

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN HIGH POVERTY, HIGH  
PERFORMING SCHOOLS

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# INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN HIGH POVERTY, HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS

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## **Abstract**

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requires schools to increase academic performance and close the achievement gaps between sub-groups of students. As schools work to increase student performance in all academic areas, educators must identify the needs of each sub-group of students they services and determine which instructional practices meet their unique needs. Students living in poverty enter school with a distinctive set of needs and therefore require instructional practices that meet these needs.

The researcher in this study strived to identify instructional practices that were being used in high and low performing Title I schools and compared the similarities and differences between the practices. Data reported from the study might inform school leaders regarding what instructional practices are effective when working in schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty.

This qualitative study of four Title I eligible schools in an urban district in southeastern Virginia, involved interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups focused on instructional practices (strategies, programs, and other factors) that influence academic achievement of students in high and low performing Title I eligible schools. Findings revealed that high performing Title I schools used student performance data to drive instruction; focused on teaching students enriching vocabulary; used the strategies of note taking, explicit instruction, similarities and differences, nonlinguistic representation, graphic organizers, and cooperative learning; conducted mentorship programs for teachers and students; utilized computer based instructional programs with fidelity; believed in their students and cared about their students; provided professional development to teachers; and implemented student reward/recognition programs.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

In the era of accountability and high stakes testing, multiple subgroups are used to determine the success of public schools. Beiswinger (2009) stated, “research has shown that children who come from poverty contribute to the greatest subgroup that is at risk of failure in public schools” (p. 9). Factors that contribute to students’ failure in this subgroup are high mobility rates among families, high incidence of emotional and behavioral problems, large numbers of students who have limited proficiency in English, low teacher expectations, and insufficient teacher preparation in working with students of low socio-economic status (Beiswinger, 2009; Boutte, 2012). According to Evans (2005), poor children confront widespread environmental inequities. Compared with their economically advantaged counterparts, they are exposed to more family turmoil, violence, separation from their families, instability, and chaotic households. Poor children experience less social support, and their parents are less responsive and more authoritarian. Low-income children are read to relatively infrequently, watch more TV, and have less access to books and computers. Low-income parents are less involved in their children’s school activities (p. 77).

Due to the inequities that students living in poverty face before entering elementary school, they often come to school less prepared to learn than their more economically advantaged peers (Evans, 2004). Educators need to use strategies that meet the varying needs of these students in order to ensure their academic success (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledfo, 2010).

#### **Statement of Problem**

The percentage of children living in poverty has risen from 39 percent in 2007 to 44 percent in 2013 (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015). In the United States there are more than 72 million children under the age of eighteen. Of these children, 31.8 million live in low-income families; \$47,248 for a family of four; and 15.8 million live in poor families; \$23,624 for a family of four (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015). In Virginia, 15% (276,736) of children live in poor families (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015). “The condition of poverty, however, may be the most important of all student differences in relation to high achievement; although not all schools

have racial diversity, nearly all schools have at least some students living in poverty” (Burney & Beilke, 2008, p. 295). Poverty may have the greatest impact on achievement as students of poverty enter school having experienced substantially less cognitive stimulation and enrichment than their more advantaged peers (Evans, 2004).

As poverty rates continue to grow, schools are challenged with servicing a growing number of students who enter school significantly behind their peers. Many students living in poverty come to school having a vocabulary that is only half that of their economically advantaged peers; which can equate to about 6,000 fewer words (Sobolak, 2011). Students who have limited vocabulary are at risk of not becoming proficient in reading (Sobolak, 2011). This can greatly affect their ability to become academically successful in school.

Schools are faced with finding the instructional practices to implement with students of low socio-economic status that will have the greatest impact on their academic achievement. If schools are unsuccessful in implementing effective practices with students of low socio-economic status, the gap between their academic achievement and that of their economically advantaged peers will continue to grow. Schools are challenged with closing the achievement gap between all subgroups of students, thus making it important to understand the learning needs of students of low socio-economic status.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research in this area will support elementary principals, curriculum personnel, and school directors as they endeavor to find instructional practices that will help close the achievement gap between economic subgroups. Meeting the educational needs of all subgroups is challenging. Having research based instructional practices that have been proven to work in elementary schools servicing students of low socio-economic status will aid in the advancement of students throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requires schools to close the achievement gaps between high and low achieving students, especially between minority and non-minority students and disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. Virginia’s waiver to No Child Left Behind (2012) also calls for reducing the failure rate in reading and mathematics by 50 percent in all subgroups within six years. Research in the area of effective instructional strategies for

reading and mathematics will help schools to move forward in meeting the tenants of No Child Left Behind and accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify the difference in the instructional practices (strategies, programs, and other factors) of high and low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in an urban district in southeastern Virginia.

### **Research Questions**

The following research question along with its sub-questions helped to guide the research of this study. The researcher solicited responses from participants in order to understand the differences in instructional practices of high and low performing Title I eligible elementary schools.

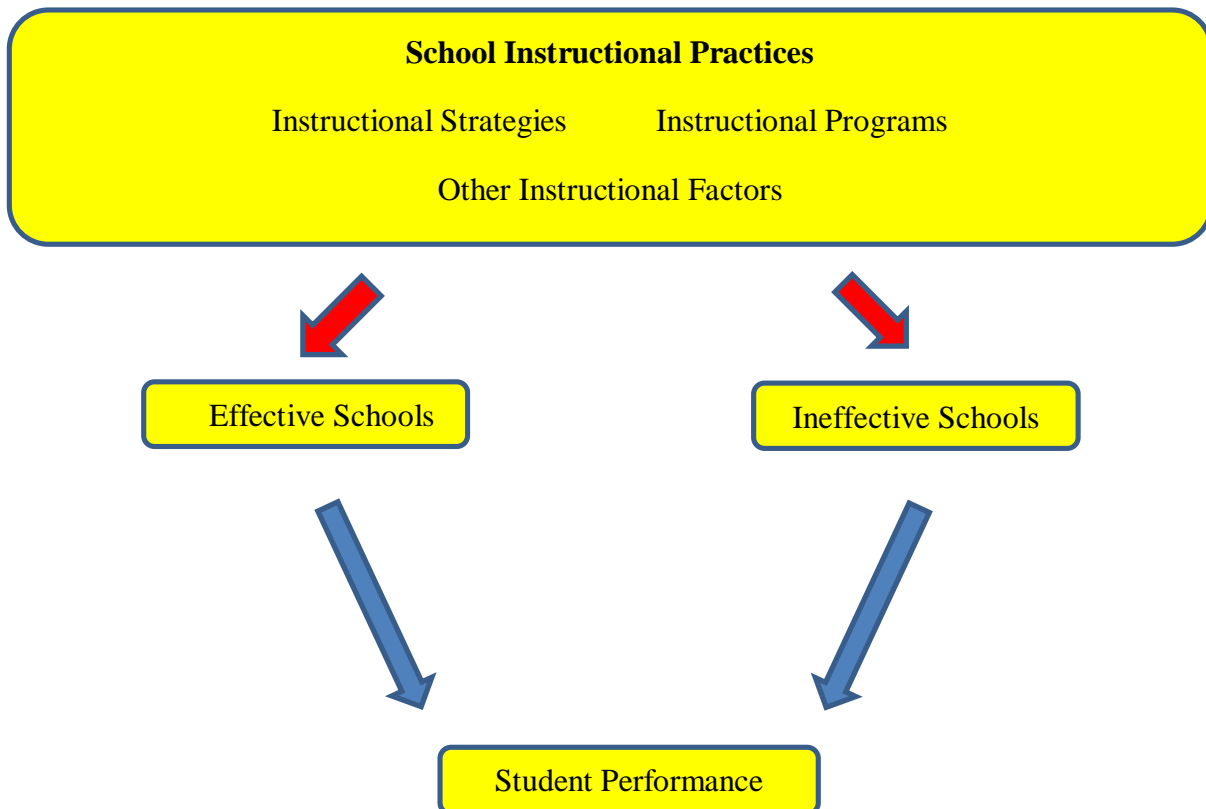
What school instructional practices influence student achievement in high and low performing Title I eligible schools?

- I. Instructional Strategies
  - a. What instructional strategies are being used in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What instructional strategies are being used in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - c. What differences, if any, are there in the instructional strategies of high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?
- II. Instructional Programs
  - a. What instructional programs are being used in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What instructional programs are being used in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - c. What differences, if any, are there in the instructional programs being used in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?
- III. Other instructional factors

- a. What other instructional factors are identified in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
- b. What other instructional factors are identified in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
- c. What differences, if any, are there in the other instructional factors identified in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework represents the basis for this research study in which the researcher shows the impact of instructional practices on the academic success of Title I eligible schools. Figure 1 illustrates that school practices; including instructional strategies, programs, and other factors; being used in effective and ineffective schools, result in student academic performance.



*Figure 1.* Conceptual Framework model of School Practices. This figure illustrates the instructional strategies, programs and factors that are used in high and low performing Title I schools.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

The following defined terms have been provided to assist in the understanding of terminology used throughout this study.

**Bloom's Taxonomy-** In 1956 Benjamin Bloom published a framework for categorizing instructional goals. Bloom's taxonomy is a progressive list of academic skills that include knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, 1956). In 2001 Bloom's Taxonomy was revised using verbs that describe the cognitive processes that learners encounter. These processes are identified as remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create (Anderson, 2001).

**Cooperative Learning-** Cooperative learning is a strategy identified by Marzano as a strategy that will enhance student achievement. Cooperative learning has five defining elements: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing (Marzano, 2001).

**Fundations-** A multisensory structured language program that focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, high frequency words, reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, handwriting, and spelling (Wilson Language Training Corporation, 2015).

**Instructional Practices-** For the purposes of this study, instructional practices include programs, strategies, and other factors related to instruction and identified by school personnel.

**Instructional Programs-** Reeves (2009) defines instructional programs as formal, usually commercially purchased, processes associated with a particular curriculum.

**Instructional Strategies-** Marzano (2001) uses the terms instructional strategies and techniques interchangeably. Instructional strategies are techniques that teachers use throughout instruction to support student understanding of concepts.

**Kagan Structures-** Kagan structures are based on research carried out by Spencer Kagan, which dates back to 1968. "Kagan structures are content-free activity factories." (Kagan, 2004, p. X). These structures are used across content areas to increase student engagement.

**Marzano Strategies-** Robert Marzano cites nine research-based strategies that were identified through a meta-analysis conducted at Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning. These strategies were found to have a high probability of enhancing student achievement for all students in all subject areas. The nine strategies identified through this study were: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort

and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and questions, cues and advanced organizers (Marzano, 2001).

**Poverty-** For the purpose of this study, students living in poverty will be defined as those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

**Socio- Economic Status-** Burney and Beilke (2008) define socio-economic status as one's relative standing in regards to income, level of education, employment, health, and access to resources.

**Subgroup-** No Child Left Behind (2001) names specific subgroups to be monitored for academic achievement. In order to qualify as a subgroup in a school or district in Virginia there must be more than 30 students represented in the groups as follows: Asian and Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and White. For the remaining categories there must be 50 or more students represented in each group: Free/ Reduced Lunch, IEP (Special Education), and LEP (Limited English Proficiency) (Accountability and Virginia Public Schools, 2012).

**Title I-** Title I refers to the section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 entitled Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. This act was amended in 2001 and states that "The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach at minimum, proficiency on challenging academic standards and academic assessments" (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). This amendment includes the provision that the needs of all children be met including students living in high poverty areas, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, American Indian children, neglected children, and children in need of reading assistance. The act also calls for closing the achievement gap between high and low performing students, especially those between minority and nonminority groups and between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

## **Scope and Limitations**

The scope of this study focused on instructional practices used by third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers in four title I eligible elementary schools in an urban district in southeastern

Virginia. The four schools were identified as being high or low performing based on student outcomes on the SOL assessments.

This study is a basic qualitative study. Qualitative studies are limited to understanding a single phenomenon and therefore the findings may not be comparable across other similar settings (McMillan, 2010). Further limitations are based on the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). As the researcher is the primary source of data collection and analysis, the results of the study will be affected if the researcher is not aware of personal biases. Another limitation of this study is the small sample size. Specifically, the researcher will interview teachers and principals from only four Title I eligible schools.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations to this study include the criterion the researcher used to select the population for this study. The population for this study was identified based on a three-year accreditation rating of Title I schools based on SOL assessment data. The population to be interviewed was limited to third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers. The population was further restricted to one urban school district in Virginia.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is arranged in five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction of the study. Chapter two provides a review of literature pertinent to the topic of study. The third chapter outlines the methodology to be used in carrying out the research for this study. Chapter four reports the data of the research study and chapter five will include the findings, conclusions, and implications of the research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this study is to identify the instructional practices utilized in high and low performing Title I eligible elementary schools. The review of literature portrays the challenges that students living in poverty face when they enter school and how these challenges affect their academic performance. Studies in this review show research that has been conducted analyzing practices used in schools with high numbers of students living in poverty. The review of literature related to instructional practices used with students living in poverty supports the researcher's study.

#### **Literature Search and Review Process**

While researching the literature relevant to the topic of instructional practices that are effective for elementary students of low socio-economic status, various steps were taken to acquire the appropriate literature. Online databases were used to find current research on students living in poverty and the barriers that they encounter when entering school. A great deal of research was available in this area that focused on lack of exposure to cognitive stimulation that is present in high poverty households. In reading this research there was a trend toward the deficiencies that students of low socio-economic status demonstrate in the areas of reading and mathematics due to this lack of exposure.

Through the reading of literature it was found that deficits are prominent in the areas of reading and mathematics for students living in poverty. Literature was then obtained that shows instructional practices in the areas of reading and mathematics that have proven to be effective with the aforementioned population of students. In researching instructional strategies that have been effective with students of low socio-economic status, literature discussing the practices of successful schools in areas of high poverty was prevalent. When discussing pedagogy that influenced academic success, the holistic practices of a school cannot go undocumented. Therefore, literature on school practices and teacher/student practices was analyzed.

Online data bases that were referenced above include the Virginia Tech Library data bases Summon and ProQuest that identified scholarly, peer reviewed articles on students of poverty, instructional strategies in teaching mathematics and reading to students living in poverty, and practices of successful schools in areas of high poverty. Search terms that were



used to find research articles and dissertations were: elementary school, poverty, low socio-economic status, instructional strategies, economically disadvantaged students, reading instruction, and mathematics instruction. The Google search engine was also employed to reference the policies of No Child Left Behind (2001), Virginia's Waiver to No Child Left Behind (2012), and data from the Census Bureau (2011) regarding poverty rates of children 18 years of age and younger.

### **Challenges Facing Elementary Students of Low Socio-Economic Status**

“Low-income children have fewer cognitive enrichment opportunities both at home and in their neighborhoods. They read less, have fewer books at home, are infrequent library patrons, and spend considerably more time watching TV than their middle income counterparts.” (Evans, 2004, p. 88). “Children of parents with high education levels have been read to more frequently, have more books in the home, have already learned how to use computers and have differing patterns of interactive reading and conversation than those children from families with less education and fewer resources.” (Burney & Beilke, 2008, p. 304) According to Evans (2004) low-income children experience less cognitive stimulation and enrichment compared to wealthier children. Parents living in poverty tend to speak less often to their children and in less sophisticated ways. They are also less likely to engage their children in literacy activities such as reading aloud and visiting the library. Thirty-eight percent of low-income parents read to their three to five year old children daily compared to 58% of families above the poverty line who read to their three to five year old children daily. Fifty-nine percent of children in America three to five years old have 10 or more children's books at home where as 81% of non-poor children have 10 or more books at home. Thirty-six percent of low-income parents are involved in three or more school activities on a regular basis compared to 59% of parents above the poverty line who are involved in school activities (Evans, 2004).

Cognitive development is enhanced by enrichment activities including quality and quantity of parent to child speech and interaction with print materials such as books. Having few print rich literacy activities and spending more time watching TV can adversely affect cognitive development (Evans, 2004). In order to be prepared for success in school, students must have opportunities for building background knowledge. This is often absent in low-income households (Burney V. B., 2008). “Opportunities to learn in group settings and exposure to

information-rich environments have been found to be less available to children in poverty, placing them at a disadvantage relative to more affluent classmates when they enter the school environment.” (Burney V. B., 2008, p. 305). “Impoverished students are far more likely to enter school as linguistically disadvantaged because they have not had the experiences that promote literacy and reading readiness.” (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledfo, 2010, p. 105)

### **Reading and Elementary Students of Low Socio-Economic Status**

Children from families on welfare or near the poverty line have a limited vocabulary in comparison to their peers from higher socio-economic households. Students from low socio-economic homes know about 6,000 fewer words than their middle-class peers at the start of school (Sobolak, 2011). “Students who have limited vocabularies are at-risk of not becoming proficient in reading.” (Sobolak, 2011, p. 15) In order to overcome the vocabulary deficit that students from low socio-economic households enter school with, it is important to provide these students with instruction in the area of vocabulary development as soon as they enter school. This instruction must be rich, interactive, and multi-faceted (Sobolak, 2011).

In a study conducted in 2012, Chambers looked at factors that distinguished high performing elementary schools from low performing elementary schools in rural Appalachian schools in the area of reading. She looked at two schools in Appalachian County, Kentucky that both had fifty percent or higher free and reduced lunch rates. One school was high achieving in the area of reading and the other was low achieving according to the Kentucky State accountability model. The high achieving school in this study had 95.24 percent of their third grade students score proficient or distinguished on the Kentucky Core Content Test for the 2008-2009 school year and 100 percent for the 2009-2010 school year. The lower achieving school had 57.69 percent of their third grade students score proficient or distinguished on the same assessment for the 2008-2009 school year and 53.7 percent for the 2009-2010 school year. Both schools were Reading First grant recipients.

The researcher interviewed the principal from each school and one teacher from kindergarten through third grade from each school. Through these interviews and observations of reading instruction, Chambers found that during reading instructional time, the high achieving school provided the majority of its instruction through small, differentiated reading groups. In addition to the small group time, they included 45 minutes of supplemental reading time and

literacy stations in their instruction daily. The school that was low achieving provided reading instruction in a whole group setting and utilized the basal reader as the teaching text. They also provided 30 minutes of small group instruction that focused on students' needs. The school that was high achieving in the area of reading focused more time on reading and the majority of that time was spent in small group instruction. Chambers also found that the high achieving school had a higher level of teacher efficacy than the lower achieving school. The high achieving school had a high level of support from the principal and the lower achieving school had a moderate level of support from its principal.

In 2001, Hoines identified instructional reading practices that were used by fourth grade teachers in high achieving, high poverty schools. Hoines studied three schools from a large county in southwest Florida that had a percentage of low socio-economic students that exceeded the state and district average. The schools performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) exceeded that of the state and district. School A was a rural/suburban school with 70 percent of its students receiving free and reduced lunch. Thirty-seven percent of the student population was minority and 23.5 percent were considered limited English proficient. School B was an urban school with 62 percent of its students receiving free and reduced lunch. Forty-four percent of the students were minority and two and a half percent of the students were identified as limited English proficient. School C was an urban school with 54 percent of its students receiving free and reduced lunch. Thirty-four and eight tenths of the student population were minority and seven and four tenths were considered limited English proficient.

Hoines conducted focus interviews with ten fourth grade teachers; two from School A, four from School B, and four from School C. She also interviewed the principal from each school. Through the focus group interviews, Hoines identified common instructional strategies that were used by the three schools in the areas of reading comprehension, motivation, writing, kinds of reading, variety of materials, and grouping. For reading comprehension the common strategies that were identified were inferencing (making predictions), identifying important information, summarizing, using context clues, analytical thinking, problem solving, utilization of story grammar, graphic organizers, vocabulary development, and modeling. In order to increase the motivation of students, the teachers provided access to books that were interesting and at the appropriate reading level for the students. In writing the students completed writing prompts and responses to expository writing and artwork. The types of reading used were read

alouds, independent reading, and instruction in basal and trade books. Common materials that were used were basal readers, test preparation materials, teacher-made transparencies, wall charts, technology, expository text, games, workbooks, and units of study. The three schools all instructed their students in individual, small, whole, and cooperative groups. They also all used student/teacher conferencing.

Johnson's study (2002) analyzed the components of the reading instructional program of two successful high-poverty schools. The two schools had percentages of free and reduced lunch participation that were at or above one standard deviation above the mean for the region. The schools were selected because they passed the third grade Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment for the spring 2000 administration. The author's research questions centered on instructional strategies and learning opportunities that schools may provide during reading instruction. The questions included opportunities to expand the use and appreciation for oral language, to hear stories and informational books read aloud, to understand and manipulate the building blocks of spoken language, and to develop written language and relate writing to spelling and reading. Other strategies that were addressed through the research questions were learning the relationship between the sounds of spoken language and letters of written language, learning decoding strategies, having a variety of reading materials, developing comprehension strategies, using a variety of assessment tools, and the amount of time devoted to instruction.

Johnson also looked at school climate, professional development and administrative practices within the two schools. Johnson interviewed teachers from the selected schools in kindergarten through third grade and the schools principals to gain information about their instructional programs. The interviews conducted in School A were held with three kindergarten teachers, three first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, and three third grade teachers. In School B interviews were conducted with one kindergarten teacher, one first grade teacher, one second grade teacher, and one third grade teacher. Each grade level was interviewed separately, as were the principals. Through these interviews the author found common threads in the reading instruction between the two schools.

In the area of oral language for both schools there was evidence of frequent discussions, concept building through vocabulary instruction, and activities to build background knowledge. In each school there were opportunities for the students to hear text read orally each day. For phonemic awareness, both schools reported the use of activities to manipulate words; including

word sorts, rhyming games, and exposure to poetry. School A reported having few students who needed specific instruction in this area and School B reported having many students who were weak in this area upon entering kindergarten.

For writing instruction related to spelling and reading both schools reported the use of early writing activities to reinforce reading, frequent writing activities connected to reading, spelling instruction that follows patterns, and specific writing instruction. School A indicated that they had a school-wide writing program, where-as School B stated that each teacher at that school developed their own approach to teaching writing.

In the area of alphabet and sound/symbol knowledge each school showed evidence of having four components; activities to learn the names of letters, activities for rapid recognition of letters, activities to match sounds with letters, and activities to make words with letters. To teach decoding both schools used a variety of materials that incorporated blending, word families, and structural analysis.

School A reported having an abundance of reading materials, where School B reported a shortage of materials and having to create their own predictable books for students. Both schools indicated the use of explicit information about word meaning, analyzing the content of text, deep discussions, and recording of new words to strengthen comprehension and vocabulary.

When asked about the use of a variety of assessments, School A stated that they use screening and informal assessments. School B reported the use of screening, informal assessments, and end of year assessments.

Both schools reported having 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction per day and teachers in kindergarten and first grade indicated having two to three hours of daily reading instruction. In the area of instructional practices, both schools reported the presence of flexible grouping, frequent interaction with feedback, additional help for struggling readers, and purposeful activities.

When referencing school climate, School A reported having a positive committed staff, an orderly environment and parent involvement. School B reported that teacher commitment and the belief that students were capable was a concern. They also cited teacher turnover and parental involvement as concerns.

Professional development in School A reflects training specific to school needs, opportunities to dialog with colleagues, and the availability of master teachers. In school B

teachers participate in professional development individually, but there are no school-wide professional development opportunities.

The teachers of School A reported that administrators work to allocate resources, facilitate professional development, and are knowledgeable of and have the ability to be instructional leaders. The teachers in School B indicated that the administrators allocate resources, but know little about reading instruction.

Linn (2004) studied the effectiveness of the Tucker Signing Strategy, a reading strategy for decoding words using a system of 44 hand signals, on the reading achievement of first grade students in schools with a high poverty population. The researcher compared the reading achievement of first grade students who were taught the Tucker Signing Strategy to students who were not taught the strategies. She also looked at the instructional practices of the teachers who implemented the Tucker Signing Program and the outside influences that would affect the reading achievement of the students.

The study consisted of nine first grade classrooms in three elementary schools; each school was considered one case in a three case study. The first elementary school had one class using the Tucker Signing Program and one class not using the program. The second school had two classes using the program and two classes not using the program. At this school the Special Education teacher was also utilizing the program. In the third school there was one class using the Tucker Signing Program and two teachers not using the program. The Special Education teacher at the third school was also using the program.

In carrying out the study, the researcher analyzed the reading progress of all of the first grade students. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the teachers addressing why they chose to use or not use the Tucker Signing Program. Archived data were reviewed to include: attendance, pre-school experience, poverty indicators, Title I recipients, parent conference, familial make-up, gender, race, age, and eligibility for free and reduced lunch.

Through the analysis of student data, interviews, and archived data the researcher found that all of the classrooms assessed showed growth from the pre- to post-assessments regardless of the use of the Tucker Signing Program. Linn stated that success in reading in high-poverty schools can be attained with or without the use of this program.

## **Mathematics and Elementary Students of Low Socio-Economic Status**

“Pervasive evidence linking low-income students to low math scores can be found throughout the U.S. school systems, despite the curriculum wars roiling the world of math instruction in attempts to address the problem.” (Holmstrom, 2010, p. 58) “On average, young children from middle socioeconomic status (SES) families have higher levels of mathematics achievement than their lower SES peers.” (Klibanoff, 2006, p. 59)

Payne (2007) investigated the impact of the Mobile Math Initiative (MMI) on student achievement in three high poverty schools. The strategies addressed in the Mobile Math Initiative are: plan instruction based on prior knowledge, facilitate additional learning opportunities by allowing adequate time for students to think and listen to each other, use questioning strategies that promote deep levels of understanding, focus on students’ thinking and problem solving strategies instead of only obtaining the correct answer, reinforce skills that enhance estimation and mental math, reinforce computational skills by connecting problem solving to real-world applications, integrate math throughout and across the curriculum, and assess student knowledge and spontaneously modify instruction (Payne, 2007).

Eighty-nine students were enrolled in the assessed schools. These students were in the second grade during the 2003-2004 school year and remained in the same school through the 2005-2006 school year when they were fourth grade students. The students were Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic. The schools were chosen for the study because they were identified as high poverty; having 80 percent of the student population receiving free or reduced-price lunch. The principals of these schools agreed to administer the SAT 10 to the schools’ second graders.

The researcher conducted a longitudinal analysis of student achievement of a group of students before and after their teachers participated in professional development in the use of the Mobile Math Initiative. The students were assessed over a three-year period. The researcher’s goal was to examine the changes in the students’ achievement after the implementation of the MMI strategies. Baseline data were collected in the 2003-2004 school year for students whose teachers had not participated in the professional development for this initiative. Teachers received training during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. Data were analyzed from the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 administration of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) math subtest and the 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 administration of the SAT

10 procedures and problem solving subtests. The research centered around three null hypotheses that looked at the significant interaction between mathematics achievement as measured by NCE scores on the Procedures and Problem-solving subtests of the SAT 10 and the scale scores on the ARMT math subtest. The independent variables that were used to assess the interactions in this assessment were: ethnic background, gender, socioeconomic status, level of English proficiency, level of Special Education needed, and the school the student attended.

Through this analysis it was found that the students of teachers who were trained in the use of the Mobile Math Initiative improved their NCE scores for the SAT 10 Procedures and Problem-solving subtests from the baseline scores to the end of the study. The mean NCE scores for the SAT 10 Procedures subtest rose significantly for each year of the study, however the Problem-solving subtest rose significantly only in the first year of the study. Scores rose in the second year of the study, but were not considered significant. The researcher stated, "...a high quality, well trained teacher is one resource that minority students need in order to reach their potential." (Payne, 2007, p. 110)

Tapper's (2009) study analyzed successful mathematics teaching practices in high poverty schools. He did so through comparing the practices of teachers in high poverty schools whose students performed above predicted on the New York State Mathematics test and teachers in the same kind of schools whose students performed significantly below predictions on the same assessment. The researchers goals were to identify reported teaching practices that discriminate student success in high poverty schools on the Survey of Instructional Practices in Mathematics (SIPM), explore data structures for potential use in a model of teaching practices, and to determine the relative amount of variance accounted for by discriminating variable and compare this to the variance accounted for by measures of teacher quality.

In order to identify the cohorts for this study the results of the New York State mathematics were analyzed. These results were used to create regression parameters to judge whether high poverty schools were performing above or below prediction. For this, school performance was regressed on the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Teachers reported out on the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards in their classes. Through this two cohorts were formed, Group S and Group U. Group S consisted of schools that achieved above predictions based on the schools' level of poverty. Group U consisted of schools that achieved below predictions based on the schools' level of poverty.



There were 130 schools and approximately 520 teachers that met the criteria for Group S. There were 103 schools and approximately 309 teachers that met the criteria for Group U. The researcher conducted an on-line survey (SIPM) to compare the teaching practices of teachers that related to the Meaningful Mathematics Instruction program. The survey looked at connection to prior knowledge, curriculum implementation, and opportunities for reflection, communication, and practice. Fifty-eight fourth grade teachers completed the survey, 31 from Group S and 27 from Group U.

Through this study Tapper reported the following findings. Meaningful Mathematics Instruction questions in teaching practice variables accounted for 14.7% of the substantial variance while poverty accounted for more than twice that amount on the 2008 New York State data. The SIPM instrument was accurate in determining the cohorts, but was not conclusive as to whether the MMI teaching practices were the reason for these results. Activating prior knowledge was determined to be a key difference between the high and low performing groups. The curriculum in the high performing schools was implemented fully. Reflection, communication, and practice were all determined to play a role in the high performing schools.

### **Characteristics of Successful Schools in Areas of High Poverty**

“The success of a growing number of schools in high poverty areas is not the stuff of inspirational anecdotes; it is a mountain of evidence that demonstrates that successful teaching progress substantially mitigates the impact of demographic factors...” (Reeves, 2000, p. 170)  
“At the school level, detailed analysis of accountability data can yield insights into effective (and ineffective) strategies employed by teachers and principals.” (Reeves, 2000, p. 170)

Research on effective schools dates back to 1966 with James Coleman’s *Equity of Educational Opportunities Report* in which Coleman looked at school characteristics, staffing issues, and student background. The results of the Coleman report generalized that student background characteristics were more powerful in determining student achievement than school-level factors (Coleman, 1966). Research from this time period raised the question, “Do Schools Matter?” (Jansen, 1995, p. 182).

Edmonds is considered the founding father of school-effectiveness research (Fleming, 2003). Through his 1979 publication, “Effective Schools for the Urban Poor”, Edmonds identified six characteristics that are essential to the success of effective schools. Edmonds

(1979) states that effective schools have: strong administrative leadership, a climate of high expectations where no child is permitted to fall below the minimum level of achievement, an orderly atmosphere without being rigid, basic skills acquisition as the schools primary purpose, the ability to divert energy and resources from other activities to advance the school's main objectives, and a means by which student progress is frequently monitored (Edmonds, 1979). Later researchers dropped the fifth characteristic of diverting energy and resources, which created a five-step approach to improve student achievement. Edmond's research has become the principal framework for reforming failing schools (Fleming, 2003).

Levine and Lezotte's (1990) research expounds upon earlier research by citing a focus on central learning skills as a key feature of effective schools. They emphasized maximizing time for learning through reducing transition times and reducing off-task behaviors. They also put an emphasis on mastery of central learning skills through teaching students learning strategies in explicit ways (Fleming, 2003). Levine and Lezotte recognized effective teaching practices as: time on task, appropriate reinforcements, lesson sequencing, wait-time after questions, and student-teacher interaction guidelines (Fleming, 2003).

Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted a meta-analysis of research studies on instructional strategies that could be used by teachers (Marzano, 2001). Through this study, nine instructional strategies were identified that have a high probability of improving student achievement in all subjects. The instructional strategies that were identified are: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representation, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and questions, cues, and advanced organizers (Marzano, 2001).

Similarly, Hattie (2009) conducted a meta-analyses of studies that related to factors that influence achievement of school-age students. Hattie cited the following strategies and their effect on students' achievement: instructional quality, instructional quantity, direct instruction, graded homework, acceleration, remediation and feedback, personalized instruction, challenge of goals, peer tutoring, mastery learning, questioning, advanced organizers, simulation and games, computer-assisted instruction, and instructional media (Hattie, 2009).

In 2007 Howard examined how exemplary teachers educate children of poverty, having low school readiness skills, without referrals to Special Education. The researcher looked at how

teachers identify the learning needs of children with low-school readiness, how they prepare these children to meet grade level expectations while avoiding special education or retention, and how the teachers alter their classroom environments to address students' individual needs. The researcher also looked at specialized training that the teachers may have received in educating students of low socioeconomic status and when this training occurred. Teachers' experiences with poverty and teachers' attitudes regarding students of low socioeconomic status were also considered.

Nine teachers in kindergarten through third grade participated in this study; one being a kindergarten teacher, four being first grade teachers, and three being second grade teachers. These teachers all served in Title I schools. The teachers referred no more than one student for Special Education services per year for three years and their students ended the school year at or close to grade level, based on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) assessments.

Through focus group interviews, observations, and pre- and post- observation interviews the researcher gained knowledge of the practices of the population studied. The researcher found that all of the teachers observed had empathy for their students and developed relationships with their students and parents. All participants provided their students with challenging content and learning experiences that maximized their culture, heritage, traditions or economic awareness. All of the teachers provided support for language acquisition and showed evidence of cooperative learning in their rooms. The teachers in this study capitalized on the strengths of the students and had a belief that their students could be successful. All of the teachers used formative assessments to drive instruction and used teacher made assessments, running records, portfolios, and anecdotal records. They all saw the need for early diagnostic methods. All of the participants tried to foster parental involvement. They were all aware of the physical needs of their students such as hunger and lack of sleep. All of the teachers fostered a safe and secure environment, using positive reinforcements and celebrating successes. They were consistently positive with their students, never separating students out for behavior issues. In these classes one could not distinguish the high performing students from the low performing students. All rooms were updated with current technology. None of the participants viewed themselves as experts in their field and they stated that they gained their skills through trial and error and on the job training.

Riley (2008) studied the elements of effective classroom instruction in high performing, high poverty urban schools. The researcher's goals were to identify trends and patterns of performance among students of color and to identify the organizational structures and systems that were perceived to contribute to high performance. The researcher also looked at how the organizational systems and structures were implemented to support school-wide effective classroom instruction that promotes student learning. She also asked how the constructs of race reflected on the schools structures and systems.

California Magnet High School was the focus of this study. The school houses about 1,642 students and was chosen because it was considered high poverty, higher performing, and an urban school. High poverty in this study is defined as having 70 percent or more of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch. The school was considered urban due to its proximity to Los Angeles and having 60 percent or more of its student population considered students of color (African American, Hispanic, and Indigenous People). Performance was measured through Academic Performance Index (API) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) scores on the California Standards Test (CST). Scores showed consistent growth for a minimum of three years.

The researcher conducted this study through observations, interviews, surveys, and artifact collection. She interviewed school administrators, teachers, and classified staff. Riley spent six days shadowing the Dean of Students and the Principal. She conducted observations of teachers' classrooms, professional development activities, parent meetings, walk-throughs on campus, and leadership meetings. In addition, parents completed surveys. The researcher also collected artifacts from office support staff, site administration and teachers. These artifacts include, but were not limited to, meeting agendas, meeting evaluations, calendars, class configurations, discipline plans, school-wide schedules, mission and vision statements, professional development logs, assessment data, referrals, curriculum, and parent involvement plans. Through these measures the researcher identified school-wide systems and structures that were in place at the participating school.

In the area of leadership, the principal distributed leadership and shared responsibilities with others in order to maintain buy-in from the staff. Parents were involved in the decision making process. Teachers were able to make decisions about their professional development needs. Students participated in peer mentorship and student recognition was displayed in the

school. For accountability and data analysis, professional development was centered on student data and each teacher's data were readily available. Teachers used data to help each other; they compared data to work toward the common goal of improving student performance outcomes. Student data were displayed throughout the school. In this school collaboration was evident. The principal utilized distributed leadership. The teachers collaborated in discussions focused on student progress and effective instructional strategies. During class time there were open discussions between teachers and students.

### **Synthesis and Conclusions**

The goal of the Title I section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) is to ensure that all students, regardless of race or social standing, have the opportunity to obtain a high quality education. Through the accountability measures called for in the No Child Left Behind Act (2001); reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965); schools have been charged with increasing the achievement of all subgroups, including students of low socio-economic status.

Researchers such as Evans, Burney, and Beilke have cited educational deficits that students living in areas of high poverty exhibit when entering and moving through their elementary school years. Educators and researchers (Edmonds, Levine, and Lezotte) have sought to identify strategies that are being used in high poverty, high performing schools that are the foundation for successful student performance. Strategies in the area of reading and mathematics instruction have been identified, as well as, school-wide strategies that promote high achievement for students of low socio-economic status.

The researchers cited in the above review of research consistently provide practices and strategies that are utilized within schools and classes with high levels of poverty and high levels of academic achievement. The review of research identifies practices being utilized in reading and mathematics instruction, in high poverty schools that have led to gains in student performance. The researchers noted instructional grouping (small group, whole group, collaborative grouping), specific instructional programs, instructional strategies, materials, and time spent on instruction as some of the variables that aid in student performance in these areas. Researchers also identified strategies such as data driven decision making, shared leadership,

parental involvement, collaboration, and professional development as some of the common threads found in high performing, high poverty schools.

From the early research of Edmonds, Levine and Lezotte, to more recent research, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the characteristics of high poverty, high performing schools. The limitation for practitioners in the above research is the lack of emphasis on the practices of high poverty, low performing schools. The above cited research shows little comparison of the practices of high and low performing schools. Where the review of research shows the practices and strategies utilized by high performing schools, it does not show if schools with similar characteristics are using the same strategies and practices without showing proficient academic performance. Without an analysis of the practices and strategies used in high poverty, low performing schools one cannot definitively recognize the strategies and practices of the high performing schools as the reason for their academic success. Based on a synthesis and review of the current research methodologies and findings, it is evident that there is need for further research on this topic that will differentiate between the practices and strategies utilized by high poverty, high performing schools and high poverty, low performing schools.

Table 1

*Synthesis of Practices Identified by Researchers*

Researcher	Instructional Strategies	Instructional Programs	Other Factors
Sobolak (2011)	Rich, interactive, multi-faceted vocabulary development		
Chambers (2012)	Small, differentiated reading groups Extended time for reading instruction		

(table continued)

Table 1 (*cont.*)

Researcher	Instructional Strategies	Instructional Programs	Other Factors
Hoines (2001)	Inferencing  Identifying important information Summarizing Context clues Analytical thinking Problem solving Using story grammar Graphic organizers Vocabulary development Modeling Read alouds Independent reading Cooperative learning Student/teacher conferencing		Access to high interest books
Johnson (2002)	Frequent discussions Vocabulary instruction Building background knowledge Read alouds Word sorts Rhyming games Exposure to poetry Writing activities connected to reading		
Linn (2004)		Tucker Signing Program	
Payne (2007)		Mobile Math Initiative	
Tapper (2009)		Meaningful Mathematics Instruction	
Edmonds (1979)			Strong administrative leadership Climate of high expectations Orderly atmosphere Purpose of basic skill acquisition Divert energy and resources to advance schools goal Frequent monitoring of student progress
Levine & Lezotte (1990)	Lesson sequencing Wait time		Time on task Appropriate reinforcements Student-teacher interaction

(table continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

Researcher	Instructional Strategies	Instructional Programs	Other Factors
Marzano (2001)	Identify similarities and differences Summarizing and note taking Reinforcing effort and providing recognition Homework and practice Nonlinguistic representation Cooperative learning Setting objectives and providing feedback Generating and testing hypotheses Questions, cues, and advanced organizers		
Hattie (2009)	Instructional quality Instructional quantity Direct instruction Graded homework Acceleration Remediation and feedback Personalized instruction Challenge of goals Peer tutoring Mastery learning Questioning Advanced organizers Simulation and games Computer-assisted instruction Instructional media		
Howard (2007)	Challenging content and learning experiences Support language acquisition Cooperative learning		Empathy for students  Develop relationships with students and parents Believe in students ability to be successful Data driven decision making Foster parental involvement Positive reinforcement

(table continued)



Table 1 (*cont.*)

Researcher	Instructional Strategies	Instructional Programs	Other Factors
Riley (2008)			Distributed leadership Professional development based on student data Peer mentorship Student recognition Data used to improve student performance Student data displayed Collaboration Student-teacher discussions

**Note.** Table 1 synthesizes instructional strategies, instructional programs, and other instructional factors identified by researchers.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter describes the purpose, research questions, and research design for the study. It also defines the parameters in which the study took place and the methods that were used to collect and analyze data.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the instructional practices of high and low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a southeastern district in Virginia. This qualitative study also compared the instructional practices of high and low performing Title I eligible schools with similar percentages of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch.

#### **Research Design**

This study was a basic qualitative study analyzing the responses to interviews with principals and teachers of Title I eligible schools. A basic qualitative study seeks to “*understand* how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). In a basic qualitative study data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis (Merriam, 2009). In this study, interviews were used to collect data from elementary school principals. These interviews provided data regarding school-wide instructional strategies that were used in each identified elementary school. Focus group interviews were also implemented with third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers of identified Title I schools. Data collected from focus group interviews depicted individual teacher strategies and school-wide strategies that were used in each of the identified schools.

#### **Research Design Justification**

Interviews are a useful method of data collection when the participants in the study are not being directly observed. The researcher conducting interviews can gain historical information from the participants being interviewed (Creswell, 2009). Focus group interviews should be conducted with a group of purposely selected participants who have knowledge of the topic. In a focus group interview, participants hear the responses of each participant and can expound upon their original answers making for high quality data collection (Merriam, 2009).

## **Research Questions**

The research question and sub-questions answered in this study are:

What school instructional practices influence student achievement in high and low performing Title I eligible schools?

- I. Instructional Strategies
  - a. What instructional strategies are being used in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What instructional strategies are being used in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - c. What differences, if any, are there in the instructional strategies of high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?
- II. Instructional Programs
  - a. What instructional programs are being used in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What instructional programs are being used in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - c. What differences, if any, are there in the instructional programs being used in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?
- III. Other instructional factors
  - a. What other instructional factors are identified in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What other instructional factors are identified in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - c. What differences, if any, are there in the other instructional factors identified in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?

## **Defining the Population**

The population for this study consisted of third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers from four Title I eligible schools in one urban school district in southeastern Virginia. The teachers were full-time, general education teachers, and had served for the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. Third, fourth, and fifth grade were the focus of this study because, in Virginia, they are

the only elementary grade levels assessed through high-stakes testing each school year. For the study, principals of four Title I eligible schools also served as participants.

Schools A and B were considered high performing and Schools C and D were considered low performing in this study. Performance of these schools was based on the pass rates from the Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessments, Virginia's state accountability measure. All four schools serviced students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade and were located in the same school district in southeastern Virginia.

School A was named a Title I Distinguished School by the Virginia Department of Education in January of 2014 and again in October of 2014 (Pyle C. B., 2014; Pyle C. B., 2014). In order to be considered at Title I Distinguished School, the school had to meet all state and federal accountability requirements for two consecutive years. The school also had to have reading and math SOL pass rates at the sixtieth percentile or higher (Pyle C. B., 2014). Based on data collected from the Virginia Department of Education website, School A had a free and reduced lunch rate of 62.54% in the 2013-2014 school year and rate of 59.39% in the 2014-2015 school year. Their fall membership was 635 for the 2012-2013 school year, 644 for the 2013-2014 school year, and 627 for the 2014-2015 school year. The school was fully accredited for at least three consecutive school years.

School B was named a Title I Distinguished School in January of 2014 (Pyle C. B., 2014). Based on data collected from the Virginia Department of Education website, School B had a free and reduced lunch rate of 61.05% for the 2013-2014 school year and a rate of 63.51% for the 2014-2015 school year. Their fall membership was 606 for the 2012-2013 school year, 569 for the 2013-2014 school year, and 593 for the 2014-2015 school year. The school was fully accredited for at least three consecutive school years.

School C was fully accredited based on the results from the 2012 and 2013 administration of the SOL assessments. In 2014 School C became accredited with warning. Based on data collected from the Virginia Department of Education website, School C had a free and reduced lunch rate of 64.05% for the 2013-2014 school year and a rate of 58.65% for the 2014-2015 school year. Their fall membership was 565 for the 2012-2013 school year, 577 for the 2013-2014 school year, and 598 for the 2014-2015 school year.

School D was fully accredited based on the results of the 2012 administration of the SOL assessments. In 2013 School D became accredited with warning and continued to hold that

status based on the results of the 2014 administration of the SOL assessments. Based on data collected from the Virginia Department of Education website, School D had a free and reduced lunch rate of 65.75% for the 2013-2014 school year and a rate of 63.99% for the 2014-2015 school year. Their fall membership was 636 for the 2012-2013 school year, 612 for the 2013-2014 school year, and 598 for the 2014-2015 school year.

### **Sample Size and Procedures**

Data for this study were gathered from four title I eligible elementary schools in an urban district in southeastern Virginia. Two of the selected schools were considered high performing schools and two of the schools were considered low performing based on the results of the 2014 spring administration of the SOL assessments. In order to be considered a high performing school, the schools had to attain full accreditation for at least three consecutive years. Schools that were considered low performing had not attained full accreditation in one of the last three school years. Another qualifying factor for selection in this study was having a Free and Reduced Lunch Rate that was greater than fifty percent; making the schools Title I eligible.

The participants in this study included the principal from each of the four Title I eligible schools that were selected for the study and at least two teachers from each SOL tested grade level (third, fourth, and fifth grades) from each school. The four principals were interviewed individually by the researcher in order to gain knowledge of the school wide instructional practices that have been implemented. The teachers selected for this study each participated in a focus group interview at their respective schools conducted by the researcher.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

For the study several data collection methods were implemented. These methods included interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis. The collection of data began with an analysis of accreditation documentation, fall membership numbers, and Free and Reduced Lunch rate data collected from the Virginia Department of Education. These data were used to select the schools that qualify as participants for the study. The researcher selected elementary schools that were within the same urban school district in southeastern Virginia that had a Free and Reduced Lunch rate of at least fifty percent. After determining which elementary schools had the qualifying Free and Reduced Lunch rate, the elementary schools were broken

down further looking at which of these schools were considered high and low performing based on SOL accreditation data.

The researcher interviewed principals of each identified school. The principal interviews were one-on-one with the researcher, and a series of open-ended questions were asked. The interview questions focused on school-wide instructional strategies that are utilized at each school (see Appendix A).

The third method of data collection for this study was focus group interviews with third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers from each of the identified elementary school. Four focus group interviews were conducted, one for each identified elementary school. The interview questions for each focus group were open-ended and focused on individual and school-wide instructional strategies utilized by the interviewed teachers (see Appendix B).

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

The data for this study were collected through document analysis, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Documents were collected from the Virginia Department of Education web site showing the accreditation status of thirty-three elementary schools in an urban district in southeastern Virginia. Documentation from this site was also gathered showing the free and reduced lunch rates of each of the thirty-three schools. Using the aforementioned data collection, four schools were identified as participants in the study. For purposes of anonymity these schools were identified as School A, School B, School C, and School D. Schools A and B were considered high performing schools based on their three year accreditation status and Schools C and D were considered low performing schools based on their accreditation status.

The researcher, in one-on-one interviews, interviewed principals from each of the identified schools. The researcher met face-to-face with each principal and asked a series of open-ended questions based on the school-wide instructional practices utilized at their schools. Principals were assured confidentiality as it relates to their name and school's name, as this information has no value to the study. Each of the four principal interviews was audiotaped for later transcription. Principals were reminded to avoid school names and identifying information during the audiotaping.

Focus group interviews were held at each of the identified schools. At each site, a combination of identified third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers were interviewed by the researcher. The teachers responded to a series of open-ended questions that were based on individual and school-wide instructional practices that are utilized by each teacher. The teachers were given an opportunity to engage in dialogue regarding the instructional practices that they implement. Each teacher was assured confidentiality as it relates to his or her name and school, as this information has no value to the study. The four focus group interviews were audiotaped for later transcription. Teachers were reminded to avoid school names and identifying information during the audiotaping.

### **Instrument Design**

Two instruments were used to gather data for the study. Interview questions were developed by the researcher for one-on-one principal interviews and teacher focus group interviews. Both instruments contained seven open-ended questions regarding utilized instructional strategies. The instrument used for the principal interviews contained questions that focus on school-wide strategies and practices in the individual schools (see Appendix A). The instrument used for the teacher focus group interviews contained questions that focus on strategies and practices that were used school wide and within individual classrooms (see Appendix B).

### **Reliability and Validity**

In order to assure the reliability and validity of the instruments used in the study, the researcher reviewed the questions with a group of research and education professionals. Reviewers consisted of school Principals and central office administrators from various school districts in Virginia that were members of the Virginia Tech doctoral cohort. In doing so, the researcher assured that the questions contained in the instruments yielded the responses necessary to answer the research questions in the study. The individuals reviewing the contents of the research instruments were not participants in the study.

### **Data Management**

Participants in the study remained anonymous throughout the study. The schools participating in the study were identified as School A, School B, School C, and School D. The

principals and teachers that participated in the study were assigned a number or letter as a means of identification. For example, the principal of school A was coded as AP and the teachers from school A was coded as AT1, AT2, AT3, etc. The school district, school names, and participant names were not revealed within the study.

All interviews were audiotaped and were transcribed. All audiotapes and transcriptions were locked in a fire safe box in the researcher's home until successful defense of this dissertation. Upon successful defense of this dissertation, all audiotapes and transcriptions will be destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

Individual principal interviews and teacher focus group interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. From the transcriptions the data were coded in order to construct categories from the interview data. Categories were identified based on similarities found in the responses to the interview questions. After carefully sorting the categories found in each transcript, generalizations, themes, and variations were made regarding the instructional practices utilized at each school.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

The researcher reported the data discovered through the study by responding to each of the study's research questions. The instructional practices found in the high performing Title I elementary schools were reported, as were the practices found in the low performing Title I elementary schools. The researcher aimed to compare the differences, if any, in the instructional practices utilized by the high and low performing schools.

### **Timeline**

The researcher completed IRB training prior to requesting IRB approval of the study. Upon approval from the research committee, an application was completed and forwarded to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once IRB approval (see Appendix C) was granted the researcher requested permission from the school district for four of their schools to participate in the study. Once consent was given by the district (see Appendix D), the researcher emailed a letter to principals asking for their participation in the study (see Appendix E). The letter to the principal also asked for them to identify the teachers in their school that met the requirements for



participation in the study. After the teachers were identified, a letter was emailed to the teachers asking for their participation in the study (see Appendix F).

After all participants agreed to participate in the study, the principal interviews and focus group interviews were scheduled and conducted. At the interview sites, participants signed a letter of consent giving permission for their responses to be used as data for the study (see Appendix G, see Appendix H).

Once all interviews were completed, the audiotapes of each interview were transcribed. The transcriptions were then coded to find similarities and differences in the data. The categories found within the transcriptions were used to report the instructional practices used within each school.

### **Methodology Summary**

The study was a basic qualitative study utilizing document analysis, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. The methodology selected for the study identified the instructional strategies used in high performing and low performing Title I eligible schools in an urban district in southeastern Virginia. The researcher used the data collected to identify the utilized instructional practices of each school and reported the similarities and differences found in the instructional practices amongst schools.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to identify the difference in the instructional practices of high and low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a southeastern district in Virginia. Four elementary school principals of Title I eligible schools were interviewed. Two principals served in high performing Title I schools and two of the principals served in low performing Title I schools. Focus group interviews consisting of third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers were conducted in each of the four schools.

The schools chosen to participate in the study were selected based on data collected from the Virginia Department of Education website. Selection was based on the schools free and reduced lunch rates and a three-year review of the schools' accreditation status.

### **Research Questions**

The research for this study was based on one over-arching research question with various sub-questions:

What school instructional practices influence student achievement in high and low performing Title I eligible schools?

- I. Instructional Strategies
  - a. What instructional strategies are being used in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What instructional strategies are being used in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - c. What differences, if any, are there in the instructional strategies of high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?
- II. Instructional Programs
  - a. What instructional programs are being used in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What instructional programs are being used in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?

- c. What differences, if any, are there in the instructional programs being used in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?

### III. Other instructional factors

- a. What other instructional factors are identified in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
- b. What other instructional factors are identified in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
- c. What differences, if any, are there in the other instructional factors identified in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?

## Codes

Codes were assigned to represent the following:

- School A and School B designate the two high performing Title I eligible schools.
- School C and School D designate the two low performing Title I eligible schools.
- AP, BP, CP, and DP designate the principals from Schools A, B, C, and D.
- ATF, BTF, CTF, and DTF...designate the teacher focus groups from School A, B, C and D.

## Schools

Data were collected from the Virginia Department of Education website defining the schools' free and reduced lunch rates, fall membership, and three-year accreditation status.

These data were used to qualify the schools as participants in the study.

- School A: School A serviced pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. It was named a Title I Distinguished School by the Virginia Department of Education based on pass rates from the 2012, 2013, and 2014 administrations of the Virginia SOL Assessments. The schools' free and reduced lunch rate for school year 2013-2014 was 62.54% and reduced to 59.39% for the 2014-2015 school year. Fall membership for School A was 635 for the 2012-2013 school year, 644 for the 2013-2014 school year, and 627 for the 2014-2015 school year. The school had been fully accredited for at least three consecutive years.

- School B: School B serviced pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. It was named a Title I Distinguished School by the Virginia Department of Education based on pass rates from the 2012 and 2013 administrations of the Virginia SOL Assessments. The schools' free and reduced lunch rate for school year 2013-2014 was 61.05% and increased to 63.51% for the 2014-2015 school year. Fall membership for School B was 606 for the 2012-2013 school year, 569 for the 2013-2014 school year, and 593 for the 2014-2015 school year. The school had been fully accredited for at least three consecutive years.
- School C: School C serviced pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. School C's free and reduced lunch rate for school year 2013-2014 was 64.05% and reduced to 58.65% for the 2014-2015 school year. Fall membership for School C was 565 for the 2012-2013 school year, 577 for the 2013-2014 school year, and 598 for the 2014-2015 school year. The school was fully accredited based on the 2012 and 2013 administrations of the Virginia SOL Assessments; however it fell into warning status based on the 2014 administration of the Virginia SOL Assessments.
- School D: School D serviced pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. School D's free and reduced lunch rate for school year 2013-2014 was 65.75% and reduced to 63.99% for the 2014-2015 school year. Fall membership for School D was 636 for the 2012-2013 school year, 612 for the 2013-2014 school year, and 598 for the 2014-2015 school year. The school was fully accredited based on the 2012 administrations of the Virginia SOL Assessments, however it fell into warning status based on the 2013 and 2014 administration of the Virginia SOL Assessments.

Table 2

*Demographic Data and Accreditation Status of Schools Participating in the Study*

School	Free and Reduced Lunch Rate 2013-2014	Free and Reduced Lunch Rate 2014-2015	Fall Members hip 2012-2013	Fall Members hip 2013-2013	Fall Members hip 2013-2014	Accreditation Status 2012-2013	Accreditation Status 2013-2014	Accreditation Status 2014-2015
A	62.54%	59.39%	635	644	627	Fully Accredited	Fully Accredited	Fully Accredited
B	61.05%	63.51%	606	569	593	Fully Accredited	Fully Accredited	Fully Accredited
C	64.05%	58.65%	565	577	598	Fully Accredited	Fully Accredited	Accredited with Warning
D	65.75%	63.99%	636	612	598	Fully Accredited	Accredited with Warning	Accredited with Warning

*Note.* Table 2 synthesizes the demographic and accreditation data for each school.

### **Presentation of the Data: Research Question**

The presentation and analysis of the data for the research question are presented in this section. Focus groups interviews were conducted with teachers in grades 3, 4 and 5 along with one-on-one interviews with principals. The data from interviews were transcribed, then coded and generalizations were made based on the themes found.

What school instructional practices influence student achievement in high and low performing Title I eligible schools?

### **Instructional Strategies**

Principals responded to the following questions, which centered on instructional strategies used in their schools:

1. What school-wide practices are in place at this school that influence academic achievement?
2. What research based instructional strategies can be observed, across content areas, in classrooms at this school?
3. What methods are used, at this school, to determine which school-wide instructional practices will be utilized?

Third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers responded to the following questions which centered on instructional strategies used in their classrooms and throughout their schools:

1. Tell me about the instructional practices that you use in your classroom.
2. What research based instructional practices can be observed in your classroom that carries across all content areas?
3. What methods do you use to determine which instructional practices to use?

The research sub-questions were used to compare and contrast the instructional strategies used in high performing and low performing Title I eligible schools.

### **Instructional strategies used in high performing Title I eligible schools**

Principals and teachers in School A and School B identified and described instructional strategies that influence student performance within their respective schools.

- Participant AP: School A provided differentiated instruction and work for all students. Differentiation could be seen for all levels of student; enrichment for high performing students and intervention and remediation for struggling students. Homework was differentiated based on the students' needs. "They cannot send home the same homework to every child and so special education looks different, regular ed. looks different and so do the gifted children" (AP, ll. 113-114). School A used technology enhanced items throughout their instruction and on assessments (AP, ll. 135-139). They also implemented reading strategies school-wide. Starting in kindergarten students were having discussions about going back into the text to find answers (AP, ll. 140-144). The use of technology enhanced items and text embedded reading had been put into place to prepare the students for what the state expects students to be able to do on the SOL assessments (AP, ll. 137-140).

Participant AP stated that data were tracked school-wide, in all grade levels including pre-k. In the upper grade levels students tracked their own data in data notebooks. Students graphed their data and set goals for themselves based on their data (AP, ll. 144-150).

The research based instructional strategies that were identified by AP as being used school wide were graphic organizers, a focus on vocabulary, and content area word walls that contain visuals for each word (AP, ll. 160-163). In all classes the

teachers posted I can statements for each lesson. "...I can walk in and say to the students, Tell me about your I can statement for today and what does it mean. They can tell you because they have gotten so acclimated into it" (AP, ll. 164-166). I can statements are state and district standards written in student friendly language. In order to write I can statements, the teachers unpacked the standards, looking at what the standard says the children need to be able to do (AP, ll. 171-177).

To determine the instructional practices to be used school-wide, School A held a summer planning session. During the planning sessions teachers from all grade levels came together and looked at data from the previous year. The teachers looked at areas of weakness and discussed what could be done at each grade level to improve in that area (AP, ll. 181-211).

- Participant BP: School B focused on the needs of all students. "...we have a fairly high poverty rate, in the high sixties, so we do a lot of mentoring of students" (BP, ll. 38-39). The schools' parent liaison held workshops for parents and went on home visits to try to support the students (BP, ll. 40-43). The school had partnerships with community partners who donate supplies and coats for students (BP, ll. 43-47). There were reward systems in place that motivate students to meet behavior expectations and work hard to meet instructional benchmarks (BP, ll. 47-55). "I would think it's just kind of a comprehensive program, with a constant focus on the children." (BP, ll. 55-56)

School B used what they refer to as power strategies across all content areas. The first of these strategies was explicit instruction. With this the teacher guided students step by step through how to solve problems (BP, ll. 65-66). The next strategy was student justification of answers. Students were required to work out every problem and show some kind of evidence that they thought about their answer (BP, ll. 68-79). The third power strategy that was used at School B was compare and contrast. This can also be described as similarities and differences (BP, ll. 79-84). The last power strategy used was a focus on vocabulary. In the primary grades there was a focus on sounding out words, but when the students got to second grade there was a push for content vocabulary and enriching vocabulary (BP, ll. 87-94). All of the power

strategies were required to be used at School B. They were mandated by the Principal and were monitored through narrow lens observations.

- Participants of Focus Group A: School A used a combination of instructional practices. The grade levels looked at the big ideas that needed to be taught and built their instruction around the big idea. The teachers used interactive notebooks, graphic organizers, hands-on activities and projects, and small group instruction (ATF, ll. 14-16). Teachers used interactive Smart board activities and intersperse student interaction (ATF, ll. 13-14).

Teachers of School A used Bloom's Taxonomy when they were planning for instruction (ATF, l. 30). Focus group participants stated that they used Marzano's strategies throughout their instruction (ATF, l. 47). Specifically, they utilized Marzano's strategies of cooperative learning, graphic organizers, homework, and practice (ATF, ll. 47-48).

Teachers at School A used a variety of assessments to determine the instructional practices that they would implement. They used data collected from pre-assessments, formative assessments, independent practice and quick checks such as exit tickets to assess their students' needs (ATF, ll. 38-42). Teachers at this school also assessed the students' learning modalities to determine how each student learned best. They tried to include activities that would benefit the kinesthetic learners, the visual learners, and the auditory learners in each lesson (ATF, ll. 60-84).

- Participants of Focus Group B: Teachers in School B utilized four instructional practices throughout their instruction that they called power strategies. These power strategies were vocabulary, explicit instruction, graphic organizers, and compare and contrast (BTF, ll. 85-86). Another instructional practice that teachers at School A used was justification of answers. Teachers stated that all of these practices were monitored by the schools administration through observations and walk-throughs (BTF, ll. 86-95).

Teachers at School B determined the instructional practices that they used through trial and error. "Sometimes it doesn't work and you just move on. You don't keep using the same thing if it's not successful." (BTF, ll. 149-150) Teachers at School B utilized Kagan structures to keep students engaged. They based the structures that



they used on what they felt their group of students could handle (BTF, ll. 158-159).

Teachers also stated that they used some practices because they were being monitored by administration (BTF, ll. 154-155).

### **Instructional strategies used in low performing Title I eligible schools**

Principals and teachers in School C and School D identified and described instructional strategies that influence student performance within their respective schools.

- Participant CP: School C conducted formal planning twice a week. One day was designated for reading and one day was designated for math. These planning sessions were grade level specific and had professional development embedded into them (CP, ll. 28-32). During this planning the teachers looked at what they were doing each week, by grade level and by group (CP, ll. 49-51). Teachers looked at their tier one, two, and three students and discussed what they could do to meet the students' needs.

School C implemented Marzano's strategies. The principal also stated that they tried to differentiate assessments and instructional strategies (CP, ll. 73-76). School C implemented Kagan structures throughout instruction. Teachers were doing quick checks such as exit tickets to check for student understanding (CP, ll. 82-83). The principal stated that administration looked for more kid talk than teacher talk (CP, l. 87).

In order to determine the instructional practices that were used school-wide, School C conducted a teacher survey to get input from the teachers. The principal stated that they were trying to get more professional discussions going on in the school about basic small group instruction, tiering students, using data to drive instruction, and utilizing staff more effectively (CP, ll. 98-105).

- Participant DP: School D had some professional development on cooperative learning (DP, l. 18). School D had some training on Singapore Math and will have further professional development in this area. Singapore Math refers to the products and programs distributed by Singapore Math Inc.

The administrators of School D looked for students to justify their answers. Homework was also an instructional practice at School D. The administration was working toward teachers assigning quality homework to students (DP, ll. 25-26).

To determine which school-wide instructional practices would be used at School D, administration conducted a survey with teachers. The teachers were given a list on Marzano's strategies and a list of Hattie's strategies and were asked to list their top three strategies from each list. The teachers were then asked to prioritize the six strategies. The teachers and administration had a discussion about which strategies they would use based on the ranked lists that the teachers created (DP, ll. 37-40).

- Participants of Focus Group C: Teachers at School C used manipulatives as part of their instruction. Student interaction was used as an instructional practice. This could be seen in small group and partner work (CTF, ll. 11-14). Participants stated that they constantly reviewed material and encouraged student talk rather than teacher talk (CTF, ll. 14-16).

School C utilized Kagan structures throughout instruction (CTF, l. 30). Teachers in this school used non-linguistic representation, such as graphic organizers as an instructional practice. Teachers also used examples and non-examples when they are teaching vocabulary (CTF, ll. 30-31).

District expectations helped School C determine the instructional practices that would be utilized. For example, teaching students in small groups was a district expectation (CTF, l. 37). Teachers also used data from formative assessments to assess the needs of the students and determined the instructional practices that would be used in classroom at School C (CTF, ll. 38-39).

- Participants of Focus Group D: Instructional practices that were utilized in classes at School D were, "modeling, peer review, whole group, lots of technology" (DTF, l. 10). Small groups were used to differentiate instruction. In small groups teachers would focus on specific strands that the students needed help with (DTF, ll. 11-12). Reteaching was an instructional practice that was used at School D.

The research based instructional practice that was identified as being used in classes at School D was teaching to the students' learning modalities. One teacher cited students sitting on exercise balls to help with kinesthetic learning. Another teacher cited applying songs to different content for the auditory learner and having students draw pictures for the visual learners (DTF, ll. 24-27).

Teachers at School D used physical and verbal feedback from students to determine the instructional practices that would be used in their classes (DTF, ll. 30-37). They also used the data they collected from assessments to know what they needed to reteach the students (DTF, ll. 34-35).

**Differences in the instructional strategies of high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools -**

Table 3

*Instructional Strategies-Similarities and Differences*

High Performing Schools	Participating School	Both High and Low Performing Schools	Participating School	Low Performing Schools	Participating School
Parent workshops	B	Lesson planning	AC	Singapore Math	D
Mentoring students	B	Support for new teachers	AC	Feedback	D
Differentiated homework	A	Grouping	ACD	Kid talk	C
Data Analysis (students track)	AB	Professional development	ABCD	Whole Group	D
Enriching vocabulary	AB	Homework	AD	Non-specific Marzano Strategies	C
Content word walls with visuals	A	Justification of answers	BD	Non-specific Kagan Structures	C
“I can” statements	A	Differentiated instruction and assessments	ACD		
Unpacking Standards	A	Professional discussions	AC		
Interactive notebooks	A	Small groups	ABCD		
Projects	A	Hands-on (manipulatives)	AC		
Explicit instruction	B	Student interaction	AC		
Compare/Contrast	B	Technology (Smartboard)	ACD		
Planning using Bloom’s Taxonomy	A	Graphic organizers/non-linguistic representation	ABC		
Self-evaluation	A	Learning styles	AD		
Self-editing	A	Peer reviews	AD		
Specific Marzano Strategies	AB	Quick checks	AC		
		Cooperative Learning	ACD		
Specific Kagan structures	B				

Note. Table 3 shows the similarities and differences in instructional strategies that are used in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools that participated in the study.

A summary of table 3 is as follows:

- School A planned for instruction using Bloom’s taxonomy. The teachers participated in vertical curriculum talks. They unpacked the standards, focused on big ideas, and used I can statements with their students. Instructional practices that were used by

- teachers at School A were interactive notebooks, projects, differentiated homework, visual content word walls, and student self-evaluation and self-editing.
- School B conducted parent workshops and had mentorship programs for students. Teachers utilized specific Kagan structures to engage students. They focused on explicit instruction and used the instructional practice of compare and contrast.
  - Both School A and School B analyzed student performance data and students in these schools tracked their own data. Teachers in both schools focused on enriching vocabulary and used specific Marzano strategies.
  - School A and School C participated in professional discussions to decide on the instructional strategies that they would utilize. Lesson planning was considered an integral part of the instructional process. Both schools provided support for their new teachers through their content specialists. Schools A and C utilized the instructional practices of student interaction, quick checks, and hands-on activities using manipulatives.
  - School A and School D considered students learning styles when planning for instruction. Both schools utilized the instructional practices of homework and peer reviews.
  - School B and School D utilized the instructional practice of justification of answers.
  - School A, School C, and School D differentiated instruction and assessments based on students' needs. All three schools used technology as part of their instruction. The schools grouped their students for instruction and used the instructional practice of cooperative learning.
  - School A, School B, and School C used the instructional practice of non-linguistic representation in the form of graphic organizers.
  - School A, School B, School C, and School D provided professional development to their teachers regarding instructional practices. All four schools employed the practice of small group instruction.
  - School C utilized Marzano strategies and Kagan Structures; however specific practices were not identified. School C used the practice of kid talk.

- School D implemented Singapore Math as an instructional practice. A portion of instruction was conducted in the whole group style. Teachers at School D provided students with feedback.

### **Instructional Programs**

Principals responded to the following questions, which centered on instructional programs used in their schools:

1. What school-wide programs influence academic achievement at this school?
2. What programs are in place at this school to promote high levels of academic achievement?

Third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers responded to the following questions which centered on instructional programs used in their classrooms and throughout their schools:

1. What instructional programs are used in your classroom that leads to academic success?
2. What programs are in place at this school to promote high levels of academic achievement?

The questions listed above were used to compare and contrast the instructional programs used in high performing and low performing Title I eligible schools.

### **Instructional programs used in high performing Title I eligible schools.**

Principals and teachers in School A and School B identified and described instructional programs utilized within their schools that influence student academic performance.

- Participant AP: School A held an after school remediation program for all grade levels (AP, ll. 80-81). This program focused on reading and math and the ratio for teachers to students was about one to three (AP, ll. 63-64).

School A implemented the Accelerated Reader program school-wide. Students could start participating in this program in kindergarten if they had a level of ten or above on the Developmental Reading Assessment (AP, ll. 90-91).

School A had a program within the school called Operation Hero that was run by the military (AP, ll. 81-83). The program provided students help with homework,

counseling for students whose parents were deployed, and helped students write letters to their parents (AP, ll. 85-89).

School A had a counselor at the school that was assigned by the military. The counselor helped students get better acclimated to their city and school. The counselor worked with students and their parents (AP, ll. 92-106).

School A had a gifted program. The gifted teacher in this program not only worked with students that were identified as gifted, but also worked with students that were high-end workers (AP, ll. 224-225). The gifted teacher helped classroom teachers plan lessons for high-end learners (AP, ll. 225-226).

School A implemented several incentive programs to motivate their students. In preparation for the SOL assessments students could earn SOL Bucks for working hard. During this time students participated in “crunch time”, earning crunch bars for putting forth effort (AP, ll. 226-229).

The parent liaison and instructional team at School A conducted workshops for parents in the areas of reading, writing, and math based on what was being taught (AP, ll. 229-231). The parent liaison purchased materials for the parents. “...the workshop will focus on whatever skill is being taught in the grade level and each one will do a workshop and there will be materials that we give away to the parents and we will show them how to use it in the home.” (AP, ll. 235-237).

- Participant BP: School B was fully immersed in Response to Intervention (RTI) (BP, l. 12). “...Response to Intervention which basically is the whole program because that includes data driven decision making, it includes the assessment system” (BP, ll. 12-14). BP stated that RTI was implemented with fidelity at School B (BP, ll. 14-15). Professional development was provided for new teachers when they came to the school. New teachers were assigned a mentor, which was usually a content specialist. The mentors went into the teachers’ classes during the first quarter to observe, demonstrate lessons, and show teachers how to use their data notebooks to track student data (BP, ll. 19-25). Administration monitored the new teachers to assure they understood the instructional expectations (BP, ll. 26-35). “...my expectation for student achievement does not change, but that is depended on us giving that really

good support and professional development and coaching because you can't expect it other-wise" (BP, ll. 31-34).

School B had several reward/motivation systems in place for all of their supplementary programs (BP, ll. 49-50). Students were rewarded with certificates and ribbons when they met set benchmarks in these programs (BP, l. 52).

- Participants of Focus Group A: Teachers at School A used Kagan structures throughout their instruction, "...to make sure everybody is included and doing their part" (ATF, l. 23-24).

Teachers at School A utilized computer-based programs that were provided by the district in the areas of reading and math. For each of these programs students received certificates, treats, or prizes for meeting their benchmarks (ATF, ll. 39-43).

School A had several recognition programs in place for students. Students were recognized for making honor roll, for bringing up their grades (BUG Roll), and for perfect attendance (ATF, ll. 87-90). Students were also recognized during SOL review time with SOL review bucks for good behavior. SOL bucks could be spent at the school store. During review time School A had the crunch program where one or two students got a crunch bar at the end of the day for "being top notch all day long, crunching their time, doing their best in the crunch time" (ATF, ll. 96-99).

School A held parent night programs throughout the year. During these programs, parents got to see different ways that teachers did activities in the different subject areas (ATF, ll. 50-52).

Teachers at School A used big ideas when planning and throughout instruction (ATF, ll. 29-30). "...we have to think about what is it that is the most essential knowledge that they should be taking from this lesson and it helps us to focus and structure our instruction around that essential idea" (ATF, ll. 32-35). Students were able to say what the big idea of each lesson was (AFT, ll. 35-39).

School A had an intervention program. Retired teachers (tutors), reading and math specialists, and Title I interventionist worked with small groups of students to target specific skills (ATF, ll. 52-55).

- Participants of Focus Group B: Teachers at School B utilized computer based reading and math programs that were provided by the district. Teachers found these



programs to be beneficial to student academic performance because they matched the rigor of the SOLs, provided technology enhanced items (TEI), and provided remediation in specific areas that the students were struggling in (BTF, ll. 100-112). Teachers used the lessons that were provided by the programs for independent practice and guided practice (BTF, ll. 100-101). Teachers liked the reading program because it was differentiated based on the students' Lexile scores, used graphic organizers, and used high level synonyms and antonyms throughout the passages (BTF, ll. 114-122). Teachers in third grade paired students with high Lexile scores with students with lower Lexile scores to help them feel successful and gain confidence in their reading and the use of the program (BTF, ll. 122-131).

Teachers in School B used menus in the area of reading. Each reading group had a different menu of activities based on their reading levels (BTF, l. 168). "There's three things across the top that everyone does because they're goals; Achieve, AR, and daily language review, but then everything is leveled out based on the child" (BTF, ll. 168-170).

### **Instructional programs used in low performing Title I eligible schools.**

Principals and teachers in School C and School D identified and described instructional programs utilized within their schools that influence student academic performance.

- Participant CP: The principal of School C analyzed the master schedule to see how the instructional day could be adjusted to better the instructional program (CP, ll. 10-14). Within the schedule, time for small group instruction was deemed as being important (CP, ll. 14-16). The principal wanted to make sure that small group instruction was consistent, done daily, the lessons were reflecting the students' needs, and assessment data were used to plan for small group instruction (CP, ll. 16-19).

School C used Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to support student discipline (CP, ll. 111-112). Within this program students were recognized for positive behaviors. Students earned character bucks that they could spend in the PBIS store (CP, ll. 116-117). "...I think it really does relate back to instruction because kids are, they're praised, they're getting recognized, they're getting validated, they feel like they're a part of things" (CP, ll. 118-120).

- Participant DP: DP identified Foundations as the biggest program that was used at School D for reading instruction (DP, l. 9). Teachers used this program in the lower grades (DP, l. 9).

Teachers at School D utilized a math computer program that was purchased by the district. “Teachers and the kids really seem to enjoy that” (DP, ll. 12-13).

School D implemented PBIS throughout the school. Students could earn character sharks if they were caught being good (DP, ll. 45-47). Students who earned character sharks could get a treat from the treasure tower (DP, ll. 46-47).

DP used staff recognition to help motivate members of the staff (DP, ll. 47-48). For this program employees nominated each other and two people were recognized each week (DP, ll. 48-49).

- Participants of Focus Group C: Teachers at School C used Kagan structures and manipulatives to get students involved (CTF, l. 19). Some teachers used Mobius Math, “best practices on teaching math” (CTF, ll. 19-20). “It comes with a consumable booklet that asks students to do high level thinking questions” (CFT, ll. 20-21).

Teachers at School C used a district purchased positive behavior reinforcement program within their classrooms (CTF, ll. 22-23). Teachers stated that it motivated the students (CTF, ll. 23-24). Students also participated in computerized reading and math programs that were purchased by the district (CTF, ll. 24-25).

School C implemented student recognition programs. Students were given quarterly awards and were acknowledged for performing well and for showing improvement on common formative assessments (CTF, ll. 49-50). “They come around and bring them something; their names are on the bulletin board” (CTF, ll. 50-51).

- Participants of Focus Group D: Students in School D utilized reading and math computer programs that were purchased by the district (DTF, l. 16). Teachers also used SOL review websites with students (DTF, ll. 17-18).

School D implemented student reward systems. One teacher had honor roll ties. Students that made honor roll got to wear the teacher’s ties for the day (DTF, ll. 42-44). In one class students got to sit on yoga balls instead of chairs as a reward for

good work (DTF, l. 44). In another class students earned points for positive behavior through a district purchased behavior reinforcement program (DTF, ll. 48-49). Students earned homework passes or a chance to sit in the teacher’s chair for a day (DTF, ll. 52-53).

**Differences in the instructional programs used in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools**

Table 4  
*Instructional Programs-Similarities and Differences*

High Performing Schools	Participating School	Both High and Low Performing Schools	Participating School	Low Performing Schools	Participating School
RTI	B	Professional development	BD	Scheduling	C
Mentor program for teachers and student	AB	Data	BC	Lesson Plans	C
Counseling	A	Specialists	ABC	Fundations	D
Monitoring	B	Student recognition/reward systems	ABCD	PBIS	CD
Rigorous instruction	B	Kagan Structures	AC	Employee Recognition	D
Tracking student data	B			Manipulatives	C
Parent workshops	A			Mobius Math	C
Big ideas	A			District Purchased	
TEI questions	B			Positive behavior program	CD
Tiered/differentiated instruction	AB			Technology (district purchased programs)	CD
Peer work	B				
Intervention	AB				
After school remediation	A				
Small group rotations	A				
Menus	B				
Technology (district purchased program) used with fidelity	AB				

*Note.* Table 4 shows the similarities and differences in instructional programs that are used in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools that participated in the study.

A summary of the table is as follows:

- School A implemented a counseling program for students. The school held workshops for parents in all content areas. Teachers in School A used Big Ideas to focus their instruction and utilized small group rotations during instructional time. School A had an after school remediation program.
- School B implemented the RTI model. Through the RTI process student data were tracked and rigorous instruction was put in place. Administration monitored to assure rigorous instruction was taking place in all classes. Throughout instruction teachers at School B used peer work, technology enhanced items, and menus.
- School A and School B had mentoring programs for their teachers and students. The schools both had a tiered, differentiated instructional program. Schools A and B had intervention programs in place. Both schools utilized district purchased reading and math computer programs with fidelity.
- School B and School D provided professional development for teachers.
- School B and School C used data to drive instruction.
- School A and School C implemented Kagan Structure throughout the instructional day.
- School A, School B, and School C used content specialists to enhance instruction.
- Schools A, School B, School C, and School D had student recognition and reward programs in place.
- School C looked at scheduling and lesson planning as part of the instructional program. Teachers at School C used manipulatives and the Mobius Math program.
- School D used Foundations as their early literacy program. There was a teacher recognition program in place at School D.
- School C and School D implemented PBIS and used a district purchased positive behavior program. Students at both schools used district purchased reading and math computer programs.

### **Other Instructional Factors**

Principals responded to the following questions, which identify other instructional factors that influence academic achievement:

1. What factors influence academic achievement at this school?

2. What one thing do you believe to be the most influential in the academic success at this school?

Third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers responded to the following questions which identify other instructional factors that influence academic achievement:

1. What factors do you feel influence academic achievement at your school?
2. What one thing do you believe to be the most influential in the academic success of the students in your classroom?

Responses to these questions were used to compare and contrast instructional factors that influence academic achievement in high and low performing Title I eligible schools.

### **Other instructional factors identified in high performing Title I eligible schools.**

Principals and teachers in School A and School B identified and described instructional factors within their schools that influence student academic performance.

- Participant AP: School A implemented grade level planning. Quarterly, grade level teachers looked at what was going to be taught for the quarter. Teachers met with the instructional team to create lessons that were rigorous (AP, ll. 2-9). “Looking at road maps making sure that teachers are teaching what their supposed to be teaching at that time and that they are not holding children back that could move on” (AP, ll. 10-12). During planning sessions teachers talked about safety nets and how they could be used to meet the needs of every child (AP, ll. 12-13).

Teachers at School A participated in data team meeting monthly and teachers were expected to maintain a data notebook (AP, ll. 23-24). “We track all of our students...” (AP, 1. 25). Based on these data, instruction was differentiated and interventions were implemented. Tutors and interventionists went into classrooms to double or triple dose students in reading and math instruction ( AP, ll. 31-37). As part of the intervention program School A had an employee in the computer lab that worked with students on computer based programs while the classroom teacher worked with small groups of students on remedial skills (AP, ll. 39-46).

The administration at School A went into classrooms daily to monitor instruction (AP, ll. 52-55). When they noted that a teacher needed assistance they sent members of the instructional team in to support the teachers (AP, ll. 55-59).

AP stated that the teachers at School A believed in their children (AP, l. 243). “They spend hours here in this building working with these kids and they believe, they have this belief that they want to be high achieving, they’re excited” (AP, ll. 244-246).

Parents at School A want their children to be successful (AP, ll. 249-250). “We don’t have a lot of them coming into the classrooms but they promote that learning and if you don’t have your parents on your side then you’re gonna struggle and they promote that” (AP, ll. 250-252). “Our parents are a big influence for us because they have high expectations too” (AP, ll. 254-255).

- Participant BP: BP stated that School B fully implemented response to intervention (RTI). “I think that that is one of the main factors because we faithfully followed the key components of that program” (BP, ll. 3-4). Teachers at School B constantly looked at student assessment data to inform instructional planning and delivery of instruction (BP, ll. 4-6).

BP stated that the teachers at School B believed that students could learn and perform at high levels. The teachers accepted accountability for making that happen (BP, ll. 8-10).

- Participants from Focus Group A: Teachers at School A stated that they had support from parents with homework and making sure students were prepared for school (ATF, ll. 1-2). Parents’ attitude toward education was a factor for student achievement (ATF, l. 2).

Teachers at School A stated that students were prepared for the grade level when they got to them. Students were reading on or close to grade level and had mastered the skills of the grade before (ATF, ll. 4-6).

Cross curricular and grade level planning influenced achievement. Teachers could emphasize information that students would need in other grade levels (ATF, ll. 6-12).

Teachers stated that making learning fun and building a class community made kids want to learn (ATF, ll. 59-63). Students’ attitude toward learning could help them succeed (ATF, 116-118). Teachers stated that students needed to know that teachers care about them (ATF, ll. 120-121). There has to be an environment of

mutual respect. “If you show them respect their gonna show it back...it’s that you show you care and that they know they have that one person that wow she really cares whether or not I do well” (ATF, ll. 127-131).

Having cohesive teams made a difference (ATF, ll. 134-136). “We are working together to enhance the lessons for all of the students in our grade level” (ATF, ll. 138-140).

- Participants of Focus Group B: School B had reinforcements put in place at the school (BTF, l. 2). Students received awards and certificates for meeting goals on instructional programs (BTF, ll. 2-4). Some awards were going to Golden Choral, attending a school carnival, and awards ceremonies for honor roll and attendance (BTF, ll. 3-10).

School B had an intervention program with a lot of support (BTF, ll. 10-11). Teachers were ingrained in the RTI process at School B. Students who scored eighty percent or less on any assessment received interventions (BTF, ll. 11-20). For each monthly assessment data were analyzed and remediation was conducted based on these data (BTF, ll. 60-66).

Students at School B justified their answers, which helped them take their time (BTF, ll. 73- 74). Teachers used the term justify starting in kindergarten so all students knew what it meant (BTF, ll. 76-77)

Teachers stated that it was important to listen to students and to relate to them (BTF, ll. 180). “Building a relationship with these kids is huge” (BTF, l. 182). “If they know that you care they are going to act a whole lot better for you. Instead of craving negative attention they’re gonna want positive attention and want to talk to you about issues” (BTF, ll. 187-198).

Teachers stated that teachers needed to recognize that students learn differently (BTF, ll. 191-192). “...it’s not a cookie cutter kind of thing” (BTF, l. 194).

### **Other instructional factors identified in low performing Title I eligible schools.**

Principals and teachers in School C and School D identified and described instructional factors within their schools that influence student academic performance.

- Participant CP: CP stated that teachers needed to meet students where they were (CP, ll. 2-3). Teacher needed to work together, and plan for the instructional program (CP, ll. 3-4). Parent involvement was also a factor that influenced student achievement (CP, l. 4).

CP stated that teachers have to have a relationship with the students and the administration has to have a relationship with teachers (CP, l. 132). Everyone in the school needs to feel safe, secure, and cared for (CP, ll. 133-134). The environment has to be engaging, positive, comfortable, and safe (CP, l. 136).

Keeping up with research and trends was important (CP, l. 149). Making sure that teachers were using best practices in instruction, were open to new ideas, and were willing to take risks in planning and instruction were factors that influenced achievement (CP, ll. 149-153).

- Participant DP: The primary factor at School D was instructional delivery (DP, l. 2). With that teacher attendance and the attitude of the teacher were important (DP, ll. 2-3). “The instruction can be there but if the attitude shows that the teacher isn’t really interested in teaching, even if it’s a good delivery, the kids get that” (DP, ll. 3-5).
- Participants of Focus Group C: Teachers at School C stated that a safe climate and parental involvement were factors that influence achievement (CTF, l. 2). “We have working parents but they are definitely available parents” (CTF, l. 5). Background knowledge of students was also influential in academic achievement (CTF, l. 7).

Teachers at School C stated that interaction between students was important (CTF, ll. 55). Students were more cohesive if they knew each other and cared about each other (CTF, ll. 57-58). Students’ level of confidence and motivation was a factor (CTF, ll. 59-60).

- Participants of Focus Group D: Parent involvement influenced achievement (DTF, l. 2). Incentives for good behavior and grades also influenced achievement (DTF, ll. 2-4).

Teachers at School D identified discipline and consequences as being factors that influenced achievement (DTF, ll. 4-8).

Teachers at School D stated that students’ intrinsic motivation was the most important factor that influenced achievement (DTF, ll. 64-67). “I think that is the



most important because we can push, push, push as much as we want but until they truly want it for themselves I don't think they're going to achieve their best" (DTF, ll. 65-67).

**Differences in other instructional factors identified in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools**

Table 5  
*Other Instructional Factors-Similarities and Differences*

High Performing Schools	Participating School	Both High and Low Performing Schools	Participating School	Low Performing Schools	Participating School
RTI	B	Planning	AC	Teacher attendance	D
Academic Rigor	AB	Instructional Delivery	BCD	Teacher attitude	D
Accountability	B	Differentiation	AC	Best Practices	C
Data driven decision making	AB	Teamwork/collaboration	AC	Open minded	C
Alignment	A	Parent Involvement	ACD	Risk taking	C
Intervention	AB	Reinforcement/awards	BD	Background knowledge	C
Monitoring	A	Building relationships	ABC	Discipline	D
Believing in students	AB			Consequences	D
Students are prepared	A			Intrinsic motivation	D
Cross curricular/grade level planning	A				
Justification	B				
Listen to students	B				
Know students	B				
Care about students	AB				
Make learning fun	A				
Recognizing that students learn differently	B				
Using a variety of strategies	AB				
Mutual respect	A				

Table 5 shows the similarities and differences in instructional factors that are identified in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools that participated in the study.

A summary of table 5 is as follows:

- School A held cross curricular and grade level planning. In this planning, assessments and instruction were aligned with the curriculum. Students came

prepared for their current grade level. Teachers made learning fun and fostered an atmosphere of mutual respect.

- School B used the RTI model and teachers were held accountable for rigorous instruction. Teachers used the strategy of justification of answers. Teachers recognized that all students learn differently. Teachers listened to their students and got to know their students.
- School A and School B provided academic rigor. Both schools used data driven decision making and provided interventions to their students. Teachers used a variety of instructional strategies. Teachers in Schools A and B believed in their students and cared about their students.
- School A and School C identified planning as a factor that influenced student achievement. Teachers in the schools worked together and differentiated instruction.
- Schools B and School D identified reinforcements and awards as factors that influenced academic achievement.
- School B, School C, and School D identified instructional delivery as a factor that influenced academic achievement.
- School A, School C, and School D identified parental involvement a factor that influenced academic achievement.
- School A, School B, and School C identified student and teacher relationships as a factor that influenced academic achievement.
- School C planned for instruction that utilized best practices. The principal of School C wanted teachers to be open minded and risk takers. Teachers at the school identified background knowledge of students as a factor that influenced academic achievement.
- School D identified teacher attendance, teacher attitude, discipline and consequences as factors that influenced academic achievement. Students' intrinsic motivation was also a factor.

## **Summary**

Four Title I eligible schools from a district in southeastern Virginia were selected to participate in this study. Two schools were deemed high performing and two were considered

low performing based on a three year review of SOL accreditation data. All four schools had similar free and reduced lunch rates and fall membership numbers.

Principals from each school were interviewed by the researcher. Focus group interviews consisting of third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers were conducted for each participating school. Through these interviews data were collected on instructional strategies, instructional program, and other instructional factors that influence academic performance in the schools.

Across the four schools it was noted that all schools had reward systems in place to motivate students. All four schools provided professional development for teachers in the area of instruction. The four schools all provided instruction in a small group setting at some point during the instructional day.

In the two low performing schools it was noted that Marzano strategies and Kagan structures were implemented throughout instruction. No specific strategies or structures were identified by the teachers or principals. Within the low performing schools, district purchased computer programs in the areas of reading and math were used by students. Other instructional programs such as Singapore Math, Foundations, and Mobius Math were being implemented. Other factors noted by the two low performing school that had an impact on student performance were teacher attendance, teacher attitude, being open minded, the students' background knowledge, the students' intrinsic motivation, and discipline and consequences.

In the two high performing schools there was a focus on using data to drive instruction. Data teams and grade level teams used student performance data, Bloom's taxonomy, and big ideas when planning for instruction to ensure the levels of academic rigor were appropriate. The schools used the instructional strategies of I can statements, interactive notebooks, explicit instruction, and compare and contrast. Both schools focused on enriching vocabulary. The two high performing schools provided intervention to their students through tiered, differentiated instruction. Both schools used district purchased computer programs in the areas of reading and math with fidelity. Both schools utilized all parts of the programs including the lessons that were provided for small group instruction. Both schools had mentor programs for their teachers and students and had workshops for parents. Other factors noted by the two high performing schools that impacted academic performance were that teachers had to use a variety of strategies because all students learn differently. Both schools stated that teachers have to believe in their students and the students need to know that the teachers care about them.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Findings, Implications, and Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to identify the differences in the instructional practices of high and low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a southeastern district in Virginia. Four schools were chosen to participate in the study. Two schools were identified as high performing and two schools were identified as low performing based on a three year review of SOL accreditation data. All schools had similar free and reduced lunch rates and fall membership numbers. The principals from each school were interviewed by the researcher and focus group interviews consisting of third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers were conducted. Data from these interviews were used to identify instructional strategies, instructional programs, and other instructional factors that influence academic performance throughout the schools.

#### **Research Questions**

The research in this study was based on one over-arching question with various sub-questions:

What school instructional practices influence student achievement in high and low performing Title I eligible schools?

- I. Instructional Strategies
  - a. What instructional strategies are being used in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What instructional strategies are being used in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - c. What differences, if any, are there in the instructional strategies of high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?
- II. Instructional Programs
  - a. What instructional programs are being used in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What instructional programs are being used in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?

- c. What differences, if any, are there in the instructional programs being used in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?
- III. Other instructional factors
- a. What other instructional factors are identified in high performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - b. What other instructional factors are identified in low performing Title I eligible elementary schools in a district in the southeast region of Virginia?
  - c. What differences, if any, are there in the other instructional factors identified in high and low achieving Title I eligible elementary schools?

## Findings

Based on the data collected in this study, the following findings were identified:

### Instructional Strategies

**Finding 1. Participants from high performing Title I schools focused on teaching their students enriching vocabulary.** Participant AP stated that teachers at School A focused on vocabulary with students. Each classroom contained content area word walls with visual representations for each word. Participant BP identified a focus on vocabulary as a power strategy that was utilized in all classes at School B. BP stated that in the primary grades there was a focus on sounding out word; from second grade on there was a focus on content and enriching vocabulary. Participants of focus group B identified vocabulary as a strategy used in all classrooms at School B.

Sobolak (2011) stated that children from low socio-economic homes enter school with 6,000 fewer words than their middle-class peers. Sobolak identified enriching, interactive vocabulary instruction as a means to overcome the vocabulary deficit, starting directly as students enter school (Sobolak, 2011).

Hoines (2001), in a study identifying instructional reading practices that were used in high achieving, high poverty schools, recognized vocabulary development as reading comprehension strategy that was utilized by teachers in high performing schools.

**Finding 2. High performing Title I schools used the strategies of note taking, explicit instruction, similarities and differences, nonlinguistic representation, graphic organizers, and cooperative learning.** Participant AP identified graphic organizers and content

area word walls with visuals as instructional strategies that were used school-wide at School A. Participant BP identified power strategies that were used school-wide at School B. These strategies include explicit instruction and compare and contrast which can also be called similarities and differences. Participants of focus group A discussed the use of interactive notebooks, graphic organizers, cooperative learning, and practice as instructional practices utilized by teachers at School A. Participants of focus group B stated that all teachers at School B were required to utilize identified power strategies. The strategies of explicit instruction, graphic organizers, and compare and contrast (similarities and differences) were utilized daily.

In a meta-analysis identifying instructional strategies that have a high probability of improving student achievement of all students, Marzano (2001), identified nine instructional strategies that have a strong impact on student achievement. Of the nine strategies identified by Marzano, six were identified as being utilized by teachers at Schools A and B.

Similarly, Hoines (2001) identified the use of graphic organizers as an instructional strategy that increases student performance in the area of reading comprehension. Howard (2007) identified cooperative learning as a strategy used to support language acquisition in children living in poverty.

**Finding 3. Participants from low performing Title I schools used non-specific Marzano Strategies and Non-Specific Kagan Structures.** Participant CP stated that teachers at School C implement Marzano Strategies and Kagan Structures throughout instruction. Participants of focus group C stated that they use Kagan Structures throughout instruction. Throughout the data collection process participants from Schools C and D did not identify the Kagan structures that are utilized within classrooms in the schools. Participants from School D stated that they use nonlinguistic representation such as graphic organizers, however they did not identify this as a Marzano Strategy.

Marzano (2001) identified nine instructional strategies that have a high probability of improving student achievement in all subjects. The identified strategies are: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representation, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and questions, cues, and advanced organizers.

Kagan Structures are specific strategies identified by Spencer Kagan. Kagan Structures are utilized throughout instruction to increase student engagement (Kagan, 2004).

**Finding 4. All participating Title I schools utilized small groups throughout instruction.** Participants from focus group A stated that tutors, specialist, and Title I interventionist work with students in small groups to target specific skills. Participant CP stated that administration at School C was trying to have more discussion about what is happening during small group instruction. Participants of focus Group C stated that they use small group instruction because it is a district expectation. Participants of focus group D stated that they focus of specific strands that students need help with during small group instruction.

Chambers (2012) found, through a study identifying factors that distinguished high performing elementary schools from low performing elementary schools, that low achieving schools provided 30 minutes of reading instruction through small groups. Contrarily, high performing elementary schools focused more time on reading and the majority of that time was spent in small group instruction.

### **Instructional Programs**

**Finding 5. High Performing Title I schools conducted mentorship programs for teachers and students.** Participant AP discussed two programs to support students at School A. Operation Hero was a program supporting students whose parents were deployed due to military duties. The military also provided School A with a counselor that helped students get acclimated to the school and their community. AP discussed parent workshops that were conducted to help parents understand how they could help their students at home. Participants of focus group A also discussed the parent workshops that were conducted at School A. Participant BP discussed providing mentoring for students. BP also discussed providing workshops for parents.

Riley (2008) identified elements of effective classroom instruction in high poverty urban schools. Like Schools A and B, schools participating in Riley's study conducted student mentorship programs for students.

**Finding 6. High performing Title I schools utilized computer based instructional programs with fidelity.** Participant AP stated that teachers at School A used technology enhanced items throughout instruction and on assessments. AP also discussed the use of The Accelerated Reader program at all grade levels. Participants of focus group A discussed the use of computer-based programs and interactive technology lessons throughout classrooms at School

A. Participants of focus group B discussed using reading and math computer based programs. Participants described how the elements of each program and how they were introduced to and utilized by all students.

Hattie (2009), through a meta-analysis, identified computer-assisted technology as a strategy that impacts student achievement. Hattie states that one advantage of the computer is that the method of teaching is different from the instruction of the classroom teacher (Hattie, 2009).

**Finding 7. Participants from low performing Title I schools used programs such as Foundations, Mobius Math, and Singapore Math, however participants did not explain how or when the programs were utilized.** Participant DP stated that teachers at School D received training on Singapore Math. Participant DP identified Foundations as the biggest program that is used at School D. Participants of focus group C stated that some teachers utilize Mobius Math in classrooms at School C. Teachers and administrators stated that Foundations, Mobius Math, and Singapore Math are utilized in classroom in Schools C and D. Teachers and administrators did not explain how these programs are utilized. There was also no explanation of the purpose for using these programs.

#### **Other Instructional Factors**

**Finding 8. Participants in high performing Title I schools used student performance data to drive instruction.** Participant BP spoke about the utilization of Response to Intervention in which teachers analyze student performance data to make decisions about instructional practices. Participant AP stated that data were tracked school-wide in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. AP stated that instruction was differentiated and interventions were implemented based on the data. Students at School A tracked their own data and set goals based on their performance data. Participants of focus group A stated that data from pre-assessments, independent practice and quick checks were used to determine the instructional practices that they would implement. Participants of focus group B stated that data from each monthly assessment were analyzed and remediation was conducted based on the data.

According to Reeves (2000) teachers and school leaders use data from their district to improve instruction and student achievement in their schools. Teachers and school leaders use system-wide and school-based data to identify challenges, identify potential solutions, and set goals for student achievement and improved teaching and leadership practices (Reeves, 2000).



According to Howard (2007), in a study looking at how teachers identify the learning needs of children with low-school readiness, all teacher participants used formative assessments to drive instruction. Participants in Howard's study used teacher made assessments, running records, and anecdotal records to direct instruction (Howard, 2007).

Riley (2008), in a study identifying elements of effective classroom instruction in high performing, high poverty urban schools, cited data driven decision making as a structure that supports effective classroom instruction. Riley found that in high performing schools professional development was centered on student data and data were used to improve student performance outcomes.

**Finding 9. Participants from high performing Title I schools believed in their students' abilities and cared about their students.** Participant AP stated that teachers at School A believed in their children. AP also stated that teachers wanted their students to be successful. Participant BP stated that teachers at School B believed that their students could learn and perform at high levels. Participants of focus group A stated that teachers have to build a classroom community and students need to know that their teachers care about them. Participants of focus group B stated that teachers have to build relationships with students. Participants said that students would work better for teachers if they knew that the teacher cared about them.

Similarly, Howard (2007) found that exemplary teachers, who educate children of poverty, develop relationships with their students and parents. Teachers, who develop these relationships with children who live in poverty and who have low school readiness skills, have fewer student referrals for special education services (Howard, 2007). Disadvantaged elementary students who feel connected to their teachers showed improvements in the areas of reading and vocabulary (Jensen, 2009).

**Finding 10. Participants from low performing Title I schools believed that discipline and consequences were factors that influenced academic achievement.** Participants of focus group D identified discipline and consequences as a factor that influences achievement. Participants stated that if students are not disciplined accordingly they will not change their behaviors. Similarly, consequences have to be in line with the students' behaviors. Participants stated that discipline has an impact on student achievement. Contrarily, Howard

(2007) found that exemplary teachers, educating student living in poverty, never separate students out for behavior issues.

**Finding 11. Participants from low performing Title I schools believed that students should be intrinsically motivated.** Participants of focus group D stated that being intrinsically motivated is the biggest factor that influences student achievement. Contrarily, Howard (2007) found that exemplary teachers who educate students living in poverty use positive reinforcements and celebrate successes.

**Finding 12. All participating Title I schools provided professional development to teachers.** Participant CP stated that teachers participated in grade level planning that had professional development embedded into it. Participant DP discussed professional development opportunities that had been provided to teachers in the areas of cooperative learning and Singapore Math. Participant BP stated that all teachers at School B participated in professional development on the utilization of the schools power strategies. New teachers received a mentor that assists them until they were able to implement the strategies independently. Participant AP stated that members of the schools instructional team provided individualized professional development to teachers in the areas that they needed assistance in. This was determined through observations conducted by the schools administration.

Johnson (2002), analyzed the components of the reading instructional programs of successful high poverty schools. Through his study he found that teachers in two schools participated in individual professional development opportunities and participated in opportunities to dialog with colleagues. Professional development was specific to the needs of the school (Johnson, 2002).

**Finding 13. All participating Title I schools implemented a student reward/recognition program.** Participant AP described incentive programs that were used at School A to motivate students. Students at School A could earn SOL Bucks for working hard and could receive a crunch bar for putting forth effort. Participants of focus group A noted recognition programs that were used at School A. Students at School A were recognized for making honor roll, for bringing up their grades, and for perfect attendance. Participant BP discussed reward/motivational programs that were held at School B. These rewards were given when students met benchmarks on supplementary programs. Participant CP discussed the use of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) with which students were recognized for

positive behaviors. Participant DP stated that School D utilized PBIS and students could earn character sharks if they were caught being good.

Levine and Lezotte (1990) identified appropriate reinforcements as an effective teaching practice. Howard (2007) also identified using positive reinforcements and celebrating successes as practices that exemplary teachers implement while educating students who live in poverty. Similarly, Riley (2008), showed that an element of effective classroom instruction in high performing, high poverty urban schools was having student recognition and displaying these recognitions throughout the school.

**Finding 14. All participating Title I schools identified parental involvement as a factor that influenced academic performance.** Participants AP and BP discussed workshops being conducted for parents to help support student learning. Participant AP stated that parents are a big influence and have high expectations for their students and the school. Participants from focus group A stated that parents' attitude toward education was a factor that influences student achievement. Participant CP and participants of focus group D identified parental involvement as a factor that influences student achievement.

Johnson (2002) found that successful, high-poverty schools identified parental involvement as a factor that influences school climate and academic success. Similarly, Howard (2007) found that exemplary teachers educating students living in poverty try to foster parental involvement.

### **Implications for Practice**

Based on the findings in this study, there are potential implications for principals and teachers serving in schools with high rates of students living in poverty.

- **Principals in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should provide regularly scheduled time for teachers and school level administrators to assess student performance data and to discuss instructional implications of these data.** According to data collected from principals and teachers of high achieving schools in this study, discussions around student performance data drive effective instructional practices and intervention programs. Student performance data shows the strengths and weakness of students throughout the content areas. Analyzing data and planning for instruction takes time that is structured for teachers and administrators to meet and

collaborate. Through scheduling common time for teachers and administrators to assess and discuss student performance data, principals can assure that discussions around student performance data are taking place and that appropriate strategies are identified to meet the needs of each student.

- **Teachers and administrators in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should maintain a system of documenting student performance data, instructional strategies that are to be implemented based on student performance data, and the impact of the instructional strategies on the students' performance.** Reeves (2000) states that teachers and leaders, at the classroom and school level, need to have access to accountability data. Teachers and principals of high achieving schools in this study were accountable for students' performance data. Teachers and principals of the schools tracked student data and had discussions about student performance and instructional strategies that were used to instruct students. Documenting student performance data, strategies to be implemented, and the impact of the strategies will help principals and teachers understand the specific needs of all students. Documenting in these areas will also show principals and teachers the instructional strategies that work best with individual students and groups of students. Student mastery of specific objectives can be identified and further areas of support can be implemented.
- **Teachers working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should focus on teaching content vocabulary and enriching vocabulary in all subject areas throughout the instructional day.** Students living in poverty enter school with a limited vocabulary compared to their middle class peers (Sobolak, 2011). In order to bridge this vocabulary gap, explicit instruction of vocabulary needs to take place in all classrooms at all grade levels (Sobolak, 2011). Marzano (2001) states that students should encounter words in context multiple times and that students should associate words with images.
- **Teachers working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should implement the instructional strategies of note taking, explicit instruction, similarities and differences, nonlinguistic representation, graphic organizers, and cooperative learning across all content area.** According teachers and

principals of high achieving schools in this study, teachers use the strategies of note taking, explicit instruction, similarities and differences, nonlinguistic representation, graphic organizers, and cooperative learning throughout daily instruction. According to Marzano (2001) these strategies have a high probability of enhancing the achievement of all students in all subjects.

- **Teachers working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should provide instruction in the small group setting.** Data collected through this study showed that high performing schools provided instruction to students in the small group setting.
- **Principals working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should assure that mentorship programs are in place for students within their schools.** Teachers and school administrators need to understand that external factors can influence student achievement. School A noted students needing support due to having parents serving in the military. The principal of School B noted that students need support due to having a lack of resources. Implementing mentorship programs that can assist students in coping with personal problems can help students with all other aspects the school day, including academic performance.
- **Teachers working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should implement computer-based programs with fidelity.** Computer programs can be a good resource for teachers to use throughout their instruction if they are used with fidelity. According to data collected from this study, teachers in high performing schools utilized the lessons and materials that were a part of their computer-based reading and math programs. Teachers in these schools used the data collected through these programs to drive their instruction. When teachers use programs with fidelity they can direct the learning of their students and address their areas of need.
- **Teachers working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should believe that their students can learn and should show students that they care about them.** Through data collected in this study, Principals and teachers of high achieving schools noted that one of the most important factors that influences student achievement is teachers believing that their students can learn and that student know that their teachers care about them. Teachers who are develop relationships with

students and share their belief that students can learn can buffer stressors that students living in poverty encounter in their lives (Jensen, 2009).

- **Principals working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should provide professional development opportunities for teachers based on the needs of the school and the needs of individual teachers.** Teachers need different levels of support based on their areas of strength and weakness. All schools in this study provided professional development based on specific programs and strategies that were utilized within the schools. The schools in this study that were considered high achieving also provided individualized professional development to teachers based on data collected from administrative observations. When principals expect teachers to implement specific strategies, it is imperative that teachers are trained on how to effectively implement those strategies.
- **Principals and teachers working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should implement reward/recognition programs that motivate students to work hard and achieve at high rates.** School systems should align their reward systems to promote the results that they are seeking (Reeves, 2000). Based on data collected in this study, schools aligned student reward systems around the behaviors that they were seeking. Schools recognized and rewarded students for meeting academic benchmarks, for showing effort, and for positive behavior. Until students reach a level where they are intrinsically motivated, administrators and teachers need to provide systems that will motivate students and recognize students for appropriate levels of performance.
- **Teachers working in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should implement all instructional strategies and instructional programs with fidelity.** Data collected in this study showed that teachers in high performing schools understood how to thoroughly implement instructional strategies and instructional programs throughout instruction. In contrast, teachers in low performing schools named instructional strategies and instructional programs without an explanation of how or why they are utilized. Teachers need to understand why and how to implement instructional strategies and programs and implement them purposefully throughout the instructional day.

- **Teachers and administrators in schools with high rates of students living in poverty should promote parental involvement.** Data collected in this study showed that parental involvement impacts student achievement. Through parent workshops schools help parents understand content that is being taught in school and ways to help their children at home. Students seeing their parents being involved in school activities shows them that education is important to their parents.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Data from this study revealed suggestions for future study. The following suggestions are recommended for further research in the area of educating students living in poverty:

1. In order to identify instructional strategies that are effective for all students living in poverty, a similar study could be conducted with a larger population. A comparative study, including school districts across Virginia, urban and rural, would identify instructional strategies that are utilized with a larger number of students living in poverty.
2. In order to further identify instructional strategies that are effective when teaching students living in poverty, a study could be conducted in which students were interviewed. This would provide the student perspective on how students feel they learn best.
3. A study that specifically identifies strategies that are utilized to help students living in poverty cope with external factors that influence academic achievement could be conducted. This would help school districts and school administrators and teachers prepare to address the needs students when they enter school.
4. In order to assist school administrators in providing effective professional development to teachers in the area of instructional strategies that increase academic performance of students living in poverty, a study could be conducted comparing types of professional development that are most effective for teachers.

### **Researcher's Reflections**

Throughout my educational career I have worked in Title I schools as a teacher and an administrator. With this I have faced the unique challenges that go along with educating students

living in poverty. It has always been interesting to me that some teachers seem to be more successful with working through these challenges than others. I also found it interesting as an administrator that Title I schools within the same district, with similar demographics, had drastically difference academic results.

When I first started the process of research, I thought that the struggle of teaching students in Title I schools was a discrepancy between how black students learn verses white students and was originally looking at strategies that are affective for teaching African American students. Through research I quickly learned that the broader issue was educating students of all races living in poverty, therefore, my research took a turn to studying instructional strategies that work when teaching students living in poverty.

When conducting this study the willingness of school to participate differed from school to school. Similarly, the thoroughness of answers and ability to explain what occurs in classrooms within schools differed significantly between schools. Both of the high performing Title I schools participating in this study were extremely willing to participate. Answers given to interview questions with all participants in the two schools where very definitive. Through interviewing participants it was very evident that administrators and teachers have a firm understanding of the instructional practices utilized throughout the schools. Contrarily, both low performing schools delayed participating in interviews. It was difficult to get teachers from both low performing schools to participate in this study. While answering interview questions Principals in these schools talked about what they would like their teachers to do rather than definitively what they are doing. Teachers interviewed in the two schools were able to identify programs and strategies, however at no time did they explain how they use the programs and strategies throughout instruction.

Throughout my research, I discovered factors that influence academic achievement are not limited strictly to instructional strategies; these are only a part of the puzzle. Due to identifying other factors that influence academic achievement in the data collection process, I found it relevant to include these factors in my findings. I found that instructional strategies alone were not responsible for the academic achievement of students living in poverty. The whole child approach of providing strategies for coping with problems within students' lives, providing motivation and recognition for students' effort and achievement, building caring and nurturing relationships between teachers and students, coupled with the implementation of



effective instructional strategies across all subject areas promotes high levels of student academic achievement in schools with high percentages of students living in poverty.

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**Appendix A**  
**Interview Questions for Principals Individual Interviews**

1. What factors influence academic achievement at this school?
2. What school-wide programs influence academic achievement at this school?
3. What school-wide practices are in place at this school that influence academic achievement?
4. What research based instructional strategies can be observed, across content areas, in classroom at this school?
5. What methods are used, at this school, to determine which school-wide instructional practices will be utilized?
6. What programs are in place at this school to promote high levels of academic achievement?
7. What one thing do you believe to be the most influential in the academic success at this school?

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions for Teachers Focus Group Interviews**

1. What factors do you feel influence student achievement at your school?
2. Tell me about the instructional practices that you use in your classroom.
3. What instructional programs are used in your classroom that leads to academic success?
4. What research based instructional practices can be observed in your classroom that carries across all content areas?
5. What methods do you use to determine which instructional practices to use?
6. What programs are in place at this school to promote high levels of academic achievement?
7. What one thing do you believe to be the most influential in the academic success of the students in your classroom?

## Appendix C

### Virginia Tech IRB Approval Memo



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email irb@vt.edu  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** March 10, 2015  
**TO:** Carol S Cash, Kristen Marie Nichols  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Instructional Strategies for Academic Success in High Poverty, High Performing Schools  
**IRB NUMBER:** 15-171

Effective March 9, 2015, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**  
Protocol Approval Date: **March 9, 2015**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **March 8, 2016**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **February 23, 2016**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

#### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*



## Appendix D

### School District Approval Letter

Department of Assessment, Research & Accountability

March 20, 2015

Ms. Kristen M. Nichols  
Doctoral candidate, Virginia Tech University  
[krismn1@vt.edu](mailto:krismn1@vt.edu)

Approval is granted to conduct the proposed study, *Instructional Strategies for Academic Success in High Poverty, High Performing Schools*, in fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Educational Leadership from Virginia Tech University. The proposed study meets the technical criteria following the Research and Survey Policy and must follow the stipulations below:

- Voluntary participation allows each participant—principal to decide individually whether to participate or withdraw at any time, without question, consequence, or follow-up.
- All participants and schools will remain anonymous in data and survey collection, and reporting results. Identifiable characteristics or linkage to the identity of any individual or school is prohibited.
- Approval does not constitute commitment of resources or the endorsement of the study or its findings by the school district or the School Board.
- Data collected and results will not become part of any principal, school, or district record. All research records must be locked in a secured location.
- The researcher will email a copy of the final report for the school district, and report any changes or problems while conducting the study, to

We look forward to your findings and contribution to instructional practice, program services, and achievement for *ALL* students.

Sincerely,

## **Appendix E**

### **Principal Letter**

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech and am conducting research to complete my dissertation. The research for my study focuses on instructional strategies that are being used in Title I schools that lead to students being successful academically.

I am seeking your permission to have your school participate in this study. All information about your school will remain anonymous.

This study will include interviews with school Principals and focus group interviews with teachers held at individual schools. Participants in the focus groups will include teachers in grades three, four, and five who have been teaching in their perspective grade levels for at least two school years. The interview conducted with Principals and focus groups will be audio taped. Information collected from these interviews will be confidential. I will be the only one who has access to the data recorded from these interviews.

If you chose to have your school participate in this study, you are invited to participate in the Principal interview. This interview will take approximately one hour and will be held at a time that is convenient for you.

If you have any questions about participating in this study, you may contact me at (757) 377-0340 or [knichols@nps.k12.va.us](mailto:knichols@nps.k12.va.us).

If you agree to have your school participate in this study, please contact me at the above email address.

Sincerely,

Kristen M. Nichols  
Doctoral Candidate  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

IRB # 15-171  
Institutional Review Board  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Dr. Moore, [moorer@vt.edu](mailto:moorer@vt.edu)  
(540) 231-4991

**Appendix F**  
**Teacher Letter**

Dear Teacher,

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech and am conducting research to complete my dissertation. The research for my study focuses on instructional strategies that are being used in Title I schools that lead to students being successful academically.

This study will include interviews with focus groups held at individual schools. Participants in the focus groups will include teachers in grades three, four, and five who have been teaching in their perspective grade levels for at least two school years. Information collected from these focus groups will be confidential. The interviews conducted with focus groups will be audio taped. I will be the only one who has access to the data recorded from these interviews.

I am inviting you to participate in the focus group that will be held at your school, directly after school hours. The focus group interview will take no more than an hour and a half. If you have any questions about the focus group interview, or about being in this study, you may contact me at (757) 377-0340 or [knichols@nps.k12.va.us](mailto:knichols@nps.k12.va.us).

If you are interested in participating in the focus group interview, please contact me at the above email address.

Sincerely,

Kristen M. Nichols  
Doctoral Candidate  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

IRB # 15-171  
Institutional Review Board  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Dr. Moore, [moorer@vt.edu](mailto:moorer@vt.edu)  
(540) 231-4991

# Appendix G

## Principal Consent Letter

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

**Title of Project:** Instructional Strategies for Academic Success in High Poverty, High Performing Schools

<b>Investigator(s):</b>	<b>Kristen Nichols</b>	<u><a href="mailto:krismn1@vt.edu">krismn1@vt.edu</a></u> (757)377-0340
	<b>Dr. Carol Cash</b>	<u><a href="mailto:ccash48@vt.edu">ccash48@vt.edu</a></u>

### I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of this research study is to identify instructional strategies that are being used in Title I schools that lead to the academic success of students. Participants in this study will include Principals and teachers from four Title I eligible schools. From each school, at least two teachers from each grade level, third, fourth, and fifth grades, will be participants in focus groups. The results of this research study will be used for completion of the investigator's dissertation and for possible publication.

### II. Procedures

Should you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in one interview conducted by the investigator. This interview will take place at your school, at a date and time that is convenient for you and the investigator. The interview will take approximately an hour to complete.

During the interview you will be asked to respond to a series of questions pertaining to instructional practices and strategies that are used within your school. Responses to these questions will be audio taped. The investigator will be the only person to have access to the audiotapes.

After your interview is complete, the investigator will transcribe your responses to the interview questions. You will be asked to review the transcriptions to assure that your responses are accurately recorded.

### III. Risks

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

### IV. Benefits

Findings from this study will provide valuable information about instructional strategies that have been effective when working with students who attend Title I eligible schools. These strategies could be shared with other schools, teachers, and divisions, to enhance student performance and inform instruction.

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

## **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

All responses to interview questions during the focus group interviews will remain anonymous. Names of schools, principals, and teachers will not be revealed within the study. In order to keep all responses anonymous, the investigator will use codes to represent the participants. For example, schools will be identified as School A, B, C, or D, Principals will be identified as AP, BP, CP or DP, and teachers will be identified as AT1, AT2, AT3, etc. All identifiable information and audio recordings will be stored in a fire safe locked box in the investigator's home. At no time will the investigator release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

## **VI. Compensation**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

## **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

## **VIII. Questions or Concerns**

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991.

**IX. Subject's Consent**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject printed name

# Appendix H

## Focus Group Consent Letter

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

**Title of Project:** Instructional Strategies for Academic Success in High Poverty, High Performing Schools

<b>Investigator(s):</b>	<b>Kristen Nichols</b>	<b><a href="mailto:krismn1@vt.edu">krismn1@vt.edu</a> / (757)377-0340</b>
	<b>Dr. Carol Cash</b>	<b><a href="mailto:ccash48@vt.edu">ccash48@vt.edu</a></b>

### I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of this research study is to identify instructional strategies that are being used in Title I schools that lead to the academic success of students. Participants in this study will include Principals and teachers from four Title I eligible schools. From each school, at least two teachers from each grade level, third, fourth, and fifth grades, will be participants in focus groups. The results of this research study will be used for completion of the investigator's dissertation and for possible publication.

### II. Procedures

Should you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in one focus group interview conducted by the investigator. This focus group interview will take place at the your school, at a date and time that is convenient for the group and the investigator. The focus group interview will take approximately an hour and a half to complete.

During the focus group interview the group will be asked to respond to a series of questions pertaining to instructional practices and strategies that are used within individual classrooms and school-wide. Responses to these questions will be audio taped. The investigator will be the only person to have access to the audiotapes. All information collected from the focus groups will be confidential.

### III. Risks

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

### IV. Benefits

Findings from this study will provide valuable information about instructional strategies that have been effective when working with students who attend Title I eligible schools. These strategies could be shared with other schools, teachers, and divisions, to enhance student performance and inform instruction.

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

## **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

All responses to interview questions during the focus group interviews will remain anonymous. Names of schools, principals, and teachers will not be revealed within the study. In order to keep all responses anonymous, the investigator will use codes to represent the participants. For example, schools will be identified as School A, B, C, or D, Principals will be identified as AP, BP, CP, or DP, and teachers will be identified as AT1, AT2, AT3, etc. All identifiable information and audio recordings will be stored in a fire safe locked box in the investigator's home. At no time will the investigator release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

## **VI. Compensation**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

## **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

## **VIII. Questions or Concerns**

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**IX. Subject's Consent**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject printed name