine indicators dedicated to setting and establishing high standards and expectations for all students found embedded within the NCStar platform that align with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) findings. These indicators fall within three of the five NCStar dimensions for school improvement. The indicators are

A2.03 The principal spends at least 50% of his/her time working directly with teachers to improve instruction, including classroom observations.

A3.04 Unit pre-tests and post-tests results are reviewed by the Instructional Teams to make decisions about curriculum and instructional plans and to flag students in need of intervention or enrichment.

A3.07 Instructional teams and teachers use fine-grained data to design for each student a learning path tailored to that student’s prior learning, personal interests, and aspirations.

A4.11 The school provides all students extended learning opportunities (e.g., summer bridge programs, after-school and supplemental educational services, Saturday academies, enrichment programs).

A4.17 The school implements a reliable and valid system-wide screening process for academics and behavior that includes the assessment of all students multiple times per year and establishes decision rules to determine students in need of

targeted intervention.

B1.06 Yearly learning goals are set for the school by the Leadership Team, utilizing student learning data.

B2.05 The principal focuses on building leadership capacity, achieving learning goals, and improving instruction.

B3.03 KEY The principal monitors curriculum and classroom instruction regularly and provides timely, clear, constructive feedback to teachers.

C2.01 KEY The LEA/School regularly looks at school performance data and aggregated classroom observation data and uses that data to make decisions about school improvement and professional development needs. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 1-4)

These indicators suggest that school leaders and their leadership team(s) play a large role in the establishment of high standards and expectations. This involvement takes on many forms from direct classroom feedback to curriculum and instruction planning; however, that involvement does not stop at that point. Building leaders are involved in creating a cyclical framework that enables the collection and analysis of data to continually drive decision-making (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

### ***Characteristic 3: Effective School Leadership***

**Definition.** Effective instructional and administrative leadership is required to implement change processes. Effective leaders proactively seek needed help.

They nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Effective leaders have different styles and roles—teachers and other staff, including those in the district office, often have a leadership role.

(Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 43)

**Shannon and Bylsma (2007) Research.** Shannon and Bylsma (2007) first cited the 1978 work of J. M. Burns when explaining effective school leadership. Burns (1978, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) defined “leadership as the influence of persons to achieve goals held mutually by leaders and followers through the use of institutional, political, psychological, and other resources” (p. 43). The team then revisited the work of Jim Collins. His Level 5 leadership concept stated,

The good-to-great leaders never wanted to become larger-than-life heroes. They never aspired to be put on a pedestal or become unreachable icons. They were seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results.... It is very important to grasp that Level 5 leadership is not just about humility and modesty. It is equally about ferocious resolve, an almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great. (Collins, 2021, para. 2)

However, the researchers did not stop at describing the building-level leader. They went deeper into the topic of leadership by addressing distributed leadership. The team acknowledged that while the principal is a vital part of effective school leadership, they are not the only factor. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) stated, “Strong learning communities develop when principals learn to relinquish a measure of control and help others participate in building leadership throughout the schools” (pp. 44).

Based on this and other studies, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) acknowledged, “leadership is a complex combination of personal dispositions, beliefs and learning” (p. 49). To provide effective leadership, the researchers recommended leaders follow three

steps to create an environment ripe for school improvement:

1. Develop positive, respectful relationships with staff, parents, and students.
2. Create a professional learning community.
3. Focus on learning. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, pp. 49-50)

**Recent Research.** Recent research also aligns with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) report and the topic of effective school leadership. In 2017, the Rand Corporation completed a research evidence review of school leadership practices (Herman et al., 2017). This work acknowledged school leadership is, "a valid target of educational-improvement activities across the titles in Every Student Succeeds Act: (ESSA)" (Herman et al., 2017, p. 4). The Rand team referenced a Leithwood et al. literature review and multiple other data sources which indicated, "principals are second only to teachers as the most important school-level determinant of student achievement" (Herman et al., 2017, p. 4). Shannon and Bylsma also referenced Branch et al.'s (2012) study. Branch et al.'s work indicated "a principal scoring one standard deviation above the mean for principal effectiveness could move the mean student achievement from the 50<sup>th</sup> to the 58<sup>th</sup> percentile" (p. 11). Therefore, the improved effectiveness of one administrator holds the "potential to affect the outcomes of far more students" (Herman et al., 2017, p. 4) in comparison to the improved effectiveness of one teacher.

SREB's Learning-Centered Leadership Program assists school administrators in the quest for effective leadership. "Through literature reviews and research data from its own school reform initiatives, the SREB has identified thirteen Critical Success Factors associated with principals who have succeeded in raising student achievement in schools with traditionally high-risk demographics" (Schmidt-Davis, n.d., para. 4). These multiple

factors are organized under three overarching sections and drive the instruction of SREB's Learning-Centered Leadership Program. This course focuses on "what school leaders must know and be able to do to improve instruction and raise student achievement...and build and support a rigorous schoolwide learning culture" (Schmidt-Davis, n.d., para. 4). Effective school leadership is a foundational piece for a successful school.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) also alluded to effective leadership as a complex arena; however, they did not focus on an effective leader who seeks to deflect or share the spotlight but explored the perceptions surrounding education leaders. Gruenert and Whitaker stated when a school leader is even perceived to be ineffective, this "lends validity to the complaints of naysayers, which enable naysayers to develop much more power than they would under strong leadership" (p. 164). Gruenert and Whitaker further indicated teachers saw effective leaders as administrators who inspire change and empower faculty, staff, and students to reach commonly held organizational goals. The research showed the school culture helped support this change and achieve success, and it was vital to positive educational practices.

### **Evaluation Systems.**

***AdvancED.*** Each of the 11 supporting standards for AdvancED's Domain 1, Leadership Capacity, aligns with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) characteristic of effective school leadership. The supporting standards are

Standard 1.1: The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.

Standard 1.2: Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the

achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.

Standard 1.3: The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.

Standard 1.4: The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.

Standard 1.5: The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.

Standard 1.6: Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.

Standard 1.7: Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.

Standard 1.8: Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.

Standard 1.9: The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.

Standard 1.10: Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.

Standard 1.11: Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency. (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 3)

The overarching statement for Domain 1, Leadership Capacity, states, "the capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress toward its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness" (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 3). This daunting

responsibility often rests on the shoulders of very few people but is vital for effective school leadership. The principal and administrative team create a framework that enables the institution to meet its stated objectives.

*NCStar*. Within the NCStar platform are six indicators aligned with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research study regarding effective school leadership. The majority of these are found within Dimension B, Leadership Capacity. The indicators are

A3.03 The principal compiles reports from classroom observations, showing aggregate areas of strength and areas that need improvement without revealing the identity of individual teachers.

B1.01 KEY The LEA has an LEA Support & Improvement Team.

B2.02 The Leadership Team shares in decisions of real substance pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and professional development.

B2.06 The traditional roles of the principal and other administrators are distributed to allow adequate time for administrative attention to instruction and student supports.

B3.02 The principal collects and acts on data from a variety of sources and in a timely manner.

D1.03 The principal provides optimum conditions for the Leadership Team to make decisions and act on their decisions. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 1-4)

Effective leadership does not only mean the building principal. The school's leadership team also shoulders responsibility for leadership effectiveness. Together, they provide direction and collaborative input in direct alignment with the clear and shared focus of

the organization. This collective group sets the stage for the school improvement process (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

***Characteristic 4: High Levels of Collaboration and Communication***

**Definition.** “There is strong teamwork among teachers across all grades and with other staff. Everybody is involved and connected to each other, including parents and members of the community, to identify problems and work on solutions” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 54).

**Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) Research.** To address the characteristic of high levels of collaboration and communication, Shannon and Bylsma focused “primarily on collaboration among school staff, teachers, and principals, in the interest of improving student learning” (p. 54). Other types of communication such as stakeholder feedback were included under other characteristics.

The team referenced the 1990 book authored by R. S. Barth, *Improving Schools from Within: Teachers, Parents, and Principals Can Make the Difference*. In this work, the idea of collegiality is defined through the existence of four related behaviors. The four behaviors required, according to Barth (1990, p. 31, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 31), were

1. Adults in schools talk about practice. These conversations about teaching and learning are frequent, continuous, concrete, and precise.
2. Adults in schools observe each other engaged in the practice of teaching and administration. These observations become the practice to reflect on and talk about.
3. Adults engage together in work on curriculum by planning, designing,



researching, and evaluating curriculum.

4. Finally, adults in schools teach each other what they know about teaching, learning, and leading. Craft knowledge is revealed, articulated, and shared. (p. 54)

Shannon and Bylsma (2007) also used the work of Pounder (1998). Pounder (1998, p. 29, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) noted that the level of “interdependence” required for true collaboration and communication could be viewed as a “loss of autonomy and discretion” (p. 55) for educators and could increase the likelihood of conflict. However, Pounder (1998, p. 74, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) found “that teacher work groups produce more enriched and more motivating work than does traditional individual teacher work” (pp. 55).

The research team stated that the collaboration and communication within the professional learning communities (PLCs) is of benefit to more than just educators. Pounder’s (1998) findings and those from a 1987 “Rosenholtz study...build confidence that there are more benefits than costs to collaboration for the professional as well as for students” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 55). In addition, Barth (1990, p. 31, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) stated, “there is even some evidence that motivation of students and their achievement rises, and evidence that when adults share and cooperate, students tend to do the same” (p. 54).

Based on this and other research, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) concluded the principal has the responsibility to create a collaborative campus. The following implementation suggestions were vital to enable high levels of communication and collaboration:

- Common planning time
- Team teaching
- Scheduled, quality professional development
- Specific groups to tackle challenges
- Staff development to improve teamwork. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 56)

**Recent Research.** Recent studies parallel Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) report and the concept of high levels of collaboration and communication. According to Spillane and Shirrell (2018), effective building-level leaders strive to cultivate a supportive school community where teachers work to achieve common goals through the practice of PLCs. "For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most teachers worked alone behind classroom doors...however, teacher collaboration has emerged as an important strategy to drive improvement, informed by research showing how on-the-job interactions can boost teacher development and effectiveness" (Spillane & Shirrell, 2018, para. 1). According to Spillane and Shirrell, teachers who have authentic academic conversations and problem solve together become a proactive part of the educational process for their students.

Wolff (2018) shared the ideas of several successful groups to support business and community leaders in their efforts to understand how creative working environments and virtual collaboration tools are facilitating the next generation of idea exchange. The ability to collaboratively work to successfully problem solve has become more crucial in recent years, not only in education, but in the general workforce as well.

PLCs have been around for years with the intent of improving teacher collaboration and communication. DuFour and Reeves (2016) addressed common PLC

pitfalls encountered by many. DuFour and Reeves explained that many educators have conducted PLC meetings in name only. These groups have only rebranded their traditional practices as PLC meetings. As a result, they have had little to no impact on student performance. “These activities fail to embrace the central tenets of the PLC process and won’t lead to higher levels of learning for students or adults” (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p. 69).

In 2019, the results of a mixed methods study focused on an elementary Title I suburban Chicago school district were published (Rosado, 2019). The purpose was to evaluate the impact of collaboration and communication within PLCs. A positive impact on student achievement was confirmed during the study. For teachers, the findings “support the effectiveness of the process...and for students, it validates the learning of essential skills and attributes to academic growth” (Rosado, 2019, p. 71).

Pastor and Dewyer (2018) noted,

Postsecondary education attainment rates among low-income, first generation, and students of color are comparatively low, and closing these educational attainment gaps can be especially difficult. Students in rural areas and impoverished communities experience significant challenges that school counseling departments are combating with non-traditional ways of working. (p. 1)

One way to tackle these unique challenges was to cultivate avenues of “collaboration between school counseling departments and college access professionals (to) create...meaningful college and career readiness across the community” (Pastor & Dewyer, 2018, Webinar). The webinar went on to highlight the success educational

leaders were achieving when working together to combat the challenges facing students, emphasizing collaboration and communication are key.

### **Evaluation Systems.**

**AdvancED.** Three individual AdvancED standards align with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) characteristic of high levels of collaboration and communication for students and staff. The standards are from Leadership Capacity and Learning Capacity, two of the three AdvancED domains. Those standards are

Standard 2.2: The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.

Standard 3.2: The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.

Standard 3.3: The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness. (AdvancED, n.d.b, pp. 4-5)

The global need for stakeholders to work together is vital to achieving the predetermined goals of the organization. This intentional creation of a school culture that promotes and encourages teamwork to improve student outcomes results in high levels of collaboration and communication.

**NCStar.** Indicators found in NCStar's Dimension A, instructional excellence, and Dimension B, Leadership Capacity, parallel Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research surrounding high levels of collaboration and communication. Those eight indicators are

A1.06 ALL teachers provide sound instruction in a variety of modes: teacher-

directed whole-class; teacher-directed small-group; independent work; computer-based.

A2.04 KEY Instructional Teams develop standards-aligned units of instruction for each subject and grade level.

A2.15 Instructional Teams develop materials for their standards-aligned learning activities and share the materials among themselves.

A3.04 Unit pre-tests and post-tests results are reviewed by the Instructional Teams to make decisions about curriculum and instructional plans and to flag students in need of intervention or enrichment.

B1.03 KEY A Leadership Team consisting of the principal, teachers who lead the Instructional Teams, and other professional staff meets regularly (at least twice a month) to review implementation of effective practices.

B1.05 The principal offers frequent opportunities for staff and parents to voice constructive critiques of the school's progress and suggestions for improvement.

B1.07 The school's Leadership Team/ Health Council regularly reviews data which reflect the school's health, nutrition and safety policies, school environment, work-site wellness, attendance and discipline records and will use the data to make decisions about school improvement and professional development needs.

B2.02 The Leadership Team shares in decisions of real substance pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and professional development. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 1-4)

Teamwork is at the crux of these indicators. Multiple teams are referenced as well as the

scope of their work. These responsibilities include but are not limited to creating and sharing aligned units of study that address student learning modalities, creating and administering common pre/post assessments to collectively evaluate teaching and learning, providing a clear path of open communication for all stakeholders, and regularly meeting to review data on multiple areas of student need. One highlight is the wording from indicator B2.02 clearly stating that the work of these teams should be of real substance (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

***Characteristic 5: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments Aligned with State Standards***

**Definition.** The planned and actual curriculum are aligned with the essential academic learning requirements (EALRs). Research-based teaching strategies and materials are used. Staff understands the role of classroom and state assessments, what the assessments measure, and how student work is evaluated. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 63)

**Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) Research.** Shannon and Bylsma reported on the characteristic of curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards by referencing the “doctrine of no surprises” (p. 64). English and Steffy (2001) outlined this doctrine. There are five sections within the doctrine described as

an aligned system (which) increases equity and excellence for students when (1) learning standards or targets are known, (2) sufficient opportunities are provided to learn them, (3) instruction is focused on the targets, (4) assessments match the content of the learning standards, and (5) assessment formats are familiar. (English & Steffy, 2001, p. 88, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 64)

To provide curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards Shannon and Bylsma (2007) suggested teachers work collectively to ensure appropriate understanding and instructional alignment. This task can be accomplished through continuous checks and balances between the curriculum taught and the required state standards. Additionally, the team stated that while instructional materials and textbooks are a means to teach curriculum, these mechanisms are not the curriculum. To assist teachers with the task of clear alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessments, a separate document was published by the Washington OSPI. The Washington State professional development document *IN ACTION: Linking Professional Development to Improved Student Learning* provided specific guidance for educators in the form of reference rubrics and critical components (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

**Recent Research.** Recent research studies parallel Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) report concept of curriculum, instruction, and assessments that are aligned with state standards. Polikoff (2013) analyzed teacher instructional alignment for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Morgan concluded that “despite the centrality of alignment in the theories of action underlying standards-based reform, research over the past decade has shown that the typical alignment of teachers’ instruction with state standards is weak to moderate” (Polikoff, 2013, p. 1). Additionally, if teachers lack understanding about their standards, it is almost impossible for them to adequately teach the required course(s) of study.

In 2017, SREB published a report entitled *Alignment of Instructional Materials* (Anderson & Mira, 2017). This meta-analysis report was conducted for SREB by a Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy and Center for Research and Reform in Education

research team. This work analyzed the effect of aligned curriculum materials. The researchers “found that curricular materials have a critical impact on students’ academic success, and that the cumulative effect of exposure to high-quality materials across a student’s academic career can be significant” (Anderson & Mira, 2017, p. 6). This guide was intended to assist district and building leaders to evaluate and choose high-quality resources and other curriculum materials aligned to their respective state standards. A curriculum tightly aligned with state standards delivered with fidelity not only increases student performance but also supports higher levels of teacher instruction (Anderson & Mira, 2017).

Other SREB studies have also shown “the impact of using high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials on student achievement” (SREB, n.d.b, para. 3). One was a 2017 Brookings Institution textbook study in California. Another was a 2016 Harvard University textbook use study in five states including two SREB states. Both studies “found significantly higher student achievement in classrooms using certain textbooks versus others” (SREB, n.d.b, para. 3).

According to Abrams et al. (2016), if an educator lacks the desire or ability to match their instruction to state standards, their students will not be prepared for state assessments. In any case, whether it be lack of understanding, lack of desire, or lack of ability, many of these students will appear to have received a subpar education. The ability to properly assess learning and align instruction to curriculum is an area in which many teachers need support. Successful schools have navigated through these misalignments and have successfully implemented purposeful and aligned instruction and understand “alignment of instruction...is fundamental for the accurate measurement of



student learning” (Abrams et al., 2016, p. 15).

The nonprofit, nonpartisan, research agency WestEd works to improve student outcomes in over a dozen states. This research agency published a curriculum alignment update for educators in March of 2018. Their publication highlighted the importance of current efforts in Oregon and Louisiana to provide quality curriculum and assessment alignment. Their research stated,

It is important to note that if curriculum is aligned to standards, and if assessments are aligned to standards, then the assessments...must also be aligned to curriculum. This comprehensive alignment ensures that educators will be able to gather information related to the specific area(s) of the curriculum that students are engaging with. (Standards Alignment to Curriculum and Assessment, 2018, p. 1).

### **Evaluation Systems.**

***AdvancED.*** There are three standards within the two AdvancED domains aligned with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) study research regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards. The two related AdvancED domains are Learning Capacity and Resource Capacity. The support standards are

Standard 2.6: The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.

Standard 3.6: The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.

(AdvancED, n.d.b, pp. 4-5)

These standards outline the need for the school to ensure quality instruction that is

aligned with all required federal, state, and local standards. Resources should be allocated to support and allow for successful implementation of these standards (AdvancED, n.d.b).

**NCStar.** There are eight indicators specifically dedicated to the expectation that curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned with state standards. These are found embedded within the NCStar platform and align with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) findings. The indicators are located exclusively within Dimension A, Instructional Excellence and Alignment. The indicators are

A1.10 All teachers use online curricula with content, assignments, and activities clearly aligned to identified standards (state or national).

A2.04 KEY Instructional Teams develop standards-aligned units of instruction for each subject and grade level.

A2.05 ALL teachers develop weekly lesson plans based on aligned units of instruction.

A2.13 Units of instruction include standards-based objectives and criteria for mastery.

A2.14 Units of instruction include specific learning activities aligned to objectives.

A2.15 Instructional Teams develop materials for their standards-aligned learning activities and share the materials among themselves.

A3.05 The school assesses each student at least 3 times each year to determine progress toward standard-based objectives.

A3.06 ALL teachers maintain and utilize a record of each student's mastery of

specific learning objectives. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 3-5)

NCStar guides schools on curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards. The standards outline a cyclical process that begins with a collaborative analysis of the standards, moves to curriculum selection and instructional planning, and then to procedures for monitoring instructional delivery while continually evaluating student performance against preset goals aligned with state standards. The necessity for curriculum, instruction, and assessments to be aligned with state standards is a large part of the NCStar resource (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

#### ***Characteristic 6: Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching***

**Definition.** A steady cycle of different assessments identifies students who need help. More support and/or instructional time is provided, either during the school day or outside normal school hours. Teaching is adjusted based on frequent monitoring of student progress and needs. Assessment results are used to focus and improve instructional programs. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 86)

**Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) Research.** Schmoker's (1996) work was the first point of reference for Shannon and Bylsma regarding the frequent monitoring of learning and teaching. Schmoker broadly defined monitoring as "analyzing what we are doing against the results we are getting" (p. 6). Shannon and Bylsma (2007) further clarified by stating, "the monitoring provides continuous feedback primarily for purposes of improvement, not for making major decisions about a student's future or a teacher's career" (p. 86). The researchers suggested administering multiple formal and informal

indicators when evaluating teaching and learning and, in addition, emphasized using “errors...as learning opportunities” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 86) for school improvement. This suggestion was also outlined by Good and Brophy (2000, pp. 229-230, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) recommended, “Students should be given multiple opportunities to learn in order to encourage their persistence in overcoming initial failures” (p. 87).

High stakes testing was not the focus for frequent monitoring. Teaching to mastery for students and educators alike with a strong emphasis on school improvement was found to be most beneficial. Based on the 1996 work of Guskey, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) mentioned grading for the sake of communication and improved student achievement with no punitive consequences.

Implementation suggestions from the team’s review of research related to frequent monitoring of learning and teaching resulted in a data-based recommendation. Shannon and Bylsma (2007) asserted there should be a systematic method for gathering student performance data and teacher practices. This information “should be routinely collected and analyzed, and instructional methods and activities modified accordingly” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 87), based on these data.

**Recent Research.** Current research studies align with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) report and the concept of frequent monitoring of learning and teaching. Abrams et al. (2016) outlined that a purposeful approach to curriculum alignment is fundamental for meaningful assessment data. Curriculum directly tied to formative and/or summative assessment results can yield quality data rooted in authentic learning. “The implementation of interim assessments, coupled with classroom assessments, has created

a data use mechanism that can facilitate stronger alignment between content standards, daily instruction, and year-end assessments” (Abrams et al., 2016, p. 16). Abrams et al. continued to state that the cycle of aligned content and aligned assessment provides educators up-to-the-minute data, setting the stage for real-time adjustments to educator instructional practices as well as creating a warning system allowing teachers to address minor student deficits before they lead to major ones.

SREB also outlines the need for frequent monitoring of learning and teaching. They routinely publish a spotlight series to highlight institutions where best educational practices are being used. *The Spotlight Series* in April 2016 focused on three schools that were described as high-need and high-performing schools due to such monitoring (Gandha & Baxter, 2016). A frequent cycle of classroom observations and feedback, the frequent practice of sharing teaching materials and tips, frequent time for reflection, and frequent progress monitoring of students were all contributing factors to the high achievement levels found in each successful school. These students “are outperforming similar peers in similar schools. Despite a prevailing sentiment that there may be a myriad of factors beyond educators’ control, teachers and leaders are positively impacting student learning and students’ lives” (Gandha & Baxter, 2016, p. 1) through frequent monitoring of learning and teaching.

In 2017, an experimental design, posttest only study looked to evaluate the effects of continual assessment upon eighth-grade social studies students in Pakistan. This work was conducted by Samiullah and Anjum (2017). The experimental group of students were continually assessed during the instructional window. This constant feed of information from students to teachers allowed for instructional changes as information

went back to students. Student surveys also supported this approach as a means to improve not only mastery of materials but also motivation and confidence (Samiullah & Anjum, 2017). This team concluded that “the treatment of continuous assessment had significant impact on academic performance of elementary school students even among the low achievers” (Samiullah & Anjum, 2017, p. 98).

### **Evaluation Systems.**

*AdvancED.* There are four AdvancED support standards outlining the expectation for frequent monitoring of learning and teaching. All these standards fell under Domain 2, Learning Capacity, and align with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) research. Those standards are

Standard 2.7: Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners’ needs and the system’s learning expectations.

Standard 2.10: Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.

Standard 2.11: Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.

Standard 2.12: The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning. (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 4)

AdvancED states the need for educators to regularly ensure quality teaching and learning are taking place. One way is to continually and reliably audit learning outcomes; however, evaluating student learning is only one piece of the assessment puzzle. There is also the expectation for schools to evaluate their curriculum and educational conditions.

Student success is the direct result of much more than only student learning (AdvancED, n.d.b).

**NCStar.** There are five indicators dedicated to frequent monitoring of learning and teaching found embedded within the NCStar platform that align with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) findings. Supporting indicators from Dimension B, Leadership Capacity, are

B3.01 The LEA/School monitors progress of the extended learning time programs and strategies being implemented and uses data to inform modifications.

B3.02 The principal collects and acts on data from a variety of sources and in a timely manner.

B3.03 KEY The principal monitors curriculum and classroom instruction regularly and provides timely, clear, constructive feedback to teachers.

B3.05 The Leadership Team implements, monitors, and analyzes results from an early warning system at the school level using indicators (e.g., attendance, academic, behavior monitoring) to identify students at risk for dropping out.

B3.06 School leaders and peer mentors regularly observe and measure instances of online, hybrid, or blended teaching to ensure instruction is implemented fully and with fidelity. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 2-3)

This section states schools should set measurable goals, collect data from multiple sources, systematically evaluate these data, provide feedback, make necessary changes, and then repeat this process. Goals should not only be set for academic subjects but should also include goals for other student success indicators such as attendance and

behavior (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

***Characteristic 7: Focused Professional Development***

**Definition.** “A strong emphasis is placed on training staff in areas of most need. Feedback from learning and teaching focuses on extensive and ongoing professional development. The support is also aligned with school or district vision and objectives” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 96).

**Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) Research.** To expound on Characteristic 7, focused professional development, Shannon and Bylsma referred to the complexity of effective professional development and the relationship to student achievement. Shannon and Bylsma cited one of the 13 papers from *What Matters Most*, a report sponsored by the National Commission on Teaching. Specifically, Shannon and Bylsma referenced the work of Hawley and Valli entitled, *The Essentials of Effective Professional Development: A New Consensus*. Based on this work, Shannon and Bylsma stated,

Effective professional development, when viewed as competency-based rather than deficit-based, is a shared, public process; it promotes sustained interaction; emphasizes substantive, school-related issues; relies on internal expertise; expects teachers to be active participants; emphasizes the why as well as the how of teaching; articulates a theoretical research base; and anticipates that lasting change will be a slow process. (p. 96)

To provide effective professional development for teachers, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) suggested a move away from the longstanding passive staff development practices. They also referenced Sparks and Hirsh’s (1997) publication, *A New Vision for Staff Development*, as it confirmed Hawley and Valli’s belief in the ineffectiveness of this



professional development strategy. These investigations, in addition to multiple others, were the basis for Shannon and Bylsma's statement that "facilitating learning requires much more of educators than teaching by telling...teachers are required to develop deeper knowledge and new skills" (p. 97); and to reach high levels of student achievement, teachers must develop the "capacity for complex and collaborative problem solving" (p. 97).

Shannon and Bylsma (2007) relied on guidance designed by multiple studies regarding the relationship between effective professional development and higher student achievement. They referred directly to the National Staff Development Council, Lieberman and Miller's (2001) book, *Teachers Caught in the Action: Professional Development that Matters*, and the research of Hawley and Valli.

The National Staff Development Council recommended emphasis on three critical areas to elevate student learning: context, process, and content standards. The three areas of focus coordinated the use of multiple student data sources to create equitable, research-based learning resources for both students and educators. In addition, the research behind the professional development should also adhere to the known principles of human development and capacity for change (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

Lieberman and Miller (1999) provided their recommendations in the form of six overarching themes. These themes included a direct connection between the learning of both educators and students and the interconnectedness of teaching and assessments. Other themes encouraged the use of accountability, collaboration, constructive criticism, and the importance of time to work together as professionals. Still, others involved using a shared vocabulary for all communications and the creation of a structured framework to

drive discussions. The final theme recommended “using real-life events of teaching as the source of professional development” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 98).

Hawley and Valli endorsed nine “learner-centered” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 98) principles for effective professional development. The nine addressed the gap between the information students should learn, what they currently know, and how to eliminate the curriculum knowledge gap between the two based on multiple pieces of data. To narrow the size of the gap, teachers must know their curriculum through the use of staff development that is personalized, school-based, and ongoing, and provides meaningful feedback. Professional development should provide, “a theoretical understanding of the knowledge and skills to be learned” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 98).

The characteristic of effective professional development when examined in relation to higher student achievement led Shannon and Bylsma (2007) to recommend the importance of “building teacher capacity tied to the impact on student learning over a career-long continuum” (p. 98). In 2006, a separate document was published by the Washington OSPI which proposed six basic elements for educator certification and identified areas for development (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Each element was examined against the measure of student achievement to determine teacher achievement. The Washington OSPI elements are

1. Student learning is structured for understanding.
2. Student learning experiences are designed to engage and support all students in learning.
3. Student assessment is used to direct learning.

4. Students participate in maintaining effective environments for learning.
5. Students prepare to live and work in a multicultural world.
6. Teachers develop the art and science of a professional educator and are active in the profession to positively impact student learning. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 99)

Implementation suggestions from the team included the need for all levels to work together to “identify professional development needs and opportunities to build teacher capacity to improve student learning” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 99). The four recommended professional development strategies were

- intensive mentoring and peer support
- teacher inquiry, study groups and action research
- collaborative lesson study and looking at student work
- walk-throughs. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 99)

**Recent Research.** Current research continues to indicate professional development practices (i.e., reading and attending a training) consisting of exposure to content do not impact a teacher’s practice unless they are reinforced through further exploration and practice. “Passive learning alone has not been found to create changes in teaching practices” (Stewart, 2014, p. 30).

In 2014, a research study was sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and conducted by The Boston Consulting Group (K-12 Education Team, 2015). The purpose of this work was to gather educator perception data in efforts to improve teacher professional development. This nationwide study found the majority of teachers see professional development as a “compliance exercise” (K-12 Education

Team, 2015, p. 10) and not as a means to improve their instruction.

Educators participating in this study identified the ideal professional development would be delivered by someone with personal experience around curricular content and/or pedagogy that is relevant, energizing, hands-on, and sustained over time. Teachers also reported being most satisfied with professional development they have helped select and when allowed to practice in a collaborative setting. However, 70% of the participating teachers reported they were only able to occasionally select their own professional development, and only 7% “surveyed report that their schools have strong collaboration models” (K-12 Education Team, 2015, pp. 8, 10).

SREB recognizes the importance of focused professional development and therefore offers states and districts multiple customizable professional development options in literacy, mathematics, project-based learning, career and college counseling, career and technical education teacher preparation, and principal leadership, just to name a few. This is in addition to publications and sponsored conferences hosted annually. SREB’s current offerings are research-based and support educators working with children from birth through college with focused professional development in over a dozen states.

Tooley and Connally (2016) explored educator professional development. Tooley and Connally evaluated current teacher professional development practices and the obstacles therein. Tooley and Connally stated that professional development for teachers is multifarious in structure and educators are being asked to meet “rigorous academic standards designed to help all students succeed in an increasingly complex and knowledge-based society” (p. 2). They found limited proof of improved student learning or improved instruction, “despite professional investments by federal, state, and local

agencies totaling about \$18 billion a year” (Tooley & Connally, 2016, p. 2). Their research did discover that while educational leaders must determine certain content of professional development to meet district initiatives, professional development “that balances teacher self-direction and input from instructional experts may hold the most promise for achieving the goal of improved teacher practice and student outcomes” (Tooley & Connally, 2016, p. 11).

Tooley and Connally (2016) stated one fundamental reason for the deficiency surrounding professional development was the failure to follow a continuous four-part theory of action. The four parts of this theory are the main hurdles between teachers and a robust system of improvement for both teacher and student performances. The first hindrance was not properly “identifying professional development needs” (Tooley & Connally, 2016, p. 5). Often, those making the professional development decisions do not take student performance into account when selecting faculty learning opportunities. The second obstacle was the failure to “choose approaches most likely to be effective” (Tooley & Connally, 2016, p. 7). Teachers are often asked to teach to match the skill being taught and the learning styles of their students, yet leaders making professional development decisions followed the one-size-fits-all approach and often did not make research-based decisions. Third, teacher professional development often is not implemented with quality and fidelity. For example, while research shows that intensive coaching can be a valuable form of professional development, just designating individuals as coaches and making them available to teachers is not enough (Tooley & Connally, 2016). The multiple factors that interfered with fidelity of educator instruction also influenced the fourth professional development hurdle which found the “assessment

of professional development outcomes relative to objectives is rare” (Tooley & Connally, 2016, p. 15), often due to many of the same limited capacity factors (i.e., time, trained staff, and financial resources) that limit fidelity implementation.

### **Evaluation Systems.**

**AdvancED.** Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) research is aligned with three specific AdvancED standards. Focused professional development is found within Domain 3, Resource Capacity. The supporting standards are

Standard 3.1: The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system’s effectiveness.

Standard 3.2: The system’s professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.

Standard 3.3: The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness. (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 5)

Together, the three standards outline the need for institutions to provide professional learning opportunities that are aligned with the identified needs of the organization and matched to improve both student and teacher performance. The experiences should support the common goals of the organization and be supported with all needed resources such as time, staff, and materials (AdvancED, n.d.b).

**NCStar.** Within the NCStar platform are eight indicators aligned with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) research study outlining focused professional development. The majority of these are found within Dimension C, Professional Capacity. The indicators

are

B3.04 The LEA/School sets goals for professional development (based on data) and monitors the extent to which it has changed practice.

C1.01 The LEA/School directly aligns professional development with classroom observations (including peer observations) to build specific skills and knowledge of teachers.

C1.02 The principal plans opportunities for teachers to share their strengths with other teachers.

C1.03 The LEA/School has established, communicated, and provided to employees clear goals and measures for employee's performance and provide targeted training or assistance for any employee receiving an unsatisfactory evaluation or warning.

C2.02 ALL teachers develop individual professional development plans based on classroom observations and self-assessments.

C2.03 The LEA/School provides all staff high quality, ongoing, job-embedded, and differentiated professional development.

C2.04 The LEA/School structures professional development to provide adequate time for collaboration and active learning.

E1.08 Professional development for teachers includes support for working effectively with families, (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 1-4)

An overview of these indicators expects data-driven decisions to be made collectively about professional development offerings. These experiences should directly align with

both teacher and student performance measures. Staff should be given opportunities to learn from one another and time to work collaboratively. Professional development should be purposeful and adequate time should be provided to maximize all outcomes (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

### ***Characteristic 8: A Supportive Learning Environment***

**Definition.** “The school has a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Students feel respected and connected with the staff and are engaged in learning. Instruction is personalized and small learning environments increase student contact with teachers” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 107).

**Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) Research.** Shannon and Bylsma looked at multiple aspects of school culture when exploring the characteristic of creating and maintaining a supportive learning environment. These included a safe and orderly campus, student resiliency, individualized learning, engagement, cultural sensitivity, and classroom management.

An orderly and safe school was the first area Shannon and Bylsma (2007) explored. They cited an article written by Edmonds (1979). Edmonds examined the need for strong leadership and equity for all children, especially those who lived in poverty. Edmonds referenced four such schools with higher than expected student achievement outcomes. Each of the four schools had a strong principal who helped establish an orderly and safe campus and high expectations for all students ingrained in the culture (Edmonds, 1979).

Helping cultivate student resiliency was also an area of focus for the team. Research supported the vital role adults played in efforts to “help students learn to cope



with adverse conditions” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 109); and how student resiliency could be cultivated “through caring and support with strong personal relationships” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 109). One such specific example was the use of turnaround opportunities for students. Student-centered strategies such as these allowed students to develop their own intrinsic motivations for learning. They provided students a lens to see the adversity or their academic setback in temporary terms and root academic growth in their own strengths. Resiliency tools “empower overwhelmed youth to see themselves as survivors rather than as victims” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 109).

In addition, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) also found that small class sizes provided the foundation for a supportive personalized learning environment. Smaller classes could adequately provide students emotional, intellectual, and social supports. The team referenced Cotton’s (2000) data analysis report, which stated when class sizes are smaller “the effects are greater for minority and poor children than for children in general” (p. 15). Smaller student groups allowed for those personal relationships that meet student social and emotional needs but also allowed for more personalized instruction. This academic support often is found within a school-wide instruction and intervention framework. This type of support system aims to identify “unsuccessful student(s) before they fall too far behind” and provides individualized instruction (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

Several strategies referenced by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) emphasized the need for teachers to recognize and enter “the frames of reference of their students from every background” (p. 107). One research-based approach was the Quantum Teaching instructional model. This strategy, supported by “years of experience with thousands of

at-risk students” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 111) requires teachers to meet their students where they are and “advocates use of practices based on theories of accelerated learning, multiple intelligences, neuro-linguistic programming, inquiry learning, and experiential learning, among others” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 111). Effort-based ability, as explained by Saphier (2016), was a second strategy explored by Shannon and Bylsma. This model provided students with three powerful messages from their teachers: “What we’re doing here is important. You can do it! And I’m not going to give up on you—even if you give up on yourself” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 112). Both strategies provided students with a positive frame of reference for their own learning. These, in addition to school-wide assessment policies that focused on continuous feedback and improvement, provided students with an avenue for learning mastery and ultimate success.

The final area of focus regarding creating and maintaining a supportive learning environment for Shannon and Bylsma (2007) was to evaluate classroom management research in relation to positive academic performance. One common factor cited across Shannon and Bylsma’s research was the differentiation between classroom management procedures and classroom discipline. Shannon and Bylsma referenced the work of Harry Wong to illustrate that “discipline is only part of the larger issue of classroom management” (p. 169); and Shannon and Bylsma, “advocated for the development of procedures and routines that create effective classrooms to facilitate learning” (p. 114). A second commonality across Wong, Shannon and Bylsma’s cited research was the recognition of relationships on behavior to create a productive community. These relationships in addition to “skillful classroom management makes good intellectual work

possible” (LePage et al., p. 327, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 113).

The first implementation suggestion for schools attempting to create a positive, sustainable learning environment was, “taking stock of the school culture, as experienced by students, teachers, and staff” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 108). The information gathered from each stakeholder group could then be used to guide school work in the areas of “creating a safe and orderly environment, personalized supportive classrooms, and effective classroom management” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 108).

**Recent Research.** Recent research aligned with the findings of Shannon and Bylsma (2007) regarding a supportive learning environment. “Learning communities thrive when all participants are invested in the work they are doing” (Stewart, 2014, p. 28). In 1943 and again in 1954, Maslow reasoned that if basic needs are met, people are more motivated to achieve (McLeod, 2020). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is still the basis for education courses nationwide. Maslow’s “holistic approach to education and learning...looks at the complete physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities of an individual and how they impact on learning” (McLeod, 2020, Educational Applications Section). A supportive learning environment that meets the needs of both teachers and students is essential for school success.

In 1994, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), specializing in state standards for social and emotional learning (SEL), was founded with the “goal of establishing high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning as an essential part of preschool through high school education” (Dusenbury et al., 2014, p. 1). CASEL has conducted a meta-analysis study of SEL programs, one in 2011 and a second in 2017. Social and emotional learning teaches children to understand

and regulate their emotions, feel empathy, make decisions, and cultivate relationships (Durlak et al., 2011). Durlak et al.'s (2011) work showed students benefit immediately from SEL instruction. These benefits were found evident in prosocial, mental, and academic areas (Durlak et al., 2011). Taylor et al.'s (2017) analysis found, "in follow-up assessments an average of 3.5 years after the last intervention, the academic performance of students exposed to SEL programs was an average 13 percentile points higher than their non-SEL peers" (p.1).

SREB has many research-based tools to support schools as they endeavor to create a supportive learning environment. In a recent South Carolina presentation, SREB President Stephen Pruitt looked at this topic from the view of a teacher. He shared the important role building-level leaders play in creating a supportive learning environment (Smith, 2018). Pruitt shared how "school administrators and teacher leaders can foster trust between colleagues" (Smith, 2018, p. 1) and that this trust is a "hallmark of a safe and enriching learning environment...put simply, it's about relationships" (Smith, 2018, p. 1). A vital element needed to create supportive learning environments for teachers is school leadership and, as a result, students will find themselves surrounded by teachers wrapped in support.

Since 2002, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has surveyed teachers and administrators using the Working Conditions Survey. "Over 109,000 educators responded to the survey during 2018" (Smith, 2018, p. 3), and the resulting data serve as a guide for both lawmakers and school leaders as they strive to create policies and supportive learning environments. One such research project was a collaboration sponsored by The New Teacher Center, a national nonprofit. Ingersoll et al.

(2017) conducted a data analysis based on almost one million surveys across 16 states, including North Carolina. The research project focused on the impact of school leaders and resulted in the report publication of *School Leadership Counts* (Ingersoll et al., 2017). Data from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (2020) is collected in the following areas:

- community engagement and support
- teacher leadership
- school leadership
- managing student conduct
- use of time
- professional development
- facilities and resources
- instructional practices and support

### **Evaluation Systems.**

***AdvancED.*** There are five standards specifically dedicated to the expectation that schools create a supportive learning environment. All five standards are found in Domain 2. The specific standards that align with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) findings are

Standard 2.1: Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.

Standard 2.2: The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.

Standard 2.3: The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs and skills needed for success.

Standard 2.4: The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.

Standard 2.7: Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations. (AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 4)

School leaders are expected to create and maintain an environment that allows educators to effectively work together to provide a high-quality learning experience for their students. The learning culture should support innovative thinking for staff and encourage the use of best practices. These expectations create a supportive learning environment for students. There is the expectation for a formal framework to exist to allow the cultivation of positive relationships which lead to a school where all feel valued and a part of the school community. This sense of belonging leads to improved student achievement (AdvancED, n.d.b)

**NCStar.** NCStar recommendations also align with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) study. There are 10 indicators that provide examples of a supportive learning environment for both students and teachers. These indicators are found in all five of the NCStar Dimensions. The indicators are

A2.18 ALL teachers use cooperative learning methods and encourage student questioning, seeking help from others, and offering help to others.

A4.04 The school promotes social/emotional competency in school rituals and routines, such as morning announcements, awards assemblies, hallway and classroom wall displays, and student competitions.

A4.05 ALL teachers teach and reinforce positive social skills, self-respect,

relationships, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions.

A4.06 KEY ALL teachers are attentive to students' emotional states, guide students in managing their emotions, and arrange for supports and interventions when necessary.

A4.14 The school provides all students with supports and guidance to prepare them for college and careers (e.g., career awareness activities, career exploration, school visits).

A4.16 KEY The school develops and implements consistent, intentional, and on-going plans to support student transitions for grade-to-grade and level-to-level.

A4.21 The school selects, implements, and evaluates evidence-based programs that enhance social/emotional competency.

A4.22 All teachers are responsive to students' cultural backgrounds and incorporate culturally relevant material in their classrooms.

B2.01 School culture promotes and supports the physical, social, emotional, and behavioral health of all school personnel.

D2.05 The environment of the school (physical, social, emotional, and behavioral) is safe, welcoming, and conducive to learning. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 1-4)

This section states schools should promote and create a school culture that nurtures students, faculty, and staff. Supports should be in place for their physical, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. The school environment should be welcoming, safe, organized, respectful, and collaborative; and each individual should be valued (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

***Characteristic 9: High Levels of Family and Community Involvement***

**Definition.** “There is a sense that all have a responsibility to educate students, not just teachers and school staff. Families, businesses, social service agencies, and community colleges/universities all play a vital role in this effort” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 119).

**Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) Research.** When describing high levels of family and community involvement, Shannon and Bylsma referenced a 2002 report published by The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. This report found improved academic performance present when there was a favorable link between school and home (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). More importantly, this academic achievement “holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24). The report acknowledged less research was found on the impact communities could make on a campus; however, there was sufficient data to show some student benefits (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). These findings led Shannon and Bylsma to recommend creating and nurturing authentic family and community engagement strategies as vital parts of school improvement plans. Implementation recommendations stated parents were “most likely to become involved” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 120) when “explicit policies and procedures” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 120) were in place. These resulted in parents who understand they “should be involved” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 121) and are “capable of making a contribution and feel invited” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 121).

**Recent Research.** Current research continues to align high levels of family and community involvement as a student success factor. The Center on Innovations in



Learning provides research for school systems and is financially backed by the U.S. Department of Education. The center is one of seven such groups across the country. The 2019 report, *Effective Practices: Research Briefs and Evidence Rating*, outlined the strong effects on the school community when effectively involving students' families and communities (Donley, 2019).

Meta-analysis yields strong effect sizes in the area of the importance of the home environment (.52) and parent involvement (.49). In addition, a large high-quality study showed that family social capital (e.g., parent/child discussions about school, parents checking homework, parent attendance at school events/meetings) is strongly predictive of students' academic achievement (Dufur et al., 2013, Kraft, M., 2013; Jeynes, 2010; Jeynes, 2017). (Donley, 2019, p. 19)

According to Park et al. (2017), the cycle of parent involvement increases communication and academic support at home; however, it can often increase funding. Many times, such interactions can benefit teachers and "are often effective in supplementing teachers' instruction, creating safe and orderly schools, and securing more resources" (Park et al., 2017, p. 196). These types of partnerships benefit not only individual students but the entire campus.

SREB's Learning-Centered Leadership Program offers professional development specifically to engage stakeholder involvement in the school improvement process. The main idea from this professional development is, "a good number of studies identify communication as a key leadership responsibility that, when combined with other leadership responsibilities, has a strong impact on student achievement" (McGrevin, n.d., p. 55). This communication with families and community representatives can lead to

strong partnerships that support school resource acquisition on multiple levels.

### **Evaluation Systems.**

*AdvancED.* Two specific support standards from AdvancED's Domain 1, Leadership Capacity, align with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) study regarding high levels of family and community involvement. Those standards are

Standard 1.8: Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.

Standard 1.10: Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.

(AdvancED, n.d.b, p. 3)

Both standards address the necessity for the family and the community to work together as one to support the common goal of student achievement. It is the leader's responsibility to collect and honor stakeholder feedback when making decisions. Community and family stakeholders can be valuable sources of support for building leaders, teachers, and students (AdvancED, n.d.b).

*NCStar.* NCStar recommendations align with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research. The important role played by families and communities throughout students' academic careers is addressed in Dimension E, Family and Community Engagement. The 10 indicators are

E1.01 ALL teachers maintain a file of communication with parents/guardians.

E1.03 ALL teachers systematically report to parents/guardians the student's mastery of specific standards-based objectives.

E1.05 The "ongoing conversation" between school personnel and

parents/guardians is candid, supportive, and flows in both directions.

E1.06 KEY The school regularly communicates with parents/guardians about its expectations of them and the importance of the curriculum of the home (what parents can do at home to support their children's learning).

E1.09 The school provides parents/guardians with practical guidance to maintain regular and supportive verbal interactions with their children, to establish a quiet place for children's studying at home, and to model respectful and responsible behaviors.

E1.11 All teachers meet with family members (parents or guardians) formally at least two times a year to engage in two-way communication regarding students' cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development outside the classroom.

E1.12 The school ensures that all parents understand social/emotional competency and their role in enhancing their children's growth in (1) understanding and managing emotions, (2) setting and achieving positive goals, (3) feeling and showing empathy for others, (4) establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and (5) making responsible decisions.

E1.13 The school ensures that all parents understand motivational competency (a growth mindset, the value of mastery, and connecting learning tasks with students' personal aspirations) and how they can enhance motivational competency at home.

E2.01 Parent and/or Community representatives advise the School Leadership Team on matters related to family-school relations.

E2.04 The school consistently engages in strategies, policies, and procedures for

partnering with local businesses, community organizations, and other agencies to meet the needs of the school. (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019, pp. 3-4)

These indicators align with the success characteristic of the need for schools to involve families and the community at large to properly support student learning. Teachers are the first line of communication with families. To meet the needs of students, there should be an open, continuous conversation between the school and home regarding the academic, physical, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of children. All stakeholders should have a voice in the overall direction of the school (North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators, 2019).

### **Monroe Study**

Monroe Christian is a small private school located in Monroe, Washington. In 2011, the School Staff Survey of School Characteristics was distributed to their entire 12-member school staff, and responses were collected anonymously (Krygsheld, 2011). The Monroe staff responded most favorably when asked to share their perception of the school's vision. The results showed "82% agreed completely and 18% of the staff agreed mostly" (Krygsheld, 2011, p. 2) that Monroe Christian had a clear focus overall. The characteristic perceived to be the area of greatest need was professional development. None of the staff agreed completely, and "45% of the MCS staff agree(d) moderately" (Krygsheld, 2011, p. 2) that professional development was adequate. The survey results were used by the administration at Monroe Christian to create two school-wide action plans. Additionally, the survey results supported their work to become an accredited institution (Krygsheld, 2011).

**Conclusion**

Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research was conducted almost 2 decades ago. However, based on the alignment found in current educational resources available for North Carolina school systems through SREB, the review of recent research, the alignment found within two current education evaluation systems, and the use of the survey instrument by a Washington school to successfully achieve accreditation, the same nine characteristics that were indicators of success then are still considered indicators of success.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the characteristics of the high-performing schools studied in Washington state are also found at the same rate in elementary schools in a successful low-wealth, rural school district in North Carolina. This chapter focuses on the methodology used in this study. Information detailing the rationale behind the research, study participants, and the survey instrument used for data collection and analysis are discussed. The role of the researcher also is established in this chapter.

### **Research Rationale**

The review of literature explored the nine characteristics that were indicators of success in Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) study. These nine characteristics are

1. A clear and shared focus
2. High standards and expectations for all students
3. Effective school leadership
4. High levels of collaboration and communication
5. Curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards
6. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
7. Focused professional development
8. A supportive learning environment
9. High levels of family and community involvement. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, pp. 4-5)

Shannon and Bylsma (2007) found that high-performing schools have five of nine

characteristics in common. The nine characteristics were defined in the literature review.

The following research questions guided this quantitative study:

1. Do Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research study findings hold true for elementary schools identified as successful low-wealth schools in a rural North Carolina school district, in that at least five of nine characteristics are present?
2. Which of the nine characteristics of high-performing elementary schools are more likely to be found in schools identified as successful in a low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district?
3. Which of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools are less likely to be found in schools identified as successful in a low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district?

One hundred percent of the students in the district of interest receive free breakfast and lunch. This is accomplished through the Community Eligibility Provision of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 which

amended the National School Lunch Act to provide an alternative to household eligibility applications for free and reduced-price meals in high poverty local educational agencies (LEAs) (or districts) and schools. The overall purpose of the CEP [Community Eligibility Provision] is to improve access to nutritious meals for students in high poverty areas by providing meals to all students "at no cost" to the students. (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.a, p. 1)

Approximately 20% of the population in this county live below the poverty line. This number is 1.5 times higher than the national average of 13.1% and 1.4 times higher than

the North Carolina average of 14%.

### **Research Methods**

This study gathered data from one qualitative method, a survey. The questionnaire collected responses using the Likert scale created by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) to guide schools and districts during the school improvement process. The study identified the prevalence of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools found in a successful low-wealth, rural school district in western North Carolina.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I have been employed in the district in which the research was conducted since 1999 and currently hold a position as an elementary school principal. Before becoming principal, I was an assistant principal in a different elementary school for 3 1/2 years, and a second-grade teacher for 12½ years.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were elementary classroom teachers from the district of interest who were employed during the 2019-2020 school year and who continued their employment at the same elementary school into the 2020-2021 school year. The survey was not sent to those who were not employed by the district during the 2019-2020 school year, to those who were reassigned to new locations, or to new employees.

The respondents were from nine of the 10 elementary schools in a successful low-wealth, rural school district located in the foothills of western North Carolina. I was the administrator at the 10<sup>th</sup> elementary school in the district; therefore, the 10<sup>th</sup> school did not participate in this study. If a respondent indicated they were from the 10<sup>th</sup> school,



their response was excluded from this work.

There were more than 170 elementary classroom teachers serving 3,600 preschool through fifth-grade students in the district. However, due to the elimination of the 10<sup>th</sup> school and the requirement that participants have been consecutively employed for 2 years at the same location, approximately 142 classroom teachers were invited to participate in the voluntary survey.

### **Instrument**

The original School Staff Survey of School Characteristics created by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) was included in their published report. The report stated schools and districts have permission to use the survey. This survey was formatted into a Google Form (Appendix F). Shannon and Bylsma's survey was reviewed and validated by researchers for the Washington OSPI. The "OSPI researchers reviewed and analyzed the studies to confirm the rigor of the nine characteristics.... A matrix that reflects the analysis" (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 129) can be found in Appendix G.

The survey was divided into 10 sections. The first section collected non-identifying demographic information such as school name, grades served by each school, participant primary roles, years in their current role, and grade(s) taught. All collected variables were measured on a nominal scale, where they were used for control; for example, schools were number coded into nine categories coded 1 through 9. There was an optional question for individual school use that was included in the original Shannon and Bylsma (2007) survey administration; however, this optional question was not included in this work.

The remaining sections asked the participants to "think about your school as you

read each of the statements below, then circle the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p.135). However, since this survey was distributed in an electronic form, “circle” was changed to select. The statements from Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) School Staff Survey of School Characteristics were specific to the following nine areas:

1. Vision (six items)
2. Standards/Expectations (five items)
3. Leadership (six items)
4. Collaboration/Communication (seven items)
5. Alignment to Standards (nine items)
6. Monitoring of Teaching and Learning (seven items)
7. Professional Development (six items)
8. Learning Environment (eight items)
9. Family and Community Involvement (six items)

The study used data from this qualitative survey in which participants responded to statements using a 5-point Likert scale.

The survey information gauged staff views and perceived implementation levels regarding each characteristic. Each of the 60 items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale from 0 indicating “no basis to judge” to 5 indicating “agree completely.” The results from the online survey were housed via Google Forms and Google Sheets on a secure encrypted server. Only I had access through a two-factor verification process.

Section 2 of Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) survey asked participating educators to consider the vision of their current school in reference to six statements. Participants

considered the sense of purpose, common goals, staff understanding, and commitment to these goals as well as if the school's vision drives decision-making and works to improve student learning (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of participant perceptions regarding school leadership.

Section 3 of the survey asked participants to think about the established standards and/or expectations of their school and the extent to which they agreed with five statements. Individuals decided if their school expected students to meet high standards and if their staff does whatever it takes to help pupils reach these expectations. Additionally, participants responded to a statement about their own individual beliefs regarding their students' ability to learn complex concepts. Participants also considered if all students were challenged and if teachers used effective strategies when working with underperforming students (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of the extent to which established standards and expectations were found within each school.

In Section 4, participants considered their school's leadership and then responded to the extent to which they agreed with six statements. These survey questions measured respondent perceptions of shared leadership; if school leaders advocated for their students, had integrity, considered multiple perspectives when making decisions, and collectively held each other responsible for student achievement; and if the participants believed their school leadership cared about them (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of participant perceptions regarding the leadership found at each school.

In Section 5, participants provided their opinion regarding the collaboration and communication within their school across seven statements. Participants responded to the

extent to which they agreed about the school's systematic use of obtaining multiple perspectives when decision-making, if teachers regularly discussed education issues, and if they worked together to solve problems and to increase student learning. In addition, they identified agreement with statements about staff instructional planning, communication with families, and if school staff members trusted one another (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of participant perceptions of the collaboration and communication within their schools.

In Section 6 of the survey, participants considered their school's alignment to standards with a response to nine statements. Respondents agreed or disagreed with the level at which the curriculum in their school was aligned to state standards and if staff had a solid grasp of and aligned materials to state standards. Additionally, they considered if instruction was built on prior knowledge and was meaningful, varied, research-based, intellectually stimulating, and based on student data (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of participant perceptions about their schools' instructional alignment to state standards.

Survey Section 7 asked participants to think about the monitoring of teaching and learning in their school and the extent to which they agreed with seven statements. Participants responded regarding students and instructional feedback, extra assistance, and modified instructional strategies. Additional areas for response included staff feedback, observations, and if high-quality work was expected of school staff (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of participant perceptions of their schools' monitoring of teaching and learning.

Section 8 of the survey asked participants to reflect upon their school's

professional development opportunities. There were six statements about this topic. Respondents indicated their level of agreement regarding the use of assessment results to decide professional development; if teachers received support in areas as needed; if professional development activities were frequent, aligned with the school's vision, and led by staff members; and if teachers viewed themselves as learners and educators (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of participant perceptions of their schools' professional development practices.

Section 9 contained eight statements and asked participants to appraise their school's learning environment. Participants identified the extent they agreed about the school culture and if it allowed students to feel safe and was conducive to learning and if teachers showed they cared about their students and respected their cultures and their individuality. Also, participants responded to the extent they agreed that instruction was adjusted to meet students at their level, if discipline was consistent, and if staff were free to share their views (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of participant perceptions of each school's learning environment.

In Section 10, participants considered their school's family and community involvement across six areas. Family involvement, stakeholder support, school attempts to reach out to the families of low-performing student(s), frequency of parent contact, level of support provided to parents and parent volunteers were the areas participants were invited to consider and respond (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Survey data informed me of participant perceptions of family and community engagement.

### **Research Design**

I obtained Citi certification (Appendix H) and permission to conduct this research

from the district of interest (Appendix I). The study surveyed elementary classroom teachers from nine of the 10 elementary schools in a successful low-wealth, rural school district located in the foothills of western North Carolina. Participation in this research study was strictly voluntary. All data were collected via Google Forms. Participation was limited to one response per email address. Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved as no identifying information was collected from the participants. Responses from individuals who were not elementary classroom teachers or those from the one excluded elementary school were not included in the analysis. Approximately 142 elementary classroom teachers who were employed at their current location during both the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years were contacted by email and asked to participate (Appendix J). The survey was provided in a digital format to participants and remained open for 3 weeks. A survey reminder to participate (Appendix K) was emailed weekly to participants.

### **Procedures**

Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) School Staff Survey of School Characteristics was formatted into a digital survey using Google Forms (Appendix F). A courtesy memorandum (Appendix L) was sent via email to the administrators of the nine participating elementary schools. A link to Shannon and Bylsma's School Staff Survey of School Characteristics was included in this communication. The Google form survey was delivered to all elementary classroom teachers who were employed at the same school during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years via an email invitation (Appendix J). Two weekly reminders to complete the digital survey were sent during the 3-week period by the candidate (Appendix K). The survey closed at the end of the 3-week period.

Results from the digital School Staff Survey of School Characteristics were recorded via Google Forms and Google Sheets. The results from the Google Form and Google Sheets were housed on a secure encrypted server. Two-factor verification was required to access the data. The document has not been shared by me.

### **Data Analysis**

At the end of the 3-week survey window, the Google Form settings were changed to stop accepting responses. Due to potential disruptions related to COVID-19, I reserved the right to extend the response window to allow for more data collection; however, the window was not extended. Once the survey closed, it was not reopened. When the survey closed, the Google Form responses were populated into a Google Sheet. I made a copy of the original data to protect this information.

Working with the copy of the collected data and before any analyses were conducted, I removed all responses from the nonparticipating schools and/or grade bands. A spreadsheet for each school was created and labeled. I sorted the responses by location and moved each school's data to the appropriate spreadsheet within the Google document. Schools with a response rate below 30% were not evaluated. Each set of data was then sorted by category and question.

Each survey question provided six response options: 1=no basis to judge, 2=don't agree at all, 3=agree slightly, 4=agree moderately, 5=agree mostly, and 6=agree completely. I only considered responses of "agree mostly" or "agree completely" as positive responses. Then the percentage of positive responses were calculated for each item within each category for each school.

Positive response rates that were 80% or higher identified the school as having

met the item threshold. I then identified how many items within each characteristic were at an 80% positive response rate. A school was identified to have a characteristic solidly in place if they had an 80% positive response rate for 100% of the characteristic's items. Once all response rates were completed, I identified the number of characteristics each school was identified to have in place.

Three years after the final report has been submitted, all data will be erased. A summary of positive response tables for all items is provided in Appendix M.



## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

Socioeconomic barriers stand between students who live in poverty and successful academic outcomes. However, one low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district met with success despite these challenges. Almost 15 years ago, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) identified nine common characteristics that were found in schools that overcame the barriers and successfully outperformed their socioeconomic predictors. A look into the perceptions of the North Carolina teachers from this district determined if Shannon and Bylsma's characteristics were also common in this successful low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district.

Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) study found that high-performing schools have five of nine characteristics in common. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine if the characteristics of the high-performing schools studied by Shannon and Bylsma in Washington state were also prevalent in a successful low-wealth, rural school district in western North Carolina. The results will be used to answer the following research questions:

1. Do Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research study findings hold true for elementary schools identified as successful low-wealth schools in a rural North Carolina school district, in that at least five of nine characteristics are present?
2. Which of the nine characteristics of high-performing elementary schools are more likely to be found in schools identified as successful in a low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district?

3. Which of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools are less likely to be found in schools identified as successful in a low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district?

The study gathered data from one qualitative method, a survey. The Google Form survey was sent via email on October 19, 2020, and remained open for 3 weeks. The survey closed on November 8, 2020. There were 146 eligible classroom teachers invited to participate, and responses were received from 64. The seven responses not used in the final analysis were received from schools with low response rates or from respondents who identified as holding positions other than classroom teachers. Fifty-seven responses were used in the final analysis.

## **Results**

The first section of the survey collected non-identifying demographic information such as school name, grades served by each school, participant primary roles, years in their current role, and grade(s) taught. The demographic data from Table 2 allowed me to develop an understanding of the number of participants. Tables 3 and 4 summarized information collected from the survey responses. Tables 2, 3, and 4 identify overall response rates by school, years working in their current school, and historical/current grade-level assignments. All elementary schools in the district of interest served students in kindergarten through fifth grade; however, 6% of respondents have held previous teaching assignments above Grade 5.

**Table 2***Number of Survey Respondents by School*

| School | Number of participants | Percentage of participants |
|--------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| A      | 10                     | 15.4                       |
| B      | 7                      | 10.8                       |
| C      | 15                     | 23.1                       |
| D      | 14                     | 21.5                       |
| E      | 3                      | 4.6                        |
| F      | 5                      | 7.7                        |
| G      | 3                      | 4.6                        |
| H      | 4                      | 6.2                        |
| I      | 3                      | 4.6                        |
| Other* | 1                      | 1.5                        |

\*Excluded from the analysis.

**Table 3***Years Working in Current School for Survey Respondents*

| Year(s)    | Number of participants | Percentage of participants |
|------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1-3        | 11                     | 16.9                       |
| 4-7        | 11                     | 16.9                       |
| 8-15       | 22                     | 33.8                       |
| 16 or more | 21                     | 32.3                       |

**Table 4***Historical and Current Grade Levels Taught for Survey Respondents*

| Grade level      | Number of survey participants | Percentage of participants |
|------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Kindergarten     | 29                            | 44.6                       |
| First            | 33                            | 50.8                       |
| Second           | 31                            | 47.7                       |
| Third            | 34                            | 52.3                       |
| Fourth           | 29                            | 44.6                       |
| Fifth            | 23                            | 35.4                       |
| Sixth            | 5                             | 7.7                        |
| Seventh          | 3                             | 4.6                        |
| Eighth           | 2                             | 3.1                        |
| Ninth            | 1                             | 1.5                        |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | 0                             | 0                          |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> | 0                             | 0                          |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> | 0                             | 0                          |

For each question in Section 1, there were 65 responses indicating that 100% of the participants answered each question in this section. Teachers were asked to identify their district, school, how long they taught at their current location, and each grade level they had taught. One hundred percent of the respondents indicated they were employed by the district of interest. The options for current location were the district's 10 elementary schools including the option of "other." One respondent indicated they were not assigned to one particular school; therefore, their individual answers were not included with any individual school data in Sections 2-10. Schools were assigned letters coded A through I to disaggregate the data in Sections 2-10. The choices for years working at their current school were broken down into four categories of 1-3 years, 4-7 years, 8-15 years, and 16 years or more. Of the 65 participants, 11 responded they had been assigned to their current school 1-3 years, 11 stated 4-7 years, 22 responded 8-15 years, and 21 indicated more than 16 years. The majority of participants, 94%, responded

they have taught exclusively at the elementary level.

Sections 2-10 of the survey were aggregated by school. Table 5 summarizes participation rates by school. Two schools were eliminated due to response rates lower than 30%.

**Table 5**

*School Response Rates*

| School | Number of surveys sent | Number of participants | Percentage of participants |
|--------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| A      | 11                     | 10                     | 91                         |
| B      | 27                     | 15                     | 56                         |
| C      | 22                     | 7                      | 32                         |
| D      | 22                     | 14                     | 64                         |
| E      | 9                      | 3                      | 33                         |
| F      | 12                     | 5                      | 42                         |
| G*     | 16                     | 3                      | 19                         |
| H*     | 17                     | 4                      | 24                         |
| I      | 10                     | 3                      | 30                         |

\*Response rate lower than 30%.

All responses from the nonparticipating schools or grade bands were removed. A spreadsheet for each school was created and labeled. I sorted the responses by location and moved each school's data to the appropriate spreadsheet within the Google document. Schools with a response rate below 30% were not evaluated. Each set of data was sorted by category and question.

Each survey question provided six response options. The options were 1=no basis to judge, 2=don't agree at all, 3=agree slightly, 4=agree moderately, 5=agree mostly, and 6=agree completely. I only considered responses of "agree mostly" or "agree completely" as positive responses. Then the percentage of positive responses was calculated for each item within each category for each school.

Positive response rates that were 80% or higher identified the school as having met the item threshold. Then I identified how many items with each characteristic were at an 80% positive response rate. A school was identified to have a characteristic if it had an 80% positive response rate for 100% of the characteristic's items. After all response rates were completed, I identified the number of characteristics each school had been identified as having in place. A summary of positive response tables for all items can be found in Appendix M.

***Characteristic 1 (A Clear and Shared Focus)***

Section 2 of the survey asked participants to consider the vision of their current school in reference to six statements. Table 6 summarizes the information collected from participants regarding their perception of their school's vision. One hundred percent of the eligible schools, all seven, had Characteristic 1, a clear and shared focus.

**Table 6**

***Characteristic 1 Response Rates by School***

| Characteristic 1  | School |      |      |      |      |      |    |    |      |
|---|--------|------|------|------|------|------|----|----|------|
|   | A      | B    | C    | D    | E    | F    | G  | H  | I    |
| A) The school has a clear sense of purpose                                      | 90%    | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| B) I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve.        | 90%    | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| C) The staff shares a common understanding of what the school wants to achieve. | 90%    | 100% | 86%  | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| D) All staff are committed to achieving the school's goals.                     | 80%    | 100% | 86%  | 86%  | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| E) The staff keeps the school's goals in mind when making important decisions.  | 90%    | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| F) The school's primary emphasis is improving student learning.                 | 100%   | 93%  | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |

|         |     |     |     |     |     |     |    |    |     |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|
| Overall | Met | Met | Met | Met | Met | Met | -- | -- | Met |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|

### ***Characteristic 2 (High Standards and Expectations for All Students)***

In Section 3 of the survey, educators responded to five statements about the established standards and/or expectations of their school. Table 7 contains the information collected from participants regarding their perceptions of the extent to which established standards and expectations are found within each school. Two schools from the district of interest had Characteristic 2, high standards and expectations for all students.

**Table 7**

#### ***Characteristic 2 Response Rates by School***

| Characteristic 2   | School  |      |         |         |         |      |    |    |         |
|--|---------|------|---------|---------|---------|------|----|----|---------|
|  | A       | B    | C       | D       | E       | F    | G  | H  | I       |
| A) All students are expected to achieve high standards.  | 100%    | 93%  | 86%     | 100%    | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| B) Teachers do whatever it takes to help all students meet high academic standards.                | 90%     | 93%  | 86%     | 100%    | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| C) I believe all students can learn complex concepts.  | 70%     | 80%  | 86%     | 79%     | 33%     | 80%  | -- | -- | 67%     |
| D) All students are consistently challenged by a rigorous curriculum.                              | 100%    | 100% | 71%     | 100%    | 100%    | 80%  | -- | -- | 100%    |
| E) Teachers use effective strategies to help low-performing students meet high academic standards. | 100%    | 87%  | 86%     | 93%     | 100%    | 80%  | -- | -- | 100%    |
| Overall  | Not Met | Met  | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Met  | -- | -- | Not Met |

### ***Characteristic 3 (Effective School Leadership)***

School leadership was the topic in Section 4. Teachers responded to six statements regarding their school's leadership. Table 8 compiles the survey data collected from participants. Characteristic 3, effective school leadership, was met by four of the seven eligible schools from the district of interest.

**Table 8**

*Characteristic 3 Response Rates by School*

| Characteristic 3  | School |     |         |      |         |      |    |    |         |
|---|--------|-----|---------|------|---------|------|----|----|---------|
|   | A      | B   | C       | D    | E       | F    | G  | H  | I       |
| A) Many staff provide leadership in some way.                               | 90%    | 87% | 86%     | 93%  | 33%     | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| B) Leaders advocate for effective instruction for all students.             | 100%   | 93% | 86%     | 100% | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| C) People in leadership roles act with integrity.                           | 90%    | 93% | 100%    | 100% | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| D) School administrators consider various viewpoints when making decisions. | 90%    | 87% | 71%     | 86%  | 67%     | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| E) Leaders hold staff accountable for improving student learning.           | 100%   | 93% | 86%     | 100% | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| F) I feel like the school leadership cares about me.                        | 90%    | 87% | 86%     | 86%  | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 67%     |
| Overall   | Met    | Met | Not Met | Met  | Not Met | Met  | -- | -- | Not Met |

*Characteristic 4 (High Levels of Collaboration and Communication)*

In Section 5, respondents provided their opinion regarding the collaboration and communication within their school across seven statements. Table 9 summarizes the data collected from participants. Characteristic 4, high levels of collaboration and communication, was found in three of the eligible schools from the district of interest.



**Table 9***Characteristic 4 Response Rates by School*

| Characteristic 4   | School |      |         |         |         |      |    |    |         |
|--|--------|------|---------|---------|---------|------|----|----|---------|
|  | A      | B    | C       | D       | E       | F    | G  | H  | I       |
| A) The school uses a system to obtain a variety of perspectives when making decisions. | 90%    | 100% | 71%     | 79%     | 67%     | 100% | -- | -- | 33%     |
| B) Teachers discuss teaching issues on a regular basis.                                | 90%    | 100% | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| C) Staff members work together to solve problems related to school issues.             | 90%    | 93%  | 100%    | 93%     | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| D) The staff works in teams across grade levels to help increase student learning.     | 90%    | 100% | 86%     | 71%     | 67%     | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| E) Staff routinely work together to plan what will be taught.                          | 90%    | 93%  | 100%    | 86%     | 67%     | 80%  | -- | -- | 100%    |
| F) Teachers have frequent communication with the families of their students.           | 100%   | 100% | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| G) Staff members trust one another.  | 80%    | 87%  | 86%     | 86%     | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 67%     |
| Overall  | Met    | Met  | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Met  | -- | -- | Not Met |

*Characteristic 5 (Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments Aligned with State Standards)*

Table 10 displays the survey results from the educators inventoried regarding Characteristic 5. In this section of the survey, nine statements gauged respondent opinions and the level with which they agreed or disagreed about the curriculum, instruction, and assessments in their school and if each is aligned to state standards. Six of the eligible schools had this characteristic.

**Table 10***Characteristic 5 Response Rates by School*

| Characteristic 5   | School |      |      |      |         |      |    |    |      |
|--|--------|------|------|------|---------|------|----|----|------|
|  | A      | B    | C    | D    | E       | F    | G  | H  | I    |
| A) The school's curriculum is aligned with state standards.                                      | 90%    | 93%  | 86%  | 100% | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| B) Instructional staff have a good understanding of the state standards in the areas they teach. | 90%    | 100% | 86%  | 100% | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| C) Instructional materials that are aligned with the state standards are available to staff.     | 100%   | 93%  | 100% | 93%  | 67%     | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| D) Instruction builds on what students already know.   | 90%    | 100% | 100% | 93%  | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| E) Schoolwork is meaningful to students.   | 90%    | 93%  | 86%  | 100% | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| F) Teachers use a variety of approaches and activities to help students learn.                   | 100%   | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| G) Classroom activities are intellectually stimulating.  | 90%    | 93%  | 86%  | 93%  | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| H) I know the research basis for the instructional strategies being used.                        | 90%    | 93%  | 100% | 100% | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| I) The staff uses state assessment results to help plan instructional activities.                | 100%   | 100% | 100% | 93%  | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| Overall  | Met    | Met  | Met  | Met  | Not Met | Met  | -- | -- | Met  |

*Characteristic 6 (Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching)*

Characteristic 6, the frequent monitoring of learning and teaching, was determined to be present in two schools. This section asked participants to respond to seven statements about both staff and student expectations and the feedback each group receives. Table 11 summarizes their responses.

**Table 11***Characteristic 6 Response Rates by School*

| Characteristic 6  | School |         |         |         |         |      |    |    |         |
|---|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|----|----|---------|
|   | A      | B       | C       | D       | E       | F    | G  | H  | I       |
| A) Students receive regular feedback about what they need to do to improve.                 | 100%   | 93%     | 86%     | 93%     | 67%     | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| B) Students receive extra help when they need it.   | 100%   | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| C) Teachers modify their instructional practices based on classroom assessment information. | 100%   | 93%     | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| D) Teachers receive regular feedback on how they are doing.                                 | 90%    | 60%     | 86%     | 93%     | 67%     | 100% | -- | -- | 67%     |
| E) Teaching and learning are the focus of staff observations and evaluations.               | 90%    | 93%     | 100%    | 86%     | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| F) Teachers provide feedback to each other to help improve instructional practices.         | 80%    | 67%     | 86%     | 50%     | 67%     | 80%  | -- | -- | 67%     |
| G) High-quality work is expected of all the adults who work at the school.                  | 100%   | 93%     | 57%     | 100%    | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100%    |
| Overall   | Met    | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Met  | -- | -- | Not Met |

*Characteristic 7 (Focused Professional Development)*

Section 8 of the survey asked participants to reflect upon their school's professional development opportunities. There were six statements about this topic. Respondents indicated their level of agreement regarding focused professional development. Table 12 displays each school's response rate. Two of seven schools were identified as having this characteristic.

**Table 12***Characteristic 7 Response Rates by School*

| Characteristic 7  | School  |         |         |         |         |      |    |    |      |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|----|----|------|
|   | A       | B       | C       | D       | E       | F    | G  | H  | I    |
| A) Assessment results are used to determine professional learning activities.                     | 90%     | 87%     | 57%     | 86%     | 33%     | 80%  | -- | -- | 67%  |
| B) Staff members get help in areas they need to improve.  | 90%     | 67%     | 71%     | 64%     | 33%     | 100% | -- | -- | 67%  |
| C) Professional development activities are consistent with school goals.                          | 90%     | 80%     | 71%     | 50%     | 33%     | 100% | -- | -- | 67%  |
| D) I have enough opportunities to grow professionally.  | 90%     | 93%     | 71%     | 79%     | 100%    | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| E) Different staff members periodically lead professional development activities for other staff. | 70%     | 67%     | 71%     | 50%     | 67%     | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| F) Instructional staff view themselves as learners as well as teachers.                           | 90%     | 93%     | 86%     | 93%     | 67%     | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| Overall   | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Met  | -- | -- | Met  |

*Characteristic 8 (A Supportive Learning Environment)*

The eight statements in Section 9 asked participants to appraise their school's culture. Participants registered their opinions about Characteristic 8, a supportive learning environment. Table 13 compiles their responses. This characteristic was found to be present in six of the seven.

**Table 13***Characteristic 8 Response Rates by School*

| Characteristic 8  | School |      |         |      |      |      |    |    |      |
|---|--------|------|---------|------|------|------|----|----|------|
|   | A      | B    | C       | D    | E    | F    | G  | H  | I    |
| A) Students feel safe on school property during school hours.                 | 100%   | 100% | 100%    | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| B) The school environment is conducive to learning.                           | 100%   | 100% | 100%    | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| C) Teachers show they care about all of their students.                       | 100%   | 100% | 100%    | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| D) The staff respects the cultural heritage of students.                      | 100%   | 100% | 100%    | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| E) Students respect those who are different from them.                        | 100%   | 93%  | 100%    | 93%  | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| F) Instruction is adjusted to meet individual student needs.                  | 100%   | 87%  | 100%    | 100% | 100% | 100% | -- | -- | 100% |
| G) Student discipline problems are managed well.                              | 100%   | 93%  | 86%     | 100% | 80%  | 80%  | -- | -- | 100% |
| H) The staff feels free to express their ideas and opinions with one another. | 90%    | 87%  | 71%     | 93%  | 80%  | 80%  | -- | -- | 100% |
| Overall   | Met    | Met  | Not Met | Met  | Met  | Met  | -- | -- | Met  |

*Characteristic 9 (High Levels of Family and Community Involvement)*

In Section 10, participants considered their school's family and community involvement across six areas. Table 14 summarizes their responses. None of the schools included in this study was found to have high levels of family and community involvement.

**Table 14***Characteristic 9 Response Rates by School*

| Characteristic 9  | School  |         |         |         |         |         |    |    |         |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----|----|---------|
|   | A       | B       | C       | D       | E       | F       | G  | H  | I       |
| A) The staff believes students learn more through effective family support.                               | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | 67%     | 100%    | -- | -- | 100%    |
| B) The school works with many community organizations to support its students.                            | 90%     | 80%     | 100%    | 79%     | 33%     | 100%    | -- | -- | 67%     |
| C) The school makes a special effort to contact the families of students who are struggling academically. | 90%     | 100%    | 100%    | 93%     | 100%    | 100%    | -- | -- | 100%    |
| D) Teachers have frequent contact with their student's parents.   | 100%    | 93%     | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | 100%    | -- | -- | 100%    |
| E) The school provides ample information to families about how to help students succeed in school.        | 100%    | 93%     | 86%     | 93%     | 33%     | 100%    | -- | -- | 100%    |
| F) Many parents are involved as volunteers at the school.   | 0%      | 27%     | 14%     | 43%     | 33%     | 40%     | -- | -- | 33%     |
| Overall   | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | Not Met | -- | -- | Not Met |

**Summary**

I collected and analyzed quantitative data for this study. The data revealed three of the seven eligible schools that participated in this study had five or more of the nine characteristics from Shannon and Bylsma (2007). Table 15 provides the number of characteristics identified from the survey responses by school.

**Table 15***Overall School Response Rates*

| School | Characteristics Present |
|--------|-------------------------|
| A      | 6                       |
| B      | 6                       |
| C      | 2                       |
| D      | 4                       |
| E      | 2                       |
| F      | 8                       |
| G*     | --                      |
| H*     | --                      |
| I      | 4                       |

\*Survey response rate lower than 30%.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Students of poverty face complicated academic hurdles directly related to the socioeconomic status of their families. For years, leaders have attempted to overcome these challenges through policies, funding, and research studies. As the number of children who live in poverty annually increases, many schools continue to struggle to meet their needs, while others find success.

Almost 20 years ago, a research study was conducted by the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). This work identified nine characteristics in schools that were outperforming their socioeconomic indicators. The nine characteristics found most often in high-performing schools were

1. A clear and shared focus
2. High standards and expectations for all students
3. Effective school leadership
4. High levels of collaboration and communication
5. Curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards
6. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
7. Focused professional development
8. A supportive learning environment
9. High levels of family and community involvement. (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, pp. 4-5)

To be exact, it was found that all high-performing schools had five of the nine characteristics firmly in place, although no characteristic was determined to be more important than any other. Although Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research took place



almost 2 decades ago, the review of current research supported the continued relevance of each characteristic in current educational research and the alignment of each characteristic within two present-day education evaluation systems.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the characteristics of high-performing schools identified in a Washington state research study led by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) were also prevalent in a successful low-wealth, rural school district in western North Carolina.

The questions used to guide this study were as follows:

1. Do Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research study findings hold true for elementary schools identified as successful low-wealth schools in a rural North Carolina school district, in that at least five of nine characteristics are present?
2. Which of the nine characteristics of high-performing elementary schools are more likely to be found in schools identified as successful in a low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district?
3. Which of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools are less likely to be found in schools identified as successful in a low-wealth, rural North Carolina school district?

## **Research Findings**

### ***Research Question 1: Do Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) Research Study Findings Hold True for Elementary Schools Identified as Successful Low-Wealth Schools in a Rural North Carolina School District, in That at Least Five of Nine Characteristics Are Present?***

Based on the findings from Chapter 4, less than half of the schools from the district of interest were found to have five of the nine characteristics present. The successful low-wealth, rural district was determined to have five of the nine characteristics solidly in place in only three of the seven participating schools. Two schools had four characteristics in place, while the remaining two schools were identified to each have two characteristics in place. On the surface, the results from this work do not support Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) study. However, Shannon and Bylsma's study was designed to support schools and districts during the school improvement process.

Shannon and Bylsma's work did not identify a specific threshold needed to determine the presence of the characteristics. I designed the criteria which determined the presence of the characteristics within schools from the district of interest. In conclusion, although the nine characteristics of high-performing schools were found in each of the schools from the district of interest, they were not present at the predefined rate of success.

### ***Research Question 2: Which of the Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Elementary Schools Are More Likely To Be Found in Schools Identified as Successful in a Low-Wealth, Rural North Carolina School District?***

Characteristic 1, a clear and shared focus, was determined most likely to be found in schools identified as successful in the district of interest. I determined three of the nine

characteristics were present in a majority of the schools. Table 16 summarizes the overall prevalence of the nine characteristics from the district of interest.

**Table 16**

*Overall Prevalence of the Nine Characteristics*

| Characteristic   | Number of schools characteristic found present |
|--|--|
| 1: A clear shared focus  | 7  |
| 2: High standards and expectations for all students                      | 2  |
| 3: Effective school leadership   | 4  |
| 4: High levels of collaboration and communication                        | 3  |
| 5: Curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards | 6  |
| 6: Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching                          | 2  |
| 7: Focused professional development                                      | 2  |
| 8: A supportive learning environment                                     | 6  |
| 9: High levels of family and community involvement                       | 0  |

One hundred percent of the schools from the district of interest had Characteristic 1, a clear shared focus, solidly in place. Shannon and Bylsma (2007) found that “the core purpose of an organization is a critical element of effective school systems” (p. 27). This is consistent with recommendations from both North Carolina’s NCStar and the AdvancEd Performance Standards which specifically recommend a clear and shared focus requires the definition of beliefs that outline a common understanding of quality teaching and learning expectations. The actions of all involved parties support these collective beliefs as they work together to achieve a common goal (AdvancED, n.d.b). The findings of this study determined that this characteristic was the district’s strongest.

Characteristic 5 also had a strong presence in the district, as it was determined solidly in place in six schools. This characteristic outlines the need for curriculum, instruction, and assessments to be aligned with state standards as stated by Shannon and

Bylsma (2007):

The planned and actual curriculum are aligned with the essential academic learning requirements (EALRs). Research-based teaching strategies and materials are used. Staff understands the role of classroom and state assessments, what the assessments measure, and how student work is evaluated. (p. 63)

I believe there is a close connection between Characteristic 5 and Characteristic 1. The clear and shared focus of improved student learning outlined in Characteristic 1 can only be met through the purposeful alignment of curriculum and assessments recommended in Characteristic 5. It would stand to reason that these two characteristics both had a strong presence, as they are mutually supportive of one another.

The third characteristic identified as a strength was Characteristic 8, a supportive learning environment. The California School Boards Association (2018) defined a safe environment as, “one where teaching and learning are not distracted; disruptions are minimized; violence, drugs, bullying and fear are not present; students are not discriminated against; expectations for behavior are clearly communicated; and consequences for infractions are consistently and fairly applied” (para. 1). This definition aligns with Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) survey statements regarding the level of safety students feel while on campus. Only one statement in this section asked participants to respond regarding a supportive learning environment specifically for teachers. This statement targeted the level of safety staff feel when expressing their own opinions. This one teacher-directed statement received the lowest levels of agreement and prevented this characteristic from identification in all schools.

***Research Question 3: Which of the Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Schools Are Less Likely To Be Found in Schools Identified as Successful in a Low-Wealth, Rural North Carolina School District?***

Based on the research findings, one characteristic was not found present in any school from the district of interest. This was Characteristic 9, which gathered perceptions regarding family and community involvement. I believe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced participant responses. The respondents were not instructed to include or exclude the impacts of the pandemic when choosing their responses. The statements within this section about parent and teacher communication were found present in each school. However, the statement regarding parent volunteers was not found present in any school. The lack of a clarifying statement regarding the pandemic may have limited the ability to determine the presence of this characteristic.

Three other characteristics were determined not to be well represented in schools from the district. These were Characteristics 2, high standards and expectations for all students; 6, frequent monitoring of learning and teaching; and 7, focused professional development.

Characteristic 2 collected perspectives regarding high standards and expectations. The students from the district of interest face socioeconomic barriers that stand between them and successful academic outcomes. Shannon and Bylsma (2007) stated that to reach high standards and expectations, “These obstacles are not seen as insurmountable” (p. 33). However, the lowest areas of agreement within this section were regarding the statement that all students can learn complex concepts. This was in direct contrast to the highest area of agreement that all students are expected to achieve high standards. These

two responses appear contradictory, as teachers stated they expect their students to achieve high goals while at the same time not believing they can reach these goals.

Characteristic 6 examined beliefs surrounding the frequent monitoring of teaching and learning. This section was divided into two subsections, one for student learning and the other for teacher learning. A 2016 SREB report shared the importance of both teacher and student feedback (Gandha & Baxter, 2016). The article highlighted three high-need schools that attributed their success to a continuous feedback cycle (Gandha & Baxter, 2016). These students “are outperforming similar peers in similar schools. Despite a prevailing sentiment that there may be a myriad of factors beyond educators’ control, teachers and leaders are positively impacting student learning and students’ lives” (Gandha & Baxter, 2016, p. 1) through frequent monitoring of learning and teaching. Survey participants from the district of interest responded in strong agreement that students received timely feedback and were supported during the teaching and learning process; however, there was far less agreement regarding the feedback provided to teachers. Teachers also indicated they did not strongly agree peers provided feedback to improve academics. The teacher-directed questions prohibited this characteristic from being identified as strongly in place.

Characteristic 7 captured perceptions around focused professional development. In all but one school, educators viewed themselves as a group of learners; however, only two schools believed that teachers received professional development that matched their area of need. A little more than half of the teachers believed that teacher trainings were aligned to school improvement plan goals. “Passive learning alone has not been found to create changes in teaching practices” (Stewart, 2014, p. 30). This would indicate that

teachers think of themselves as people who are ready to learn, but the professional growth opportunities provided to them do not match their individual areas of need.

There were four characteristics determined least likely to be identified in the district of interest. Only one of the characteristics was not identified in any school, and it is the opinion of this researcher that this was due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The three remaining characteristics identified as present in only two schools were only determined entirely lacking from three schools. Each of the four characteristics had some presence in the district of interest, just not to the level this researcher determined to be considered strongly in place.

### **Research Findings Summary**

Shannon and Bylsma (2007) conducted a research study which identified nine characteristics that were found in high-performing schools. Shannon and Bylsma further determined that schools that were successfully educating students of poverty had five of these nine characteristics firmly in place, although no characteristic was determined to hold more importance than any other. Despite the fact this research took place almost 2 decades ago, the review of current research in Chapter 2 supported the continued relevance of each characteristic and highlighted the alignment of each characteristic within two present-day education evaluation systems. The purpose of this study was to determine if the characteristics of high-performing schools identified in Shannon and Bylsma's research were also prevalent in a successful low-wealth, rural school district in western North Carolina.

The findings of this study did not clearly align with Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) findings. Shannon and Bylsma's report suggested successful schools have five of the nine

characteristics of high performing schools solidly in place. However, less than half of the schools within the successful low-wealth, rural district of interest met the criteria. The findings from this study were based solely on the perceptions of participating classroom teachers. Nonetheless, I clearly identified the presence of each characteristic within all schools from the district, just not at my predetermined levels, to identify if the characteristic was solidly in place. The final conclusion is that the nine characteristics of high-performing schools are still aligned to current research, but a district can outperform their socioeconomic indicators and be deemed successful without five of the nine characteristics solidly identified, based on the opinions of classroom teachers.

#### **North Carolina School Report Cards by Prevalence of the Nine Characteristics**

The state of North Carolina annually releases report cards for all schools within the state. The report cards provide school and district data to stakeholders across many areas including but not limited to “student performance and academic growth, school and student characteristics” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.b, para. 1). The schools identified to have more characteristics in place are all schools that have traditionally produced stronger scores on these report cards than those schools with fewer than four characteristics in place. In fact, all five schools identified to have four or more characteristics in place have earned B scores on their North Carolina School Report Cards for the years 2015-2019. The two schools determined to have only two characteristics solidly in place both consistently posted C school report card scores (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.b). The state did not post school report card scores for the 2019-2020 school year due to the COVID-19 shutdown.



## **Limitations**

This study was intentionally designed to focus solely on classroom teachers. Shannon and Bylsma (2007) stated school success required more than cursory attention to the nine characteristics and “reaching that level (of success) takes years of sustained school commitment, affecting values, attitudes, beliefs, and instructional practices” (p. 4).

To more accurately identify the presence of each characteristic by campus, participant information was obtained exclusively from elementary classroom teachers who were employed at the same school for both the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. The survey was voluntary, and most schools did have enough responses to meet the participant threshold. The schools without sufficient responses were excluded from the analysis. However, some schools met the required 30% response rate; but in two cases, this only amounted to three total responses per school. This is a very small sample size, and additional information may have yielded different results if all eligible staff had responded.

The findings may also have varied if all certified staff and/or paraprofessionals had been included. Schools are comprised of many different perspectives. The inclusion of itinerant staff, paraprofessionals, and newly hired teachers may have provided information to lead me to different conclusions. Itinerant staff travel throughout the district. Their perspectives may be vastly different based on the fact that they routinely are in multiple schools. Additionally, paraprofessionals may have limited information regarding state standards for classroom instruction, professional development, and other items within the survey instrument that are not directly related to their daily duties. Finally, classroom teachers who are new to the profession or those who are new to their

assigned school may also have a different perspective than their more experienced counterparts. While each perspective is important, these were intentionally not included in this research.

School administrators were also purposefully not included in this study. Even though “the quality of principal leadership is the second-most influential school-based effect on student achievement (after classroom instruction)” (Tosh & Doss, 2019, p. 1), the perceptions of elementary principals were excluded from this work. More than half of school administrators from the district of interest were not employed at the same school for both the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. This did not allow for alignment with the classroom teacher participant criteria and ultimately led me to eliminate this important stakeholder perspective. For future studies, district and school leaders would benefit from the comparison of administrator perceptions alongside teacher perceptions. The purposeful exclusion of participants lowered the overall number of responses for this study. A larger survey response pool that included multiple stakeholders could have led to different research findings.

Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced participant responses. Section 10 of the survey asked participants to provide their opinions about Characteristic 9, high levels of family and community involvement. This was the only characteristic not determined present in any of the participating schools. However, the respondents were not instructed to include or exclude the impacts of the pandemic when choosing their responses. Schools across the country have been operating while following strict entry guidelines for almost a year. The lack of a clarifying statement regarding the pandemic may have limited the ability to determine the presence of this characteristic.

## **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this voluntary research study provided an in-depth look into classroom teacher perceptions from the district of interest regarding the nine characteristics identified in successful schools from Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) study. It is the intent of this researcher that school leaders use these results to build upon their current strengths and adjust current practice to increase the prevalence of each characteristic within their own school and collectively across the district. School operations at each location have the potential to be affected by the results of this research study.

Each of the nine characteristics was observed within one of three tiers: solidly in place, somewhat in place, or not present. Across these tiers, three characteristics were identified solidly in place, two were determined somewhat in place, and the remaining four characteristics were not determined present. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that classroom teacher perceptions are only one part of the entire school community.

### ***Tier 1: Characteristics Solidly in Place***

**Continue to Emphasize a Clear and Shared Focus.** The first of the three characteristics found to be solidly in place was Characteristic 1, a clear and shared focus. The survey indicated this characteristic was a strength identified by teachers in each participating school. One hundred percent of participants agreed mostly or agreed completely that a clear and shared focus was found in their school. The district recently underwent a rebranding campaign which has increased the emphasis around the district's strategic plan and goals. For example, agenda items and topics of discussion for the Board of Education, leadership team, and faculty meetings all fall under one of the

district's key strategic plan elements. The district's new brand includes a visual representation of the elements found on the website, letterhead, and district signage. Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) research stated, "The focus and vision are developed from common beliefs and values, creating a consistent direction for all involved" (p. 27). Clearly, the district of interest has created an understanding of their intended direction and target objectives among the employees surveyed. To maintain and or strengthen the shared vision found in the district, school leaders should continue their efforts to emphasize a clear path forward.

### **Continue to Align Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments with State**

**Standards.** I determined that Characteristic 5, curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards, was also a strength for the district. Only one campus did not identify this characteristic to be solidly present. Researchers have "found that curricular materials have a critical impact on students' academic success, and that the cumulative effect of exposure to high-quality materials across a student's academic career can be significant" (Anderson & Mira, 2017, p. 6). The district of interest has worked diligently to create a cohesive team of schools. Over the past decade, curriculum choices have been purposefully aligned with a specific focus on state standards. At one point in the history of the district, more than a dozen math curriculums were being taught, while presently there is only one core elementary math curriculum. Consequently, a district committee (of which I am a member) is currently exploring the adoption of a comprehensive English language arts curriculum directly aligned to North Carolina state standards. Through the continued purposeful selection and utilization of curriculum materials that are aligned to North Carolina State Standards, the district can continue to increase the prevalence of this

characteristic.

**Continue to Provide a Supportive Learning Environment.** The third characteristic determined solidly in place was Characteristic 8, a supportive learning environment. This characteristic was determined present in all but one of the district's schools. Currently, schools use a variety of positive behavior intervention frameworks and formal social-emotional curriculums such as the Zones of Regulation, The Seven Habits, and Second Steps to create a nurturing school culture. This is in addition to partnerships with outside agencies to provide students and their families with both material and physical needs. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, I suggest the district continue to build upon this strength. The academic and social implications from the pandemic will be felt for an unknown amount of time; however, resiliency tools “empower overwhelmed youth to see themselves as survivors rather than as victims” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 109). The same strategies educators have used to combat the effects of poverty and other adverse childhood experiences can become the foundation school leaders and students build upon as they move forward together on their road to a post-pandemic world.

***Tier 2: Characteristics Somewhat in Place***

Two characteristics were not determined to be solidly in place, nor were they found seriously lacking. Characteristic 3, effective school leadership, was found in four schools; while Characteristic 4, high levels of collaboration and communication, was identified in three schools.

**Build Upon Effective School Leadership.** Characteristic 3, effective school leadership, was identified in most of the district's schools. A closer look into the

responses revealed that all participants believed school leaders advocated for students, held educators accountable, and acted with integrity. It is my opinion that these positive findings should be shared with current school administrators; however, shared decision-making and distributed leadership were both seen as lacking. To build upon the strong leadership within the district, McLaughlin and Talbert (2006, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007) stated, “Strong learning communities develop when principals learn to relinquish a measure of control and help others participate in building leadership throughout the schools” (pp. 44-45). Professional development in the areas of distributed leadership and/or developing teacher leadership could strengthen the presence of this characteristic districtwide.

**Increase Levels of Collaboration and Communication.** Characteristic 4, high levels of collaboration and communication, was identified in a little less than half of the schools from the district of interest; however, there were strengths within this characteristic. One hundred percent of survey participants indicated that teachers routinely communicate with parents. It is my opinion that the district should continue to use communication methods such as Class Dojo, Remind, school-wide phone calls, and notes home. I also determined that a strong majority of respondents felt teachers discussed teaching and learning on a regular basis.

The weakest area in this characteristic focused on gathering multiple perspectives when making school-wide decisions. It is my opinion that the professional development recommended to strengthen Characteristic 3, effective school leadership, focused on creating a culture of distributed leadership and/or developing teacher leadership, could also increase the prevalence of this characteristic across the district.

### ***Tier 3: Characteristics Not Present***

Four characteristics were not readily identified within the district of interest and were determined present in fewer than two schools. These characteristics were

- Characteristic 2, High Standards and Expectations for all Students
- Characteristic 6, Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching
- Characteristic 7, Focused Professional Development
- Characteristic 9, High Levels of Family and Community Involvement

**Build Teacher Efficacy.** It is my opinion that the responses for Characteristic 2, high standards and expectations for all students, and Characteristic 7, focused professional development, are interrelated. One troubling finding with this characteristic was the juxtaposition between teachers' expectations of students and their ability to reach those standards. Saphier (as cited in DuFour et al., 2005) defined the idea of "effort-based ability (as) helping each student develop his or her abilities...at high standards, even if they are far behind academically and need a significant amount of time to catch up" (p. 86). However, the research findings do not support the belief that educators within the district of interest believe all students can achieve, even though they hold high expectations for all students.

Shannon and Bylsma (2007) recommended the high expectations set by teachers be supported "by instructional practices and teacher behavior that demonstrate that teachers believe in the students, believe in their own efficacy to teach students to high standards, and that they will persist in teaching them" (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 39). Therefore, targeted professional development to build teacher efficacy in meeting the needs of all students could provide teachers with the necessary tools and ability needed to

reach all students.

**Create a Cycle of Continuous Improvement.** Focused professional development for school administrators could also prove valuable to the district to increase the presence of Characteristic 6, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning. Gandha and Baxter (2016) found successful schools established a framework that included a frequent cycle of classroom observations and feedback, the frequent practice of sharing teaching materials and tips, frequent time for reflection, and frequent progress monitoring of students. I concluded the widest area of improvement within this characteristic related to school administrators more so than teachers. The survey participants indicated students were receiving frequent feedback; however, collectively, teachers wanted more meaningful feedback from administrators. They also indicated the need for increased collaboration and reflection time with peers. Targeted professional development designed to help school-level administrators create a continuous cycle of improvement could help the district improve collaboration and move forward.

**Implement Focused Professional Development.** Survey results did not indicate that teachers felt their professional development activities were tied to assessment results, nor did staff receive assistance in areas they needed to improve. A nationwide study found the majority of teachers see professional development as a “compliance exercise” (K-12 Education Team, 2015, p. 10) and not as a means to improve their instruction. Tooley and Connally (2016) recommended professional development “that balances teacher self-direction and input from instructional experts may hold the most promise for achieving the goal of improved teacher practice and student outcomes” (p. 11). I concluded the characteristics not determined present in the majority of schools from the



district of interest could be strengthened through the use of targeted professional development and, as a result, increase the prevalence of multiple characteristics of high-performing schools.

**Leverage Family and Community Partnerships.** At the bottom end of the spectrum, no campus respondents indicated that Characteristic 9 (high levels of family and community involvement) was present. The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools report found improved academic performance in schools when there was a favorable link between school and home, and this academic achievement “holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24). The district of interest does have unit-wide family engagement policies and procedures in place as required by Title I and recommended by Shannon and Bylsma (2007). In addition, each elementary school employs a part-time family and parent engagement coordinator to facilitate strong family involvement; however, the unknown impact of the COVID-19 pandemic hinders the interpretation of these findings. Participants were not instructed to respond based on their pre-COVID-19 experiences or asked to exclude the current COVID-19 restrictions placed on schools when responding. I suggest district leaders conduct a follow-up study to gather stakeholder perceptions as they navigate through rebuilding strong community and family partnerships.

### **Primary Recommended Action**

The single most important action for the district of interest to consider would be to build up administrative skills at the school level. “Principals are second only to teachers as the most important school-level determinant of student achievement”

(Herman et al., 2017, p. 4). Based on the survey results, school administrators hindered multiple characteristics from being identified as solidly in place. The three characteristics impacted by school leaders were:

- Characteristic 3, Effective School Leadership
- Characteristic 4, High Levels of Collaboration and Communication
- Characteristic 6, Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching

Survey respondents collectively expressed their desires for an increased level of distributed leadership, a larger role in the decision-making process, and requested more feedback from administration. It is my opinion the most effective and expedient method to address multiple areas of concern at once would be through the use of focused professional development for school administrators.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

I have four recommendations based on the results of this study for further work in investigating the characteristics of successful schools in the district in this study. I also recommend this investigation expand to other levels within the district and the state of North Carolina, as well as investigations in other states. These recommendations below are intended to strengthen research in this field and to aid school administrators and other school leaders during the school improvement process.

#### ***Recommendation 1: Include Multiple Stakeholder Perceptions***

This study gathered classroom teacher perceptions related to the nine characteristics of high-performing schools but did not gather information from any other group. Schools are complex organizations and including opinions from multiple stakeholders would provide the data needed to allow for a more in-depth analysis of each

campus. I recommend inviting all certified staff, paraprofessionals, school administrators, custodians, child nutrition staff, bus drivers, district-level support administration, community members, parents, and students to be included in future work. As noted earlier, the identification of strengths and weaknesses across multiple stakeholder groups could prove powerful for both school improvement work and the district accreditation process.

***Recommendation 2: Raise the Participation Threshold***

Survey responses were included in the data analysis section of this study if the school met the predetermined 30% participation threshold. In some instances, this totaled three participants. Basing the schools' status on just three teachers does not provide a sufficient sample size and could render conclusions unreliable. I recommend raising the participation threshold to a minimum of five respondents or 30%, whichever is higher.

***Recommendation 3: Broaden to Other Levels***

This study looked only at elementary schools within a single district of interest. To provide a broader view of the district, I recommend expanding the study to include the district's middle and high schools. Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) survey instrument was designed for use at both the elementary and secondary levels. Further research at the middle and high school levels would determine if the characteristics held at those levels outside of Washington state. For the district in this study, this would allow for targeted district-wide improvement and the identification of district trends. It would also allow the district to track student cohorts and determine if the success at elementary levels continues as students enter middle and high school.

#### ***Recommendation 4: Broaden to Other Areas Through a Leveraged Partnership***

To take an even deeper look into the connection between the nine Shannon and Bylsma (2007) characteristics and successful rural, low-wealth schools, I recommend expanding the number of schools to include others in the region and/or beyond the state with similar demographics. SREB supports the work of educators to “strengthen student learning with professional development, proven practices and curricula” (SREB, n.d.a, para. 1). A partnership between SREB and the district could help evaluate and determine next steps for the district and the region.

#### **Conclusion**

The struggle to educate children who live in poverty is not a new one. Founding father Thomas Jefferson, with many others, advocated for such hundreds of years ago (Kober et al., 2007). While today’s educators are not fighting the battle to establish a free public education, they share their desire to provide a quality education to the growing number of students who live in poverty. In “2013 low-income students became (the) new majority in the nation’s public schools” (Suitts, 2015, p. 2). While the most successful schools in the United States have been and continue to be comprised of the most affluent students, there are schools serving children who live in poverty who successfully provide a quality educational experience to their students.

The desired outcome of this research study was twofold. First, I sought to determine if the nine characteristics identified in high-performing schools in Shannon and Bylsma’s (2007) research study were still aligned with current education research. Shannon and Bylsma examined not only schools within Washington state but also schools around the country; their researcher examined “more than twenty studies that

focused on schools in which students were achieving at greater levels than would be predicted based on their demographic characteristics” (p. 3). The ability of a school to outperform its predicted levels became Shannon and Bylsma’s definition of a successful school. The district of interest I examined meets this definition of success.

For almost 2 decades, the Washington “Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE) for OSPI and more than four hundred Washington schools support the use of the nine characteristics...which has shown a positive impact on students’ learning and achievement” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 5). In fact, all high-performing schools in that study had five of the nine characteristics firmly in place. No single characteristic directly equated to school success; Shannon and Bylsma ascertained all schools identified as successful had five of these nine characteristics firmly in place.

Second, I aimed to determine if five of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools were identified in a successful low-wealth, rural school district in Western North Carolina. The district of interest recently posted its highest to date graduation rate. This system has outpaced the state and region in student achievement gains and continues to grow in multiple academic areas, despite 20.3% of the population in this county living below the poverty line.

As outlined in Chapter 2, there is a strong evidence base to support each of the nine characteristics. In addition, recommendations from the AdvancED Accreditation System and the NCStar school improvement platform both align with the 2007 work of Shannon and Bylsma regarding the nine characteristics of high-performing schools.

The findings of this study did not clearly align with Shannon and Bylsma (2007). Their publication suggested successful schools have five of the nine characteristics

solidly in place. Most schools from the district of interest were not identified to have five of the nine characteristics in place, according to classroom teachers; however, there was a solid representation of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools across the district. The final conclusion is that the nine characteristics of high-performing schools are still aligned to current research; however, a district can outperform their socioeconomic indicators and be deemed successful without five of the nine characteristics solidly identified, based on the opinions of classroom teachers.

This work can benefit schools and districts as they work to identify, implement, and strengthen the research-based nine characteristics of successful schools and seek to provide each child with a high-quality, robust, rigorous education no matter their socioeconomic status. Future work should move beyond just elementary classroom teachers to include multiple stakeholders and carefully consider the minimum participation rate of those participants. Further, this work should also examine the prevalence of these nine characteristics in middle and high schools as well as in other districts and states. As more is known about the linkage of these characteristics to successful schools, the additional research will aid school administrators and other school leaders during the school improvement process.

## References

- 2020 Federal Poverty Guidelines. (2020). Washington, DC: Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/2020-poverty-guidelines#guidelines>
- Abrams, L., Varier, D., & Jackson, L. (2016). Unpacking instructional alignment: The influence of teachers' use of assessment data on instruction. *Perspectives in Education, 34*(4), 15-28.
- AdvancED. (n.d.a). *About us*. <https://www.advanc-ed.org/about-us>
- AdvancED. (n.d.b). *Performance standards for schools*. [https://www.advanc-ed.org/sites/default/files/documents/APS\\_Schools.pdf](https://www.advanc-ed.org/sites/default/files/documents/APS_Schools.pdf)
- Anderson, K., & Mira, M. E. (2017). *Alignment of instructional materials trends in state efforts*. Southern Regional Education Board.  
<https://www.sreb.org/publication/alignment-instructional-materials>
- Avett, S., & Avett, S. (2008). Murder in the city [Song]. The Second Gleam. Ramseur Records.
- Bottoms, G., & Schmidt-Davis, J. (2010). *The three essentials: Improving schools requires district vision, district and state support, and principal leadership*. Southern Regional Education Board. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED512028>
- Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2012). *Estimating the effect of leaders on public sector productivity: The case of school principals*. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w17803.pdf>
- Brooke, E. (2017). *Four key factors of effective school leadership*. Lexia Learning.  
<https://www.lexialearning.com/resources/white-papers/four-key-factors-effective-school-leadership>

Calhoun, E. F. (1994). *How to use action research in the self-renewing school*. ASCD.

California School Boards Association. (2018). *Governance and policy resources*.

<https://www.csba.org/GovernanceAndPolicyResources/ConditionsOfChildren/SafeSupportiveSchlEnvironment#:~:text=A%20safe%20school%20is%20one,are%20consistently%20and%20fairly%20applied>

Chantrill, C. (2021). *Monthly government spending details*.

[https://www.usgovernmentspending.com/year\\_spending\\_2019USbn\\_19bc2n\\_20#usgs302](https://www.usgovernmentspending.com/year_spending_2019USbn_19bc2n_20#usgs302)

Coleman, J. S. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Homepage

Casel.org. <https://casel.org/>

Collins, J. (2021). Jim Collins level 5 leadership.

<https://www.jimcollins.com/concepts/level-five-leadership.html>

Collins, R. (2019, October 8). *School achievement and accountability data*. Board of Education Meeting.

Cotton, K. (2000). *The schooling practices that matter most*. ADCD.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED469234.pdf>

Danilova, M. (2018, May 16). Teachers dig deep into their own pockets to pay for supplies, study finds. The Monitor.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2018/0516/Teachers-dig-deep-into-their-own-pockets-to-pay-for-supplies-study-finds>



- Dike, V. E. (2017). Poverty and brain development in children: implications for learning. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 3(1), 64-68.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1147369.pdf>
- Donley, J. (2019). *Effective practices: Research briefs and evidence rating*. Center on Innovations in Learning. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593306.pdf>
- DuFour, R., Eaker, R., Lezotte, L., Reeves, M. D. B., Saphier, J., Schmoker, M., Sparks, D., Stiggins, R., Eaker, R., & DuFour, R. (2005). *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities*. Solution Tree Press.
- DuFour, R., & Reeves, D. (2016, March 1). The futility of PLC lite. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 97(6), 69-71. <https://kappanonline.org/the-futility-of-plc-lite/>
- Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Weissberg, R. P., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Dusenbury, L., Weissberg, R. P., Goren, P., & Domitrovich, C. (2014). *State standards to advance social and emotional learning findings from CASEL's state scan of social and emotional learning standards, preschool through high school*  
<https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/casel-brief-on-state-standards-january-2014.pdf>
- Edmonds, R. (1979, October). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership*, 15-24.  
[http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed\\_lead/el\\_197910\\_edmonds.pdf](http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_197910_edmonds.pdf)

English, F., & Steffy, B. E. (2001). *Deep curriculum alignment: Creating a level playing field for all children on high-stakes tests of educational accountability*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Summary and Background Information. (2018). Washington, DC.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget19/summary/19summary.pdf>

Gandha, T., & Baxter, A. (2016). *Effective teaching communities lessons from high-needs, high-performing Delaware schools*. SREB.

[https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/effective\\_teaching\\_communities.pdf](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/effective_teaching_communities.pdf)

Gorski, P. C. (2017). *Reaching and teaching students in poverty: Strategies for erasing the opportunity gap*. Teachers College Press.

Gruenert, S., & Whitaker, T. (2015). *School culture rewired: How to define, assess, and transform it*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence the impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement annual synthesis 2002*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

<https://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

Herman, R., Gates, S., Arifkhanova, A., Barrett, M., Bega, A., Chavez-Herrerias, E.,

Han, E., Harris, M., Migacheva, K., Ross, R., Leschitz, J., & Wrabel, S.

(2017). *School leadership interventions under every student succeeds act:*

*Evidence review*. The Rand Corporation.

[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1500/RR1550-3/RAND\\_RR1550-3.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1500/RR1550-3/RAND_RR1550-3.pdf)

Hite, J., & Daugherty, C. (2016, June). Florida gauging progress, accelerating pace: 2016

state progress report on the challenge to lead 2020. Southern Regional Education

Board. [https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/fl_2016_goals_0.pdf?1468505465)

[attachments/fl\\_2016\\_goals\\_0.pdf?1468505465](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/fl_2016_goals_0.pdf?1468505465)

Holloway, J., Nielsen, A., & Saltmarsh, S. (2018). Prescribed distributed leadership in the

era of accountability: The experiences of mentor teachers. *Educational*

*Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(4), 538-555.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216688469>

Hytten, K., & Bettez, S. C. (2011). Understanding education for social justice.

*Educational Foundations*, 19. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ925898.pdf>

Ingersoll, R. M., Dougherty, P., & Sirinides, P. (2017). *School leadership counts*.

<https://p.widencdn.net/q1hzuq/Richard-Ingersoll-School-Leadership-Counts>

Jarosz, B., & Mather, M. (2018). *Low-income working families: Rising inequality despite*

*economic recovery*. [http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Spring-2018_WPFP-Policy-Brief.pdf)

[content/uploads/2018/04/Spring-2018\\_WPFP-Policy-Brief.pdf](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Spring-2018_WPFP-Policy-Brief.pdf)

- Jiang, Y., Ekono, M., & Skinner, C. (2016). *Basic facts about low-income children: Children under 18 years, 2014*. National Center for Children in Poverty.  
[http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text\\_1145.pdf](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1145.pdf)
- Johnson, L. (1965). *Johnson's remarks on signing the elementary and secondary education act*. <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/lyndon-baines-johnson/timeline/johnsons-remarks-on-signing-the-elementary-and-secondary-education-act>
- K-12 Education Team. (2015). *Teachers know best: teachers' views on professional development*. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.  
<http://k12education.gatesfoundation.org/download/?Num=2336&filename=Gates-PDMarketResearch-Dec5.pdf>
- Katz, M. B. (1976). The origins of public education: A reassessment. *History of Education Quarterly*, 16(4), 381-407. <https://doi.org/10.2307/367722>
- Keung Hui, T. (2017, September 17,). Some principals face big pay cuts. What does that mean for your kid's school? *The News & Observer*.  
<https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article173533601.html>
- Kober, N., Stark Rentner, D., Jennings, J., & McMurrer, J. (2007). *Why we still need public schools: Public education for the common good*.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED503799.pdf>
- Korte, G., & Troyan, M. (2015, December 11). Every student succeeds act vs. no child left behind: What's changed? *USA Today*.  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/12/10/every-student-succeeds-act-vs-no-child-left-behind-whats-changed/77088780/>

- Krygsheld, B. (2011, April 26). *Betty Krygsheld's blog. Metareflection Standard 11 inquiry/research*. <https://bettykrygsheld.wordpress.com/>
- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (1999). *Teachers transforming their world and their work*. Teachers College Press and ASCD.
- Lieberman, A. & Miller, L. (2001). *Teachers caught in the action: Professional development that matters*. Teachers College Press.
- Lord, J. (2016). *Goals for education*. Southern Regional Education Board.  
[https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/refreshedchallenge\\_2020\\_june2016\\_wcover\\_0.pdf](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/refreshedchallenge_2020_june2016_wcover_0.pdf)
- McGrevin, C. (n.d.). *Communicating to engage stakeholders in school improvement*. Learning-Centered Leadership Program Presentation.  
[https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/communicating\\_to\\_engage\\_stakeholders\\_in\\_school\\_improvement\\_final\\_5.pdf](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/communicating_to_engage_stakeholders_in_school_improvement_final_5.pdf)
- McKnight, K., & Glennie, E. (2019). *Are you ready for this? Preparing for school change by assessing readiness*. RTI Press Publication No. PB-0020-1903.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED594155.pdf>
- McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2006). *Building school-based teacher learning communities: Professional strategies to improve student achievement*. Teachers College Press.
- McLeod, S. A. (2020, March 20). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Simply Psychology.  
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Montanari, A., & Vecchione, C. (July 22, 2016). *North Carolina school improvement planning implementation guide* (Ver. 2.3). NCDPI.

<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/4632/download>

Murphy, J. F., & Tobin, K. J. (2011). *How homeless children and youths can succeed: researchers and advocates have identified successful strategies for schools enrolling homeless students.*

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/003172171109300308>

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.a). Child nutrition.

[https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/information-resources/eligibility/community-eligibility-provision-cep#:~:text=Community%20Eligibility%20Provision%20\(CEP\),\(or%20districts\)%20and%20schools](https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/information-resources/eligibility/community-eligibility-provision-cep#:~:text=Community%20Eligibility%20Provision%20(CEP),(or%20districts)%20and%20schools)

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.(n.d.b). *North Carolina school report cards*. Author. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/data-reports/school-report-cards>

North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report-School Indicators. (2019). Academic Development Institute.

<http://www.indistar.org/app/reports/IndicatorsByLevelReport.aspx?State=NC&Level=SCHOOL&Group=RTI>

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. (2020).

<https://www.ncteachingconditions.org/index>

An Overview—The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning. (2013). <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/overview-the-school-principal-as-leader.aspx>

Park, S., Stone, S. I., & Holloway, S. D. (2017). School-based parental involvement as a predictor of achievement and school learning environment: An elementary school-level analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 82, 195-206.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.09.012>

Pastor, K., & Dewyer, R. (2018, October 17). Move from good to great with collaboration to ensure college and career readiness across your community.

[Webinar] Southern Regional Education Board.

<https://www.sreb.org/webinar/move-good-great-collaboration-ensure-college-and-career-readiness-across-your-community>

Polikoff, M. S. (2013). Teacher education, experience, and the practice of aligned instruction. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 64(3), 212-225.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487112472908>

Pounder, D. (1998). *Restructuring schools for collaboration: Promises and pitfalls*.

SUNY Press.

Rosado, G. D. (2019). *The effects of professional learning communities on student achievement at the elementary education level* (Publication No. 10978238)

[Doctoral dissertation, University of St. Francis]. ProQuest Dissertation and

Theses Global.

Samiullah, M. I., & Anjum, A. (2017). Effect of continuous assessment techniques on students' performance at elementary level. *Bulletin of Education and Research*,

39(1), 91-100. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1210121.pdf>

- Saphier, J. (2016). *Research for better teaching empowering sustainable school improvement*. <https://www.rbteach.com/about-rbt/welcome-jon-saphier>  
<https://www.rbteach.com/about-rbt/welcome-jon-saphier>
- Schmidt-Davis, J. (n.d.). *School leadership training opportunities*. Southern Regional Education Board. <https://www.sreb.org/training>
- Schmoker, M. (1996). *Results: The key to continuous school improvement* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). ASCD. <http://www.ascd.org/readingroom/books/schmoker99book.html>
- Shannon, S. G., & Bylsma, P. (2007). *Nine characteristics of high-performing schools: A research-based resource for schools and districts to assist with improving student learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED499819>
- Smith, M. (2018). Improving school climate: A briefing. Southern Regional Education Board. [https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/improving\\_school\\_climate\\_doc.pdf](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/improving_school_climate_doc.pdf)
- Southern Regional Education Board. (n.d.a). About SREB. <https://www.sreb.org/about>
- Southern Regional Education Board. (n.d.b). Instructional materials. Why align instructional materials to college and career readiness standards?. <https://www.sreb.org/instructional-materials>
- Southern Regional Education Board. (n.d.c). SREB services to states. North Carolina: An overview of SREB programs and services and how North Carolina participates in them. <https://www.sreb.org/sreb-services-states>



Spillane, J., & Shirrell, M. (2018, Spring / VOL. 18). The schoolhouse network: How school buildings affect teacher collaboration. *Education Next*, 18(2).

<https://www.educationnext.org/schoolhouse-network-how-school-buildings-affect-teacher-collaboration/>

Standards Alignment to Curriculum and Assessment. (2018). WestEd and CREST.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED588503.pdf>

Stewart, C. (2014). Transforming professional development to professional learning.

*Journal of Adult Education, Mountain Plains Adult Education Association*, 43(1), 28-33. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1047338.pdf>

Suitts, S. (2015). *A new majority research bulletin: Low income students now a majority in the nation's public schools*. <https://www.southerneducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/New-Majority-Update-Bulletin.pdf>

Sweeney, D., & Mausbach, A. (2019, March). Creating powerful principal and coach partnerships. *Educational Leadership*, 76(6), 30-35.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar19/vol76/num06/Creating-Powerful-Principal-and-Coach-Partnerships.aspx>

Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning

interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1156-1171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12864>

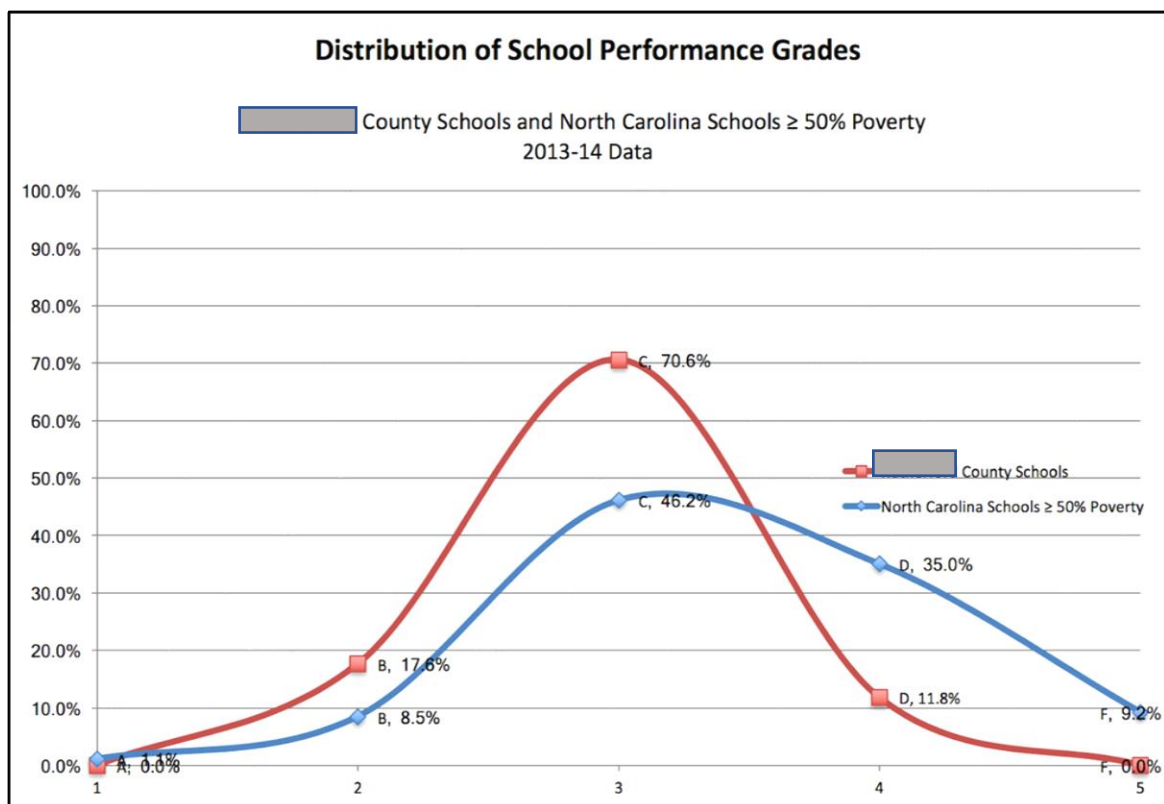
- Thomson, S. (2018). Achievement at school and socioeconomic background: An educational perspective. *NPJ Science of Learning*, 3(1), 5.  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-018-0022-0>
- Tooley, M., & Connally, K. (2016). *No panacea diagnosing what ails teacher professional development before reaching for remedies*. New America. [https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/NA\\_NoPanaceaPaper7.7.pdf](https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/NA_NoPanaceaPaper7.7.pdf)
- Tosh, K., & Doss, C. J. (2019). *Perceptions of school leadership: Implications for principal effectiveness*. RAND Corporation.  
[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2575z5.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2575z5.html)
- Twal, N. (2018, April). Want to create lasting change? Listen first, design second. *The Learning Professional*, 39(2), 14-16.  
<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=a+clear+and+shared+focus+education+success&id=EJ1181204>
- United States Department of Education. (2011, October 20). *Mission*.  
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/mission/mission.html>
- Wilkinson-Flicker, S. (2019, August 13). *Back to school by the numbers: 2019-2020 school year*. National Center for Education Statistics.  
<https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/back-to-school-by-the-numbers-2019-20-school-year>
- Wolff, B. (2018, August 14). The future of work is creative collaboration. *Forbes Online Magazine*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/benjaminwolff/2018/08/14/the-future-of-work-is-creative-collaboration/#29275a673228>

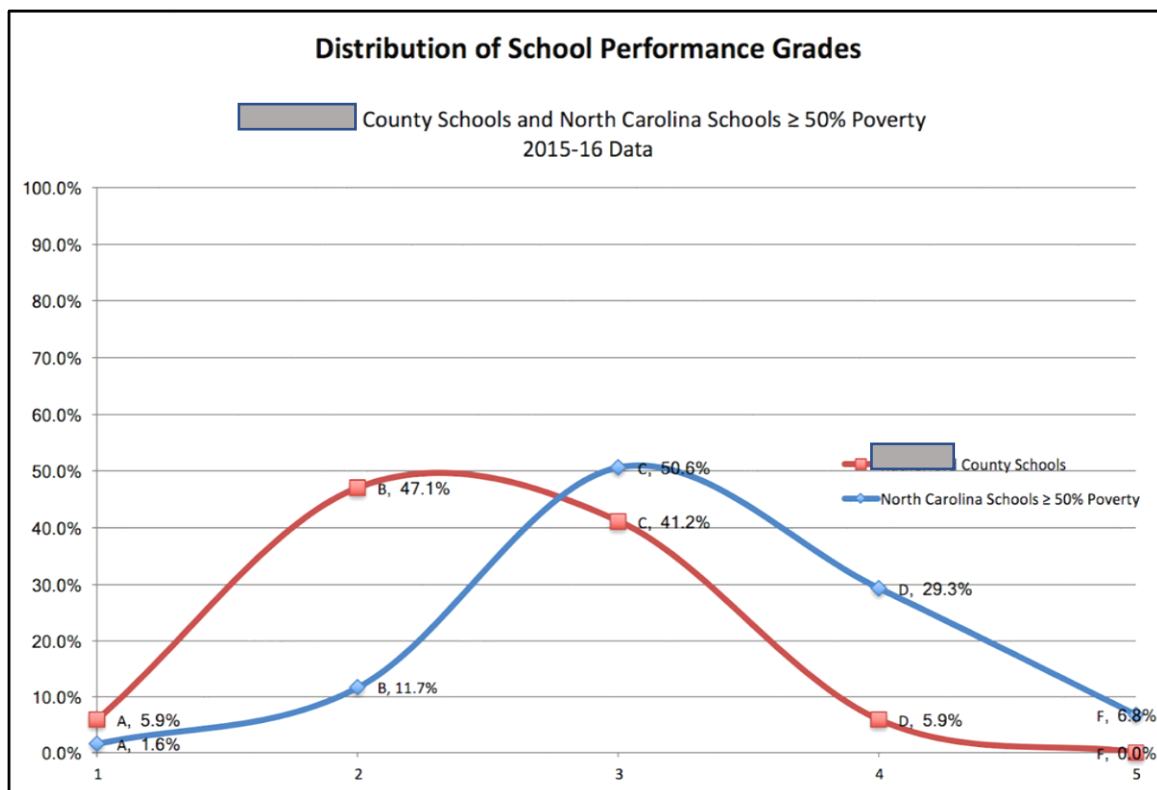
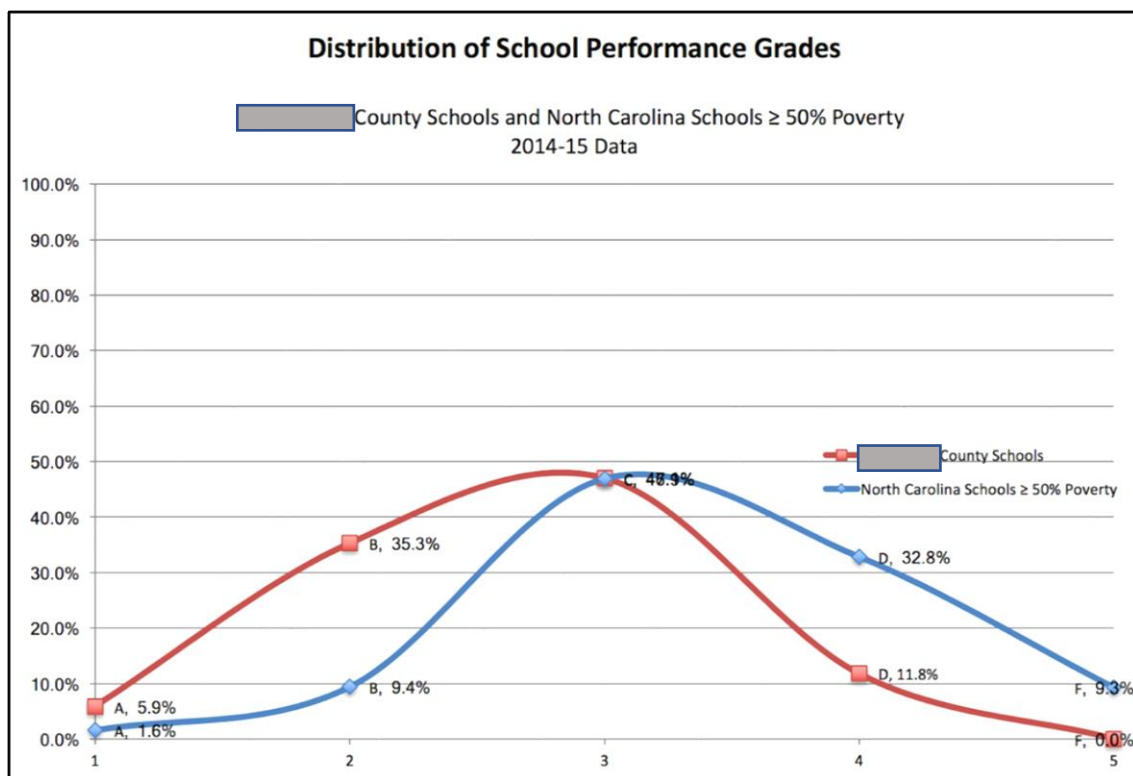
Workman, E., Woods, J. R., Wixom, M. A., & Griffith, M. (2016). *ESSA: Quick guides on top issues*. Education Commission of the States.

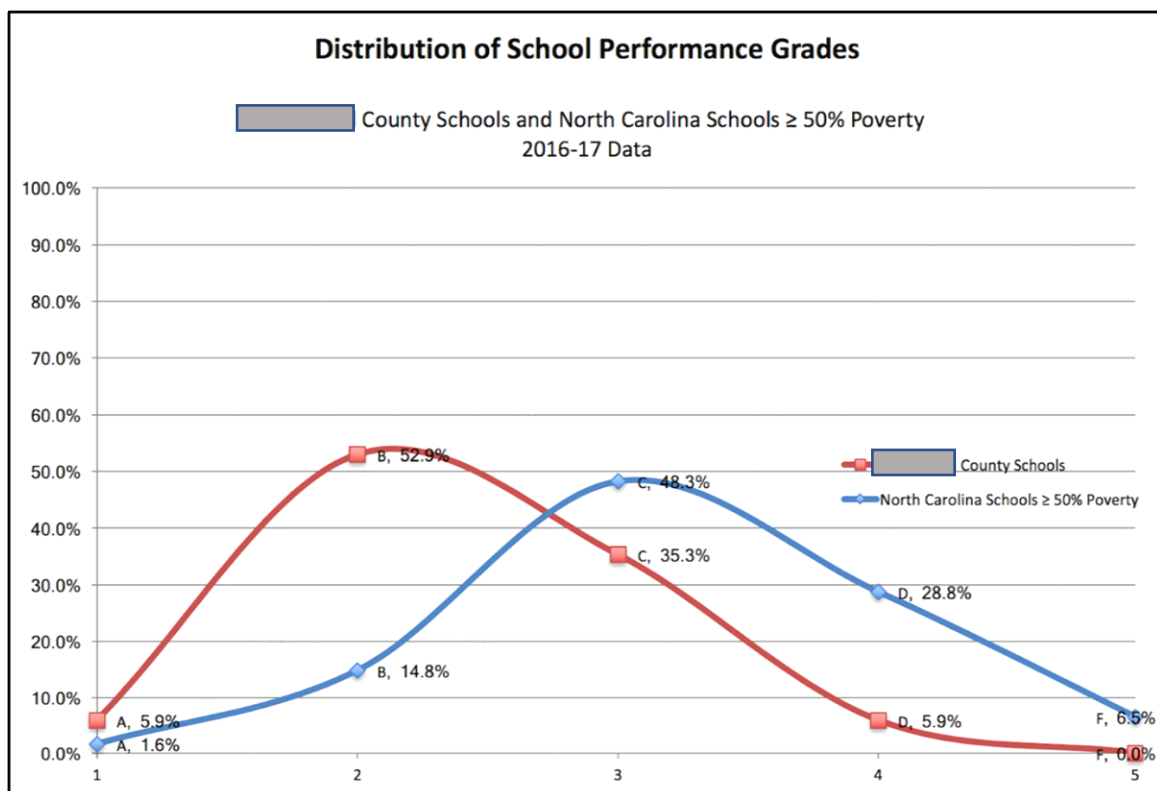
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED567801>

## Appendix A

## Historic Distribution of School Performance Grades



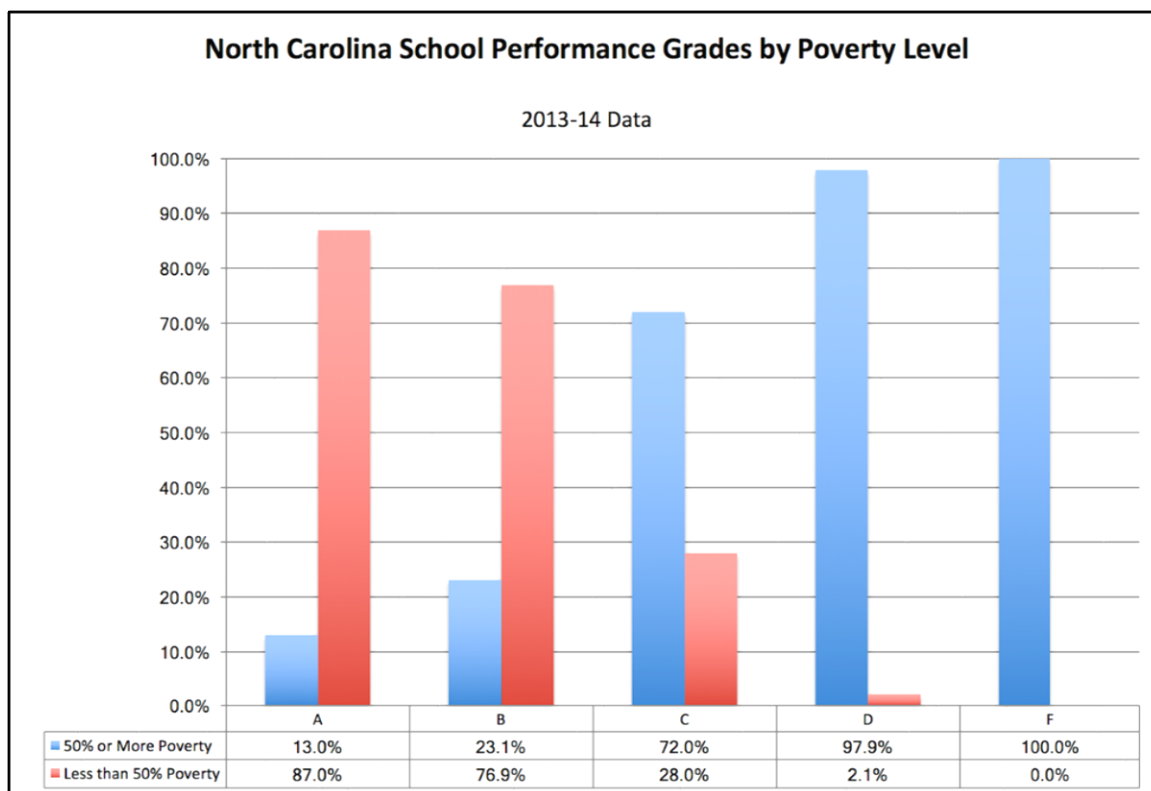




(Collins, 2019).

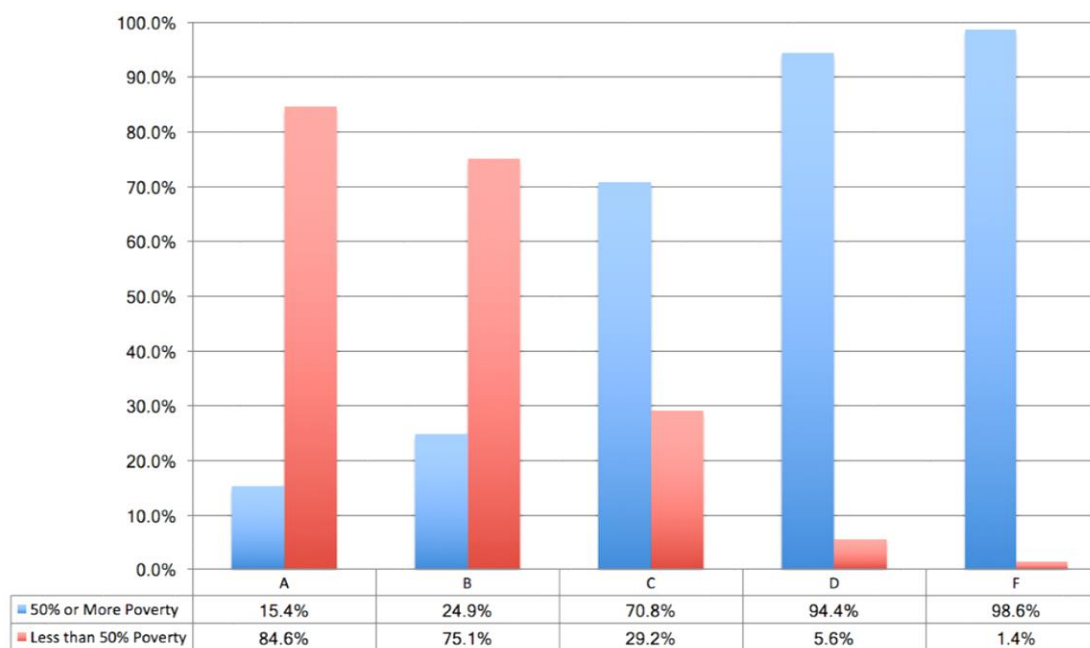
## Appendix B

## Historic Distribution of School Performance Grades by Poverty Level



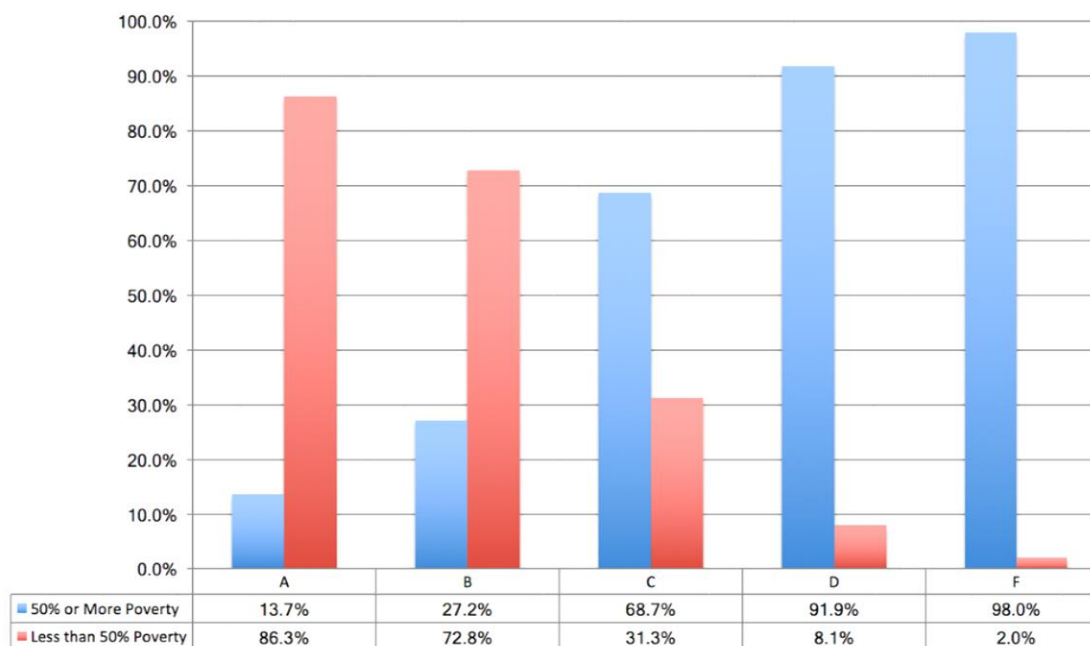
### North Carolina School Performance Grades by Poverty Level

2014-15 Data

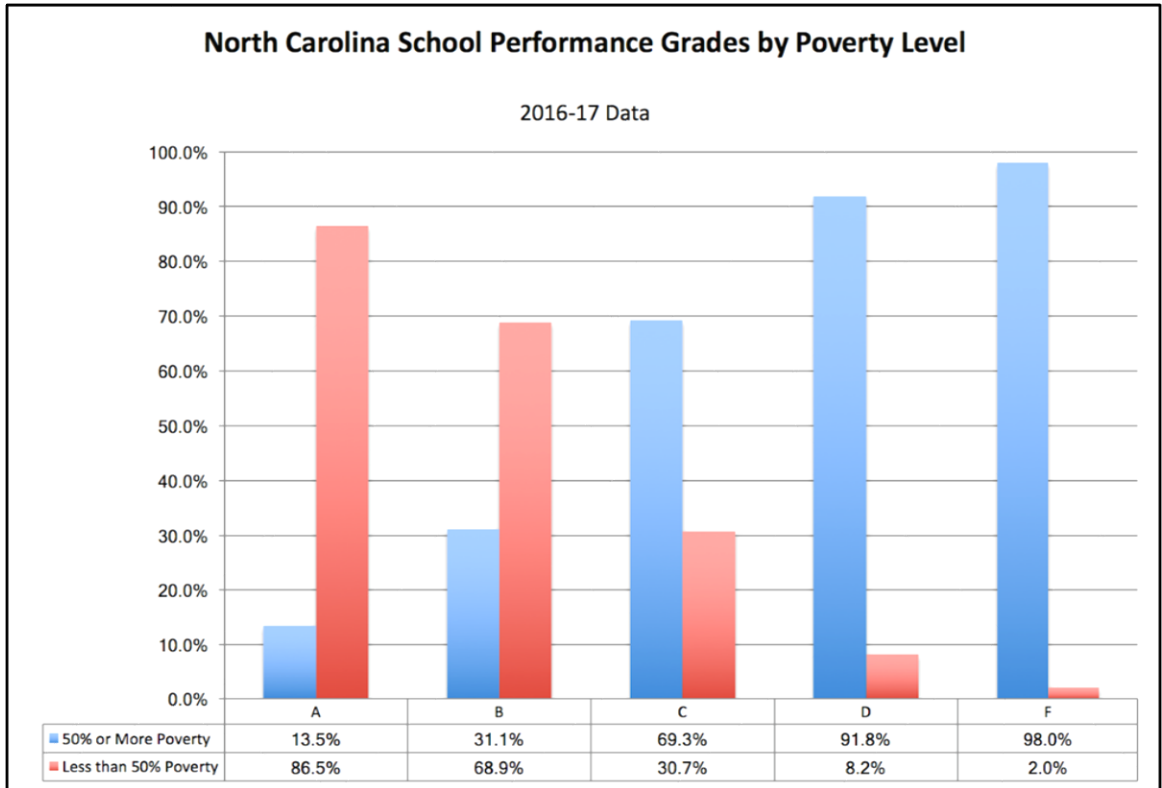


### North Carolina School Performance Grades by Poverty Level

2015-16 Data







(Collins, 2019).

## Appendix C

## School Staff Survey of School Characteristics

**SCHOOL STAFF SURVEY OF SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

To improve school quality and help students learn, school personnel need to identify their strengths and areas needing improvement. Obtaining your views about your school is an important part of this process.

The survey on the following pages was developed to generate discussion that can help your school improvement efforts. Each of the statements in the survey relate to one or more of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools. (For more information on these types of schools, see <http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/9character%20SIP.pdf>)

It will take you about 10 minutes to complete the survey. To ensure your responses remain confidential, your ratings will be combined with other staff and reported as a group. Completing the survey is voluntary, although we encourage you to respond honestly

to help your school get a complete understanding of staff views. To help keep survey responses confidential, consider using an independent party (ESDs, universities, consultants, etc.) to give the survey and analyze the results.

**Survey Scale:** The survey on the following pages uses a 5-point scale, from 1 meaning you “do not agree at all” to 5 meaning you “agree completely.” Indicate the number that best describes your level of agreement about each statement. If you have no knowledge to make an accurate selection, mark 0 in the first column (“no basis to judge”).

Before taking the survey, please complete the bottom half of this page. This information will be used for analysis purposes only, and results will not be reported for categories that have fewer than five (5) responses.

District: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date (month/year): \_\_\_\_\_

1. Level / Type of School (check all that apply):

- ☐ Elementary      ☐ Middle / Junior High  
☐ High School      ☐ Other (specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

2. Grades Served by this School (e.g., K–6): \_\_\_\_\_

3. Your primary role (check one):      ☐ Teacher      ☐ Building administrator  
☐ Other certificated staff      ☐ Para-educator  
☐ Other classified staff

4. Years working in your current role:      ☐ 0–3      ☐ 4–7      ☐ 8–15      ☐ 16 or more  
(include work in other locations)

5. Years working in this school (check one):      ☐ 0–3      ☐ 4–7      ☐ 8–15      ☐ 16 or more

6. Grade(s) taught (circle all that apply):      K   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   12      Not applicable

7. [Optional: For individual school use]: \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---



---

Think about your school as you read each of the statements below. Then circle the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement.

|  | No basis to judge | Don't agree at all | Agree slightly | Agree moderately | Agree mostly | Agree completely |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|
| <b>1. Vision</b>   |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) The school has a clear sense of purpose.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve.                           | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) The staff shares a common understanding of what the school wants to achieve.                    | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) All staff are committed to achieving the school's goals.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) The staff keeps the school's goals in mind when making important decisions.                     | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| f) The school's primary emphasis is improving student learning.                                    | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| <b>2. Standards/Expectations</b>   |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) All students are expected to achieve high standards.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) Teachers do whatever it takes to help all students meet high academic standards.                | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) I believe all students can learn complex concepts.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) All students are consistently challenged by a rigorous curriculum.                              | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) Teachers use effective strategies to help low-performing students meet high academic standards. | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| <b>3. Leadership</b>   |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) Many staff provide leadership in some way.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) Leaders advocate for effective instruction for all students.                                    | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) People in leadership roles act with integrity.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) School administrators consider various viewpoints when making decisions.                        | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) Leaders hold staff accountable for improving student learning.                                  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| f) I feel like the school leadership cares about me.   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |

|  | No basis to judge | Don't agree at all | Agree slightly | Agree moderately | Agree mostly | Agree completely |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|
| <b>4. Collaboration/Communications</b>   |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) The school uses a system to obtain a variety of perspectives when making decisions.           | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) Teachers discuss teaching issues on a regular basis.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) Staff members work together to solve problems related to school issues.                       | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) The staff works in teams across grade levels to help increase student learning.               | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) Staff routinely work together to plan what will be taught.                                    | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| f) Teachers have frequent communication with the families of their students.                     | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| g) Staff members trust one another.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| <b>5. Alignment to Standards</b>   |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) The school's curriculum is aligned with state standards (EALRs).                              | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) Instructional staff have a good understanding of the state standards in the areas they teach. | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) Instructional materials that are aligned with the EALRs are available to staff.               | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) Instruction builds on what students already know.   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) Schoolwork is meaningful to students.   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| f) Teachers use a variety of approaches and activities to help students learn.                   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| g) Classroom activities are intellectually stimulating.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| h) I know the research basis for the instructional strategies being used.                        | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| i) The staff uses WASL results to help plan instructional activities.                            | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| <b>6. Monitoring of Teaching and Learning</b>  |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) Students receive regular feedback about what they need to do to improve.                      | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) Students receive extra help when they need it.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) Teachers modify their instructional practices based on classroom assessment information.      | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) Teachers receive regular feedback on how they are doing.                                      | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) Teaching and learning are the focus of staff observations and evaluations.                    | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| f) Teachers provide feedback to each other to help improve instructional practices.              | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| g) High quality work is expected of all the adults who work at the school.                       | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |

(Continued on next page)

|   | No basis to judge | Don't agree at all | Agree slightly | Agree moderately | Agree mostly | Agree completely |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|
| <b>7. Professional Development</b>  |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) Assessment results are used to determine professional learning activities.                             | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) Staff members get help in areas they need to improve.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) Professional development activities are consistent with school goals.                                  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) I have enough opportunities to grow professionally.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) Different staff members periodically lead professional development activities for other staff.         | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| f) Instructional staff view themselves as learners as well as teachers.                                   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| <b>8. Learning Environment</b>  |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) Students feel safe on school property during school hours.   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) The school environment is conducive to learning.   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) Teachers show they care about all of their students.   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) The staff respects the cultural heritage of students.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) Students respect those who are different from them.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| f) Instruction is adjusted to meet individual student needs.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| g) Student discipline problems are managed well.  | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| h) The staff feels free to express their ideas and opinions with one another.                             | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| <b>9. Family &amp; Community Involvement</b>  |                   |                    |                |                  |              |                  |
| a) The staff believes students learn more through effective family support.                               | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| b) The school works with many community organizations to support its students.                            | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| c) The school makes a special effort to contact the families of students who are struggling academically. | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| d) Teachers have frequent contact with their student's parents.   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| e) The school provides ample information to families about how to help students succeed in school.        | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |
| f) Many parents are involved as volunteers at the school.   | 0                 | 1                  | 2              | 3                | 4            | 5                |

Comments or response to optional question(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Advanced Performance Standards Domains/Standards

#### Domain 1 - Leadership Capacity

- Standard 1.1: The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.
- Standard 1.2: Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.
- Standard 1.3: The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.
- Standard 1.4: The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.
- Standard 1.5: The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.
- Standard 1.6: Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.
- Standard 1.7: Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.
- Standard 1.8: Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.
- Standard 1.9: The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.
- Standard 1.10: Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.
- Standard 1.11: Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.

#### Domain 2 - Learning Capacity

- Standard 2.1: Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.

- Standard 2.2: The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.
- Standard 2.3: The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs and skills needed for success.
- Standard 2.4: The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.
- Standard 2.5: Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.
- Standard 2.6: The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.
- Standard 2.7: Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.
- Standard 2.8: The system provides programs and services for learners' educational future and career planning.
- Standard 2.9: The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.
- Standard 2.10: Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.
- Standard 2.11: Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.
- Standard 2.12: The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.

### Domain 3 - Resource Capacity

- Standard 3.1: The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.
- Standard 3.2: The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.

- Standard 3.3: The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- Standard 3.4: The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.
- Standard 3.5: The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.
- Standard 3.6: The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.
- Standard 3.7: The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.
- Standard 3.8: The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.



## Appendix E

## North Carolina/NCStar Indicator Report–School Indicators

## NCStar Student Success Indicators

**Dimension A - Instructional Excellence and Alignment - High expectations for all staff and students (A1.01 - A1.10)**

- A1.01 The principal models and communicates the expectation of improved student learning through commitment, discipline, and careful implementation of effective practices. (5082)
- A1.02 ALL teachers improve their practice by responding to principal's observations and/or observations by peers. (5083)
- A1.03 The LEA/School promotes a school culture in which professional collaboration is valued and emphasized by all. (5084)
- A1.04 ALL teachers assess student progress frequently using a variety of evaluation methods and make appropriate curriculum adjustments based on results. (5085)
- A1.05 ALL teachers individualize instructional planning in response to individual student performance on pre-tests and other methods of assessment to provide support enhanced learning opportunities for students. (5086)
- A1.06 ALL teachers provide sound instruction in a variety of modes: teacher-directed whole-class; teacher-directed small-group; independent work; computer-based. (5087)
- A1.07 KEY ALL teachers employ effective classroom management and reinforce classroom rules and procedures by positively teaching them. (5088)
- A1.08 ALL teachers promote a growth mindset by attributing learning success to effort and self-regulation and insist upon and reward persistence to mastery. (5089)
- A1.09 The school expects students to participate in activities to develop skills outside of the classroom (e.g., service learning, clubs, athletics, enrichment opportunities, internships). (5090)
- A1.10 All teachers use online curricula with content, assignments, and activities clearly aligned to identified standards (state or national). (5307)

**Dimension A - Instructional Excellence and Alignment - Curriculum and instructional alignment (A2.01 - A2.28)**

- A2.01 Instructional Teams meet regularly (e.g., twice a month or more for 45 minutes each meeting) to review implementation of effective practice and student progress. (5091)
- A2.02 Instructional Teams meet for blocks of time (e.g., 4 to 6-hour blocks, once a month; whole days before and after the school year) sufficient to develop and refine units of instruction and review student learning data. (5092)
- A2.03 The principal spends at least 50% of his/her time working directly with teachers to improve instruction, including classroom observations. (5093)
- A2.04 KEY Instructional Teams develop standards-aligned units of instruction for each subject and grade level. (5094)
- A2.05 ALL teachers develop weekly lesson plans based on aligned units of instruction. (5095)
- A2.06 ALL teachers reinforce elements of mastered knowledge that can be retained through review, questioning, and inclusion in subsequent assignments. (5096)
- A2.07 ALL teachers include vocabulary development as learning objectives. (5097)
- A2.08 ALL teachers teach and model the metacognitive process (goals, strategies, monitoring, and modification) and specific learning strategies and techniques. (5098)
- A2.09 ALL teachers include self-checks, peer-checks, and documentation of learning strategies as part of assignment completion. (5099)
- A2.10 ALL teachers teach methods of logic, synthesis, evaluation, and divergent thinking. (5100)
- A2.11 ALL teachers build student's metacognitive skills by teaching learning strategies and tools and their appropriate application as well as providing students with processes for determining their own mastery of tasks. (5101)
- A2.12 ALL teachers encourage self-direction by giving students choice in the selection of topics and the application of learning strategies. (5102)
- A2.13 Units of instruction include standards-based objectives and criteria for mastery. (5103)

- A2.14 Units of instruction include specific learning activities aligned to objectives. (5104)
- A2.15 Instructional Teams develop materials for their standards-aligned learning activities and share the materials among themselves. (5105)
- A2.16 Units of instruction and activities are aligned with AIG goals, ELL student progress, IEP goals and objectives for all students. (5106)
- A2.17 ALL teachers establish classroom norms for personal responsibility, cooperation, and concern for others. (5107)
- A2.18 ALL teachers use cooperative learning methods and encourage student questioning, seeking help from others, and offering help to others. (5108)
- A2.19 ALL teachers integrate college and career guidance and supports relevant to their subject areas into their taught curricula. (5109)
- A2.20 All teachers use appropriate technological tools to enhance instruction. (5306)
- A2.21 All teachers use online curricula whose goals are measurable and clearly state what students will know or do at the end of instruction. (5308)
- A2.22 All teachers and teacher teams plan instruction based on the aligned and expanded curriculum that includes rich reading, writing, memorization, and vocabulary development. (5321)
- A2.23 All teachers assign rich reading and the application of the reading in written work and discussion. (5327)
- A2.24 All teachers and teacher teams plan instruction based on the aligned and expanded curriculum that includes objectives for student management of their learning. (5330)
- A2.25 The teacher builds students' ability to use a variety of learning tools. (5339)
- A2.26 All teachers and teacher teams plan instruction with a curriculum guide that includes methods to enhance student motivation to learn. (5342)
- A2.27 Instructional Teams and teachers embed cultural education into learning experiences in the curriculum. (6825)
- A2.28 Instructional Teams and teachers utilize culturally relevant examples in curriculum and instruction to strengthen students' learning. (6826)

**Dimension A - Instructional Excellence and Alignment - Data analysis and instructional planning (A3.01 - A3.10)**

- A3.01 Instructional Teams use student learning data to identify students in need of instructional support or enhancement. (5110)
- A3.02 Instructional Teams track and maintain records of student learning data to determine progress toward meeting goals as indicated in students' IEPs. (5111)
- A3.03 The principal compiles reports from classroom observations, showing aggregate areas of strength and areas that need improvement without revealing the identity of individual teachers. (5112)
- A3.04 Unit pre-tests and post-tests results are reviewed by the Instructional Teams to make decisions about curriculum and instructional plans and to flag students in need of intervention or enrichment. (5113)
- A3.05 The school assesses each student at least 3 times each year to determine progress toward standard-based objectives. (5114)
- A3.06 ALL teachers maintain and utilize a record of each student's mastery of specific learning objectives. (5115)
- A3.07 Instructional teams and teachers use fine-grained data to design for each student a learning path tailored to that student's prior learning, personal interests, and aspirations. (5116)
- A3.08 Online programs generate accessible and actionable student data about their use, performance, and progress. (5305)
- A3.09 All teachers differentiate assignments to provide the right balance of challenge and attainability for each student. (5350)
- A3.10 All teachers use assessment data and match instruction and supports to individual student needs. (6827)

**Dimension A - Instructional Excellence and Alignment - Student support services (A4.01 - A4.22)**

- A4.01 KEY The school implements a tiered instructional system that allows teachers to deliver evidence-based instruction aligned with the individual needs of students across all tiers. (5117)
- A4.02 Teams of special educators, general education teachers, and related service providers meet regularly to enhance/unify instructional planning and program implementation for students with disabilities. (5118)

- A4.03 Instructional teams utilize student learning data to determine whether a student requires a referral for special education services. (5121)
- A4.04 The school promotes social/emotional competency in school rituals and routines, such as morning announcements, awards assemblies, hallway and classroom wall displays, and student competitions. (5122)
- A4.05 ALL teachers teach and reinforce positive social skills, self-respect, relationships, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions. (5123)
- A4.06 KEY ALL teachers are attentive to students' emotional states, guide students in managing their emotions, and arrange for supports and interventions when necessary. (5124)
- A4.07 The LEA/School has a system in place for determining the nature and extent of early learning opportunities each student has access prior to school entry. (5125)
- A4.08 ALL pre-k teachers ensure that all students are involved in activities each day that are designed to stimulate development in all domains: social-emotional, physical, approaches to learning, language, and cognitive development. (5126)
- A4.09 The Leadership Team monitors rates of student transfer, dropout, graduation, attendance, and post-high school outcome (e.g. student enrollment in college, student in careers). (5127)
- A4.10 The school provides all high school students with academic supports (e.g., tutoring, cocurricular activities, tiered interventions) to keep them on track for graduation. (5128)
- A4.11 The school provides all students extended learning opportunities (e.g., summer bridge programs, after-school and supplemental educational services, Saturday academies, enrichment programs). (5129)
- A4.12 The school provides all high school students with opportunities for content and credit recovery that are integrated into the regular school day to keep them on track for graduation. (5130)
- A4.13 The LEA/School provides all high school students with opportunities to enroll in and master rigorous coursework for college and career readiness. (5131)
- A4.14 The school provides all students with supports and guidance to prepare them for college and careers (e.g., career awareness activities, career exploration, school visits). (5132)

- A4.15 The school provides all students with opportunities to learn through nontraditional educational settings (e.g., virtual courses, dual enrollment, service learning, work-based internships). (5133)
- A4.16 KEY The school develops and implements consistent, intentional, and on-going plans to support student transitions for grade-to-grade and level-to-level. (5134)
- A4.17 The school implements a reliable and valid system-wide screening process for academics and behavior that includes the assessment of all students multiple times per year and establishes decision rules to determine students in need of targeted intervention. (5856)
- A4.18 All teachers connect students' out-of-school learning with their school learning. (5315)
- A4.19 All teachers employing blended learning methods make sure that technology and data enhance relationships, but do not pretend to substitute for them. (5317)
- A4.20 All teachers help students articulate their personal aspirations and connect their learning to the pursuit of these aspirations. (5348)
- A4.21 The school selects, implements, and evaluates evidenced-based programs that enhance social/emotional competency. (5355)
- A4.22 All teachers are responsive to students' cultural backgrounds and incorporate culturally relevant material in their classrooms. (6824)

**Dimension B - Leadership Capacity - Strategic planning, mission, and vision (B1.01 - B1.07)**

- B1.01 KEY The LEA has an LEA Support & Improvement Team. (5135)
- B1.02 The Leadership Team serves as a conduit of communication to the faculty and staff. (5857)
- B1.03 KEY A Leadership Team consisting of the principal, teachers who lead the Instructional Teams, and other professional staff meets regularly (at least twice a month) to review implementation of effective practices. (5137)
- B1.04 The principal effectively and clearly communicates the message of change. (5138)

- B1.05 The principal offers frequent opportunities for staff and parents to voice constructive critiques of the school's progress and suggestions for improvement. (5139)
- B1.06 Yearly learning goals are set for the school by the Leadership Team, utilizing student learning data. (5858)
- B1.07 The school's Leadership Team/ Health Council regularly reviews data which reflect the school's health, nutrition and safety policies, school environment, work-site wellness, attendance and discipline records and will use the data to make decisions about school improvement and professional development needs. (5859)

**Dimension B - Leadership Capacity - Distributed leadership and collaboration  
(B2.01 - B2.06)**

- B2.01 School culture promotes and supports the physical, social, emotional, and behavioral health of all school personnel. (5855)
- B2.02 The Leadership Team shares in decisions of real substance pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and professional development. (5142)
- B2.03 KEY The school has established a team structure among teachers with specific duties and time for instructional planning. (5143)
- B2.04 The principal makes sure everyone understands their role in continuously elevating professional practice. (5144)
- B2.05 The principal focuses on building leadership capacity, achieving learning goals, and improving instruction. (5145)
- B2.06 The traditional roles of the principal and other administrators are distributed to allow adequate time for administrative attention to instruction and student supports. (5146)

**Dimension B - Leadership Capacity - Monitoring instruction in school (B3.01 - B3.06)**

- B3.01 The LEA/School monitors progress of the extended learning time programs and strategies being implemented, and uses data to inform modifications. (5147)
- B3.02 The principal collects and acts on data from a variety of sources and in a timely manner. (5148)
- B3.03 KEY The principal monitors curriculum and classroom instruction regularly and provides timely, clear, constructive feedback to teachers. (5149)

- B3.04 The LEA/School sets goals for professional development (based on data) and monitors the extent to which it has changed practice. (5150)
- B3.05 The Leadership Team implements, monitors, and analyzes results from an early warning system at the school level using indicators (e.g., attendance, academic, behavior monitoring) to identify students at risk for dropping out. (5151)
- B3.06 School leaders and peer mentors regularly observe and measure instances of online, hybrid, or blended teaching to ensure instruction is implemented fully and with fidelity. (5304)

**Dimension C - Professional Capacity - Teacher quality and experience (C1.01 - C1.07)**

- C1.01 The LEA/School directly aligns professional development with classroom observations (including peer observations) to build specific skills and knowledge of teachers. (5152)
- C1.02 The principal plans opportunities for teachers to share their strengths with other teachers. (5153)
- C1.03 The LEA/School has established, communicated, and provided to employees clear goals and measures for employee's performance and provide targeted training or assistance for any employee receiving an unsatisfactory evaluation or warning. (5154)
- C1.05 The LEA/School facilitates swift exits to minimize further damage caused by underperforming employees. (5156)
- C1.06 The LEA/School offers an induction program to support new teachers in their first years of teaching. (5157)
- C1.07 ALL pre-K teachers have specialized education in early childhood education or child development. (5158)

**Dimension C - Professional Capacity - Quality of professional development (C2.01 - C2.04)**

- C2.01 KEY The LEA/School regularly looks at school performance data and aggregated classroom observation data and uses that data to make decisions about school improvement and professional development needs. (5159)
- C2.02 ALL teachers develop individual professional development plans based on classroom observations and self-assessments. (5161)



- C2.03 The LEA/School provides all staff high quality, ongoing, job-embedded, and differentiated professional development. (5163)
- C2.04 The LEA/School structures professional development to provide adequate time for collaboration and active learning. (5164)

**Dimension C - Professional Capacity - Talent recruitment and retention (C3.01 - C3.05)**

- C3.01 The principal celebrates individual, team, and school successes, especially related to student learning outcomes. (5165)
- C3.04 KEY The LEA/School has established a system of procedures and protocols for recruiting, evaluating, rewarding, and replacing staff. (5168)
- C3.05 The LEA/School has a system for performance-based incentives that is transparent and fair. (5169)

**Dimension D - Planning and Operational Effectiveness - Resource Allocation (D1.01 - D1.03)**

- D1.02 The LEA has aligned resource allocation (money, time, human resources) within each school's instructional priorities. (5171)
- D1.03 The principal provides optimum conditions for the Leadership Team to make decisions and act on their decisions. (5172)

**Dimension D - Planning and Operational Effectiveness - Facilities and technology (D2.01 - D2.09)**

- D2.01 ALL teachers use online, hybrid, or blended learning as part of a larger pedagogical approach that combines the effective socialization opportunities within the classroom with the enhanced learning opportunities available through technology. (5173)
- D2.02 ALL teachers enable students to place selected work into a digital portfolio that is updated throughout the student's school experiences and provides a picture of interests, skills, competencies, and growth over time. (5174)
- D2.03 Students with disabilities are provided with and taught effective ways to use assistive technology (as needed) to support their individual learning needs. (5175)
- D2.04 The LEA/School consistently implements a process to determine and to acquire necessary instructional technology. (5176)

- D2.05 The environment of the school (physical, social, emotional, and behavioral) is safe, welcoming, and conducive to learning. (5854)
- D2.06 All teachers build students' ability to learn in contexts other than school. (5314)
- D2.07 Instructional teams determine which blended learning model is appropriate for the school or individual classroom. (5313)
- D2.08 All teachers receive initial and ongoing training and support in effective use of blended learning methods. (5312)
- D2.09 All students receive adequate, up-to-date equitable access to technology. (6828)

#### **Dimension E - Families and Community - Family Engagement (E1.01 - E1.13)**

- E1.01 ALL teachers maintain a file of communication with parents/guardians. (5177)
- E1.02 ALL teachers regularly assign, check, mark, and return homework. (5178)
- E1.03 ALL teachers systematically report to parents/guardians the student's mastery of specific standards-based objectives. (5179)
- E1.04 ALL teachers regularly make "interactive" assignments that encourage parent-child interaction relative to school learning. (5180)
- E1.05 The "ongoing conversation" between school personnel and parents/guardians is candid, supportive, and flows in both directions. (5181)
- E1.06 KEY The school regularly communicates with parents/guardians about its expectations of them and the importance of the curriculum of the home (what parents can do at home to support their children's learning). (5182)
- E1.07 The school's documents (Parent Involvement Guidelines, Mission/Vision Statements, Homework Guidelines, and Classroom Visit Procedures) are annually distributed and frequently communicated to teachers, school personnel, parents, and students. (5183)
- E1.08 Professional development for teachers includes support for working effectively with families. (5184)
- E1.09 The school provides parents/guardians with practical guidance to maintain regular and supportive verbal interactions with their children, to establish a quiet

place for children's studying at home, and to model respectful and responsible behaviors. (5185)

- E1.10 The school provides parents/guardians with practical guidance to encourage their children's regular reading habits at home. (5186)
- E1.11 All teachers meet with family members (parents or guardians) formally at least two times a year to engage in two-way communication regarding students' cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development outside the classroom. (5187)
- E1.12 The school ensures that all parents understand social/emotional competency and their role in enhancing their children's growth in (1) understanding and managing emotions, (2) setting and achieving positive goals, (3) feeling and showing empathy for others, (4) establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and (5) making responsible decisions. (6330)
- E1.13 The school ensures that all parents understand motivational competency (a growth mindset, the value of mastery, and connecting learning tasks with students' personal aspirations) and how they can enhance motivational competency at home. (6795)

#### **Dimension E - Families and Community - Community Engagement (E2.01 - E2.04)**

- E2.01 Parent and/or Community representatives advise the School Leadership Team on matters related to family-school relations. (5188)
- E2.02 The school provides a broad spectrum of communication to the community through meetings, announcements, newsletters, and a consistently updated website. (5189)
- E2.03 The high school tracks the post-secondary school placements and experiences of their graduates and reports the results to the school board, faculty, and school community. (5190)
- E2.04 The school consistently engages in strategies, policies, and procedures for partnering with local businesses, community organizations, and other agencies to meet the needs of the school. (5191) NCStar July 16, 2019

## Appendix F

### Google Form Survey

#### School Staff Survey of School Characteristics

To improve school quality and help students learn, school personnel need to identify their strengths and areas needing improvement. Obtaining your views about your school is an important part of this process.

The survey on the following pages was developed to generate discussion that can help your school improvement efforts. Each of the statements in the survey relate to one or more of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools.

It will take you about 10 minutes to complete the survey. To ensure your responses remain confidential, your ratings will be combined with other staff and reported as a group. Completing the survey is voluntary, although we encourage you to respond honestly to help your school get a complete understanding of staff views.

**Survey Scale:** The survey on the following pages uses a 5-point scale, from 1 meaning you "do not agree at all" to 5 meaning you "agree completely." Indicate the number that best describes your level of agreement about each statement. If you have no knowledge to make an accurate selection, mark 0 in the first column ("no basis to judge").

Before taking the survey please complete the following. This information will be used for analysis purposes only, and results will not be reported for categories that have fewer than five (5) responses.

\* Required

1. District: \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Rutherford County Schools  
☐ Other

2. School: \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Cliffside Elementary School  
☐ Forest City Dunbar Elementary School  
☐ Ellersboro Elementary School  
☐ Harris Elementary School  
☐ Mt. Vernon Ruth Elementary School  
☐ Pinacole Elementary School  
☐ Rutherfordton Elementary School  
☐ Spindale Elementary School  
☐ Sunshine Elementary School  
☐ Other

3. Date: \*

Example: January 7, 2019

4. Level/Type of School (check all that apply): \*

Check all that apply:

- ☐ Elementary  
☐ Middle/Junior High  
☐ High School  
☐ Other

5. Grades Served by this School (e.g., K-6): \*

6. Your primary role (check one): \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Building Administrator
- ☐ Other Certified Staff
- ☐ Para-educator
- ☐ Other classified staff

7. Years working in your current role; (include work in other locations) \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0-3
- ☐ 4-7
- ☐ 8-15
- ☐ 16 or more

8. Years working in this school (check one): \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0-3
- ☐ 4-7
- ☐ 8-15
- ☐ 16 or more

9. Grade(s) taught (choose all that apply): \*

Check all that apply.

- ☐ K  
☐ 1  
☐ 2  
☐ 3  
☐ 4  
☐ 5  
☐ 6  
☐ 7  
☐ 8  
☐ 9  
☐ 10  
☐ 11  
☐ 12  
☐ Not applicable

1. Think about your school as you read each of the statements below. Then choose the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement. VISION

10. A) The school has a clear sense of purpose \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

No basis to judge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree completely

11. B) I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

12. C) The staff shares a common understanding of what the school wants to achieve. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

13. D) All staff are committed to achieving the school's goals. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

14. E) The staff keeps the school's goals in mind when making important decisions. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

15. F) The school's primary emphasis is improving student learning. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

2. Think about your school as you read each of the statements below. Then choose the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement. STANDARDS/EXPECTATIONS

16. A) All students are expected to achieve high standards. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

17. B) Teachers do whatever it takes to help all students meet high academic standards. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

18. C) I believe all students can learn complex concepts. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

19. D) All students are consistently challenged by a rigorous curriculum. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

20. E) Teachers use effective strategies to help low-performing students meet high academic standards. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

3. Think about your school as you read each of the statements below. Then choose the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement. LEADERSHIP

21. A) Many staff provide leadership in some way. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

22. B) Leaders advocate for effective instruction for all students. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

23. C) People in leadership roles act with integrity. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

24. D) School administrators consider various viewpoints when making decisions. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |





32. F) Teachers have frequent communication with the families of their students. \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

No basis to judge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree completely

33. G) Staff members trust one another. \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

No basis to judge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree completely

5. Think about your school as you read each of the statements below. Then choose the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement. ALIGNMENT TO STANDARDS

34. A) The school's curriculum is aligned with state standards. \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

No basis to judge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree completely

35. *B) Instructional staff have a good understanding of the state standards in the areas they teach.\**

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

No basis to judge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree completely

36. C) instructional materials that are aligned with the state standards are available to staff. \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

No basis to judge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree completely

37. D) Instruction builds on what students already know. \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

No basis to judge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree completely

38. E) Schoolwork is meaningful to students. \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

No basis to judge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Agree completely





53. D) I have enough opportunities to grow professionally. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agree completely  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |

54. E) Different staff members periodically lead professional development activities for other staff. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agree completely  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |

55. F) Instructional staff view themselves as learners as well as teachers. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agree completely  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |

8. Think about your school as you read each of the statements below. Then choose the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement. **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

56. A) Students feel safe on school property during school hours. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agree completely  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |

57. B) The school environment is conducive to learning. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agree completely  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |

58. C) Teachers show they care about all of their students. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agree completely  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |

59. D) The staff respects the cultural heritage of students. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Agree completely  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |



67. D) Teachers have frequent contact with their student's parents. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                |
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

68. E) The school provides ample information to families about how to help students succeed in school. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                |
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

69. F) Many parents are involved as volunteers at the school. \*

Mark only one oval.

|                   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|                   | 0                     | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                |
| No basis to judge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree completely |

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

## Appendix G

## Research Base Summary

## Research Base

## Summary

|   | Characteristics of High-Performing Schools |                               |                             |                                    |   |  |                           |                              |  |
|---|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|
|   | Clear & Shared Focus                       | High Standards & Expectations | Effective School Leadership | High Levels of Collabor. & Commun. | Curric., Instruct., & Assessment Aligned with Standards | Frequent Monitoring of Teaching & Learning | Focused Profess. Develop. | Supportive Learning Environ. | High Level of Family & Community Involvement |
| <b>National Reports</b>                               |  |                               |                             |                                    |   |  |                           |                              |  |
| Comprehensive School Reform                           | X  |                               |                             | *                                  | X   | *  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Dispelling the Myth                                   |  | X                             |                             |                                    | X   | X  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Educational Reform and Students at Risk               | X  |                               | *                           | X                                  | *   | X  | X                         | X                            | *  |
| Hawthorne Elementary School                           | X  | X                             | X                           | X                                  | *   |  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Hope for Urban Education                              | X  | *                             | X                           | X                                  | X   |  | X                         | X                            | X  |
| Key High School Reform Strategies                     |  | X                             |                             | X                                  |   |  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Leave No Child Behind                                 | X  | X                             | X                           | X                                  | X   | X  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Org. Characteristics of Schools that ... Serve ...    | X  | X                             | X                           | X                                  | X   |  | X                         | X                            | X  |
| Profiles of Successful Schoolwide Programs            | X  | *                             | X                           | X                                  | X   | *  | X                         | *                            | X  |
| Promising Practices Study of High-Performing Schools  | X  | *                             | X                           | *                                  | *   | X  | X                         |                              |  |
| Promising Programs for Elementary and Middle Schools  | X  |                               |                             |                                    | X   | X  | X                         |                              |  |
| Schooling Practices That Matter Most                  | X  |                               | X                           |                                    | *   | X  | *                         | X                            | X  |
| Schools that Make a Difference                        | X  | X                             | X                           | X                                  | X   | X  | X                         | X                            | X  |
| Stories of Mixed Success                              | X  |                               | X                           | X                                  | X   |  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Successful School Restructuring                       | X  | *                             | X                           | X                                  | X   | *  | X                         | X                            | *  |
| Toward an Understanding of ... Successful ...         | X  | X                             | X                           | X                                  | X   | X  | X                         | X                            | X  |
| Turning Around Low-Performing Schools                 | X  | X                             | X                           | X                                  | X   | X  | X                         | X                            | X  |
| <b>Washington Reports</b>                             |  |                               |                             |                                    |   |  |                           |                              |  |
| Bridging the Opportunity Gap                          | X  | X                             | X                           | X                                  | *   | X  | X                         | X                            | X  |
| Making Standards Meaningful                           | X  | X                             |                             |                                    |   |  |                           | *                            |  |
| Making Standards Stick                                | X  | X                             | *                           | X                                  | X   | X  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Making Standards Work                                 | X  |                               |                             | X                                  | *   |  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Organizing for Success                                | X  | X                             | X                           | X                                  | X   | *  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Reality of Reform                                     |  |                               | O                           | *                                  |   |  |                           | O                            | O  |
| School Restructuring and Student Achievement in WA    | X  |                               |                             | X                                  |   |  | X                         |                              | X  |
| Washington State Elementary Schools on Slow Track ... | O  |                               | O                           | O                                  | O   |  | O                         |                              |  |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>22</b>                                  | <b>16</b>                     | <b>18</b>                   | <b>21</b>                          | <b>21</b>   | <b>15</b>                                  | <b>23</b>                 | <b>12</b>                    | <b>21</b>                                    |

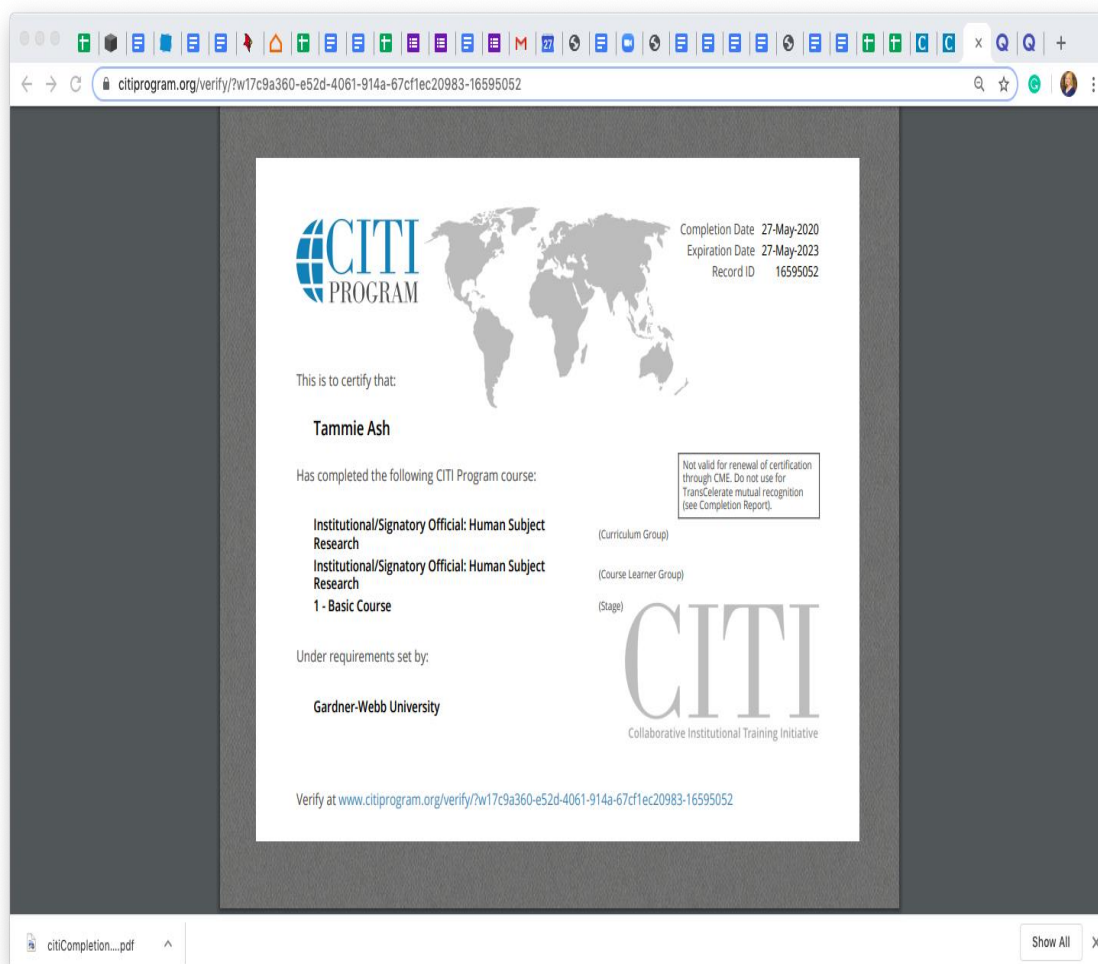
X Explicitly identified as key finding or in discussion of findings

\* Inferred or identified indirectly in descriptions

O Identified as important by noting the absence or lack thereof

## Appendix H

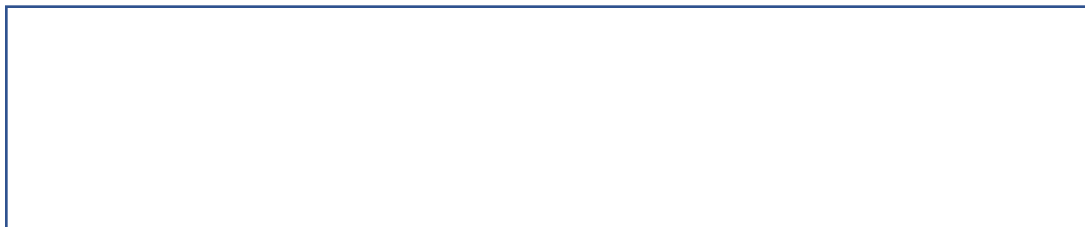
### Citi Certification





## Appendix I

## Permission from District of Interest



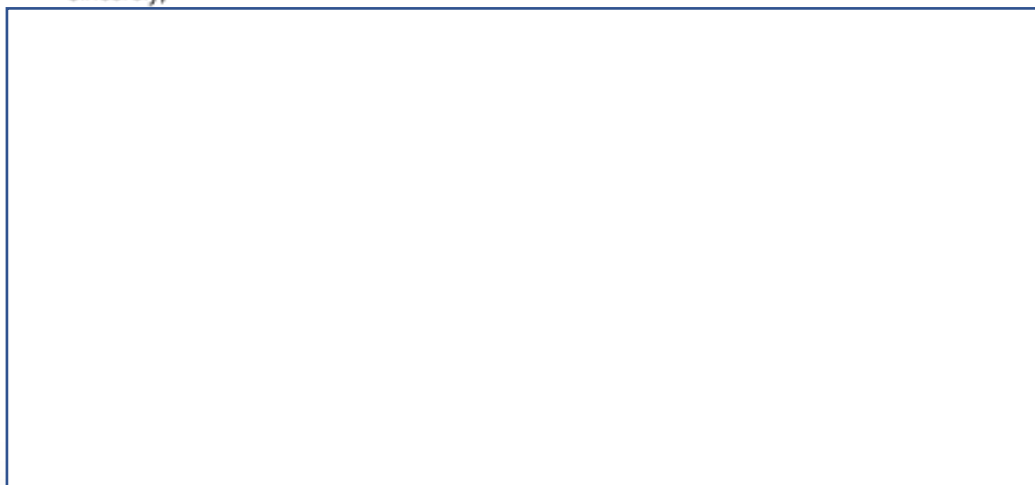
Thursday, May 28, 2020

Dear Mrs. Ash:

Thank you for your interest in conducting your doctoral dissertation research, in whole or in part, within Rutherford County Schools. Based on the substance of our discussion about the purpose and scope of your research earlier today, I believe that your research interests and anticipated protocol are consistent with the requirements of local board of education policy 5230, "Participation in Research Projects." I am therefore pleased to provide preliminary approval of your research within the school system pending (1) your successful proposal defense and (2) approval of your research protocol by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at your college or university. Following IRB approval, please send me a copy of your approved IRB application, at which time I will confirm final approval so that your research within the school system may proceed.

I wish you continued success in your research. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can help you in any way.

Sincerely,



## Appendix J

### Invitation to Participate in the Survey

Reminder to Participate [Tammie Ash's Dissertation Survey](#)

Gardner-Webb University IRB  
Informed Consent Form for Online Survey

### **IDENTIFICATION OF HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS IN SUCCESSFUL LOW-WEALTH, RURAL NORTH CAROLINA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

Hello Fellow Educators,

My name is Tammie Ash and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Gardner-Webb University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for my Doctoral degree, and I would like to invite you to participate in my study of the identification of high performing school characteristics in successful low-wealth, rural North Carolina elementary schools. The purpose of this anonymous, voluntary quantitative survey study will be to determine if the same characteristics identified in a 2003 Washington state research study are also found in your successful low-wealth, rural school district.

The Staff Survey of School Characteristics will be the survey instrument used to identify and determine the prevalence of the nine characteristics.

You are invited to participate in this study because the superintendent has agreed to participate in this research study. Please indicate to the degree that you agree with the statements contained in the survey instrument. Your anticipated time for all 60 questions will be about 10 minutes. All aggregate data will be available only to the researcher and the dissertation committee. Participation in this study is voluntary; however, I am hopeful to have a 50% return rate of completed surveys from your school. Please do not include any personal identifiers in your online responses.

You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty.

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data.

There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. Data from this study will/ will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

#### **If you have questions about the study, contact:**

Researcher's name: Tammie Ash

Researcher telephone number: XXX

Researcher email address: XXX

Faculty Advisor name: Dr. Laura Boyles

Faculty Advisor telephone number:

Faculty Advisor email address: [lboyles@gardner-webb.edu](mailto:lboyles@gardner-webb.edu)

Name

IRB Institutional Administrator

Telephone:

Email:

Clicking the link below to continue on to the survey indicates your consent to participate in the study:

[Tammie Ash's Dissertation Survey](#)

If you are not 18 years of age or older or you do not consent to participate, please close this window.

## Appendix K

### Reminder to Participate

Reminder to Teachers:

Hello Fellow Educators,

This is a reminder for you to complete the dissertation survey I sent to you last week as part of my work at Gardner-Webb University. The survey explores the nine characteristics found in high performing schools as identified in a 2003 Washington state study and the prevalence of these characteristics in your district. The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete if you have some time to spare this week. The survey window will close on Sunday, November 8, 2020. If you have already completed the survey, I thank you.

[Tammie Ash's Dissertation Survey](#)

Respectfully,

Tammie Ash

## Appendix L

### Principal Memorandum Regarding the Survey

Dear Fellow Principals,

My name is Tammie Ash and I am a Gardner-Webb University doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am conducting a research study and Dr. Superintendent has given approval for this work. The survey will be a voluntary, anonymous, quantitative perception survey. Elementary classroom teachers who were worked at your school during the 2019-2020 school year and continue to be work your location will be asked to provide ratings surrounding nine characteristics identified in high-performing schools as determined by a 2003 Washington state study. This study will replicate the perception surveys created by the Washington State research team and should only take about 10 minutes to complete. The survey responses will be totally anonymous and only used to enable aggregation of data from your school, and will not be used for any other purpose. All aggregate data will be available only to me and the dissertation committee. The results are intended to help generate discussions that can be used to guide school improvement efforts. I hope the results will be valuable to you going forward. I have included a link to the survey below for your review. I appreciate your help and support. Have a great week!

## Appendix M

## Response Rates by Characteristic

| School  | 1              | 2          | 3              | 4              | 5              | 6          | 7 | 8 | 9              |
|---|----------------|------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------|---|---|----------------|
| <b>Characteristic 1</b>   |                |            |                |                |                |            |   |   |                |
| <i>A) The school has a clear sense of purpose</i>   | 90%            | 100%       | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>B) I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve.</i>                           | 90%            | 100%       | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>C) The staff shares a common understanding of what the school wants to achieve.</i>                    | 90%            | 100%       | 86%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>D) All staff are committed to achieving the school's goals.</i>  | 80%            | 100%       | 86%            | 86%            | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>E) The staff keeps the school's goals in mind when making important decisions.</i>                     | 90%            | 100%       | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>F) The school's primary emphasis is improving student learning.</i>                                    | 100%           | 93%        | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <b>Overall</b>  | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Met</b> | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Met</b> | - | - | <b>Met</b>     |
|   |                |            |                |                |                |            |   |   |                |
| <b>Characteristic 2</b>   |                |            |                |                |                |            |   |   |                |
| <i>A) All students are expected to achieve high standards.</i>  | 100%           | 93%        | 86%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>B) Teachers do whatever it takes to help all students meet high academic standards.</i>                | 90%            | 93%        | 86%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>C) I believe all students can learn complex concepts.</i>  | 70%            | 80%        | 86%            | 79%            | 33%            | 80%        | - | - | 67%            |
| <i>D) All students are consistently challenged by a rigorous curriculum.</i>                              | 100%           | 100%       | 71%            | 100%           | 100%           | 80%        | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>E) Teachers use effective strategies to help low-performing students meet high academic standards.</i> | 100%           | 87%        | 86%            | 93%            | 100%           | 80%        | - | - | 100%           |
| <b>Overall</b>  | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Met</b> | - | - | <b>Not Met</b> |
|   |                |            |                |                |                |            |   |   |                |
| <b>Characteristic 3</b>   |                |            |                |                |                |            |   |   |                |
| <i>A) Many staff provide leadership in some way.</i>  | 90%            | 87%        | 86%            | 93%            | 33%            | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>B) Leaders advocate for effective instruction for all students.</i>                                    | 100%           | 93%        | 86%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |

|   |            |            |                |                |                |            |   |   |                |
|---|------------|------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------|---|---|----------------|
| <i>C) People in leadership roles act with integrity.</i>  | 90%        | 93%        | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>D) School administrators consider various viewpoints when making decisions.</i>                      | 90%        | 87%        | 71%            | 86%            | 67%            | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>E) Leaders hold staff accountable for improving student learning.</i>                                | 100%       | 93%        | 86%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>F) I feel like the school leadership cares about me.</i>   | 90%        | 87%        | 86%            | 86%            | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 67%            |
| <b>Overall</b>  | <b>Met</b> | <b>Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Met</b> | - | - | <b>Not Met</b> |
| <b>Characteristic 4</b>   |            |            |                |                |                |            |   |   |                |
| <i>A) The school uses a system to obtain a variety of perspectives when making decisions.</i>           | 90%        | 100%       | 71%            | 79%            | 67%            | 100%       | - | - | 33%            |
| <i>B) Teachers discuss teaching issues on a regular basis.</i>  | 90%        | 100%       | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>C) Staff members work together to solve problems related to school issues.</i>                       | 90%        | 93%        | 100%           | 93%            | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>D) The staff works in teams across grade levels to help increase student learning.</i>               | 90%        | 100%       | 86%            | 71%            | 67%            | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>E) Staff routinely work together to plan what will be taught.</i>                                    | 90%        | 93%        | 100%           | 86%            | 67%            | 80%        | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>F) Teachers have frequent communication with the families of their students.</i>                     | 100%       | 100%       | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>G) Staff members trust one another.</i>  | 80%        | 87%        | 86%            | 86%            | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 67%            |
| <b>Overall</b>  | <b>Met</b> | <b>Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Met</b> | - | - | <b>Not Met</b> |
| <b>Characteristic 5</b>   |            |            |                |                |                |            |   |   |                |
| <i>A) The school's curriculum is aligned with state standards.</i>                                      | 90%        | 93%        | 86%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>B) Instructional staff have a good understanding of the state standards in the areas they teach.</i> | 90%        | 100%       | 86%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>C) Instructional materials that are aligned with the state standards are available to staff.</i>     | 100%       | 93%        | 100%           | 93%            | 67%            | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>D) Instruction builds on what students already know.</i>   | 90%        | 100%       | 100%           | 93%            | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>E) Schoolwork is meaningful to students.</i>   | 90%        | 93%        | 86%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>F) Teachers use a variety of approaches and activities to help students learn.</i>                   | 100%       | 100%       | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>G) Classroom activities are intellectually stimulating.</i>  | 90%        | 93%        | 86%            | 93%            | 100%           | 100%       | - | - | 100%           |





|  |                |                |                |                |                |                |   |   |                |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|---|----------------|
| <i>A) Students feel safe on school property during school hours.</i>   | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>B) The school environment is conducive to learning.</i>   | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>C) Teachers show they care about all of their students.</i>   | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>D) The staff respects the cultural heritage of students.</i>  | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>E) Students respect those who are different from them.</i>  | 100%           | 93%            | 100%           | 93%            | 100%           | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>F) Instruction is adjusted to meet individual student needs.</i>  | 100%           | 87%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>G) Student discipline problems are managed well.</i>  | 100%           | 93%            | 86%            | 100%           | 80%            | 80%            | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>H) The staff feels free to express their ideas and opinions with one another.</i>                             | 90%            | 87%            | 71%            | 93%            | 80%            | 80%            | - | - | 100%           |
| <b>Overall</b>   | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Met</b>     | <b>Met</b>     | - | - | <b>Met</b>     |
| <b>Characteristic 9</b>  |                |                |                |                |                |                |   |   |                |
| <i>A) The staff believes students learn more through effective family support.</i>                               | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 67%            | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>B) The school works with many community organizations to support its students.</i>                            | 90%            | 80%            | 100%           | 79%            | 33%            | 100%           | - | - | 67%            |
| <i>C) The school makes a special effort to contact the families of students who are struggling academically.</i> | 90%            | 100%           | 100%           | 93%            | 100%           | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>D) Teachers have frequent contact with their student's parents.</i>   | 100%           | 93%            | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>E) The school provides ample information to families about how to help students succeed in school.</i>        | 100%           | 93%            | 86%            | 93%            | 33%            | 100%           | - | - | 100%           |
| <i>F) Many parents are involved as volunteers at the school.</i>   | 0%             | 27%            | 14%            | 43%            | 33%            | 40%            | - | - | 33%            |
|  | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | <b>Not Met</b> | - | - | <b>Not Met</b> |
|  |                |                |                |                |                |                |   |   |                |
|  | <b>6 of 9</b>  | <b>6 of 9</b>  | <b>2 of 9</b>  | <b>4 of 9</b>  | <b>2 of 9</b>  | <b>8 of 9</b>  | - | - | <b>4 of 9</b>  |