ACHIEVEMENT SPIRALS: UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFERENCES IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

by

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Alan Sadovnik

and approved by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Achievement Spirals: Understanding Academic Achievement Differences in an Urban School

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Alan Sadovnik

This case study examined achievement differences in an urban school where student achievement was high in K-5 but declined in Grades 6-8. School- and classroom-level factors, such as the principal’s leadership, school culture, school vision, qualified teachers, use of student performance data, curriculum and instructional practices, and external factors such as parent and community partnerships were examined.

Quantitative data were analyzed to identify differences in student achievement between transfer students from a feeder school and nontransfer students. Where differences existed, multiple and fixed effect regressions identified the most likely predictor(s) of the differences. Analysis identified a combination of contributing student-level factors: special education, Limited English Proficiency, transfer, race/ethnicity, and poverty, leading to the conclusion that the problem stemmed from a combination of factors. While transfer students contributed to depressed academic achievement in Mathematics, the decline had begun in Grade 4, before the merger of students. Thus, it was concluded that transfer students were not the sole cause of the overall decline in performance. Similar findings for Language Arts Literacy led to the same conclusion.
Analysis of qualitative data indicated that the effectiveness of the school was dependent on several key factors: the cited student-level factors, consistent and stable leadership, accessible resources (defined as support and time), teacher expectations, lower curricular rigor, and parental involvement. The effectiveness of the school was dependent on perceived accessible resources, such as support and time, and effective stable leadership. Inconsistent guidance and planning were reflected in the instability of leadership at the middle school level, inadequate time to plan and collaborate, pressure of accountability and minimal parental involvement. This challenge created an environment in which meeting the high expectations and accountability standards seemed unattainable and insurmountable, producing a less effective school.

The study provides important quantitative and qualitative evidence of school and student factors that can contribute to decline in achievement at an urban middle school, especially with regard to problems with the transfer component of No Child Left Behind. It was concluded that factors affecting student achievement are multidimensional and that solutions are very difficult but not insurmountable.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents and heroes, Leonard and Rita Gordon.
Acknowledgments

*The fight is not to the swift, but to those who persevere.* (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

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being the “wind beneath my wings” and for instilling the belief that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).
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Chapter 1: Problem Statement and Rationale for the Study

Schools in high-poverty districts are frequently viewed as failures. These schools frequently face the challenge of consistent low student performance, high dropout rates, poor attendance, unqualified teachers, dilapidated buildings, lack of resources, inadequate funding, and inefficient bureaucracies (Noguera, 2003). Urban school failure is “pervasive; it is endemic in the nation’s largest cities, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, and not uncommon in small cities such as East St. Louis, Poughkeepsie, Camden, and Compton . . . . Wherever poor people are concentrated and employment scarce, public schools are frequently in dire straits” (Noguera, 2003, p. 3).

Poverty is a major contributor to low student achievement. In fact, the poverty level in the United States is significant. In 2006 the official poverty rate was 12.3%, which means that 36.5 million people were living in poverty. Incidence was higher for children under 18 years old: 17.4% and 9.4 million children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006). These data are significant because poverty influences academic attainment by students.

Sociologists Lee and Burkam (2002) examined the cognitive abilities of African American and Caucasian children as the children began the educational process in kindergarten. Their findings indicated that race and ethnicity were related to socioeconomic status (SES). Other researchers have reported that children of minority groups, specifically Blacks and Hispanics, enter school both cognitively and socially disadvantaged (Lee & Burkam, 2002). These inequities are evident before children enroll in kindergarten and are magnified as they progress in school. Lee and Burkam (2002) stated that “34% of Black children and 29% of Hispanic children are in the lowest
quintile of SES, compared with only 9% of White children” (p. 2). This implies that Black and Hispanic children are more likely to be impoverished. The 2006 census data indicate that the poverty rate increased from 12.1% to 17.4% between 2002 and 2006. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). These data are compelling because children living in poverty may achieve less academically due to the detrimental effects of poverty.

There is a clear correlation between the poverty level and achievement attained in school. The data suggest that Black and low-income children achieve at a disproportionately lower level than their White counterparts. Figure 1 demonstrates this disparity. The figure illustrates that African American children enter school less prepared than their White counterparts. The data reveal that the reading skills of African American 4- and 5-year-olds were 27% below those of their White counterparts in 2002 and 2004 (Lee & Burkam, 2002; Rothstein, 2004). African American students scored at the 34th percentile in reading, while their White counterparts scored at the 50th percentile. Similarly, mathematics achievement was substantially lower: African American 4-and 5-year-olds, on average, scored at the 27th percentile, while their White counterparts scored at the 50th percentile.

As Rothstein (2004) stated, “Socioeconomic differences produce an achievement gap between students from different social classes” (p. 14). Lower-class children usually enter school less equipped academically and with fewer resources than their middle-class counterparts. Thus, children from lower social classes and from many racial and ethnic minorities, even in the best schools, will achieve less, on average, than middle-class children (Rothstein, 2004, p. 14).
Figure 1. Comparison of reading and mathematics skills of Black and White students at the start of kindergarten. The reading and mathematics performance of Black students has been normalized to the reading and mathematics performance of White students. Source: (a) Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children Begin School, by V. E. Lee & D. T. Burkam, 2002, Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute; (b) Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap, by R. Rothstein, 2004, New York, NY: Teachers College.

Nevertheless, some schools in high-poverty districts are performing at a high rate. One such school is the Summit School (pseudonym) in Newark, New Jersey, which is the focus school of this study. However, performance rates are not necessarily simple and straightforward. For example, students at Summit School perform well in Grades K-5 but performance declines significantly in Grades 6-8. This raises the question, What factors contribute to within-school differences in academic achievement?

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that explain within-school achievement differences in a school with high achievement on the K-5 level and
declining achievement on the 6-8 level. The study explored school- and classroom-level factors and family and community factors; it examined student-level data such as the differences between K-5 students and 6-8 transfer students’ achievement, as well as the effects of student background, including race and ethnicity, on academic achievement.

**The Effective School Movement**

While earlier effective school literature (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Cohen, 1983; Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1982, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1986; Klitgaard & Hall, 1974; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Weber, 1971) suggest common characteristics of effective schools, including strong principal leadership, high expectations of students, quality instructional program, and a structured and safe environment, to be key in promoting student achievement, later effective school literature (Andrews & Morefield, 1991; Bell, 2001; Marzano, 2003; Purkey & Smith, 1983) has expanded these findings to be more inclusive of other factors, such as shared leadership among administrators, faculty and parents, data assessment, clear goals, collaborative models with teachers involved in decision making, collaborative planning and collegial relationship, sense of community, faculty and students supportive of the school’s vision and mission, and parental and community involvement. These findings support the premise of this study that examined within-school academic differences through the lens of the effective school literature.

The phenomenon of effective urban schools is not a recent notion. In fact, over the past 30 years, scholars have analyzed the characteristics of effective and high-performing schools serving low-income students. Ronald Edmonds was one of the preeminent scholars of the effective schools movement and stressed equity and the
“mastery of basic skills” as an important component in producing effective schools (Edmonds, 1979a, p. 15). The effective schools movement evolved in response to the Coleman Report in 1966, which argued that schools had little to do with students’ achievement. The authors of the report maintained that family background was critical and more significant than schools in making a difference in the academic achievement of students (Coleman, 1966).

Edmonds, one of the founders of the research on effective schools, rejected the Coleman report conclusion and argued that equity and “mastery of basic skills” were crucial to creating effective schools. Edmonds argued,

By equity I mean a simple sense of fairness in the distribution of the primary goods and services that characterize our social order . . . . Equitable public schooling begins by teaching poor children what their parents want them to know and ends by teaching poor children at least as well as it teaches middle class children. (p. 15).

It should be noted that the Coleman group later rejected the position espoused in its report. They refuted this position in comparisons of public, Catholic, and private schools in the 1980s (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982).

The early research findings of Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, and others (Edmonds, 1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1982; Edmonds & Fredericksen, 1978; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978) challenged the genetic/familial explanations of differences in outcomes [espoused by Coleman, 1966]. [Thus], by identifying schools that were effective with children, regardless of family income or ethnic status, the effective

As the movement evolved over the next three decades (beginning in the early 1970s), the definition of effective schools also changed to focus not only on mastering the basic skills but also on increasing problem-solving and analytical skills. The initial characteristics were also expounded and became more inclusive of other factors. For example, the early effective schools movement suggested several factors that contribute to school success, including strong principal leadership, quality instructional program, high expectations of students, and a structured and safe school environment (Brookover et al., 1979; Cohen, 1983; Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1982, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1986; Klitgaard & Hall, 1974; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Weber, 1971).

More recently, however, there has been a shift in this paradigm. While the early conceptualizations of effective schools were most concerned with the achievement of basic skills of minority students, some schools and districts in this movement have already reached a high level of effectiveness in basic skills . . . [thus,] working within this framework, some have redefined what they mean as basic to include higher-order thinking skills, problem solving, creativity . . . as part of their own local definitions of “effectiveness.” (Peterson & Lezotte, 1991, p. 130)

Consequently, the effective schools movement has developed specific criteria based on best practices to effectively educate students in high-poverty districts and characteristics of successful high-poverty schools.
Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines the reasons student achievement in an urban K-8 school with high achievement at the K-5 levels declines at the 6-8 levels. Specifically, it investigates within-school differences of achievement through the lens of the effective school literature. It further examines how an effective school at the K-5 level responds to the problem of declining scores at the 6-8 levels. Finally, it provides policy recommendations related to the transfer component of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Although numerous studies have examined the characteristics of effective schools, the effective school movement, and achievement differences among schools (Andrews & Morefield, 1991; Bell, 2001; Bliss, Firestone, & Richards, 1991; Cohen, 1983; Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1982, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1986; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Marzano, 2003; Peterson & Lezotte, 1991; Purkey & Smith, 1983), little of this research has connected the role of the effective school literature in understanding within-school academic achievement.

While Summit School is successful on the K-5 level, it is less effective on the 6-8 level. This research was designed to understand the question of within-school differences and the factors that interact at the K-5 level to produce positive gains in student achievement. The conceptual integrative model is based on research reported in the effective school literature. It conceptualizes the interrelationships among eight variables prominently displayed in effective school and proposes that these factors engage in an interactive process to impact student achievement. Equally, this research was designed to
understand whether these factors were exemplified on the 6-8 level, since student performance is less effective there.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and student levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?

RQ2: What factors explain the achievement differences at Summit School?

   SQ2a: How does the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in Grades 6 to 8?

   SQ2b: How do school administrators, teachers, and parents respond to the difference in student achievement between Grades K-5 and Grades 6-8?

Table 1 describes the processes and research questions for the study (the processes explain the factors examined to understand the research questions).

The *processes* examined were (a) classroom-level factors: qualified or tenured faculty, curriculum and instructional practices, teacher expectations, data-driven assessment, accountability, teacher collaboration, and professional development, related to the achievement differences of this school; (b) microlevel/school factors: instructional and transformational leadership, clear vision/mission, school culture, related to the achievement of this school; and (c) outside school factors: parental and community involvement, and student and family culture, related to achievement differences of this school.

The dependent variable was student achievement. The independent variables were (a) student demographics: race, ethnicity, gender, and SES; (b) leadership: instructional
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<td>SQ2a: How does the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in Grades 6 to 8?</td>
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<td>SQ2b: How do school administrators, teachers, and parents respond to the difference in student achievement between Grades K-5 and Grades 6-8?</td>
<td><strong>Processes/factors</strong>: academic achievement, curriculum and instructional practices, academic preparation: teacher expectation, special education classification, socioeconomic status, demographics</td>
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and transformational; (c) curriculum and instructional practices; (d) qualified/tenured teachers; (e) professional development and faculty collaboration; (f) data-driven assessment/accountability; (g) school culture; (h) high expectations; (i) school vision/mission; (j) parental and community involvement; and (k) parent and student culture.
For the selection purpose of this study, *an effective low-income school* was defined, based on the standards of NCLB and the New Jersey State Department of Education School Report Cards for the 2007 and 2008 academic years, as a school where students achieved the required state standard for adequate yearly progress (AYP). That is, on the elementary level 73% of the students were proficient in Language Arts Literacy and 69% of the students were proficient in Mathematics. Likewise, on the middle school level, 72% of the students were proficient in Language Arts Literacy and 61% were proficient in mathematics (New Jersey Department of Education, 2008b). Summit School achieved student proficiency scores above what was predicted by controlling for student demographic characteristics (i.e., race, ethnicity, SES and poverty). An in-depth discussion of the selection criteria is provided in the methods section.

This study examined whether and how the school incorporates the conceptual integrative model to explain within-school differences in achievement. Other components, such as the school leadership, quality of the instructional program, school culture, clear and focused vision, parent and community partnerships, and the professional development and collaboration of faculty, were examined to explain the effectiveness of Summit School in terms of student achievement. While test scores are but one measure of school effectiveness, given their centrality under NCLB accountability, they are one mechanism to assess the effectiveness of schools. The purpose of this study was to examine whether the characteristics outlined in the effective school literature explained the school’s test scores. Components such as the school leadership, quality of the instructional program, school culture, clear vision/mission, parent and community partnerships, and the professional development and collaboration
of faculty should, according to the literature, provide a context for understanding the effectiveness of Summit School. This study focuses primarily on within-school differences rather than between-school differences. That is, how can achievement differences among students in the same school be explained?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Components of Effective Schools

Over the past three decades, researchers have analyzed the characteristics of effective and high-performing schools serving low-income populations. Edmonds (1983) was one of the preeminent researchers examining the characteristics of effective urban schools and poor children. Edmonds focused on equity for disadvantaged students and contended that schools were a key component in providing quality education to at-risk children. As Edmonds (1983) stated, “The great problem in schooling is that we know how to teach in ways that can keep some children from learning almost anything, and we often choose to thus proceed when dealing with the children of the poor” (p. 22). Several studies have examined the characteristics of effective schools and the effective schools movement (Andrews & Morefield, 1991; Bell, 2001; Bliss et al., 1991; Cohen, 1983; Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1982, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1986; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Marzano, 2003; Peterson & Lezotte, 1991; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Their findings suggest common factors essential to the basic tenets of school effectiveness: strong principal leadership, quality instructional program, high expectations of students, and a structured and safe school environment.

Edmonds (1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1982, 1983) argued that equity, instructional leadership, teacher expectations, and school climate are key factors in student achievement. Edmonds concluded that within-school factors have a profound impact on student achievement. Equally important, he stated that the following factors are crucial for school success: “the principal’s leadership and focus on quality instruction,” “a strong focus on instructional leadership,” “a structured and safe climate conducive to teaching
and learning,” “teacher expectations,” and “student performance data employed to evaluate and adjust instruction and curriculum” (Edmonds, 1982, p. 4). Edmonds suggested that these factors must “work in collaboration with each other to promote effective schools” (p. 4).

Similarly, Cohen examined how school-related factors contributed to student achievement based on the work of Good and Brophy (1986). Cohen (as cited in Good & Brophy, 1986) proposed three characteristics of effective schools:

First, school effectiveness is clearly dependent upon effective classroom teaching; second, school effectiveness requires the careful coordination and management of the instructional program at the building level; and finally, effective schools generate a sense of shared values and culture among both students and staff. (p. 581)

Marzano (2003) investigated factors most significant to school effectiveness and student achievement. His research indicated that, of the three factors (school-level, teacher-level, and student-level), school-level factors had the most influential impact on school effectiveness and student achievement. He contended that on the school level the important criteria were “(1) guaranteed and viable curriculum (2) challenging goals and effective feedback including high expectations (3) parent and community involvement (4) safe and orderly environment (5) collegiality and professionalism” (Marzano, 2003, p. 10). While Marzano’s findings were similar to Cohen’s results, Marzano further analyzed his findings and reported that, of the three factors influencing student performance, school-level factors had the most salient influence on student achievement.
Several scholars (Brookover et al., 1979; Bell, 2001; Cohen, 1983; Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1982, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1986; Klitgaard & Hall, 1974; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Marzano, 2003; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Weber, 1971) proposed similar foundational characteristics of effective schools. Although some scholars have added components to their definitions of effective schools, the basic tenets espoused by Edmonds in the 1970s seem to still be relevant. For example, Marzano’s definition of effective schools was inclusive of the basic principles of the effective school movement. However, he argued that parent and community involvement were also necessary in the building of the effective school.

Three goals define effective parental and community involvement (a) communication, (b) participation (in day-to-day running of school such as working as teacher aides or guest lectures, volunteering); and (c) governance (requires establishment of specific structures that allow parents and community some voice in key school decisions. (Marzano, 2003, p. 10)

While Marzano maintained the necessity of parental and community involvement on the school level, he contended that home environment and family background had less effect on school effectiveness and student achievement. Marzano’s findings mirrored Good and Brophy’s conclusion about effective schools, but disputed the infamous Coleman Report of 1966, which maintained that family background was critical and more significant than schools in making a difference in the academic achievement of students. Still, this was a contentious issue. While the effective schools research indicated that schools were significant in making a difference in the child’s academic achievement and school effectiveness, much of the sociological research (Anyon, 1997; Lareau, 2003; Lee
& Burkam, 2002; Rothstein, 2004) suggested, similar to the Coleman Report, that the family had a significant effect on student achievement. While acknowledging that factors such as poverty, SES, race, and class affect student achievement, it would be foolhardy not to acknowledge the role of schools in student performances.

On a similar note, Bell (2001) investigated the characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools. Bell discussed the outcome of the High-Performing, High-Poverty Symposium in California, which included about 200 of the state’s education leaders collaborating with 12 California High-Performing, High-Poverty School Leaders. The results indicated 14 common factors inherent in high-performing, high-poverty schools:

- Implement rigorous standards for all students as the school’s main goal;
- Focus on delivery of high-quality teaching and learning for all students;
- Emphasize hard work, high expectations and persistence;
- Promote discipline and a safe orderly environment as key to learning;
- Make district support evident and essential;
- Have principals who are models of strong instructional leadership;
- Have principals who are persistent and innovative in obtaining resources to serve students’ needs;
- Share leadership among administrators, faculty and parents;
- Collaborate on school goals and professional development;
- Regularly use assessment as a diagnostic tool to reinforce the school’s academic goals;
- Intervene early and often to promote the academic success of all students;
- Promote a policy of inclusiveness and a sense of family;
• Work actively with parents to extend the mission of the school into the home;

• Help faculty and students see themselves as part of the system as a whole through articulation of the academic program across grade levels. (as cited in Bell, 2001, p. 10)

Bell noted that these findings “reflected similar findings in the current research on teaching and learning in high-performing, high-poverty schools” (p. 9). However, it was clear that specific characteristics were common to high-performing, high-poverty schools in contributing to their effectiveness.

The Center for Public Education (2005), in their investigation of high-performing, high-poverty schools, found seven key factors that contributed to school effectiveness:

• Schools and staff support the belief that all students can and will learn;

• Ongoing assessment in the school and classrooms allows teachers to individualize instruction for students, aligning curriculum with instruction and assessment provides teachers with a successful system, school leadership promotes a collaborative model with teachers involved in decision making;

• Teachers collaborate across grade levels and curriculum areas to ensure that teachers and students receive the support they need;

• Classrooms with highly qualified teachers enable students to succeed;

• Family involvement in a child’s education positively affects student achievement. (p. 1)
These characteristics were the foundational tenets in the effective schools movement. As Peterson and Lezotte (1991) suggested, the “early work in school improvement based on the effective schools research and the writings of Edmonds assumed that an effective school was one defined by both quality educational programs and equity of achievement across different subsets of students” (p. 129). Similarly, Firestone (1991) noted that the effective school research had remained closely aligned with the early principles of what constituted effective schools.

Ninety-two percent of the effective schools programs reported that they emphasized instructional leadership and raising staff expectations, 88 to 89 percent monitored student achievement and stressed basic skills acquisition, and 76 percent worked on developing a safe and orderly school environment. (p. 16)

Consequently, many of the standards of the effective schools movement consisted of factors related to improving student achievement. Thus, inputs, such as quality instructional program, strong principal leadership, collaboration of faculty on school goals, high expectations that all children can achieve, and structured and disciplined environment, all contributed to the output of improved student performance and effective schools.

**Role of Leadership**

Another central component in the effective school research was the role of leadership. Numerous studies have examined the role of leadership on effective schools and students’ achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Findings from these researchers suggested that leaders played an integral role in the schools’ effectiveness. The current study focused on two of the
more commonly discussed forms of leadership: transformational and instructional leadership. Both forms were examined related to their effectiveness in improving high-poverty schools.

Two prominent frameworks espoused in the scholarly literature are the *instructional leadership model* and the *transformational leadership model*. It is necessary to understand the differences between these frameworks. Figure 2 summarizes the distinctions between these models based according to Hallinger (2003) and explains how these components relate to the current research questions.

This model explains the differences between the instructional and transformational forms of leadership, but it is essential that effective high-poverty schools incorporate a mix of transformational and instructional leadership. This study investigated this concept, guided by research question 1: *What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and students’ levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?*

This study explored school-level factors that contribute to effective schools. That is, how do school- and classroom-level factors described in the effective schools literature exist in Summit School? These included microlevel/school factors: principal leadership (instructional and transformational), a clear vision and mission and school culture to determine how these factors were related to the effectiveness of this school.

**Instructional Leadership**

The instructional leadership model predominated the field of education in the 1980s as the framework that would reform low-performing schools. This body of research “identified strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Leadership (IL)</th>
<th>Transformational Leadership (TL)</th>
<th>Differences and Similarities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articulate and communicate clear school goals</td>
<td>Clear vision</td>
<td>IL model emphasizes clarity and organizational nature of shared goals, set either by the principal or by and with staff and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate curriculum</td>
<td>Shared school goals</td>
<td>TL model emphasizes linkage between personal goals and shared organizational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervise and evaluate instruction</td>
<td>No equivalent elements for these coordination and control functions in the TL model. TL model assumes others will carry these out as a function of their roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor student progress</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect instructional time</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide incentives for learners and teachers</td>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Similar focus on ensuring that rewards are aligned with mission of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide professional development for teachers</td>
<td>Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>IL model focuses on training and development aligned to school mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture building</td>
<td>IL model focuses on culture building but subsumed within the school climate dimension</td>
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from the principal as a characteristic of elementary schools that were effective at teaching children in poor urban communities” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 329). The role of the principal emerged as a crucial and determinant factor in promoting and implementing change in low-performing schools. Research consistently found that “the skillful leadership of school principals was a key contributing factor when it came to explaining successful change, school improvement, or school effectiveness” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 331). As Hallinger (2003) noted, “The instructional leadership model shaped the thinking about effective principal leadership disseminated in the 1980s and early 1990s internationally” (p. 329).

Hallinger and Heck (1998) analyzed extensive empirical evidence of the principal’s contribution to school effectiveness during the period 1980-1995. Their findings indicated that school leadership influenced the organizational structure in four dimensions:

1. Purposes and goals, which focused on the vision, mission, and setting the goals of the institution. Thus, the school leader’s influence on student achievement and school effectiveness was demonstrated through mediated effects, such as the ability to motivate teachers.

2. Structure and social networks, this implied that there was a synergy between the organizational functions and the network relationships of the individuals.

3. The people: It was clear that a central role of the administrative function involved the interaction of people in the organization, including teachers, students, parents, and community members.
4. Organizational culture, which signified the influence of the values and meanings of an organization as it motivated and encouraged people to change their behavior to be more aligned with the culture and vision of the organization. (p. 171)

Although, Hallinger and Heck (1998) concluded that principals demonstrated a significant but indirect influence on school effectiveness, they maintained that the difference was “statistically significant and supported the general belief among educators that principals contributed to school effectiveness and improvement” (p. 157).

Still, the definition and parameters of instructional leadership in the scholarly review suggested a divergent and ambiguous perspective. For example, the early research on principal instructional leadership had been concerned with “the relationship of isolated personal traits of administrators (e.g., gender, training, locus of control, leadership style) that correlated with successful schools” (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990, p. 96). However, these studies had claimed “a single dimension (leadership style) or two-factor model (initiating structure and consideration), while generally ignoring the context of the school” (Heck et al., 1990, p. 96). Other studies had proposed a multidimensional approach to leadership. For example, Heck et al. (1990) proposed a theoretical model of principal leadership that demonstrated other contingent factors that may influence student achievement (Figure 3).

The model illustrates the indirect effect of instructional leadership on student achievement. It further suggests that a multidimensional approach of instructional leadership, governance and school climate inclusive of the school mission and goals and
school culture contains mediated factors that also promote student achievement (Heck et al., 1990, p. 100).

Equally, results reported by Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) indicated that the school principal’s instructional leadership demonstrated no direct effect on student achievement. However, the results were consistent with prior findings that “the principal could have an indirect effect on school effectiveness through actions that shape the school’s learning climate” (p. 527). Hallinger et al. (1996) concluded that “the principal’s role in school effectiveness position the principal’s leadership behavior in the context of the school organization and its environment” (p. 527). They further stated that “it assessed leadership effects on student achievement through mediating variables” (p. 527). Consequently, the principal’s leadership promoted school improvement through other
variables, such as the fostered culture, goal consensus, teacher empowerment, and building the organizational capacity—all aspects of the transformational model.

While the extant literature on instructional leadership suggested an ambiguous and indirect role in improving student performance and school effectiveness, it ascertained that instructional leadership played a viable role and was essential in improving school effectiveness. The next section discusses the scholarly work on transformational leadership and its role in influencing academic achievement and school effectiveness.

**Transformational Leadership**

Several themes emerged from the scholarly review of transformational leadership: empowerment, shared leadership, consensus of goals, change agents, organizational learning, and distributed leadership. Transformational leadership evolved in the early 1990s as a vehicle to reform schools. The emergence of the transformational model shifted the focus in the educational field from the 1980s dominant notion of the principal as the instructional leader. Moreover, it shifted the emphasis from the administrator as the sole power structure for improving student achievement and creating effective schools.

Transformational leaders played a key role in precipitating change (Marks & Printy, 2003). Bass and Avolio espoused four attributes of the transformational leader: “charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” (1994, as cited in Lunenburg, 2003, p. 2). These factors fostered the production and innovation of change in the organization. According to Marks and Printy (2003), transformational leaders “motivated followers by raising their
consciousness about the importance of organizational goals and by inspiring them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization” (p. 375).

Transformational leadership is thus viewed as an innovative mechanism that could transform an organization. For example, Leithwood (1994) examined transformational leadership and its effect on school restructuring. Leithwood’s research suggested that principals who were engaged in transformational leadership were effective through their influence on vision building, fostering group goals, providing individualized support, and intellectual stimulation. These components were consistent with Bass’s and Avolio’s criteria (1994, as cited in Lunenburg, 2003) stipulated for effective transformational leadership: charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Leithwood’s (1994) results indicated that “transformational leadership practices, had significant direct and indirect effects on school-restructuring initiatives and teacher-perceived students outcomes” (p. 506).

Transformational leadership had strong direct and indirect effects on teachers’ personal goals. These goals, in turn, had strong effects on teachers’ context beliefs and weaker but still significant effects on teachers’ capacity beliefs. In school conditions typically had the strongest direct effects on most of the dependent variables in our studies (regression coefficients in the .30 to .50 range), and these conditions were, in turn, strongly and directly influenced by transformational leadership practices (regression coefficients in the .60 to .70 range). Organizational learning was strongly influenced by transformational leadership. (Leithwood, 1994, p. 506)
Another emerging theme from the transformational leadership framework was the role of the principal as change agent. This role, according to Witziers et al. (2003), “arose from the notion that principals should not only perform tasks related to coordination and evaluation of the educational system but also in relation to further developing the educational system via transformation of the school culture” (p. 403). The power of school culture in influencing change played a significant role in the transformational leadership framework. As Purkey and Smith (1983) suggested, “An academically effective school was distinguished by its culture: a structure, process, and climate of values and norms that emphasized successful teaching and learning” (p. 442).

Lucas (2002) contended that principal transformational leadership influenced the school culture by increasing the teachers’ level of perception and knowledge of the organizational structure, in addition to empowering the teachers. Thus, if teachers were empowered and support the vision, they were more likely to engage in activities that would benefit the school on a larger scale, which increased the organizational capacity. Lucas claimed that the transformational principal “facilitated this focus upon culture by creating parallel learning systems that promoted organizational reflection and change” (p. 23). Consequently, “leaders who could embody and put into practice these transformational behaviors created school cultures that engendered purpose, commitment, and creativity” (Lucas, 2002, p. 23). The transformational leadership model is illustrated in Figure 4.

Hallinger’s model of transformational leadership alludes to the school culture playing an integral role in school effectiveness. This idea related to the first research
question in the current study, *What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and students’ levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 level?* Micro-level/school factors include principal leadership (instructional and transformational), a clear vision and mission, and school culture. How are these factors related to the effectiveness of the school that is the focus of this study? That is, do the administrators of Summit School facilitate the leadership characteristics, as evidenced in the literature, and do these factors contribute to the effectiveness of Summit School on the K-5 level? Moreover, is it evidenced at Summit School that school culture and a clear vision and mission relate to the effectiveness of this school on the K-5 level?

Hallinger (2003) contended that transformational leadership employs collaborative effort to improve academic achievement and school effectiveness. As shown in Figure 5, Hallinger suggested that these characteristics were necessary for promoting the transformational leader’s role in the organization. Thus, the principal is not
the sole leader in creating an effective school but, under the principal’s leadership, other essential factors are utilized to motivate the faculty to partake in the vision. Hallinger noted that behavioral components, “such as individualized support, intellectual stimulation, and personal vision suggest that the model is grounded in understanding the needs of individual staff rather than coordinating and controlling them towards the organization’s desired ends” (p. 337).

Hallinger (2003) reported that transformational leaders in his study “fostered a climate in which teachers collaborated and engaged in continuous learning with their
colleagues” (p. 338). Teacher collaboration was an essential component to school effectiveness because it allowed teachers to share best practices and empowered them to take on leadership roles and to develop solutions to school challenges. Hence, as the transformational literature suggests, the principal plays a key role in fostering the change that is needed to generate effective schools and improved student achievement.

Lucas (2002) investigated the premise of transformational leadership, specifically the relationships among principal, the school leadership team, and school culture. The data analysis was mainly quantitative and utilized survey data to determine

(a) if any direct relationships existed between principal transformational leadership and school leadership team transformational leadership, (b) if any direct relationships existed between principal transformational leadership and school culture, (c) if any direct relationships existed between school leadership team transformational leadership and school culture, and (d) if school leadership team transformational leadership either moderated or mediated the relationships between principal transformational leadership behavior and school culture. (p. 4)

Lucas’s findings, similar to those in prior studies, revealed that the principal was the key figure in articulating and executing the vision of the school. Moreover, the principal was integral in creating a school culture, which facilitated teacher collaboration and the goals of the group. The model of collaborative transformational leadership and school culture shown in Figure 5 provided insight into Lucas’s results.

Culture

This model illustrated the collaborative effort and relationship that transpired among the principal leadership, leadership team, and school culture. From a
transformational leadership perspective, the model based on Lucas’s (2002) findings led to the following conclusion:

The principal seems to be the primary source of *identifying and articulating a vision* and *providing an appropriate model*, although in two instances—both within the culture factor of collaborative leadership—the leadership team mediates the principal’s influence upon school culture;

The leadership team seems to be the primary source of *providing intellectual stimulation* and *holding high expectations*; however, *providing intellectual stimulation* seems to be the weakest, or least predictive, factor of transformational leadership within the study;

There is a mix of principal and leadership team influence as sources of *fostering commitment to group goals* and *providing individualized support.* [emphasis in the original] (p. 20)

Examining the results from the perspective of school culture suggested the following to (Lucas, 2002):

The leadership team, rather than the principal, seemed to exert the greatest influence upon *collaborative leadership* and *learning partnership*; however, it should be noted that the leadership team mediated the impact of two principal transformational leadership behaviors—identifying and articulating a vision and providing an appropriate model—upon collaborative leadership. . . . The principal, rather than the leadership team, seems to exert the greatest influence upon *teacher collaboration* and *unity of purpose.* [emphasis in original] (p. 21)
The implication of these findings substantiated the conclusions reported in numerous studies (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck et al., 1990; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Lucas, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Witziers et al., 2003): The principal was vital in executing the vision and facilitating the culture of the school. The results indicated that the principal played an integral role in creating the culture of the school and empowering its constituents. These findings, as reported by Lucas (2002), also “supported the theoretical literature regarding principal transformational leadership as a significant influence upon the development of teachers and teacher leaders” (p. 21). As Alexander and Keller noted, “Transformational principals proactively recognized the leadership abilities of others in the school, help brought about a shared vision for the school, and fostered training for both leadership and change” (1994, p. 21).

Consequently, based on the empirical evidence, it was concluded in this study that the transformational model of leadership could influence high-poverty urban schools. The ability of the visionary leader to motivate and empower constituents could be critical to vision building and implementation of the goals. Moreover, facilitating high-performance expectations and providing individualized support and intellectual stimulus could be utilized as a vehicle for improving urban schools. However, in order for leadership to reform high-poverty schools (in this case, to play an integral role in making Summit School an effective urban school), it was essential to employ an integrated approach to transformational and instructional leadership.
Conceptual Framework

Based on the effective school literature, a conceptual framework was developed that suggests that effective high-performing high-poverty schools engage in an inter- and intra-relationship between the variables of school and classroom factors to create effectiveness, as illustrated in Figure 6. This section presents the conceptual framework for this study, titled an integrative model of effective schools.

![Figure 6. Conceptual framework for effective high-performing high-poverty schools to guide the current study. Source of student achievement data: New Jersey Report Card, by the New Jersey Department of Education, 2008b, retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/re/nelb08/reports: K-5 students→Demographics→Test Scores: 5,6,7,8 (2005-2008); Transfer students→Demographics→Test Scores: 5,6,7,8 (2005-2008).]

Summit School was examined through this integrative framework. The study explored through the lens of the effective school literature whether an integrative process was evident at Summit School whereby numerous entities, such as school- and
classroom-level factors work in conjunction to produce an effective school on the K-5 level. On the same note, the study investigated the extent to which the factors related to the effectiveness of Summit School on the K-5 level were reflected on the 6-8 level. These included classroom factors, such as qualified faculty, curriculum, data-driven assessment, accountability, high expectations, professional development, and teacher collaboration, and school factors, such as instructional and transformational leadership, parental involvement, clear and focused school vision/mission, and school culture.

The study was designed to determine whether these levels worked as an integrative process to influence student achievement and to create the conditions for an effective school on the K-5 level, as well as the extent to which these characteristics were evident on the 6-8 level. Thus, the model showed the interactive process and inter- and intra- relationship between classroom variables, such as qualified faculty, curriculum, data-driven assessment, professional development, and teacher collaboration, and school factors, such as instructional and transformational leadership, parental involvement, clear and focused school vision, and school culture, all working together to produce the common premise of an effective school.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

This chapter describes the research design, methods, data collection, and methods of analysis of this research project. The research design best suited for this study was mixed methods. A mixed-methods design provided a holistic understanding of the research problem. While the quantitative method statistically analyzed the data and showed relationships among variables, the qualitative method provided means through interviews and observations to understand how these variables influenced student achievement at Summit School. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), mixed methods combine paradigms that “could be both narrative (qualitative) and numeric (quantitative)” (p. 26).

Mixed method research could simultaneously address a range of both confirmatory and exploratory questions. . . . Mixed method research used both deductive and inductive logic in a distinctive sequence described as the inductive-deductive research cycle, the chain of reasoning (Krathwohl, 2004), the cycle of scientific methodology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), and the research wheel (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 26)

The mixed-methods design combines the best of both worlds and merges the “quantitative-numeric data and analysis and the qualitative-narrative data and analysis” (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 4).

Since the present research question contained both confirmatory exploratory elements, a mixed-methods design was adopted because “mixed method research could simultaneously address a range of both confirmatory and exploratory questions” (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 26). Confirming whether or not transfer students account for the
grade-level drop-off at Summit School required evaluating a quantitative measure (performance scores), and exploring secondary or other compounding causes required qualitative measures (gained through interviews).

**Mixed Methods**

The intent of a mixed-methods design was to draw from the strengths of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches and to minimize their weaknesses. Thus, while “quantitative research took apart a phenomenon to examine component parts . . . , qualitative research could reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The units of analysis for the quantitative component of this study were ethnicity/race, gender, economically disadvantaged/free or reduced-price lunch students, transfer and incumbent students, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and special education classifications. The units of analysis for the qualitative part of the study were curriculum, data-driven instruction and assessment, teacher collaboration, parental involvement, leadership, teacher expectations, and academic preparation and performance (nontransfer and transfer).

Since the intent of a mixed-methods design for this study was to draw from the strengths of both approaches and minimize their weaknesses, there was value in the mixed-methods approach. While the qualitative data provided understanding of the factors explaining academic differences at Summit School between levels K-5 and 6-8, the quantitative data explored whether achievement by the transfer students compared to increases achieved by their counterparts and whether these remained consistent or decreased over time while at Summit School during the sixth- to eighth-grade levels.
The strengths of a mixed-methods design for this study provided understanding of the data that could not be explained by statistical analysis of the New Jersey Report Card and State Standardized Assessment. The design was substantiated with qualitative descriptions about the phenomenon, providing a full analysis of the two research questions and measuring the influence of the studied factors on the differences in achievement by students at Summit School. The recognized limitation of the mixed-methods design was that it addressed the probable cause of the achievement differences at Summit School and hypothesized that transfer students were the plausible reason for the differences. Despite this limitation, it was determined that the mixed-methods design was most appropriate to address the research questions posed in this study.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and student levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?

RQ2: What factors explain the achievement differences at Summit School?

SQ2a: How does the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in Grades 6 to 8?

SQ2b: How do school administrators, teachers, and parents respond to the difference in student achievement between Grades K-5 and Grades 6-8?

The mixed-methods approach was deemed to be the most appropriate design for this study to provide in-depth analysis of the phenomenon: the achievement differences between Grades K-5 and Grades 6-8 at Summit School.
School Selection Criteria

Summit School was selected as the target school for this study based on a regression analysis of all 193 schools in Abbott Districts in New Jersey. Summit School was chosen as an “effective school” in the Pockets of Educational Excellence (POE) project sponsored by Rutgers-Newark Institute on Education Law and Policy and Goldman Sachs Foundation (where the researcher served as a research assistant). The selection of Summit School as the target for this study was based on the criteria used in the POE project (Sadovnik et al., n.d.a). A full discussion of the methodology for selecting schools for the POE study, which led to the selection of Summit School for the current student, is contained in Sadovnik et al. (n.d.b).

A key factor in the selection of Summit School for the current study was that it displayed within-school academic differences. That is, while the school was effective on the K-5 level, it was less effective on the 6-8 level and had failed to meet the level of Proficiency for certain subgroups and the special education population on the 6-8 level. This resulted in the school’s status as a Collaborative Assessment for Planning and Achievement (CAPA) school, that is, for the past 3 years the school had not made AYP in Grades 6-8 in these subgroups.

Although Summit School was considered to be an effective school based on the aforementioned criteria, at the time of this study the school was designated a CAPA school. This condition was significant in the selection of the school for this study in that it was particularly interesting to examine the achievement differences within the school. That is, what factors explained the achievement differences and subsequently the decline in achievement on the 6-8 levels?
Description of Summit School

Summit School was situated in the Ironbound section of Newark, New Jersey, a working-class neighborhood. Summit served a population of pre-kindergarten through eighth grade and had an enrollment of approximately 800 students for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 academic years (most recent data available). Summit had several initiatives, including “a bilingual Spanish and Portuguese program, ESL, Children’s Literacy Initiative in grades pre-kindergarten to third grade, vocal and instrumental music, and special education services” (New Jersey Department of Education, 2008b [Principal, Report Card Narrative for the anonymous target school]). Summit has received several awards for academic excellence, including “seven consecutive Outstanding Performance in Student Achievement Awards totaling over $85,000, a $4,000 Brass Ring Award for School Climate and Culture and three consecutive NJ Chamber of Commerce ‘Just for the Kids’ Benchmark School Awards” (New Jersey Department of Education, 2008b [Principal, Report Card Narrative for the anonymous target school]). This is exemplary because Summit is located in an “Abbott district” (Newark), which had been under state control since 1995. In New Jersey 31 Abbott districts are designated as “poor urban districts” or “special needs districts.” based on the historic school funding decision of the New Jersey Supreme Court in Abbott v. Burke (1994). It was within this context that school achievement and school effectiveness were examined at Summit School.

Although Summit School had been one of the higher-performing schools in the Newark school district, at the time of this study it was designated a CAPA school under NCLB for not attaining AYP in the Middle School (Grades 6-8) by some of the subgroups, including special needs, Hispanics, and economically disadvantaged students.
(New Jersey Department of Education, 2008b). Still, this made for an interesting discussion in examining school effectiveness related to within-school differences in academic performance at Summit School.

**Description of the City of Newark**

This section provides background of the city of Newark regarding demographics, income, population, and poverty level. Newark is the largest city in New Jersey and the third-oldest cosmopolitan area in the United States. According to the 2000 census report, Newark had a total population of 273,546, “making it the 64th-largest municipality in the United States” (Newark, New Jersey, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Newark is located in Essex County and is divided into five geographic wards: North, Central, East, West, and South. The Ironbound district is located in the East Ward and is primarily populated by Portuguese, Brazilians, Mexicans, Ecuadorians, and other Latin Americans. It is a predominantly working-class neighborhood with a large immigrant population.

Newark is considered to be the second most diverse city in New Jersey, home to African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Portuguese, Brazilians, Mexicans, Ecuadorians, and other Latin American groups.

In 2005-2009, 44 percent of the population reported that they spoke a language other than English at home. Of those speaking a language other than English at home, 65 percent spoke Spanish and 35 percent spoke some other language; [while] 54 percent indicated that they did not speak English “very well.” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008, para. 4).

This made for an interesting context in examining Summit School and its within-school achievement differences.
Empirical evidence suggests that poverty is a factor strongly correlated to academic achievement by students.

In 2005-2009, 24 percent of people in [Newark] were in poverty. Thirty-two percent of children under 18 were below the poverty level, compared with 24 percent of people 65 years old and over. Twenty-one percent of all families and 35 percent of families [headed by a female] had incomes below the poverty level.

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, para. 13)

While students at Summit School on the middle school level mirrored the harmful effects of poverty on student achievement, students at the K-5 level achieved at the level of Proficiency. This led to an interesting exploration of the interplay of poverty, SES, and school factors on the achievement differences between the K-5 and 6-8 levels at Summit School.

**Description of Demographic Neighborhood Profile**

This section provides a demographic neighborhood profile of the schools related to this study: Summit School and Feeder School (pseudonyms). Feeder School was home to the majority of the transfer students who matriculated to Summit School at the sixth-grade level. Based on the 2000 census report, both Summit School and Feeder School, although located in the same geographical area (Newark Ironbound) had different zip codes, reflecting differences in demographics, social characteristics, and economic status. The demographics of the schools’ neighborhoods showed that, while the Summit School area had a majority White population, the Feeder School zone had a large Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino population. Specifically, the social characteristics of the Summit School region had a population of approximately 73% White, 14% Black/
African American, and 13% Hispanic or Latino; in comparison, the Feeder School region had a population of approximately 53% White, 40% Black/African American, and 24% Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). These characteristics, summarized in Table 2, posed the question of whether demographics influenced academic achievement in these schools.

Table 2

*General Neighborhood Characteristics of Summit School and Feeder School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood (Newark Ironbound)</th>
<th>White (%)</th>
<th>Hispanic (%)</th>
<th>Black/African American (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summit School zone</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeder School zone</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The difference in the poverty levels was also evident in the regions where the schools are located. For example, based on the 2000 census report (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), 6.3% of families and 8.5% of individuals in the Summit School region were living below poverty level, while 36.0% of families and 39.0% of individuals in the Feeder School region were living below poverty level (Table 3).

The data indicated that the geographic zone of Summit School had a significantly lower poverty level (nearly 30% lower) than the geographic zone of Feeder School,
Table 3

*Economic Characteristics/Poverty Levels in the Summit School and Feeder School Regions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School zone</th>
<th>Families below poverty level (%)</th>
<th>Individuals below poverty level (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summit School zone</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeder School zone</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Poverty levels reflect the zip codes in which the schools are located. Source: 2005-2007 *American Community Survey*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2008, retrieved from [http://www.factfinder.census.gov](http://www.factfinder.census.gov)

suggesting that the poverty level of the region may have some effect on lower achievement levels at Feeder School. This lower achievement at Feeder School (K-5) may be a plausible explanation and may have contributed to the decline in achievement at Summit School when these students transferred to Summit in the sixth grade.

Likewise, there were differences in the educational characteristics of the students at the two schools: In the Summit School zone, 82% of the population reported having a high school diploma, while in the Feeder School zone, a little over 50% of the population reported having a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), a difference of nearly 25% in level of educational attainment. These data provided a context for understanding how academic achievement by students may be influenced by demographics and socioeconomic characteristics in these regions (Table 4).
Table 4

*Educational Characteristics in the Summit School and Feeder School Regions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School zone</th>
<th>High school graduate or higher (%)</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree or higher (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summit School zone</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeder School zone</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Educational characteristics reflect the zip codes in which the schools are located. Source: 2005-2007 *American Community Survey*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2008, retrieved from http://www.factfinder.census.gov

Thus, the frequency distributions and the neighborhood characteristics of Summit School and Feeder School provided context for understanding the interplay of demographics, poverty level, and educational level on achievement.

**Comparison of Summit School and Feeder School**

This section presents a comparative analysis of performance by Summit School and Feeder School students on the annual NJASK standardized test at Grades 4 and 5. This analysis serves as a comparative benchmark of overall school-level achievement to identify differences between Summit School and Feeder School in the context of achievement. Also, Summit School’s performance at Grades 6 through 8 is analyzed to determine whether there were differences in achievement after the populations merged.

Table 5 and Figure 7 indicate that Summit School outperformed Feeder School significantly in mathematics in Grades 4 and 5 in the academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. Summit School outperformed Feeder School at 67% difference in the Grade 4 mathematics assessment in academic year 2008-2009 and at 53.6% difference in
Table 5

Percentages of Grade 4 and Grade 5 Students Scoring Proficient or Above in Mathematics at Summit School and Feeder School, Academic Years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summit</td>
<td>Feeder</td>
<td>Summit</td>
<td>Feeder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 7. Percentages of Grade 4 and Grade 5 students scoring proficient or above in mathematics at Summit School and Feeder School, academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. Author’s calculations from data from (a) New Jersey Department of Education Report Card 2009, 2009b, by New Jersey Department of Education, retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/rc09, and (b) New Jersey Department of Education Report Card 2010, 2010, by New Jersey Department of Education, retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/rc10
academic year 2009-2010. Summit School outperformed Feeder School at 51.3% difference in the Grade 5 mathematics assessment in academic year 2008-2009 and at 36.4% difference in academic year 2009-2010. Thus, the data suggest that Feeder School performed at a consistently and significantly lower level in mathematics in Grades 4 and 5 than its Summit School counterparts, which establishes the premise that Feeder School was a lower-performing school.

Table 6 and Figure 8 indicate that Summit School outperformed Feeder School significantly in LAL in Grades 4 and 5 in the academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. Summit School outperformed Feeder School at approximately 61% difference in the Grade 4 LAL assessment in academic year 2008-2009 and at approximately 42% difference in academic year 2009-2010. Summit School outperformed Feeder School at approximately 44% difference in the Grade 5 LAL assessment in academic year 2008-2009 and at approximately 27% difference in academic year 2009-2010. Thus, the data suggest that Feeder School performed at a consistently and significantly lower level in LAL in Grades 4 and 5 than its Summit School counterparts, which establishes the premise that Feeder School was a lower-performing school.

While the data establish significant differences in achievement between Summit School and Feeder School at Grades 4 and 5 in both mathematics and LAL, they also suggest that Feeder School students matriculated at Summit School at a significantly lower level of achievement. Based on this finding, it was necessary to examine student achievement levels at Grades 6, 7, and 8 at Summit School to explore the effects on performance when the Feeder School population (transfer students) merged with Summit School students (nontransfer).
Table 6

Percentages of Grade 4 and Grade 5 Students Scoring Proficient or Above in Language Arts Literacy (LAL) at Summit School and Feeder School, Academic Years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summit</td>
<td>Feeder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 8. Percentages of Grade 4 and Grade 5 students scoring proficient or above in Language Arts Literacy (LAL) at Summit School and Feeder School, academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. Author’s calculations from data from (a) New Jersey Department of Education Report Card 2009, 2009b, by New Jersey Department of Education, retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/rc09, and (b) New Jersey Department of Education Report Card 2010, 2010, by New Jersey Department of Education, retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/rc10
Table 7 and Figure 9 indicate that Summit School student performance in Grade 6 mathematics declined by approximately 16% in 2008-2009 and approximately 22% in 2009-2010 in comparison to their performance in Grade 5. Summit School student performance in Grade 7 mathematics continued to declined by approximately 10% in 2008-2009 but increased by 1% in 2009-2010 in comparison to their performance in Grade 6. Summit School student performance in Grade 8 mathematics declined by less than 1% to 62.7% in 2008-2009 and approximately 3% in 2009-2010 to 63%.

While the data showed achievement differences between Summit School students and Feeder School students in Grades 4 and 5, with Feeder School students performing lower in mathematics, the data for student achievement in mathematics at Summit School in Grades 6 through 8 suggest that the decline in student achievement could be attributed to the merging of the Feeder School population, that is, the transfer students. Although student performance in mathematics dropped Grade 5 to Grade 6, the decline continued in Grades 7 and 8 at Summit School, suggesting that more analysis is required to understand the reason for the decline. Nevertheless, the data demonstrate that student performance in mathematics dropped at Grade 6 and continued to decline in Grades 7 and 8 at Summit School. To understand this phenomenon in depth, the researcher examined student-level data for the NJASK standardized tests, employing quantitative techniques such as t test, multiple regression, and fixed effects regression to measure the degree to which transfer students accounted for the overall effect on test scores. This is discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

Table 8 and Figure 10 indicate that Summit School student performance in LAL in Grade 6 grade LAL declined slightly (less than 3% difference in 2008-2009 and
Table 7

Percentages of Grades 6, 7, and 8 Students Scoring Proficient or Above in Mathematics at Summit School, Academic Years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 8

**Percentages of Grades 6, 7, and 8 Students Scoring Proficient or Above in Language Arts Literacy (LAL) at Summit School, Academic Years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Figure 10.* Percentages of Grades 6, 7, and 8 students scoring proficient or above in Language Arts Literacy (LAL) at Summit School, academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. Author’s calculations from data from (a) *New Jersey Department of Education Report Card 2009*, 2009b, by New Jersey Department of Education, retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/rc09, and (b) *New Jersey Department of Education Report Card 2010*, 2010, by New Jersey Department of Education, retrieved from http://education.state.nj.us/rc10
approximately 8\% in 2009-2010) in comparison to their Grade 5 performance. In Grade 7 the LAL scores at Summit School declined by nearly 10\% difference, as approximately 58\% of the students scored at or above proficiency in 2008-2009 but decreased by approximately 1\% in 2009-2010 in comparison to Grade 6 performance. In Grade 8 grade student performance in LAL increased by 4.4\% in 2008-2009, resulting in 62.6\% of students scoring at or above proficiency, and 16.5\% in 2009-2010, resulting in 67.4\% of students scoring at or above proficiency. Although the data demonstrate achievement differences between Summit School students and Feeder School students at Grades 4 and 5 and showed that Feeder School students were lower performing, the LAL student achievement data in Grades 6 through 8 at Summit School demonstrate that, while achievement scores declined Grade 7, they increased in Grade 8. This suggests that in-depth analysis is necessary to understand this phenomenon. The researcher also examined student-level data of the NJASK assessment, employing quantitative techniques of t test, multiple regression, and fixed effects regression to determine the degree to which transfer students accounted for the overall effect on test scores. This is discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

Data

This study was designed to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data collected included student-level data: grades 5-8 disaggregated by social, economic, and academic dimensions, including ethnicity/race, gender, economically disadvantaged/free or reduced-price lunch, transfer and nontransfer students, LEP students, and special education classifications. The data consisted of a panel dataset collected during the academic years 2005-2008 for cohort 1 and 2006-2009
for cohort 2. Because the data were collected “longitudinally, from the same set of people, at several different points of time” (Babbie, 2004, p. 104), they provided a trajectory of the students’ performance scores over time. That is, the data indicated whether the transfer students’ achievement, compared to that of their counterparts increased, remained consistent, or decreased over time while at Summit School in Grades 6-8. Additional quantitative data included data from the New Jersey Report Card for 2005-2008 and 2006-2009 (New Jersey Department of Education, 2008b, 2009). Student performance data were taken from the New Jersey Department of Education, Report Cards (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009). The New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) provided scores for annual standardized tests for third through eighth grades and assessed students’ proficiency in language arts, mathematics, and science.

The dependent variable was student achievement (measured by the NJ ASK assessments) and the independent variable was student demographics: ethnicity/race, gender, economically disadvantaged/free or reduced-price lunch, transfer and nontransfer students, LEP, and special education classifications. Specifically, sixth- to eighth-grade longitudinal data were examined both for students who had been at Summit School from Kindergarten through Grade 8 (nontransfer students) and for transfer students (matriculating from Feeder School at the end of sixth grade) to address the second research question, What factors account for the decline in academic performance on the middle school level at the Summit school? This was accomplished by examining whether the lower scores for students Grades 6 to 8 were due to an overall decline for all students or due to differences in the abilities and/or preparation of transfer students.
The second type of data collected was qualitative. Qualitative data in this research project included interviews, observations, and review of documents.

The interviews were semistructured and focused on specific themes that might influence academic achievement: (a) classroom-level factors—qualified teachers, curriculum, data-driven instruction and assessment, teacher collaboration, and professional development; (b) school-level factors—instructional and transformational leadership, school culture, school vision, and parental and community involvement; and (c) statewide standardized assessments (NJ ASK). The purpose of these themes was to address the research question related to the academic achievement differences at Summit School from the participants’ perspectives. Interview protocols for teachers, administrators, and parents are included as Appendices A, B, and C, respectively.

Classroom-level and school-level observations were conducted. Classroom level observations consisted of participant observation. School-level observations were conducted at grade-level team meetings, faculty monthly meetings, school programs, report card nights, and parent/teacher association meetings. Actions related to academic achievement were recorded. The observation protocol is included as Appendix D.

Additional data included school-level data such as the annual report, professional development assessment (PDA) and CAPA Report from the state of New Jersey.

Quantitative Data

The quantitative data consisted of both school- and student-level data. The school-level data were mainly data from the New Jersey Department of Education Report Cards. The Report Card is an annual report that demonstrates how school districts across the state performed in terms of achievement and proficiency levels. It provides an overall
picture of this performance statewide and discusses specific categories, including school proficiency data, school and student performance indicators, school environment, attendance and mobility rates, percentage of students with disabilities, faculty and administrator credentials, attrition rates, and district financial information such as teacher and administrator salaries and benefits and school and per-pupil expenditures.

Quantitative student-level data included students’ test scores from the annual state standardized exam (NJ ASK) assessment. The test scores represented a panel data set, collected during the academic years 2005-2008 for cohort 1 and 2006-2009 for cohort 2. Because the data were collected “longitudinally, from the same set of people, at several different points of time” (Babbie, 2004, p. 104), they provided a trajectory of the students’ performance scores over time, indicating whether the transfer students’ achievement, compared to that of their counterparts, increased, remained consistent, or decreased over time while at Summit School during Grades 6 to 8.

**Quantitative Data Selection**

The sample for school-level data included Summit School and Feeder School. Feeder School (Grades K-5) was examined because the majority of the transfer students at the sixth-grade level at Summit School matriculated from this elementary school. The school-level data provided information on the school environment, student performance indicators, and faculty credentials, particularly as “qualified” teachers. Data were selected from the New Jersey Report Card for Summit School and Feeder School based on the above criterion. Student performance indicators were selected from the fifth grade at both Summit School and Feeder School to establish a comparative benchmark for achievement differences between transfer and nontransfer students. That is, the data showed the
student performance proficiency at the fifth grade before the groups were combined at the sixth-grade level. The comparative data also presented descriptive information on both schools to understand the school environments, student achievement, and proficiency levels of students from both schools. This population reflected the transfer and nontransfer population at Summit School at the middle school level. These data provided knowledge to measure the achievement differences between transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School when students matriculate at the sixth-grade level from Feeder School or continue attendance at Summit School. This information provided a plausible explanation for the question of whether there were achievement differences between transfer and nontransfer students.

The sample for the student-level data consisted of 136 students for both cohorts at Summit School. The data were longitudinal and included transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School. These students were selected from two cohorts during the academic years 2005-2008 and 2006-2009. The first cohort consisted of students who had attended Summit School or Feeder School during the 2005 academic year and then matriculated or continued their matriculation at Summit School from Grade 6 to Grade 8, graduating in 2008. The second cohort of students had attended Summit School or Feeder School during the 2006 academic year and then matriculated or continued their matriculation at Summit school from Grade 6 to Grade 8, graduating in 2009. The total sample population of both cohorts was 136 students after data were cleaned and the definition of transfer students and nontransfer students was applied to the data. *Transfer students* were defined as students primarily matriculating at Summit School beginning at Grade 6; the majority of these students matriculated from the feeder K-5 elementary
school, with a few students entering from the Newark district. *Nontransfer* students were defined as students who had attended Summit School from the K-5 level and continued to the middle school 6-8 level. These students would also have graduated from the eighth grade of Summit School. These 136 students included various ethnic groups, predominantly Latino, Whites and African Americans; transfer and nontransfer students; students designated as economically disadvantaged (receiving free or reduced-price lunch), special needs students, and LEP students.

**Quantitative Data Collection**

The student-level data were collected primarily from the students’ cumulative records or “permanent records.” These records transfer with students when they move to other schools within a district or out of district or state. The cumulative records contain information such as standardized test results, district-wide assessment results, report cards, health information, educational accommodations (such as special education classification and Individual Education Plan [IEP] or 504 accommodations), discipline records, and honors and awards. For the purpose of this research, the student-level data collected were primarily reports of students’ annual statewide assessments (NJ ASK) from the fifth grade through the eighth grade. These data were collected for both cohorts ($N = 136$) and represented the students’ standardized scores and proficiency level in Mathematics and Language Arts from the fifth grade through the eighth grade. The assessment reports also contained the students’ educational classification, gender, free/reduced-price lunch status, and ethnicity. These data provided key criteria for the quantitative analysis.
Quantitative Data: Preparation and Cleaning

The student-level data were prepared and cleaned for data analysis. The data represented 136 students’ NJ ASK standardized assessment scores from Grade 5 through 8. The first step in cleaning the data involved applying the operationalized definition for transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School. Transfer students had matriculated at Summit School beginning at the sixth grade, primarily from Feeder School (K-5), with a few students entering from the Newark district. To prepare the data, the criterion of transfer students’ attrition was central to the cleaning process. Thus, transfer students matriculated at Summit School from Grades 6 through 8 and graduated from Summit School in Grade 8. If transfer students withdrew from Summit School at any point before completing Grade 8, they were eliminated from the dataset. Likewise, if nontransfer students attended Summit School at the K-5 level but were accepted and transferred to one of the Newark magnet schools at the beginning of seventh grade before they had completed the eighth grade at Summit School, they were eliminated from the dataset. The final data set consisted of 136 students.

The second step in preparing the student-level data involved transferring the data from the actual cumulative records into the SPSS™ spreadsheet. Each student was assigned a number to protect confidentiality. The data were entered into the SPSS program. Each variable was coded as 1 or 0 (e.g., transfer students were labeled 1 and nontransfer students were labeled 0). For ethnicity, a “dummy” variable was created because there were more than one ethnicity in the sample: White, African American, and Hispanic. For example, the dummy variable identified the student’s race as White or non-white, African American or non-African American, or Hispanic or-non Hispanic. The
variables consisted of the dependent variables, including ethnicity, gender, transfer, economically disadvantaged/free or reduced-price lunch, cohort, LEP, special education, scaled NJ ASK scores (Grades 5-8) and the “norm” NJ ASK test scores (Grades 5-8) for each content area: language arts, literacy, and mathematics. The data were compiled and checked for accuracy for each student.

The third step in cleaning the data involved norming all standardized test scores on the NJ ASK from Grades 5 through 8 in each content area. The following process was applied:

1. The raw scores were compiled from the New Jersey Department of Education assessment middle school technical report, NJ ASK 5-8, for the academic years 2005-2008 and 2006-2009 for each cohort: (a) NJ ASK 2008 (Grades 5-8; New Jersey Department of Education, 2009), (b) NJ ASK 2007 (Grades 6 and 7; New Jersey Department of Education, 2008a), and (c) NJ ASK 2006 (Grades 5 and 6; New Jersey Department of Education, 2007).

2. The descriptive statistics from the technical report were recorded for the total raw scores by content area and grade level. The raw scores were converted and recorded as scaled scores.

3. The means and standard deviations were identified from the technical report. These data were recorded as Raw Mean, Scale Mean, and Standard Deviation.

4. The Norm scores were calculated based on the standard deviations and the mean calculated scores. The norm test scores were recorded for each content area and academic year.
Because the NJ ASK standardized assessments were criterion-referenced tests, it was necessary to normalize the NJ ASK test scores to make the data comparable for the academic years 2005-2008 (cohort 1) and 2006-2009 (cohort 2). The normalized test scores allowed the researcher to examine the data as a panel dataset and to evaluate the academic achievement differences between transfer and nontransfer students.

**Analysis of the Quantitative Data**

The statistical vehicles used to analyze the quantitative data were SPSS™ and Stata®. The multivariate statistical techniques employed to analyze the data were multiple regression analysis and fixed-effect analysis to examine the normed test scores of the NJ ASK 5-8 in terms of various predictors, such as ethnicity, gender, transfer, economically disadvantaged, cohort, LEP, and special education students. The multiple regressions were conducted to address the second research question.

**RQ2: What factors explain the achievement differences at Summit School?**

SQ2a: How does the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in Grades 6 to 8?

SQ2b: How do school administrators, teachers, and parents respond to the difference in student achievement between Grades K-5 and Grades 6-8?

The first regression examined student achievement, specifically the normed test scores of the NJ ASK 5-8 student-level data for all students (transfer, nontransfer, and general education population and special education population). Regression 1 with everyone**: **normscore = f(race, gender, year of cohort, econdis, sped, lep, grade level, transfer); for example, (a) reg testnorm6math White Black Female Cohort08 EconDis
SpecEd LimEngProf Transfer, (b) reg testnorm6lal White Black Female Cohort08 EconDis SpecEd LimEngProf Transfer

Regression 2 examined the normed test scores of the NJ ASK 5-8 student-level data with just the general education population: **normscore=f(race, gender, year of cohort, econdis, lep, grade level, transfer) without special ed; for example, (a) reg testnorm6math White Black Female Cohort08 EconDis LimEngProf Transfer if SpecEd==0, (b) reg testnorm6lal White Black Female Cohort08 EconDis LimEngProf Transfer if SpecEd==0.

Regression 3 analyzed the normed test scores of the NJ ASK 5-8 student-level data but created an “interaction” variable to interact the grade with whether the students were transfer students. The new variable was created to multiply the student with the transfer “dummy” variables. This gave insight as to whether the transfer students catch up with the other students as they progress through Summit School. Regression 3 with everyone**: **normscore=f(race, gender, year of cohort, econdis, sped, lep, transfer*grade); for example, (a) reg testnorm6math White Black Female Cohort08 EconDis SpecEd EngLanLearn TransGrade if SpecEd==0; (b) reg testnorm6lal White Black Female Cohort08 EconDis SpecEd EngLanLearn TransGrade if SpecEd==0.

Regression 4 was a fixed-effect regression using the Stata statistical program. The fixed-effect regression controlled for all constant characteristics of the student, examining whether there are differences between transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School. The regression further explored potential differences in the general education population, transfer performance versus the total population, as well as whether there was evidence of growth in the transfer students. That is, was there evidence that the transfer
student “catch up” as they progress at Summit School in Grades 6-8? Regression 4**:

\[
\text{normscore} = f(\text{race, gender, year of cohort, econdis, sped, lep, grade level*transfer}) \text{ with student fixed effects for all students; for example, } (a) \text{ xtreg testnorm6math White Black Female Cohort08 EconDis SpecEd LimEngProf TransGrade, i(id) fe, (b) xtreg testnorm6lal White Black Female Cohort08 EconDis SpecEd LimEngProf TransGrade, i(id) fe.}
\]

The additional fixed-effects regressions that were conducted included (a) fixed effects for all students (above); (b) fixed effects but only with the GenEd student:

\[
\text{normscore} = f(\text{race, gender, year of cohort, econdis, sped, lep, grade level*transfer}) \text{ with only GenEd students; (c) fixed effects with only the transfer GenEd students:}
\]

\[
\text{normscore} = f(\text{race, gender, year of cohort, econdis, sped, lep, grade level*transfer}) \text{ with transfer GenEd students; (d) norm score on grade level but for the non transfers who are GenEd: } \text{normscore} = f(\text{race, gender, year of cohort, econdis, sped, lep, grade level*transfer}) \text{ with non transfer GenEd students.}
\]

**Qualitative Data**

This section describes the qualitative method of analysis for this study, including the types of qualitative data, the selection criterion and sample size, data collection, preparation of the data, and analysis of the data.

A second set of data, interviews, was analyzed based on the grounded theory framework. The rationale in using grounded theory in this study was that this process of inductive and deductive analysis of the data provided in-depth understanding because “the theory [was] derived from the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). That is, this
method provided a rich meaning in its explanation and understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative data were collected via interviews and observations, as described below.

Interviews were conducted with 30 teachers, 3 administrators, and 10 parents. Of the 30 teachers interviewed, two were considered academic coaches (Language Arts and Mathematics). However, since the coaches were not considered administrators, they were placed in the category of teachers. The sample of teachers was selected in consultation with the principal and included teachers from Grades 2 through 8. Because the sixth- to eighth-grade level was departmentalized, the participants included 13 of those teachers in all subject areas and bilingual teachers in those grades. The remaining 17 teachers were drawn from the self-contained classrooms of Grades 2 through 5 and included at least two teachers from each of these grade levels. The participants included a combination of tenured and nontenured faculty. Two of the three administrators who were interviewed were assistant principals; one supervised the middle school (Grades 6-8) and the other assistant principal supervised the primary grades (Grades 3-5). The principal was responsible for the early childhood grade levels, Pre-K to Grade 2. Ten parents were interviewed, including two parent classroom aides, parent office personnel who worked at Summit, the parent liaison for the parent committee, and six parents selected through snowball sampling to include parents who were active in the parent committee.

The researcher employed the method of participant observation in the field. Thus, the researcher not only observed and recorded the activities in the classroom and school but also engaged in the activities in the classroom. These activities included working with small groups in group-related activities and/or the whole class during independent assignments, tutoring students one on one, and teaching small groups of students on
related class objectives. Classroom observations also involved instructional pedagogy; specifically, the researcher observed whether the strategies that were used were primarily didactic, interactive, or a combination of student-teacher interaction, student engagement, communication, and social support in the classroom. Classrooms chosen for observation was selected in consultation with the principal to include a representative sample of Grades 3 through 8 to ensure reliability.

School level-observations were conducted at grade-level team meetings, faculty monthly meetings, school programs, report card night, and parent/teacher association meetings, where any actions related to academic achievement were recorded. Students were observed in a school-wide context. Thus, observations involved students outside of the classroom in environments such as the cafeteria during lunch, the playground during lunch recess, and the hallways during transition to classes.

Additional data collected included school-level data, such as the annual report, PDA, and CAPA reports from the State of New Jersey.

**Qualitative Data Selection**

The sample consisted of 30 teachers (tenured and nontenured), including departmentalized, self-contained, and bilingual teachers; two academic coaches (Language Arts and Mathematics); three administrative leaders (a principal and two assistant principals); and 10 parents. The criteria for selecting the teachers were based on their grade level, subject level, tenure status, and responsibility for self-contained classes and/or bilingual immersion classes. Neither gender nor race played a role in the selection. Nevertheless, the sample included more females and White teachers than their
counterparts because teaching professionals are is predominantly White and female, particularly at the elementary level.

A representative sample was chosen stratified by grade level, subject level, and tenure status, a representative sample of teachers was selected. Since stratified random sampling is unbiased, the researcher is recommended to “enumerate the population, divide the population into ‘strata’ and randomly select the sample within the strata” (Bernard, 2002, p. 148). The stratified random sampling method ensured that the sample of teachers at Summit School was representative for addressing the research questions related to classroom- and school-level factors and their influence on academic achievement. The first four parents to be interviewed were selected in consultation with the principal, and the remaining six parents were chosen through snowball sampling (that is, after interviewing the first four parents, they were asked to suggest the names of other parents who embodied “similar and relevant characteristics” [Berg, 2004, p. 36]). The three administrators voluntarily participated in the study.

**Qualitative Data Collection**

Regardless of method of selection, all teachers, administrators, and parents participated voluntarily. The participants were given an explanation of the project and its significance and they signed a consent form (Appendix E) to indicate their decision to participate. The researcher explained that this was a voluntary project and that participation or nonparticipation, or the results of the study, would not jeopardize their employment or assignment with the Board of Education. Furthermore, the participants were told that they were free to withdraw at any point without consequence. This information was explained verbally to each participant and written in the consent form.
Interviews and observation protocols were used in collecting qualitative data. These research instruments were valid and reliable, with a history of use in school-based research. The one-time interviews lasted 1 to 1.5 hours for teachers and administrators and 1 hour for parents. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. A tape recorder was used in all interviews to “ensure that everything said was preserved for analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 87). All interviews were confidential and anonymous.

**Qualitative Data Preparation and Cleaning**

The data were transcribed by hand using an audio device. Each interview was played on the audio tape recorder; the researcher typed the information verbatim into a word document. The researcher created a word document template with the interview protocols. This facilitated transcription; as the researcher first listened to the question on the tape recorder, paused the recorder, and located the question on the template. The researcher then recorded the participant’s response to the question. The researcher repeated the process for each interview question. All interview transcriptions were coded, observing the confidentiality protocol (e.g., Teacher A, Elementary; Teacher G, Middle School). While this process was confidential, it allowed the researcher to track the findings by academic level.

Following compilation of the raw data for each participant, the individual transcriptions were separated and compiled as responses to each interview question in a document chart for each question (e.g., Participant 1’s response to Question 3 was coded R1Q3). The process was repeated for each question in the interview protocol, and responses were compiled in separate word documents for teachers, administrators, and parents.
Analysis of the Qualitative Data

The qualitative analysis employed an open coding technique based on the grounded theory framework. In coding the data, “Open coding . . . [is] an unrestricted coding of the data” (Berg, 2004, p. 281) and an “analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). The raw data were analyzed by hand and line by line to glean patterns and common themes within the text that explained the phenomenon of the achievement differences at Summit School and the extent to which the effective factors on the K-5 levels were reflected on the 6-8 levels. Coding began by examining the raw text, reading through it and highlighting relevant text that addressed the research question. For example, one teacher’s response to the request to “Please describe the culture and climate of Summit School” was aligned with the first research question.

RQ1: What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and student levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?

The culture and climate is very diverse [Diverse]. I happen to be teaching Bilingual learners and predominately Spanish-speaking students, so I’ve had the opportunity to actually work with that aspect of school culture for the last 5 years (bilingual students predominantly Spanish speaking). However, I do see that in other parts of the building it’s very diverse [Diverse population/culture].

This example demonstrates how relevant text was highlighted to denote phrases such as diverse, bilingual learners, Spanish speaking, which addressed key ideas related to the research question. This process was done for each response from teachers and administrators for each question. Simultaneously, the “memo” technique was employed
to indicate the researcher’s thought processes about why a specific text was deemed to be important or to record ideas that were generated from the text (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 48). This process consistently grounded the researcher in the text to question and interpret the data continuously while reading through the text. The example below illustrates the technique of “memo” addressing the same question as above on the culture and climate of Summit School. The teacher responses to the question where the relevant text was highlighted and described the researcher’s thought process in questioning the data and recording inquiries generated from the text.

It’s very friendly as far as colleagues go [Friendly environment]. It’s multicultural throughout students and administration [multicultural/diverse student population and administration]. {Memo: How about the teacher population? Is there diversity? If so, or if not . . . How does it influence academic achievement? How does it affect student expectation? Student performance?}

In the next step of coding the relevant data were explore to identify repeating ideas and to find the pattern in text by grouping texts that were connected. For example, the interview request, “Please describe the culture and climate of Summit School” was aligned with the first research question

RQ1: What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and student levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?

One of the repeating ideas that emerged was diversity and another was demographic shift. Table 9 provides an example of how the relevant text was separated to reveal connections and repeating ideas.
Table 9

Example of the Process of Examining Interview Response Text to Identify Connections and Repeating Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Repeating idea(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Summit is the most diversified school in the Iron Bound area [Summit diversified school]. I think it [diversity] strengthens the different types of cultures and I think it makes us a more stronger and tolerant sch. [Acceptance of differences; differences strengthen culture of school]</td>
<td>2. Diverse school, acceptance of differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They only strengthen Summit [Immigrants/transfer students strengthen student body] {Memo: HOW?}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Very diverse culture [Diversity]. There are children of all religions and races and I think that is what makes Summit one of a kind; we can all live together, get along together. [multicultural climate . . . different religion, races; unique school cultural differences).]</td>
<td>4. Diverse cultures, multicultural climate, cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>The demographics have been changing slowly over the last 10 years. [Demographic change over last 10 years]</td>
<td>23. Demographic shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>{Memo: What is it about shift in demographic? How does this influence academic performance at Summit?} [What has the demographic shift?]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher H</td>
<td>A lot of Hispanics and Brazilians. It used to be a lot of Portuguese but it‟s changed and now there are children from all over. [Demographic change over years . . . from Portuguese to now predominantly Hispanics and Brazilians]</td>
<td>25. Shift from Portuguese to Hispanics and Brazilians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)What was the connection or relationship?

As the repeating ideas emerged, the next step in the coding process was to organize these themes based on “conceptual ordering” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 19), that is, “grouping the repeating ideas in coherent categories” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 43). Thus, one theme that became apparent from the data was Diversity; another
was Demographic Shift. As these themes emerged, the idea was to examine the data more abstractly, thus creating theoretical constructs and finally using the constructs to develop theoretical narratives to explain the explored phenomenon. These constructs were created by combining themes on an abstract level “consistent with the theoretical framework” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 43), that is, exploring how the themes related and interconnected conceptually and holding this consistent with the theoretical framework. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted, “Theorizing was work that entailed not only conceiving or intuiting ideas (concepts) but also formulating them into a logical, systematic, and explanatory scheme (p. 21), since the goal was to explicate how the phenomenon explained the achievement differences at the Summit School and to make clear the effective factors at the K-5 levels that were reflected at the 6-8 levels.

The final step in the analysis of the qualitative data was to develop theoretical narratives that examined the participants’ stories through the lens of the theoretical construct (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 43). As the theoretical narratives were developed for each specific research question, the concluding step was to synthesize all narratives to respond consistently to the main research questions

RQ1: What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and student levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?

RQ2: What factors explain the achievement differences at Summit School?

SQ2a: How does the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in Grades 6 to 8?
SQ2b: How do school administrators, teachers, and parents respond to the difference in student achievement between Grades K-5 and Grades 6-8?

The qualitative data substantiated the quantitative data through interviews, observations, and other documents, such as the annual report, PDA, and CAPA reports from the State of New Jersey.

**Chapter Summary**

A mixed-methods design was utilized to address the research questions, first using quantitative data to determine whether there was a difference in academic achievement by transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School. Qualitative data were analyzed to examine that difference through interviews, observations (classroom and schoolwide), and examination of documents such as the annual report, PDA, and CAPA reports from the State of New Jersey.

Interviews with the participants led to an understanding of the factors that may explain the academic achievement differences between transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School. Similarly, through observations (classroom and school-wide), the researcher gained insights regarding the school culture, instructional pedagogy, student performance, and teacher-student interactions in classrooms and hallways. The analysis of quantitative data shed light on whether there was a difference in academic achievement by transfer and nontransfer students. The qualitative data substantiated the findings based on the quantitative data, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.
Chapter 4: Quantitative Findings

This chapter first examines the results of tests to determine (a) whether there were performance differences between transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School, and (b) where differences existed, whether these differences remained through Grades 7 and 8. Independent t tests were employed to measure whether there was a statistically significant difference in student achievement between transfer and nontransfer students.

Second, the chapter reports results of multiple regressions and fixed effects regression to analyze the degree to which transfer students accounted for the overall effect on test scores. The regressions measured which predictor(s) was more significant in influencing achievement performance. Results of four models of regression are reported. The first regression examined student achievement, specifically the normed test scores on the NJ-ASK 5-8 and the effect of multiple independent variables on those scores: ethnicity, gender, transfer status, economically disadvantaged status, LEP, and special education student. The results were analyzed to address the question, to what degree do these variables affect achievement by transfer and nontransfer students? The second regression examined the normed test scores on the NJ-ASK 5-8 student-level data for only the general education population and the other independent variables to determine not only whether there were differences in performance by general education transfer students versus all students but how excluding special education students from the sample affected results. The third regression analyzed the trajectory of the transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School to address the question, was there evidence of transfer students’ improvement at Summit School? The fourth regression, a fixed effects regression, controlled for all constant characteristics of the individual student to
determine the degree of differences between transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School.

**Independent t Test**

The independent t test was utilized to explore the hypothesis that transfer students were the reason for the decline in performance scores at Summit School by testing whether there was a difference in mean scores at the Grade 6 level between transfer and nontransfer students in Language Arts and Mathematics. Additional t tests examined whether these differences remained at the Grade 7 and Grade 8 levels in Language Arts and Mathematics.

The independent t test examined the data of transfer and nontransfer students in Language Arts to assess differences in norm mean scores. The data demonstrated a statistically significant difference in achievement ($p < .01$) between transfer and nontransfer students in Grades 7 and 8 but no significant differences in achievement between transfer and nontransfer students in Grade 6 (Table 10).

For Grade 4, the nontransfer and transfer students displayed significant differences in levels of performance in Language Arts Literacy (LAL): $X = -0.0020$ for nontransfer students and $X = -1.2712$ for transfer students. The mean difference was significant ($p < .01$) at 1.2692 points, suggesting that, prior to matriculating at Summit School, the transfer students were at a lower level in LAL at Grade 4.

For Grade 6, the nontransfer and transfer students showed no significant difference in LAL performance. The nontransfer students’ norm mean score was -0.2527 and transfer counterparts’ mean score was slightly lower at -0.5479, for a nonsignificant difference in norm means of 0.2952.
Table 10

Results of Independent $t$ Test of Difference in Language Arts Literacy (LAL) Scores on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) Between Transfer Students and Nontransfer Students in Grades 4 and 6-8 at Summit School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK 4 LAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>-0.0020</td>
<td>0.7236</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-1.2712</td>
<td>1.0628</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK 6 LAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>-0.2527</td>
<td>1.0552</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>-0.5479</td>
<td>0.9188</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK 7 LAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-0.1209</td>
<td>0.7316</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-0.6717</td>
<td>0.7459</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK 8 LAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-0.1990</td>
<td>0.8563</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-0.7331</td>
<td>0.7417</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.

The results of the independent $t$ test in LAL indicated that, while there was significant difference between nontransfer and transfer students in norm mean test scores in LAL at the Grade 4 level, the difference at the Grade 6 level was not significant. Transfer student LAL scores neither positively nor negatively affected overall Grade 6 scores.

Although there was no significant difference between nontransfer and transfer students in LAL at the Grade 6 level, there were differences at the Grade 4 level. The data suggest that nontransfer students’ achievement decreased from Grade 4 ($X =$
-0.0020) to Grade 6 (X = -1.2712), while the transfer students’ achievement increased slightly from Grade 4 to Grade 6. Further analysis showed that these differences remained through Grades 7 and 8. The data indicated a significant difference (p < .01) between nontransfer and transfer students in LAL performance levels at Grade 7: X = -0.1209 for nontransfer students and X = -0.6717 for transfer students. The mean difference was significant at 0.5508 points. Likewise, the data indicated a significant difference (p < .01) between nontransfer and transfer students in performance levels in LAL at Grade 8: X = -0.1990 for nontransfer students and X = -0.7331 for transfer students. The mean difference was significant at 0.5341 points, suggesting that, while the difference in LAL scores was not significant at Grade 6, the difference between nontransfer and transfer students became more apparent in Grade 7 and persisted in Grade 8. Furthermore, the difference in performance level between nontransfer and transfer students suggests that the performance level in LAL was declining for both nontransfer and transfer students at Summit School. For example, exploring LAL achievement by nontransfer students from Grade 4 to Grade 8 indicated that the decline was gradual, beginning at Grade 4 and persisting through Grades 7 and 8. Thus, the decline began before the population merged at the Grade 6 level.

Next, the independent t test examined the data for nontransfer and transfer students to assess differences in norm mean scores in Mathematics. The data revealed a statistically significant difference (p < .01) between groups in achievement scores at Grade 4, 6, 7, and 8 (Table 11).

For Grade 4, nontransfer and transfer students demonstrated a statistically significant difference (p < .01) in levels of performance in Mathematics: X = 0.5413 for
Table 11

Results of Independent t Test of Difference in Mathematics Scores on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) Between Transfer Students and Nontransfer Students in Grades 4 and 6-8 at Summit School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK 4 Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0.5413</td>
<td>0.7259</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-0.5992</td>
<td>0.9571</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK 6 Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.002**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0.0917</td>
<td>1.0233</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-0.4442</td>
<td>0.8813</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK 7 Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0.2593</td>
<td>0.7679</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-0.2772</td>
<td>0.7632</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ ASK 8 Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0.1011</td>
<td>0.8489</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-0.5806</td>
<td>0.8655</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.

nontransfer students and X = -0.5992 for transfer students. The mean difference was significant (p < .01) at 1.1405 points, suggesting that, prior to matriculating at Summit School, the transfer students were at a significantly lower achievement level in Mathematics at Grade 4.

For Grade 6, the nontransfer and transfer students displayed significant difference in performance in Mathematics: X = 0.0917 for nontransfer students and X = -0.4442 for transfer students. The mean difference was significant (p < .01) at .5359 points,
suggesting that as the transfer students matriculated to Summit School at Grade 6, the difference between the groups in mathematics achievement remained.

Next, the data were examined to explore whether differences between groups persisted at the Grade 7 and Grade 8 levels. The data indicated a significant difference \((p < .01)\) in performance levels at between nontransfer and transfer students in Mathematics scores at Grade 8: \(X = 0.2593\) for nontransfer students and \(X = -0.2772\) for transfer students. The mean difference was significant at \(.5365\) points. The data also revealed a significant difference \((p < .01)\) between nontransfer and transfer students in performance levels in Mathematics in Grade 8: \(X = 0.1011\) for nontransfer students and \(X = -0.5806\) for transfer students. The mean difference was significant at \(.6817\) points, suggesting not only that student achievement in Grade 8 Mathematics remained statistically significant between transfer and nontransfer students, but that the transfer students’ performance decreased significantly, widening the gap between nontransfer and transfer students. The results implied that student achievement differences between transfer students and nontransfer students were not only statistically significant in Grades 4 and 6-8; the performance differences remained in Grades 7 and 8.

The data also indicated that the decline in achievement by nontransfer students began at Grade 4 and persisted through Grade 8. Although transfer students’ scores had a negative influence on overall student scores, their test scores increased slightly from Grade 4 to Grades 6 and 7. Nevertheless, student performance for both transfer and nontransfer students in Mathematics declined significantly at Grade 8. Although transfer students’ performance in Mathematics was consistently lower than that of their nontransfer counterparts and the difference remained statistically significant, the data
indicated that the transfer students’ performance increased slightly in Grades 6 and 7 but declined in Grade 8. This finding is key because it suggests that transfer students could not be the sole reason for the decline at Summit School, which would have been reflected as a significant decrease in scores at Grade 6 and leveling off of scores in Grades 7 and 8. The fact that the decline continued and that nontransfer students’ mean scores also decreased suggests that the problem was more complex and multifaceted. The next section discusses the trends of nontransfer and transfer students in LAL.

**Trends of Nontransfer Students in LAL**

Considering the complexity of this issue, it was important to explore the trends in scores by nontransfer and transfer students to assess whether the differences were transparent and sharply declined at the Grade 6 level when the populations merged or whether the differences were evident before the groups were combined. An independent $t$ test compared student achievement scores by grade levels and the differences in mean scores for nontransfer students in LAL. The findings indicated that the mean norm scores of the nontransfer students at Grade 4 (-0.0020) and Grade 8 (-0.1990) demonstrated no statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) in student achievement. Likewise, the trend showed no statistically significant differences in student achievement by nontransfer students from Grade 4 (-0.0020) to Grade 6 (-0.2527) or from Grade 6 (-0.2527) to Grade 8 (-0.1990), as shown in Table 12.

**Trends of Transfer Students in LAL**

An independent $t$ test compared student achievement scores in LAL by grade levels and the differences in mean scores for transfer students. The findings indicated that the mean norm scores for transfer students at Grade 4 (-1.2712) and Grade 8 (-0.7331)
Table 12

Results of Independent t Test of Difference in Language Arts Literacy (LAL) Scores on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) to Explore Trends of Nontransfer in Grades 4 and 6-8 at Summit School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>-0.0020</td>
<td>0.7236</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>-0.2527</td>
<td>1.0552</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>-0.2527</td>
<td>1.0552</td>
<td>.730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-0.1990</td>
<td>0.8563</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>-0.0020</td>
<td>0.7236</td>
<td>.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-0.1990</td>
<td>0.8563</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.

demonstrated that the change in mean difference in student performance was statistically significant (p < .05); transfer students’ performance was also statistically significant (p < .01) at Grade 4 (-1.2712) and Grade 6 (-0.5479). However, there was no statistically significant difference in student performance between Grade 6 (-0.5479) and Grade 8 (-0.07331), as shown in Table 13.

Trends of Nontransfer Students in Mathematics

The trends for transfer and nontransfer students in Mathematics were examined. The independent t test examined the differences in mean scores for nontransfer students in Mathematics by grade levels. The findings indicated that the mean norm scores of
Table 13

*Results of Independent t Test of Difference in Language Arts Literacy (LAL) Scores on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) to Explore the Trends of Transfer Students in Grades 4 and 6-8 at Summit School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-1.2712</td>
<td>1.0628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>-0.5479</td>
<td>0.9188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>-0.5479</td>
<td>0.9188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-0.7331</td>
<td>0.7417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-1.2712</td>
<td>1.0628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-0.7331</td>
<td>0.7417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *p < .05. **p < .01.

nontransfer students in Mathematics at Grade 4 (0.5413) and Grade 8 (0.1011) demonstrated that differences in student performance was statistically significant \((p < .01)\); nontransfer students’ performance was also statistically significant \((p < .01)\) at Grade 4 (0.5413) and Grade 6 (0.0917). However, there was no statistically significant difference in student performance between Grade 6 (.0917) and Grade 8 (.1011), as shown in Table 14.

The findings indicated that the mean norm scores in Mathematics of the nontransfer students at Grade 4 (0.5413) and Grade 8 (0.1011) had declined significantly \((p < .01)\) by Grade 8. Likewise, the data indicated that the change in nontransfer students’
Table 14

Results of Independent t Test of Difference in Mathematics Scores on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) to Explore Trends of Nontransfer Students in Grades 4 and 6-8 at Summit School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.003**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0.5413</td>
<td>0.7259</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0.0917</td>
<td>1.0233</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0.0917</td>
<td>1.0233</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0.1011</td>
<td>0.8489</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontransfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0.5413</td>
<td>0.7259</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0.1011</td>
<td>0.8489</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01.

performance in Mathematics was also statistically significant (p < .01) between Grade 4 (0.5413) and Grade 6 (0.917). These norm mean scores suggest that the nontransfer students’ performance had declined significantly before the transfer students had matriculated to Summit School at Grade 6. Moreover, the nontransfer students’ decline began at Grade 4 and gradually decreased as they progressed from Grade 4 to Grade 8, indicating that the deficiencies of the nontransfer students were compounded as the scores declined rapidly. Thus, by the time the students were in Grade 8, the gap in their Mathematics performance had increased significantly, suggesting that, while transfer students compounded the problem of lower achievement scores, they were not the sole reason for the significant overall decline at Summit School. In fact, the trend among
nontransfer students implies that the decline in performance at Summit School had begun as early as Grade 4, before the groups merged at Grade 6. That is, the trend demonstrated by the nontransfer students was a precipitous decline beginning at Grade 4 and magnified by Grade 8. Thus, as the transfer students entered Summit School at Grade 6, they exacerbated the problem but the difference was not statistically significant to demonstrate a sharp decline in achievement at this grade level.

**Trends of Transfer Students in Mathematics**

An independent *t* test examined the difference in mean scores for transfer students in Mathematics at various grade levels. The findings indicated that the mean scores for the transfer students at Grade 4 (-0.5992) and Grade 8 (-0.5806) showed no significant difference in achievement (*p* > .05). Likewise, transfer students’ performance demonstrated no significant difference in achievement at Grade 4 (-0.5992) and Grade 6 (-0.4442) or at Grade 6 (-0.4442) and Grade 8 (-0.5806), as shown in Table 15.

The findings suggest that the trend in the mean scores for the transfer students from Grade 4 (-0.5992) to Grade 8 (-0.5806) showed no significant difference in achievement (*p* > .05) in Mathematics. While the transfer students’ mean score declined as the students moved from Grade 4 to Grade 8, the decline was gradual. Moreover, although the transfer students’ performance continued to decrease as they progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, the decline was marginal compared to that of their nontransfer counterparts.

**Results of Regressions**

While the independent *t* tests revealed a significant difference in scores between transfer and nontransfer students, the results did not indicate the degree to which the
Table 15

Results of Independent t Test of Difference in Scores in Mathematics on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) to Explore Trends of Transfer Students in Grades 4 and 6-8 at Summit School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-0.5992</td>
<td>0.9571</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-0.4442</td>
<td>0.8813</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-0.4442</td>
<td>0.8813</td>
<td>.398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-0.5806</td>
<td>0.8655</td>
<td>.398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-0.5992</td>
<td>0.9571</td>
<td>.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-0.5806</td>
<td>0.8655</td>
<td>.940</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A transfer factor was affecting overall scores. Nor did the t test identify what factors were prominent in contributing to the performance difference between transfer and nontransfer students. Thus, multiple regression and fixed effects regression were employed to describe the relationship between independent variables and student performance at Summit School and identify major factors significantly influenced achievement. Four regressions were conducted.

The first regression examined student achievement as measured by normed test scores for all students (transfer, nontransfer, and general education students and special education students). The purpose of this regression was to determine which independent variable had the greatest effect on performance by the total student population.
The second regression examined student achievement as measured by normed test scores for only the general education students, excluding special education students. The purpose of this regression was to determine whether performance by general education students was affected to the same degree between transfer and nontransfer students.

The third regression examined normed test scores to measure the trajectory of scores for transfer and nontransfer students. The purpose of this regression was to determine whether transfer students caught up with nontransfer students as they progressed through Summit School.

The fourth regression was a fixed effects regression that examined the degree of the difference between individual transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School, controlling all fixed characteristics of the individual students, such as ethnicity, gender, economic disadvantage, LEP status, and special education status. The purpose of this regression was to measure the degree to which the individual transfer students had contributed to the effect of achievement differences, considering that all factors remained constant except change of grade level. Thus, the fixed effects regression measured the degree to which the individual transfer students’ test scores declined as they progressed through grade levels at Summit School and the effect of these changes on student performance.

**Results of Multiple Regression**

**Regression 1 (Mathematics).** The results of the panel data analysis identified seven predictors of student achievement on the Mathematics test scores: special education, transfer student, ethnicity, economically disadvantaged student, cohort08, grade level, and female student. The results indicated that White students were more
likely to impact student performance positively and were likely to score 0.22 points above their Hispanic or African American counterparts. Likewise, cohort08 was positively associated with student achievement. Scores for African American students, special education students, and transfer students were more likely to be negatively associated with student achievement. The special education population represented one of the most significant factors affecting student achievement: Special education students were likely to score substantially lower (-1.00) than the general population, which depressed student performance scores. Transfer status was negatively associated with student achievement. That is, transfer students were likely to score lower (-0.39) than nontransfer students. Special education (-1.00) was a stronger predictor of student achievement than was ethnicity (Black, -0.38) or transfer status (-0.39). These results are summarized in Table 16.

**Regression 2 (Mathematics).** Results of the second regression, with general education students without special education students, identified five predictors that significantly affected student achievement in Mathematics: ethnicity (White and Black), transfer status, economically disadvantaged status, and cohort08. Scores for economically disadvantaged students and cohort08 students were positively associated with student achievement, while ethnicity had both a positive and negative correlation with student achievement. That is, African American students were more likely to affect achievement performance, scoring negatively (-0.38 points) but White students were more likely to positively affect student achievement, scoring 0.26 points above their African American and Hispanic counterparts. Transfer students had a negative effect on student performance, scoring 0.30 points below their nontransfer counterparts. This suggests that,
Table 16

Results of Multiple Regression on Normed Mathematics Assessment Scores ($N = 136$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All OLS (Model 1)</th>
<th>General Education OLS (Model 2)</th>
<th>All OLS (Model 3)</th>
<th>General Education OLS (Model 4)</th>
<th>Fixed effects (Model 5)</th>
<th>Fixed effects General Education (Model 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.22** (0.08)</td>
<td>0.26** (0.09)</td>
<td>0.22** (0.08)</td>
<td>0.26** (0.09)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.38** (0.12)</td>
<td>-0.38** (0.15)</td>
<td>-0.38** (0.12)</td>
<td>-0.36* (0.15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.08)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort08</td>
<td>0.237** (0.07)</td>
<td>0.28** (0.09)</td>
<td>0.24** (0.07)</td>
<td>0.29* (0.09)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>0.16 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>-1.00** (0.08)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-1.00** (0.08)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>-0.24 (0.13)</td>
<td>-0.23 (0.13)</td>
<td>-0.23 (0.13)</td>
<td>-0.23 (0.13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.02)</td>
<td>-0.00 (0.03)</td>
<td>-0.06* (0.03)</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.03)</td>
<td>-0.05* (0.02)</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>-0.39** (0.09)</td>
<td>-0.30** (0.10)</td>
<td>-1.00** (0.36)</td>
<td>-0.90* (0.46)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer * Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.09 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.25 (0.19)</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.22)</td>
<td>0.41 (0.21)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.25)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.15 (0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. OLS = ordinary least squares; parentheses indicate an inverse relationship.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
when special education students were excluded from the data set, achievement differences were more likely to be related to ethnicity and transfer status as these students depressed achievement scores in Mathematics. Transfer students to Summit School were predominantly African Americans, which could explain the negative influence of both ethnicity and transfer student status on student achievement in Mathematics.

**Regression 3 (Mathematics).** The normed Mathematics test scores were analyzed for transfer students, looking specifically at their trajectory as they progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8 and exploring whether transfer students’ scores changed and whether they “caught up” with nontransfer students. This was accomplished by creating an interaction dummy variable between grade and transfer status. The results indicated that cohort08 had a positive effect on student achievement, while ethnicity had both positive and negative correlations. That is, White students were more likely to score slightly higher (0.22 points) than their African American or Hispanic counterparts, while African American students were more likely to score lower (-0.38 points) than their White or Hispanic counterparts.

The results also indicated that special education, grade level, and transfer status had a negative effect on student achievement. Grade levels suggested that, as students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, their scores were negatively associated with achievement, as they were likely to score lower (-0.06 points) as they increased in grade level. Analysis of transfer students’ grades with the interaction dummy variable (transfer*grade) revealed that the scores were not statistically significant, suggesting that, on average, their Mathematics test scores did not show substantial improvement; this implied that the transfer students did not “catch up” to the nontransfer students in
Mathematics achievement. Although the data reflected that transfer students did not “catch up” to nontransfer students, it was clear that scores, irrespective of transfer or nontransfer status, declined as students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8.

Special education and transfer students represented the most significant factors affecting student achievement. Special education students were likely to score substantially lower (-1.00) than the general population and transfer students were likely to score significantly less (-1.00) than their nontransfer counterparts, which depressed student performance scores. The panel data set indicated that, as the special education students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, the achievement gap increased significantly, by -1.00 points (-1.00 x 6 = -6.00; -1.00 x 7 = -7.00; -1.00 x 8 = -8.00). Thus, by the time special education students were in Grade 8, the gap in achievement had increased significantly, with the result that the special education students were performing significantly below their general education counterparts.

Regression 4 (Mathematics). The normed Mathematics test scores were analyzed to examine the trajectory of transfer students to determine whether they “caught up” with nontransfer students. This panel data set examined only general education students, excluding special education students. The findings revealed that, when the special education students were excluded from the data, transfer students (-0.90) were the more significant predictor of student achievement. This suggests that, while special education status contributed significantly to the overall decline in achievement, other factors, including transfer students, also influenced this decline.

The results of the fourth regression also demonstrated that cohort08 had a positive effect on student achievement, while ethnicity showed both positive and negative
correlations. White students were more likely to score slightly higher (0.26 points) than their African American or Hispanic counterparts, while African American students were more likely to score lower (-0.36 points) than their White or Hispanic counterparts. It should be noted that grade level and the interaction of the dummy variable (transfer*grade) were not statistically significant in student achievement in Mathematics, suggesting that, on average, Mathematics test scores did not show substantial improvement. This implied that the transfer students did not “catch up” to the nontransfer students in Mathematics achievement.

**Summary findings from mathematics regressions.** The results of the four regressions identified several factors that depressed overall achievement at Summit School. Special education status was a major factor in the decline in student achievement, even more prevalent than transfer status. When special education students were excluded from the regressions, ethnicity (particularly African American) and transfer status of general students were highly correlated with lower student achievement and were significant predictors of depressed student achievement in Mathematics.

While transfer student status and grade level had significantly negative impacts on achievement scores (that is, as students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, scores for both transfer or nontransfer students decreased), when these variables interacted (transfer*grade), the results indicated no statistically significant difference in student performance in Mathematics. That is, on average, scores in Mathematics did not show substantial improvement, implying that the transfer students did not “catch up” to the nontransfer students in achievement in Mathematics. Still, the finding that special education status was one of the most significant factors in affecting student achievement
is key, implying that transfer students could not be the sole cause of the sharp decline in achievement at Summit School but that other variables, such as special education status and ethnicity, played important roles. Furthermore, the data suggest that overall performance of students decreased as they progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, regardless of transfer status. This is indicative that the decline in mathematics achievement at Summit School would have manifested even if transfer students had not entered Summit School.

**Results of Fixed Effects Regression for Mathematics**

The results of the fixed effect regression of scores in Mathematics identified one significant predictor of student achievement: grade level. That is, as both transfer and nontransfer students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, there was a negative association with student achievement, irrespective of transfer status, in which achievement in Mathematics decreased significantly. The remainder of the variables analyzed through fixed effects regression were omitted due to collinearity; that is, the factors remained constant or “fixed.” Thus, the only factors that remained were grade and the “interaction” variable (grade * transfer). Of these two factors only grade level was significant in achievement, although negatively correlated.

Conversely, when the fixed effect regression examined the general education students, excluding special education students, the results revealed no significant difference between scores of individual transfer and nontransfer students. All other variables analyzed through fixed effects were omitted due to collinearity, with the exception of grade and the “interaction” variable (grade * transfer), which did not
demonstrate significant differences between transfer and nontransfer students when
special education students were excluded from the model.

**Results of Fixed Effects Regression for LAL**

**Regression 1 (LAL).** The panel data analysis revealed seven predictors of student
achievement as reflected by LAL scores: special education status, LEP, transfer status,
ethnicity, and cohort08 status. The analysis indicated that White students and cohort08
students were likely to positively influence student performance and to score slightly
higher on student achievement: the former (0.23 points) higher than their African
American and Hispanic counterparts and the latter (0.20) higher than their cohort09
counterparts. Conversely, LEP and special education status were the most significant
predictors of student achievement: LEP students were likely to score significantly (-1.24
points) below the general student population and special education students were likely to
score significantly (-1.03 points) below the general student population, thus depressing
the overall achievement score. Transfer students similarly depressed overall achievement
performance, as they were likely to score -0.38 points below nontransfer students. Table
17 summarizes these results.

**Regression 2 (LAL).** The results of the second regression on LAL scores
indicated that, when the scores of general education students were analyzed without
scores of special education students, the significant predictors of student achievement in
LAL were LEP status, ethnicity, and transfer status. The data demonstrated that White
students were more likely to have a positive effect on student achievement, scoring 0.33
points higher than their African American and Hispanic counterparts. Conversely, LEP
students had significant negative effect on overall achievement, scoring -1.29 points
Table 17

Results of Multiple Regression on Normed Language Arts Literacy (LAL) Assessment Scores (N = 136)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All OLS (Model 1)</th>
<th>General Education OLS (Model 2)</th>
<th>All OLS (Model 3)</th>
<th>General Education OLS (Model 4)</th>
<th>Fixed effects General Education (Model 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort08</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>-1.03**</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.03**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>-1.24**</td>
<td>-1.29**</td>
<td>-1.24**</td>
<td>-1.28**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>-0.38**</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>-1.26**</td>
<td>-1.24*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
<td>(0.58)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer * Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(0.09)</td>
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Note. OLS = ordinary least squares; parentheses indicate an inverse relationship.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
below the general education students, thus substantially depressing overall achievement scores. Transfer students scored 0.29 points below their nontransfer counterparts.

**Regression 3 (LAL).** The normed LAL scores were analyzed for transfer students, examining specifically their trajectory from Grade 6 through Grade 8, to determine whether the transfer students’ scores changed and whether they “caught up” with nontransfer students. This analysis was conducted by creating an “interaction” dummy variable between grade and transfer students. The results indicated that special education, LEP, and transfer students exerted a significantly negative effect on normed LAL scores. Transfer and LEP students were the most significant predictors of student achievement, with transfer students scoring significantly (-1.26 points) below their general education population counterparts, followed closely by LEP students scoring substantially (-1.24 points) below their general education population counterparts, thus depressing overall LAL achievement scores. Likewise, special education students scored significantly (-1.03 points) below their general population counterparts, thus depressing overall LAL achievement scores.

While transfer students scored -1.26 points below their nontransfer counterparts (a significant difference), there was no significant difference in their LAL scores as they progressed through grade levels. Nevertheless, when the dummy variable (transfer*grade) “interacted,” there was a significant difference in LAL scores between the groups. That is, as transfer students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, there was slight improvement (0.13 points) in their LAL test scores. This key finding suggests that, as transfer students remained at Summit School, their performance improved and the improvement was significant by Grade 8. For example, the interaction variable multiplied
by grade level produced this outcome (0.13 x 6 = 0.78 points, 0.13 x 7 = 0.91 points, 0.13 x 8 = 1.04 points); thus, performance seemed to increase gradually from Grade 6 to Grade 8. Although the transfer students did not “catch up” to nontransfer students in LAL achievement, there was slight improvement for transfer students the longer they remained at Summit School.

The data indicated that White students and cohort08 students had significantly positive effects on normed LAL scores. White students were more likely to score 0.24 points above their African American and Hispanic counterparts. Cohort08 students were more likely to score 0.16 points higher than their cohort09 counterparts on LAL achievement. This suggests that these students exerted some effect on overall LAL student achievement.

**Regression 4 (LAL).** The normed LAL test scores were analyzed to examine the trajectory of the transfer students, exploring whether they “caught up” with nontransfer students. This panel data set examined only general education students, excluding special education students, to identify major contributors to depressed student achievement. The findings indicated that ethnicity and cohort08 were positively associated with LAL student achievement, while LEP and transfer students were negatively correlated with LAL student achievement. White students were likely to score 0.32 points above their African American and Hispanic counterparts. Cohort08 students were likely to score 0.23 points higher than their cohort09 counterparts in LAL.

Conversely, the findings revealed that, when special education students were excluded from the data, LEP and transfer students were the most significant predictors of student achievement in LAL. That is, LEP students were likely to score -1.28 points
below their general education counterparts; similarly, transfer students were likely to
score -1.24 points below their nontransfer counterparts on LAL achievement. This
suggests that, while special education status contributed significantly to the overall
decline in achievement, other factors, including transfer status and LEP status also
influenced this decline.

**Summary findings of LAL regressions.** The results of the four regressions
indicated several factors that depressed overall achievement at Summit School. While the
LAL results revealed somewhat different outcomes from the Mathematics results, special
education, LEP, and transfer student status were major contributors to the overall decline
in student achievement. Ethnicity (African American) and grade level also contributed to
the overall decline in Mathematics scores but not in LAL scores. When special education
students were excluded from the regressions, LEP and transfer student status were highly
correlated with lower student achievement and were significant predictors of depressed
student achievement in LAL. When the grades interacted (as students progressed from
Grade 6 to Grade 8), there was little significant change in LAL achievement, irrespective
of transfer status. This suggests that the LAL scores were depressed primarily by special
education, LEP, and transfer students.

When the dummy variable (transfer*grade) interacted, there was a significant
difference (0.13 points) in the trajectory of transfer students. That is, as transfer students
remained at Summit School, their performance in LAL improved slightly (0.13 points).
This is a key finding, suggesting that, while transfer students did not “catch up” with
nontransfer students in LAL achievement, they improved slightly in performance.
Moreover, it suggests that transfer students could not be the sole cause of the sharp
decline in achievement at Summit School, but that other variables, such as special education status and LEP status, played important roles.

The results of fixed effects regression of LAL scores revealed no significant differences in student achievement. Grade level and the interaction variable (grade * transfer) were the only variables that were not eliminated, but they were not statistically significant. The remainder of the variables analyzed through fixed effects regression were omitted due to collinearity; that is, these variables remained constant. Likewise, when the fixed effect regression examined general education students, excluding special education students, the results revealed no significant differences between individual transfer and nontransfer students. All other variables analyzed through fixed effects were omitted due to collinearity, with the exception of grade level and the interaction variable (transfer*grade), which did not demonstrate significance in the differences between transfer and nontransfer students.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter examined performance differences between transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School. The findings did not support the hypothesis that transfer students were the sole reason for the overall decline in performance at Summit School but suggested that they played an important role in the overall decline in student achievement. While results of $t$ tests measured differences between transfer and nontransfer students and explored whether these differences remained in Grades 7 and 8, the multiple regressions and the fixed effect regressions examined factors that contributed to the overall decline in academic achievement in both Mathematics and LAL. Where
differences existed, the fixed effect regressions measured the degree of these differences between individual transfer and nontransfer students.

The t tests of scores in Mathematics suggested that the decline in Mathematics decreased substantially even before the transfer students had matriculated at Summit School at the Grade 6 level. The evidence pointed to a decline in nontransfer students’ mean scores beginning at Grade 4 and a gradual decrease as students progressed from Grade 4 through Grade 8. This is a key finding, implying that, while transfer students contributed to depressing academic achievement in Mathematics and exacerbated the gap between transfer and nontransfer students in Mathematics, this decline had begun as early as Grade 4, before the transfer students had merged with the Summit School population. The results revealed that the differences were not only significant but increased significantly in Mathematics as both transfer and nontransfer students progressed from Grade 7 to Grade 8. This key finding indicates that the transfer students could not be the sole reason for the overall decline at Summit School, since this would point to a significant drop at Grade 6, leveling off in Grades 7 and 8. The fact that the decline increased rapidly and that nontransfer students’ mean scores also declined significantly implied that there additional factors influenced the overall decline.

While the results of the independent t test for LAL scores revealed a difference in mean scores between transfer and nontransfer students in Grades 4, 7, and 8, there was no significant difference in achievement in Grade 6, indicating that the decline in achievement had begun before the merger of transfer and nontransfer students at Grade 6. Although the merger compounded Summit School’s overall decline in performance, it was not statistically significant at Grade 6. Although the transfer students matriculated at
Summit School with lower achievement scores and their mean scores were lower than those of their nontransfer counterparts, the trend for transfer students indicated a statistically significant difference in test scores between Grades 4 and 8 but no significant difference in scores between Grades 6 and 8. That is, while their scores increased from Grade 4 to Grade 8 and demonstrated a significant difference in achievement in LAL, they declined slightly from Grade 6 to Grade 8, indicating no significant difference in LAL achievement between these grade levels.

Although the results of the independent t tests revealed differences in scores between nontransfer and transfer students, the multiple regressions identified other significant factors that influenced overall student achievement and depressed achievement scores and measured the degree of those differences between individual transfer and nontransfer students.

The results of the multiple regressions in Mathematics indicated that, while several factors had depressed overall achievement at Summit School, special education status was one of the major factors influencing the decline, even more dominant than transfer status. Nevertheless, transfer status and ethnicity (particularly African American) were highly correlated with lower student achievement and were also significant predictors of depressed student achievement in Mathematics. While transfer status and grade level had significantly negative influences on performance (that is, as students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, scores declined irrespective of transfer status), when these variables interacted (transfer*grade), the results indicated no statistically significant difference in student performance in Mathematics. This suggested that, on average, transfer students scores in Mathematics did not show considerable improvement,
implying that the transfer students did not “catch up” to the nontransfer students in achievement in Mathematics.

The data indicate that transfer students could not be the singular cause of the decline in achievement at Summit School, failing to support the related hypothesis. Although transfer students played an important role in student achievement, the reasons for the decline were more complex and indicated that other factors affected the depressed student achievement in Mathematics. Special education status and ethnicity played crucial roles in the differences between transfer and nontransfer students in achievement in Mathematics. Moreover, the data indicated an overall decrease in student performance from Grade 6 to Grade 8, regardless of transfer status. This implies that that the decline in Mathematics achievement at Summit School would have emerged even if transfer students had not entered Summit School.

The results of the multiple regressions for LAL scores also indicated that special education status was a major factor in depressed LAL student achievement. When special education students were excluded from the regressions, LEP and transfer status were key factors in student achievement and were highly correlated with lower student achievement in LAL. Nevertheless, as students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8, few significant differences in LAL achievement were seen, implying that there was little improvement in overall achievement, regardless of transfer status. This suggests that the LAL scores were depressed primarily by special education, LEP, and transfer students.

The fixed effects regressions revealed no significant degrees of difference between individual transfer and nontransfer students in performance in LAL, even when special education students were excluded from the regressions. That is, while grade level
and the interaction variable (grade*transfer) were the only variables that were not eliminated due to collinearity, they were not statistically significant. Nevertheless, key findings suggested that as transfer students remained at Summit School, their performance in LAL improved slightly (0.13 points). This is a key finding, suggesting that, while transfer students did not “catch up” with nontransfer students in LAL achievement, they improved slightly in performance. Furthermore, it implies that transfer students could not be the singular factor in the decline in achievement at Summit School but that other variables, such as special education and LEP status, played crucial roles.
Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings for Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked, *What conditions or factors at the school, classroom, and student levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?*

The findings indicated that, when resources and support were perceived, teachers were motivated and were successful in meeting the expectations and high accountability standards. That is, teachers were more likely to work together as a group when resources such as time and availability were provided. However, when support or resources were not sensed, the very thing that motivated the teachers became a challenge and was met with resistance. Accountability and high expectations, for example, were viewed as impossible standards to meet when support of leadership or time was not accessible to teachers.

Teachers and administrators reported that factors such as resources, working together as a group, accountability, high expectations, caring and diverse culture, academically prepared students, and parental involvement created a more effective school. Conversely, factors such as inconsistent guidance and planning, insufficient time, and little parental involvement promoted a demanding environment with high accountability.

**Effective Components**

Teachers and administrators discussed several components that contributed to the effectiveness of Summit School. Factors such as accountability, resources, working as a group, academically prepared students, diverse and caring culture, parents’ participation in school, demanding environment, inconsistent guidance and planning, pressure of accountability, and limited parental involvement, were identified as positive and negative
key characteristics in creating an effective school environment. Effectiveness was dependent on the perception of the administration providing these resources, which promoted means for teachers to work together in fulfilling high expectations and meeting accountability standards.

**Accountability**

There was a strong and persistent sense of accountability that allowed people to know what was expected of them and what would happen if expectations were not met. The clear expectations removed ambiguity and doubt as administrators held teachers accountable to high standards. For example, the principal argued that “teachers need to be able to articulate the percentage of students who will pass the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) assessments . . . [and] develop an action plan in order to address the failing students.” The administration’s clarity and openness about the teachers’ ability to produce results and push students to achieve higher levels of proficiency were reflected through this mechanism of accountability. Understanding these expectations, teachers had the ability to plan how to best meet the standards and maximize instructional strategies to prepare students to attain proficiency.

Not only were the expectations clear; teachers were also given the flexibility to incorporate various pedagogical strategies that would engage the students in meeting those expectations. One teacher noted, “There was flexibility in executing the teaching methods for content areas. The district was open to teachers using creativity and a variety of teaching strategies for effective teaching in the classrooms.” This suggested that, while teachers were held to high accountability standards, their teaching was not stymied. The flexibility allowed creativity in various modalities in engaging students in the learning
process. Not only was there flexibility in teaching the content areas; teachers were deliberate in indicating the learning objectives and the content standards so that students understood and made connection to what they were learning. These clear accountability standards provided structure and transparency for teachers in meeting the needs of their students.

While teachers were held accountable with these high standards, administrators were also held to similar accountable standards by the district and state for the performance of their schools. Administrators were also clear on the expectations and requirements that enabled them to function appropriately and to support their teachers effectively. The principal contended that having a clear sense of the guidelines and the tools to evaluate teachers contributed to the effectiveness of Summit School. The principal referred to the 32-page evaluative document that addressed all categories of administration. The principal explained, “This evaluative tool goes through every goal in the district and it covers every area including budget, academics, teacher performance, safety and security.” The principal maintained, “As administrators, we have to document and gather evidence showing that we are addressing the areas of concerns or areas where Summit is not meeting the district’s goals.” This evaluative tool and accountability standard gave administrator’s defined guidelines to ascertain the effectiveness of Summit School.

Another way in which teachers were held accountable was through data-driven instruction. This accountability standard contributed to the effectiveness of Summit School through its use of data to drive instruction. Data assessed the students’ strengths and weaknesses and provided teachers with the necessary information to address skills
that had not been mastered. One teacher explained, “Accountability for teachers is high . . . you are expected to constantly analyze your students’ work, their strengths and weaknesses then use your results to drive your instruction.” Similarly, another teacher maintained, “Data-driven instruction makes you focus on the skill [in which] the student did not achieve mastery.” This provided insight into developing activities to address skills not yet mastered. Teachers and administrators recognized the benefits of the data-driven process. Yet it was the transparent guidelines and clearly defined means by which data could be utilized to drive instruction that led to the effectiveness of this process at Summit School. As one teacher explained, “The data analysis provided me with the information to develop specific problems to address the students, particularly those students on the borderline of being proficient.” Another teacher maintained, “Data analysis reports the weaknesses and strengths of each student, and with that information we can group the students accordingly to target objectives and reteach the skills [in which] they have not attained mastery.” All of this allowed teachers to act on their own, to know what they needed to do, which freed them from having to get directions. Being able to act toward meeting goals gave them a sense of agency and made the goals attainable. These two things kept the goals positive rather than negative.

As one administrator put it,

The more we work with data, the more useful I find it. For example, teachers have been doing progressive data analysis (PDA) each month and charting the growth of regular, special education, and bilingual students each month, noting strengths and weaknesses and what they have to address within a month’s period so that the children master the skills they did not master in the previous month.
In order to drive instruction, teachers needed to analyze the data effectively and follow through with specific strategies to address students who were not performing adequately. That is, ineffectual analysis of data will not drive instruction. Teachers and administrators recognized the importance of this stipulation and the necessity for the means of accountability to be evident. This clarity in the accountability standards fostered the effectiveness of Summit School.

**Resources**

The availability of resources was another factor that promoted effectiveness at Summit School. These factors included time availability, support of instruction and learning, and visibility of administrators. These components allowed teachers and administrators to meet the expectations of high accountability standards because the leadership supported instruction and learning through professional development and allocated specific time in the schedule for weekly grade-level meetings. As one teacher noted, “We are always looking for professional development opportunities, different resources and materials to make it more creative and engaging for the students. The administration gives us a lot of support and gives us opportunities to participate in these seminars.” Another teacher reported that the principal researched varied means such as grant writing to have adequate resources. The teacher noted, “The principal gives us everything that we need and even writes several grants and gets the funding annually so that we can have the necessary resources.”

The administration not only provided professional development for teachers to improve their craft, but also provided the structure for teachers to collaborate and improve their pedagogical and instructional practices. As one teacher remarked, “We
meet weekly at our grade level and this incorporates third and fourth grade. The principal
gives us five preps every week and provides the time and opportunity to meet.” Similarly,
another teacher explained that the administration promoted collaboration. She remarked,
“The administrators want us to work together and so gives us the weekly grade-level
meetings to work together. We also have staff meetings and vertical planning meetings to
improve instructional strategies.” Teachers perceived this as support because the
administration provided the means and the time availability in the schedule that allowed
them to collaborate. This provided teachers with the opportunity to facilitate more
effective teaching and learning in the classroom and influenced pedagogical practices.

 Administrators also emphasized that the support of faculty members maintained
high priority in achieving a successful academic environment. The administration team
seemed to provide whatever was necessary to maximize instruction and learning in the
classroom and to encourage student achievement. The principal captured this concept
succinctly: “I will provide our teachers with support, resources, and whatever it is to
make their job more manageable so they can focus on teaching the students.” Another
administrator noted, “Whatever resources the teachers need in order to achieve, they
know that they will have it.” The presence of the support and leadership necessary to
meet high expectations and accountability standards promoted a culture and environment
that focused intently on teaching and learning.

 In addition to this support that facilitated a culture of success, there was also a
transparency that motivated teachers to meet the standards. As one administrator noted, “I
also believe in open communication. If there is a need to speak about something that
needs to be changed, I will do so. If there is a staff member who needs some guidance
and redirection, we will talk.” This openness in communicating helped teachers to know that they were meeting standards. Because the administration was forthright and honest in addressing problems as they occurred, teachers had a generally relaxed feeling about their day-to-day actions. Because they knew that they would hear about it if there was a problem, when left alone, the staff relaxed and believed that they were doing a good job.

The administration was open about more than problems. They regularly recognized and relied on accomplished teachers to share responsibilities for professional development and instructional design. As one administrator remarked,

As the principal, I believe I need to be knowledgeable of everything, but I may not have the expertise in every single area. As such, I utilize the strengths of our teachers to support the organizational structure. For example, a few of our teachers have been trained and become certified experts on developing differentiated literacy instructional practices and literature structures to foster academic achievement of students. These teachers were considered master teachers in this instructional pedagogy. As a school, we depended on them to turnkey the information to the remainder of the staff through professional development seminars.

Recognizing the accomplishments and expertise of these teachers was another way that the administration created a supportive culture at Summit. More important, positioning these teachers to “turnkey the information to the remainder of the staff through professional development seminars” positioned these teachers to become shared resources for important instructional development. The administration saw the
importance of these teachers’ expertise and made sure that they were available to share it with others who could benefit from it.

While academic performance had high stakes for Summit School, teachers recognized that, if they asked an administrator for what they needed, it was readily accessible. This not only encouraged them not only to meet expectations; they recognized that the administration was there to support them. As one teacher said,

All administrators are very concerned with the student and their abilities to score high on the NJ ASKS and all the other state assessments. . . . I always find that, when I have a question or concern, personally speaking, that I feel comfortable going to someone and saying, ‘Listen, I need help. I don’t know how to do this.’ Usually, 99.9%, I do get the answer and if I don’t get it today, I’ll have it tomorrow.

Another teacher remarked, “I can go to the administrators for anything. They are always there and supportive. If I have a question, I am not afraid to approach them.” This level of urgency to guide teachers in the right direction to achieve support contributed to teachers’ meeting high expectations and academic standards. As one teacher explained, “In my 23 years, I’ve never been turned down by an administrator in my request for help or to get someone in to assist me. If they cannot help you, they’ll send you to someone who can. It is never been a problem. That’s at this school.” As one teacher said, “If we invite an administrator or staff to come in and be a part of a class, they always come in. I feel that they are there when you need them and are always available at any time.”
Working as a Group

Accountability and resources were only part of the equation. Summit School obtained more from its staff and students by using teamwork and by working together than they would have gained by individual efforts. Because of the clear expectations and the available resources, Summit School teachers were able to work together to create effective teaching and learning environments; they even used teamwork pedagogically to scaffold learning experience. As one leader contended,

As a leader, you are responsible for the successful functioning of the school. You cannot do everything, so it is important that we work as a team and everyone needs to do their part. . . . They need to understand that everyone’s job is important.

This guiding principle identified teamwork as an essential component of the effectiveness of Summit School.

Teachers spoke favorably of teamwork and grade-level meetings as integral parts of their weekly schedule. In fact, these meetings were seen as important enough to be built in the organizational structure of Summit School. The administration both valued teamwork and respected the teachers’ schedules enough to provide specific time for teachers to collaborate, share ideas, and discuss ways to improve student learning. As one teacher noted, “We have weekly grade-level meeting where we discuss students’ progress, concerns and plan instructionally.” Another teacher described the process: “We are pushed to collaborate and work together. Although it happens frequently on staff development days; it happens informally and formally at grade-level meetings.” These opportunities fostered a community of learning where teachers worked together to meet
the needs of the students. As an administrator explained, “The third grade, for example, developed an entire thematic and interdisciplinary unit on the rain forest across their grade levels. Teachers consistently met to plan, evaluate, and assess the project.” While the planning was time intensive, the collaboration, the implementation of the project, and the knowledge fostered seemed beneficial and facilitated active student learning; therefore, it was scheduled into regular work weeks.

Teamwork and working together seemed to influence instructional outcomes and created synergy in Summit School. It worked so well at the teacher level that some programs adopted it to student-level learning. Specifically, through student-oriented teamwork, teachers engaged students in in-depth learning experiences. Teachers often found that the students could perform at a higher level by working together. One teacher argued that the mathematics curriculum was sophisticated and that, because students worked together, they were pushed to solve problems and worked strategically to develop ideas to explain mathematical concepts. The teacher noted, “The value in the curriculum is that students are working in groups and are working together. They are figuring it out, they are solving problems. That is actually the real-world environment.” The ability for students to work together and acquire these skills not only prepared them to compete in a global economy; the arrangement helped them to prepare to compete aggressively in the world market.

The ability to use resources driven by accountability and teamwork allowed teachers at Summit School to attain high expectations. These components allowed Summit School to consistently set and meet high expectations for students, a target that contributed to feeling successful about themselves and their school. Because Summit
School teachers felt that their students were capable of achieving at a high rate, they felt good about themselves and their school; they also felt comfortable in adopting varied strategies for reaching various groups of students, regardless of how much effort it took.

Summit School teachers assumed and built upon the idea that each child had the capability and potential to achieve. This resulted in a level of confidence that students would succeed regardless of their level of academic ability. As one teacher commented,

High expectation to me is believing that every child can learn. It may be in a different way and not at the same level or speed of the other children, but I do believe that everyone has the ability. You just have to tap into it. It doesn’t always work and it is not easy and really time consuming, trying to use varied strategies such as differentiated teaching, but they can achieve. Every child has the potential.

Just as the administration held teachers accountable and shared teacher accomplishments with other teachers, Summit School teachers often used a similar strategy to motivate their students. For example, several teachers commented that out-of-class student assignments were just as important as class work. By having students share completed work with other students, Summit School teachers motivated all students, gently remediate lower-performing students and rewarding successful students at the same time. One teacher noted, for example,

I had a lot of students that would come in and say, “Well, I didn’t do my work.” They know that with me that is unacceptable. I want them to take pride in their work. We post it up so they can look at and be proud of what we’ve actually done and achieved.”
By posting the work, completed or not, the Summit School teachers were duplicating the leadership style of the administration that shared teacher success but redressed problems.

Although it seemed challenging to hold students to these criteria, teachers felt it necessary to push students to think at higher levels, using evidence to support their responses and strategically analyze the literature or problem solve mathematical concepts in a way that would facilitate learning and engage them. This strategy motivated students to participate actively in their own learning and educational process. As one teacher remarked,

My expectations of my students are high and they know it based on the assignments that I give. I am not just giving comprehension questions, I want the higher thinking and they know they have to analyze the material and support their argument with evidence.

By adopting a sophisticated and rigorous curriculum, Summit School teachers felt good about preparing their students for high-stakes tests at the same time that they taught them problem-solving skills. This level of expectation made students academically prepared to meet the high-stakes standardized assessments and the rigorous curriculum because it engaged them at a more complex level of thinking. As one teacher reported, “Our math program, Everyday Math, is very sophisticated. It prepares the students to succeed and reach those goals that the state demands, especially with the New Jersey standardized assessments.” Not only was the Everyday Math curriculum rigorous; it seemed to push students to analyze and solve concepts aligned with the standardized assessments. Another teacher remarked, “Many of the concepts and problems in our math curriculum promote a higher-order level of thinking.”
Based on researcher observations, this rigor was also illustrated in an eighth-grade science class. The eighth-grade science teacher consistently implemented rigorous lessons that engaged her students and pushed them to synthesize and apply the scientific concepts to their understanding of the material. This teacher also used various modalities to engage her learners, from technology projects to students building models that illustrated their understanding of the scientific concepts. This push to facilitate higher-level and critical thinking skills in the students enforced the teacher’s belief that she had the ability not only to engage her students but to motivate and guide them in their learning process. This active participation and high level of student engagement produced an effective school.

Teachers of third-grade students collaborated for several weeks to develop and implement a rain forest thematic unit. The teachers incorporated several of the subjects in a thematic format to engage students in the learning process. Students constructed a rain forest in the hallway, learned about the animals of the rain forest, wrote essays, read books, and raised funds for preserving animals in the rain forest. This level of facilitation generated in-depth learning and engagement whereby students had a deep understanding of the content and made connections thematically. This rigor and high level of critical thinking pushed students to another level of engagement and active learning where they took responsibility for their own learning process. This type of initiative—actively engaged and participating—in one’s learning and educational process generated a more effective Summit School.

Teachers noted that the academic standards at Summit School were aligned with the district and the New Jersey curriculum standards. Not only were standards aligned;
the expectation was that students would show mastery in the content area. Teachers approached the curriculum with confidence because the clarity of the curriculum provided the means for students to participate in their own learning by asking questions, which led to understanding the concepts that they found challenging. As one teacher maintained, “We approach the curriculum with stating the objective on the board so students know the skills they are working on and that we expect them to show mastery of these skills set clear expectations. They are aware of what we want from them.” The expectations conveyed to students were clear, which reduced ambiguity. Similarly, another teacher reported, “Our expectations are very high . . . everyone here believes that the children are capable and they are going to be successful. As a school, we have high expectations and follow the New Jersey curriculum standards.” Administrators noted that the alignment of the teachers’ lesson plans with the district and New Jersey Core Curriculum content standards was essential to upholding academic standards at Summit School. The administrator maintained, “Teachers not only have to indicate the learning objective, but also the content standards and the cumulative progress indicators that align with that standard.”

High expectations, coupled with support, accountability, and teamwork, allowed teachers to meet and maintain expectation levels for their students and themselves. Teachers’ high expectations provided motivation, guidance, and knowledge of when students meet and miss goals. As one teacher maintained, “All of our expectations are higher than anticipated. We want the children to do well. . . . I think it would be wrong of anyone not to keep their expectations high.”
**Academically Prepared Students**

While rigorous academic standards provided a mechanism for effectiveness of Summit School, equally important was the academic preparation of the students. Rigorous academic standards coupled with high expectations were met seamlessly when students were academically prepared. Students matriculating from nations such as Spain and other European countries were more academically prepared than their counterparts from South America and Central America. Conversely, transfer students matriculating from Feeder School at the sixth-grade level seemed less prepared academically than their Summit School counterparts. As one teacher argued,

> I find that the academic standards, depending on what part of the country they come from, are not as high as we could expect. . . . We have some students that come from little towns that don’t put a great focus on attending school on a regular basis, so sometimes the kids come to us with a lack of an academic background and considering the challenge of speaking a new language and bringing them up to speed, sometimes it’s not up to where it should be.

A teacher describing the transfer students matriculating from Feeder School noted, “The transfer students are predominantly African Americans and Hispanics; for the most part, they perform lower academically.” It is interesting that the majority of the students performed at a lower rate than their counterparts at Summit School, based on their proficiency levels on the state standardized assessments and report cards.

It was apparent that, among transfer students from Feeder School, the countries of origin of the students played a role in their academic achievement and the gap that Summit School was challenged to bridge for academic success. Despite the challenge of
meeting their academic preparation, teachers were cognizant that they were held accountable for student achievement. Thus, high expectations, support from leadership, adequate resources and team work enabled teachers to meet the students who were less academically prepared.

**Diverse and Caring Culture**

Acceptance of diverse cultures created a meaningful and enriching school experience. Students learned from each other and were supportive of growth. Summit School was known as one of the more diverse schools in the area, and teachers and administrators fostered this strength to enrich students’ experience. As one teacher emphasized, “Diverse culture makes Summit School one of a kind; we can all live together and work together.” Students worked in groups to solve problems and, as one teacher explained, “The different types of cultures makes us a stronger and more tolerant school.” Summit School was multicultural and had “children of all religions and races representing 12 or 13 countries.” Such diversity did not impede the learning experience of the students; rather, it made the experience more meaningful. In fact, over 80% of the population spoke a language other than English. As one K-5 teacher explained, “I don’t think there is one student this year in my class that doesn’t speak another language. I have had mostly Portuguese or other South and Central American students, but this year I even have a Chinese student in my class.” The diversity of cultures and languages increased the groups’ problem-solving capabilities. Given the variety of experiences, groups composed of diverse students had larger background experiences upon which to draw in developing problem-solving skills. Ultimately, each student became a unique resource to the whole.
The matriculation of transfer students at the sixth-grade level from Feeder School added to the diversity of Summit School, which was predominantly Portuguese and Hispanic in the elementary grades, specifically in the area of art. As one upper-level teacher explained, “The transfer students matriculating from [Feeder School] are predominantly African Americans and add a richer diversity to Summit School; although they seem less prepared academically, they seem more artistic.” This diversity allowed new interactions within the student population and built on the strength of Summit School.

Not only was Summit School diverse; it had a “warm and inviting culture.” As one teacher said, “The school culture, teacher wise, is very close knit. My first day here people [other teachers] were making jokes with me as if I had been teaching here for years.” Another teacher’s response mirrored similar thoughts, describing the school climate as very friendly of student and teacher. We all get along very well. I feel I can go to a faculty member and ask a question and get results. I can also go to an administrator and get similar results. . . . It is very friendly and people are always available to help.

The collegiality of the faculty members suggests an environment where teachers can collaborate and support each other in meeting the needs of the students in a meaningful way.

**Parents’ Participation in School**

Family and community factors such as parental involvement were also central to the effectiveness of Summit School. Parents’ participation in school events and report
card conferences not only demonstrated their interest in their child’s education; it also illustrated their partnership with Summit School to create stronger partnerships in the students’ academic progress.

Parental involvement was reflected in ongoing correspondence, informal visits, and general concern; this involvement seemed most prominent on back-to-school nights and report card nights. One teacher noted, “On back-to-school nights we get about one third of parents show up. There is such a correlation between the students’ level of performance and the parental involvement.” Another teacher, supporting this argument, reported, “Out of 23 students I had 20 parents show up. I do have, especially in my homeroom, a lot of concerned parents. I get a lot of notes. I have two parents that just drop in informally and check on their child.” However, report card night and open house usually promote a high turnout. As the principal noted, “On the night of report cards or open house, there is a high parental turnout . . . tomorrow we have a talent show and I am expecting a strong turnout.” When teachers know that parents are concerned, they feel supported in their work with achieving academic success with the students. This support makes teachers view parents as an essential part of the team, prepared to work together in meeting goals and creating a more effective Summit School.

While report card night visits represented ways in which parents support the educational experience of their children, other parents show this support through being a consistent presence at Summit School, whether attending in-school functions, corresponding with the teachers through notes, or taking their child to school every morning so they can communicate with the teachers if necessary about the child’s progress. One teacher reported,
Parental involvement varies; a few parents we see every single day who bring the children to school and pick them up and constantly write notes, others are at your beck and call no matter and help you, even if it does not involve their child. This level of support is necessary to promote a team effort in engaging the students and fostering the effectiveness of Summit School. Not only were parents involved in their children’s educational progress but some parents pursued other opportunities at the school and some of the parents were teachers’ aides or volunteered in the cafeteria. As one teacher stated,

We have a high level of parental involvement, if I were to compare Summit School to any other school in [the city]. We have parents who have gone on and obtained their teacher’s aide license. We even have a few parents who work in the school as teachers’ aides and also as an office manager.

Summary of Effective Components

Components attributing to the effectiveness of Summit School included accountability, resources, support of administration and teachers, administrators and students working together as a group to high expectations, academically preparation, a caring and diverse culture, and parent involvement. These components provided support to teachers who were then motivated to meet the high expectations and high standards of accountability. When these factors were not perceived, the environment became demanding and the expectations and accountability became a goal that seemed impossible to meet.
Ineffective Components

The findings suggested that, when support and resources were not recognized, the environment became demanding and unyielding. Moreover, it challenged teachers and administrators in meeting high accountability standards and expectations. Accountability and high expectations, for example, were viewed as impossible standards to meet when support of leadership or time was inaccessible to teachers. When these factors were not perceived, the environment became laborious and the expectations and accountability of Summit School seemed impossible to meet.

Administrators held teachers and students accountable to high expectations and high academic standards, yet without accessible resources, including time and leadership support, an unyielding and challenging environment for Summit School made it difficult if not impossible to meet these demands.

Teachers and administrators reported that factors that created an ineffective school included a demanding environment, inconsistent guidance and planning, pressure of accountability, insufficient time, ambiguity in expectations, and little parental involvement. Summit School was perceived as ineffective when there were inadequate resources and lack of support or guidance from leadership. This made it impossible to meet the high-stakes accountability standards and grueling demand for student achievement.

Demanding Environment

Teaching at Summit School was demanding and made it challenging for teachers to do their jobs successfully because they were pressured and pushed to collaborate; lacking the support from leadership and structured time built in the schedule created
difficulty in meeting the high expectations and standards. As one teacher noted, “We are pushed to collaborate and work together . . . there is too much pressure on us to collaborate, which makes it an uncomfortable process.” Another teacher succinctly captured this frustration: “I don’t know about supporting . . . they push!” This level of detail in documenting all actions makes it unwieldy in meeting high expectations.

Still, solely having high expectations for students did not seem adequate in meeting the high stakes of testing and the school making AYP. As one teacher contended, “We have high expectations of our students . . . everyone here believes that the children are capable. That is why there is so much stress right now because we are classified as a CAPA school.” This need to achieve and meet AYP in order for Summit School to be declassified as a CAPA school produced an even more demanding environment.

**Inconsistent Guidance and Planning**

While grade-level planning seemed consistent and promoted student learning; other types of planning, such as vertical planning and collaboration between the special education or bilingual teachers and the classroom teachers, seemed to be less structured at Summit School. Lack of support and guidance from the administration to incorporate this type of team work in the infrastructure of Summit School made teaching more challenging and Summit School less effective in meeting the needs of the students. Moreover, administration not providing resources in building time in the schedule for the special education, bilingual, and classroom teachers to work together produced additional layers of challenges and ineffectiveness in working with the students and meeting their needs. As one teacher noted, “We don’t collaborate . . . special education, bilingual and
general education. Could we? Yes, but the administration fails to set it up. They expect us to use our lunch to collaborate, but there is not enough time.”

Teachers seemed willing to collaborate. As one teacher noted, “It happens frequently on staff development days and it happens informally and formally at grade level meeting.” The problem emerged when teachers did not have adequate resources and were expected to use their lunch time or other nonacademic time to meet these expectations.

One teacher noted,

I think the administration wants us to collaborate. . . . However, in terms of special needs and bilingual education teachers, I think that these meetings need to be facilitated. Instead, the administration leaves it up to the teachers to plan. But I think the administration needs to facilitate collaboration between special education bilingual and classroom teachers.

This lack of resource created dissonance within teachers where they were put in positions to make conflicting decisions, such as having lunch or meeting with teachers in the bilingual and special education department or finding times informally throughout the day or after school to work together. Administration not scheduling time within the organizational structure of the school, similar to the grade-level meetings, created an impression that this was not as important and so teachers would need to go above and beyond to work with each other. This made teaching more challenging and Summit School less effective because students’ needs were not being met. As one teacher contended,
There is no collaboration between special education and the general education teacher. Someone comes in and watches what we are doing and tells the kids to just do this or do that. I can do that on my own without the interruption. They are just not being serviced and it is not fair to them. They need the one on one.

As teachers struggled to meet the needs of students without adequate resources, teaching and learning became more challenging and less effective.

While the administration attempted to incorporate vertical planning within the schedule, it happened arbitrarily and, when it occurred, impeded the instruction of the students and failed to address the root of the issue: consistent structured time. As one teacher explained,

We do have vertical planning meetings, but it is done sporadically. The administration will just randomly assign a day for vertical planning and then pull us out first period and we will have a substitute teacher for the period. Half of the time the students are unable to work independently, so I will not introduce a new lesson yet . . . they are just kind of left there. I think that is the administration’s way of pretending to address the issue, but it’s kind of just like sweeping dirt under the rug.

As one teacher stated, “the school has implemented a vertical planning period. When it happens, which is rare, it is good. . . But when it happens, it happens. I think we’ve only had two or three vertical planning [meetings] this year.” This inconsistency in not having the resource systematically built in the schedule for teachers to plan vertically made planning challenging and unstructured in addressing students’ academic
achievement. Thus, Summit School was ineffective in systematically addressing curriculum mapping and vertical planning to facilitate improved student achievement.

Although it was challenging for bilingual, special education, and general education teachers to collaborate because of the lack of resources (structured time within the schedule), there were instances when the self-contained bilingual teachers were able to participate in grade-level meetings. Still, having multiple grade levels within the classroom influenced the effectiveness of Summit School. As one administrator maintained, “The self-contained bilingual teachers collaborate more frequently because their time aligns with the grade-level meetings. However, it seemed harder with special education because there were multiple grade levels within the classroom.” Another teacher noted,

A special education teacher, for example, may be servicing sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students, but not able to attend the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade-level meetings. That is a problem because she may collaborate with one or the other grades, but not have time to collaborate with the others and not have time to discuss curriculum.

This lack of resource of time led to Summit School’s ineffectiveness and created a challenge for teachers to work together.

Inconsistent guidance and leadership was another way in which Summit School’s ineffectiveness was manifested. Inconsistent leadership on the middle school level, the lack of assertive leadership and guidance, lack of resources such as communication, and unclear expectations regarding collaboration played a role in teachers’ perceptions of being unsupported in their teaching. One teacher spoke about the instability of leadership,
specifically on the middle school level, stating, “We have had at least five assistant principals on the middle school level over a 10-year period.” This information, combined with the fact that the administration on the elementary level had been consistent equally for 10 years, was significant. While the principal and one of the assistant principal were constant forces on the elementary level, the leadership on the middle school level included at least five assistant principals during the same time period, due either to early retirement or change of administrator. Still, this inconsistency of leadership on the middle school level produced challenges for the middle school teachers in their teaching. Teachers had to adjust to the leadership style of each new assistant principal. However, as soon as this became a routine, another change of administration led to inconsistent expectations on this level and made Summit School less effective.

Lack of resources such as communication hindered leadership from working together productively, which led to inconsistent expectations and goals communicated to teachers on the middle school and elementary school levels. As one administrator noted, There is no communication among us and the teachers know that. . . . Communication is key . . . you’re not going to get a real administrative effort without it and you need that guidance. . . . You don’t always have to agree, but the bottom line is that, even though the principal calls the shots, you have to understand the focus. Even if I don’t feel that this is going to work, at least understand your goal so we can drive that home to the teachers.

This lack of resource, communication, made teaching challenging and Summit School ineffective. That is, the inconsistent expectations communicated to teachers on the various levels—middle and elementary school—did not allow teachers to work toward a
common goal or vision of the school but segmented goals based on the administrator supervising that level since there was little communication among them.

Not only was there a lack of resources such as communication and time; expectations were unclear or not modeled or enforced, which led teachers to resist collaboration. When teachers perceived support from the administration, collaboration seemed seamless; however, when support was not perceived, the teachers resisted collaboration. As one teacher explained,

The administrators do tell us to collaborate. They discuss all of the guidelines that we should collaborate and use the time and go to staff developments together, sit at lunch, speak if we have an idea and not be afraid to share it. They do mention it and would like for it to happen, but I don’t think it is demonstrated enough by them to give us that model or enforce it. They say it but then don’t show us on a grade level. Then the teachers automatically feel that they don’t need to be in the meeting if the administration is not there and so they leave . . . which means the collaboration is over.

Ambiguity in expectations created inconsistent collaboration in the various grades. Teachers’ motivation, coupled with support from the administration, seemed key in facilitating collaboration necessary to contribute to a more effective Summit School.

Equally, the lack of guidance prevented teachers from improving their craft and becoming stronger and more effective teachers. Not knowing how to improve their teaching hindered development of their pedagogical practices and made their teaching less effective. As one untenured teacher noted,
I do wish I was observed more and received more feedback on what I can change or improve at or what I’m doing well. I feel like a lot of times I am just in here and figuring out what I am doing good or bad, but I wish the leadership would take more of a leadership role in my progression and growth.

One administrator acknowledged this lack of guidance:

I have been called laid back, but I am just not going to get upset at things I have no control over . . . . I am focused when I can be on the specific tasks, but I have learned not to worry about things that I have no control over.

This perception of lack of leadership and guidance is the very thing that hindered teachers’ developmental growth in their instructional pedagogy and the effectiveness of Summit School.

Not only did teachers perceive a lack of leadership and guidance in improving their pedagogical practices; they also sensed a lack of support in the administration advocating and supporting them when it came to the unwieldy expectations and demands from the state or the district. As one teacher argued,

I get the sense that the administration just do as they are told, whether they agree with it or not, rather than addressing these issues as administrators. As an administrator, I would advocate and be a voice for my teachers at those meetings.

This inconsistency in leadership and guidance, lack of resources such as communication, and time and ambiguity in the expectations regarding collaboration prevented teachers from being effective in their teaching. This reinforced the perceived lack of support from leadership and influenced the ineffectiveness of Summit School.
Pressure of Accountability

Accountability was valued and evident at Summit School and provided teachers with the necessary feedback to improve their instructional pedagogy. As one teacher noted, “They want you to constantly analyze your students’ work, their strengths and weaknesses, then use your results to drive instruction.” Still, the expectations of accountability made teaching challenging because the tasks and documentation required could not be completed within the time constraints of the school work day. In fact, the demands required teachers to work outside of school to keep up with the expectations. As one teacher explained,

I take these binders home with me back and forth and find myself doing hours of documentation at home and on the weekends. . . . In the 5 years that I have been at Summit School, the amount of documentation and paperwork has increased tremendously.

Another teacher contended that the demand to complete the required documentation seemed unrealistic and made it challenging to teach effectively in the classroom. That is, to facilitate instruction, work with individuals and groups of students, engage in the teaching and learning process of her students, and simultaneously document the progress of each student on the varied skills and objectives within the time constraints seemed an arduous task. The teacher argued,

It is very overwhelming. . . . I haven’t understood yet how to do this paperwork in class. I don’t have time . . . I am busy teaching and working with the students. . . . It takes time to write accurate and legitimate comments of each child’s progress and give accurate evidence.
Teachers seemed to work hard to keep abreast of the expectations and to document their students’ progress. Still, challenges came into play and the accountability seemed excessive when they did not have the time built in the day to get the task accomplished. Moreover, to meet the demands of accountability, they were conflicted with giving up other commitments such as family and personal time at home.

Even when teachers were motivated and worked diligently to meet expectations and move their students toward higher goals, students who did not meet AYP were considered as not proficient. As one administrator said,

The bottom line is that standardized test score is basically what counts. It is great if a teacher can show a year’s growth, but if it does not meet the AYP benchmark . . . that child is not considered proficient.

This idea made teaching challenging because, if teachers had varied levels of students within their class and students were considered below grade level, even when student achievement improved, if it did not meet AYP benchmark, the student would still be considered not proficient.

**Little Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement provided a means for parents to work collaboratively with the school. While parents seemed to show support of their children in participating in some school events, including talent show performances, Halloween parade, or the end-of-year performances, parents’ limited involvement in the students’ educational process, including participation in back-to-school night and report card night proved a continuous challenge. As one teacher argued, “Parental involvement is like pulling teeth . . . when
you have 20 parents turn out for back to school night, that is depressing . . . . We’ve had more faculty than parents.”

Another way in which limited parental involvement was manifest was lack of support at home. This lack of support and the perception that parents did not care impeded teachers and parents from working together to improve the students’ progress because academic work was not reinforced at home. As one administrator said, “The parents are not very involved helping out with homework or tutoring.” A teacher commented, “Parental involvement gets worse as students progress through the grades. I think when they are in middle school and need it more, . . . we see a total decline.” Still, another teacher argued that this lack of involvement in homework may be attributed to the difficulty of the curriculum. “Parents can help with homework, but our curriculum on the middle school level is too confusing for parents.” However, even when time was specifically set aside for parents to collaborate with the school and be actively involved in the learning process of their child, the parents failed to take this initiative. One teacher explained this challenge:

We have conferences on Wednesday, and I am still waiting for four parents to say they are coming to conference and I sent my third note today. What else can I do? You’re holding a day for them and giving them time to choose and telling them that this is for them to come in for just 10 minutes . . . still nothing.

This inability to support the students at home contributed to the challenges of teaching and ineffectiveness of Summit School because students were less prepared to participate in the learning process and instruction in the classroom. When parents were
not as engaged, the school undertook the majority of the responsibility for the academic
achievement of the student with relatively minimal reinforcement at home.

While parental involvement seemed minimal, parents seemed willing to
participate and support their children in other nonacademic events, even though there
were language barriers. Nevertheless, parents arguably may feel challenged to be
involved academically due to the language barrier. As one teacher noted, “There is very
little parental involvement. The excuses I hear are, ‘I don’t understand, or I don’t speak
English.’” Another teacher concurred: “Because of the language barrier, our parents feel
like they can’t get involved . . . most of them don’t speak English.” Still, both teachers
maintained that there were resources within the school to support parents who were not
fluent in English. One of the teachers noted, “There are people here at the school to help
them get involved . . . . Several teachers are bilingual and speak both Portuguese and
Spanish.” Another teacher asserted that “our department liaison speaks Spanish.” Both of
these teachers maintained that, although language may be a barrier to parents being
involved, resources were available at Summit School to address this concern. Still, low
parental involvement was evident and hindered the effectiveness of Summit School.

Not only was parental involvement compounded by the lack of support at home
and the parents’ language barrier; parents’ educational background also played a role in
their minimal engagement in the educational process. As one teacher noted, “I don’t think
that the parents don’t want to help the students, I think they don’t know how.” Another
teacher agreed, “Many of our parent’s educational backgrounds are not as strong . . . for
many parents, English is not their first language.” However, there seemed to be a
disconnect between the school’s and the parents’ expectations. On the one hand, parents
may argue that it is the school’s responsibility to teach students and that they do not see how they could get involved and become partners in improving the educational and learning process of the students. On the other hand, teachers may contend that limited parental involvement, ranging from the lack of support at home to reinforcing the students’ academic activity to participating in activities such as back-to-school night and report card night, designed to facilitate dialogue between the teachers and parents on how to best work together for the academic success of the students, hindered the effectiveness of Summit School and made teaching challenging.

Although opportunities such as the parent academy or other resources, including staff members serving as liaisons between parents and Summit School, were available and fostered parental involvement, the fact that many parents worked several jobs made this process challenge. Several parents at Summit School were immigrants and worked at least two jobs and long hours, which prevented them from participating in some of the events at Summit School. As one administrator noted,

We have the parent academy volunteers, but because most of our parents are working parents, it is difficult. Almost all of the immigrant families work two jobs. . . . the women are mostly housekeepers and the men are laborers and work long hours.

Although the reasons for the lack of participation seemed valid, the inability to participate and actively engage in the students’ academic process prevented Summit School from facilitating more productive parental involvement, causing it to be less effective.
Chapter Summary

The findings revealed that teachers’ perceptions of available resources were central to their perception of Summit School’s effectiveness or ineffectiveness. The term resources is defined in this study as support and time; that is, support and guidance from leadership and time within the schedule to meet the demands of the accountability standards. It was evident that administration, faculty, staff, and even students at Summit School all had similar goals in improving academic achievement and meeting high-stakes accountability standards. However, when resources such as support and time were recognized as plentiful and readily available, teachers were able to meet these high expectations and accountability with few problems, which developed an effective school. Conversely, even in similar situations, meeting these same high expectations and high-stakes accountability without the perception that adequate resources were available to the teachers produced the feeling of a demanding and challenging environment. This perception of Summit School as a demanding environment led to the inability to meet these standards and resulted in an ineffective school that impeded the means for teachers to work productively together and accomplish these requirements.

For example, when teachers were provided with specific time allocated in their schedule for grade-level meetings, they had the ability to collaborate and meet the challenges of the high-stakes examinations. They were willing to collaborate and utilized that time to plan thematically or address instructional strategies to improve their teaching and students’ learning in the classroom. Even though it was challenging when students were below grade level and the district expected teachers to bridge that gap and effectively meet AYP requirements, teachers employed various strategies, including
differentiated teaching, that continued to hold students to high expectations to meet the goals. The resource of time fostered a culture of success and motivated teachers to meet standards.

Conversely, when these same goals of high-stakes examinations were present but time was not allocated in the schedule for teachers to meet, such as the bilingual, special education, and general education teachers, the culture was perceived as oppressive and demanding, which made it impossible to meet these goals. Similarly, when teachers were required to show documentation of the progress of their students through data analysis and could not complete the requirements within the time constraint of the academic day, they not only acknowledged that the environment was demanding but noted that the oppressive culture cultivated a defeating environment that hindered teachers from meeting goals and expectations.

While the leadership recognized that the inability to create time in the schedule for teachers to meet was a problem, they encouraged bilingual, special education, and general education teachers to find the time to meet informally. Even though the data indicated that the special education students and bilingual students were two subgroups that were not successful in meeting AYP for the academic year, time was still not allocated in the schedule. Understanding this challenge, it was necessary that the leadership respond to this demand. Theoretically, an effective leadership would respond in two ways to meet this demand: either reexamine and change the goals or provide the necessary resources and create specific time in the infrastructure for teachers, particularly bilingual, special education, and general education teachers, to meet and collaborate. If leadership fails to address this problem, Summit School will continue to experience
ineffectiveness; if leadership either makes the adjustment to goals or provides the necessary resources, Summit School will improve its level of effectiveness.
Chapter 6: Qualitative Findings for Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, *What factors explain the achievement differences at Summit School?* Research question 2b asked, *How does Summit School respond to the achievement differences?*

The achievement differences at Summit School were considered a major concern influencing the effectiveness of Summit School. Teachers and administrators discussed four major factors explaining the achievement differences at Summit School: (a) Feeder School’s preparation of their students, (b) increased special education classification in the higher grades, (c) maturation process of students, including physical/emotional/social changes, and (d) Summit School’s instruction actions (pedagogical and instructional practices). To address these concerns, the teachers and administrators responded to these achievement differences through various mechanisms, including increased accountability and data analysis, after-school programs, focus on small group instruction, guiding reading and cooperative learning, differentiation, availability of in-class support, instructional coaches (Mathematics and Literacy), and modified assignments. Although the faculty and administrators discussed several causes for the academic achievement differences, the majority of the resources were focused on only one of the causes: Summit School’s actions in redressing the issues through instructional and pedagogical practices. Although the other three causes were equally considered as contributing factors to the achievement differences, few suggestions were offered in addressing the factors. To improve achievement differences, it will be important for Summit School to address all four factors equally.
Factors Explaining Achievement Differences at Summit School

Feeder School Preparation/Bias

One of the major explanations that faculty and administrators reported contributing to the achievement differences was the academic preparation of the transfer students. Students being poorly prepared academically prevented them from being critically engaged in their learning and applying their thinking to a higher level of concept analysis. Moreover, the majority of the transfer students matriculating into Summit School seemed to be lower skilled and below grade level. One teacher reported, I don’t think they are below because they don’t know, but because they haven’t been taught to apply the concepts. I can get the feedback and the knowledge is there, but they don’t know how to apply the knowledge to what is being asked of them.

Similarly, another teacher noted, “Feeder School kids aren’t up to par . . . the NJ ASK Feeder School scores had been mostly failing . . . academically they are also failing with grades like D’s and F’s, whereas we are A’s and B’s up to the fifth grade.” This perception that the matriculation of Feeder School students was the major source of Summit School’s decline in achievement at the middle school level was widespread. As one teacher remarked, “Our NJ ASK scores were pretty good up until the fifth grade . . . . All of a sudden the sixth-grade transfer students come in from Feeder School and you’ll see a big drop in the test scores in that grade.”

While this perspective seemed biased, the notion was not without merit, pointing to data that provided evidence that Feeder School students performed at lower levels than their Summit School counterparts. As one administrator noted, “The data show that the
matriculating students are weak in some areas coming in our school, in comparison to our fifth graders here at Summit School . . . their performance levels show weaknesses in several areas.” Another administrator concurred, maintaining that there was a difference in the standardized test scores between students from Feeder School and students at Summit School.

We have been looking at performance closely the last 2 years, and there is a big difference from the scores of our students and those from our feeder school . . . .

Many of the transfer students are not on grade level when they begin sixth grade at Summit School.

This evidence was indicative of the persistent differences in academic performance in these two schools. As one teacher remarked,

Summit School, along with all of the other [district] schools, have that reputation of being the top schools. So if you talk to the teachers around here, they will say,

“Oh, those kids from [Feeder School] bring our scores down.”

However, other teachers recognized that to blame the decline solely on the transfer students, regardless of the evidence, masks other possible explanations for this decline. As one teacher contended,

You can’t constantly blame it on the fact that this is a transition school and we get children in the sixth grade from other schools, especially [Feeder School], you can’t blame it on that. That to me is just a copout . . . there has to be other reasons.

Nevertheless, the data cannot be ignored that the academic performance of matriculating students from Feeder School tended to be lower than that of their counterparts at Summit School. This lower achievement, coupled with the facility design
and geographical location of Feeder School, were other reasons that teachers indicated as causes for achievement differences. The facility and geographical location of Feeder School, an old building with interconnected classrooms and situated next to a housing project, were not conducive to effective teaching. The design of the facility led to consistent interruption throughout the academic day, which took away valuable instructional and learning time from students and teachers. This problem resulted in less-engaged and less-focused students in the classroom, which may influence academic performance by the students. As one teacher noted,

[Feeder School’s] building was very old and the classrooms were interconnected; to leave one classroom, you have to disturb the other three adjoining classrooms and then go down to the office or the bathroom. . . . When you have that type of interruption going on all day, two or three classes passing your class, that is a problem.

Not only was the facility design poor, but the school was situated next to a housing project where the majority of students from Feeder School resided. These students experienced myriad social issues, ranging from violence to poverty, that may have influenced their academic performances. As one teacher argued,

The majority of students were not on the same level with our students . . . but there were many factors . . . , including [Feeder School] being situated next to the housing projects. So many of those children deal with many of the social issues in urban neighborhoods, such as violence, drugs, gangs, and poverty.
Special Needs to Special Education Transition

Although some teachers and administrators explained the achievement differences at Summit School based on Feeder School academic preparation, others pointed to the transition of special needs to special education classifications in the general population. This transition created a gradual decline in test scores from the fourth grade through the eighth grade and increased the special education student population while allowing students with IEPs to be tested on grade level despite their classification. This factor produced achievement differences in the Summit School population. As one administrator explained,

“It’s not that our deficiencies occur automatically in the sixth grade, but when we examine the data, they show that in the third grade some of our regular education students changed to special needs and by fourth grade our special needs changed to special education classification. It slowly progresses, so by the time we get to sixth grade, it’s not that the transfer students come in and we’re behind the eight ball, but the data show that the decline started once we began testing at the third grade.

Similarly, another teacher noted, “You look at the scores in the third grade, they do so well, but by fourth, they are going down and by the time you get to eighth grade, it’s gone.” This is an interesting observation, since the prevalent perception was that the scores declined abruptly with the matriculation of Feeder School students. These data demonstrate that the decline at the Summit School in the sixth grade had other possible explanations. Moreover, the decline seemed to be a gradual shift versus an immediate decrease in academic achievement.
Despite the provision of resources and support to classified students during the academic year based on their IEP, special education students were not allowed the same accommodations when they were administered the NJ AS assessments. These students were administered the NJ ASK assessment on grade level, even though their IEP may have indicated otherwise, and they were given only time accommodation on the assessment. This requirement influenced the performance of the special education students on the standardized assessments, since accommodations such as additional time was not adequate in supporting the needs of cognitively impaired students or students in other types of classifications. As one teacher maintained,

The special education students are tested on grade level, regardless of what their IEP says. . . . We have students reading on a third- and fourth-grade level who are in the sixth grade, but because of the NCLB, everyone has to have access to the same curriculum.

**Maturation of Adolescent Students**

Teachers reported that the adolescence maturation process—physical, emotional, and social changes—may also provide a plausible explanation for achievement differences at Summit School. The maturation developmental stage influenced achievement by teenagers in that they experienced more developmental changes and tended to socialize more, initiating intimate relationships. This was compounded by a lack of interest in education and lack of respect for authority figures, including teachers and principal. Students became disengaged from academics. As one teacher noted, “They are teenagers and they are hormonal and lacking the interest in education at this point.” Similarly, a teacher asserted,
A lot has to do with the kids, because I can see a change in them. . . . I see how they react to me in the fourth and in the fifth grade and how different they’ve become when they get to the sixth grade and higher. . . . You see a big difference in their attitude. . . . They don’t fear as much when they get older.

This change was compounded by students feeling overwhelmed by the transition to a new and larger school, departmentalized classes, and having several teachers, compared to self-contained classes at the elementary level. As one administrator explained,

The adjustment is too much at once for the students coming in from [Feeder School] . . . . Coming from a self-contained, small school and then going to a larger school with four teachers and changing classrooms and getting homework from four teachers as opposed to one is overwhelming.

To address these issues, administrators initiated block scheduling to make the transition manageable for the students, but the complexity seemed more challenging, and so the idea was discarded after 2 years. The administrator described this process:

We tried block schedule, where the students only had 2 days of literacy training and math and then switched . . . and Friday would be the day they stay in their homeroom, which meant they’d get homework every other day from teachers. We tried it for 2 years, but it was difficult.

Not only were the transfer students from Feeder School academically unprepared for the rigor of Summit School; the gradual transition of special needs to special education classification of the general population at the Summit School, compounded by the
maturation process during adolescence, was a plausible explanation for the achievement differences at Summit School.

**Summit School’s Instructional Actions**

Teachers and administrators reported that Summit School’s instructional actions once students matriculated at sixth grade was a contributing factor to achievement differences at Summit School. Actions such as teacher expectations, teaching pedagogy, resistance to change, leadership, and the retention policy created an environment at the middle school level that provided plausible explanations for achievement differences. These actions cultivated a distinct culture at the middle school level that perpetuated ineffectiveness at Summit School.

As mentioned, the majority of transfer students matriculated at Summit School below grade level and at low skill levels. However, teachers’ expectations of these students seemed compounded by this achievement level, and so few teachers addressed the issue. As one administrator maintained, “This achievement level needs to be addressed immediately by the teachers, regardless of what school they’ve been in, [Feeder School] or not.” Teachers were expected to employ varied instructional strategies to meet these students’ needs.

Another administrator concurred, asserting,

I think it is really based upon the expectation of the teacher. Even if they are not performing on the level of the sixth-grade students, if there are academic weaknesses, they need to be addressed . . . . These kids can definitely improve but the teacher has to go the extra mile. . . . It is not easy, but it is not impossible.
Although challenging administrators presumed that teachers would push students to the next level academically, expectations seemed to be for mediocre performance. As one middle school teacher remarked, “Some teachers could expect more from the transfer students, but they don’t . . . so the kids are minimal.” This distinction in teacher expectations seemed to permeate the culture of Summit School, even in its pedagogy and instructional modalities.

Still, if perceived resources were not available, then teachers seemed to feel incapacitated in making a difference and addressing the lower-skilled students and actively engaging them in the learning process. While some teachers perceived the environment as demanding because of lack of resources such as time, others found ways to meet these demands, although at the expense of the students’ education. As one administrator contended,

Some of the teachers are trying to get everything done during school hour, but you cannot do that . . . your concern is teaching . . . If you are just giving students busy work so you can complete your paperwork, that’s not fair to the kids. The administrator continued,

This is seen mostly in the upper grades. The lower grades and their students are doing well. I have never seen any of these teachers sitting there doing their work and students are doing something on their own . . . They are teaching four subjects and still find time to get their work done . . . It is different in the upper grade classes.

While teachers perceived this environment as demanding because they were conflicted by the limited resources and finding time to meet requirements and
accountability standards, administrators perceived this as low teacher expectations that failed students because the teachers were not actively facilitating instruction and learning in the classroom. Observations showed that, while this did not happen in all classes on the middle school level, it was prevalent in the middle school classrooms, where students would sit and work independently while the teacher was working at the desk, which limited teacher-student interaction.

Not only was there a difference in teacher expectations on the elementary and middle school levels; there was a distinction between special education students and general education students. Although there were inclusion classes at Summit School, the segregation within the classroom between special education and general education populations resulted in achievement differences between these groups. As one administrator put it,

The teachers are not open to going above and beyond for their students to service special education students . . . to make sure those students feel apart in their class. They are separated from the other kids in the classroom and really don’t have an understanding as to what they need to do to improve these kids.

Another administrator noted that, because “the special education students were pullouts, where they were being serviced outside of the classroom for some subjects and in class for other subjects,” the disconnect was apparent. The administrator remarked, “During those times is when you see the disconnection when the general education teachers feel that they shouldn’t be servicing this child.”

While administrators perceived this disconnect as teachers having low expectations of their special education students in the inclusion classes, the teachers
argued that they lacked support and training to work with special education students in their classes. As one teacher said, “The special needs students sit in the back of the classroom and I don’t really know what I am supposed to do with them. . . . Sometimes they get work, but sometimes they don’t.” Another teacher argued, “The administration doesn’t make the provisions or give you an understanding of what these students need and how you can modify the instruction. . . . They put it on us as an expectation to figure it out.”

Although teachers supported the idea of inclusion within the classroom for special education students, many contended that the lack of support and lack of training made it challenging. As one teacher explained,

They don’t train you or teach you about inclusion. They tell you why you can’t fail them and they tell you the laws and you sit there and agree. You sign your name on the certificate saying that you learned the laws of inclusion, but when it comes to the practice and the execution, we are not trained and couldn’t accommodate really severe special education students.

Concurring that special education students should be included in the general education classes but arguing that teachers needed more support, the teacher remarked, “Special education students need to be treated like everyone else, but inclusion is not meeting the expectation because the teachers are not prepared.” This lack of support was a consistent theme, as one teacher said,

It’s not fair to the special education students and the top students who are not getting what they are supposed to get. . . . It’s a mixed group and the ideal
situation would be to have the special education teacher with me all of the time and team teach, but we don’t . . . it’s not fair to anyone.

The administrators recognized that this was a problem at Summit School and that it was necessary to provide training to general education teachers so that they were equipped to work effectively with the special education students and inclusion classes, which was not evident. One administrator asserted,

General education teachers need to be trained and coached on how to best work with the special needs students and aides. . . . This is an area that needs work at Summit School. . . . A lot of times, especially in the upper grades, when the kids cannot keep up, the teachers will do something else with them and that’s when it becomes separate. . . . Most of the students do work with the curriculum that the teacher is using, but it is watered down.

Thus, the rigor of the curriculum at the middle school level was influenced by inclusion of special education students in the classroom, which provided a plausible explanation for the achievement differences demonstrated on the elementary and middle school levels.

Similar to special education students, bilingual students were also frequently pulled out of class for instructional services. This frequent interruption in the instructional day prevented bilingual students from having a prolonged and engaged instructional period, which impeded their learning. As one teacher said,

They sit down, do an assignment, and then they are going into classes in between lessons. . . . If you look at the scores, a lot of the kids that aren’t succeeding are the bilingual students who are pulled out of the regular education classrooms and are not being serviced correctly.
Another teacher argued that Summit School was failing the bilingual students: “We are failing the ones who are being pulled out and no one is doing anything to fix it.” This teacher maintained that Summit School was not actively addressing the root of the problem, which would continue to penalize the bilingual students for receiving appropriate services to supplement their education.

They are just putting a Band Aid on it and hoping that it’s going to be fixed and putting the blame on everyone else instead of designing a stronger program so the teachers can mainstream them for half of the week and then pull them out to give them services in their language. I think that’s a big problem with why there is such an issue with the scoring and lack of success.

Although the leadership recognized the pressing problem of persistently low achievement by bilingual and special education students, which influenced the ineffectiveness of Summit School, the leadership acknowledged that they were not relentless in addressing this issue. The administrator maintained, “We are really not addressing this much . . . we are not sitting with each other and discussing how to improve the special needs student achievement in meeting the level of proficiency.” This also spoke to the lack of collaboration among special education, bilingual, and general education teachers. If this issue is not addressed, Summit School will continue to be ineffective in this area and will be challenged to meet the goal of proficiency for both the bilingual and special education populations.

In summary, the teachers and administrators discussed four prevalent factors that explained the achievement differences at Summit School: academic preparation of Feeder School students, special needs to special education transition of the general population,
maturation process of students, and Summit School’s instruction actions. In light of these explanations, the question becomes, how does Summit School respond to the achievement differences?

**Summit School’s Responses to Achievement Differences**

Teachers and administrators reported that Summit School responded to the problem of achievement differences through various mechanisms: accountability, after-school programs, small group instruction, guided reading and cooperative learning, differentiation, in-class support, data analysis, instructional coaches, and modification of assignments. Although several factors that contributed to academic achievement differences were discussed, the majority of the resources were focused primarily on one of the causes: Summit School’s instructional and pedagogical actions. The other reasons that were identified as plausible explanations for the achievement differences were not addressed when teachers and administrators noted how they responded to the achievement differences. Still, these explanations, not being inclusive of the other rationales, continued to promote the ineffectiveness of the school.

**Accountability**

Accountability was a response to the achievement differences by focusing on instructional planning through assessment of students’ strengths and weaknesses and creating an action plan to address these areas. As one teacher noted, “We document everything that we are doing to help the students . . . assess their strengths and weaknesses and adjust our instruction in our classrooms to meet these needs.” Another teacher asserted, “We address and document every single area where the child is below average and explain how we are going to bring them up.” Although this process was a
necessary component to improving student achievement, the teachers maintained that this level of accountability became tedious to complete within the available time frame. As one teacher commented,

If 80% of my students pass a specific objective, those 20% who didn’t pass that one skill will have to be assessed and show improvement. . . . So assessing them one-on-one on their weaknesses becomes very tedious with only having an hour. Nevertheless, as one teacher said, “Readdressing the weaknesses of the students demonstrating progress makes us more accountable.”

Teachers developed action plans to address the skill deficiencies or challenges and focused on improving students who were on the “cusp”—that is, students whose level of proficiency was below 200 points, which was the passing proficiency level. As one teacher said,

We develop an action plan of what we intend to do in order to move the students who do not pass. . . . If students are way below, . . . although you need to raise their scores, . . . more time is focused on those students on the cusp, meaning that when you look at the NJ ASK assessment, if 200 is passing, 190 and above is the cusp.”

Although teachers’ action plans were designed to meet instructional needs of the students and improve their academic performances, this process required additional time and was considered by many teachers as extra work. While teachers were not against the idea of accountability, many were concerned about the time required to meet this expectation. On the other hand, administrators seemed to view the high accountability standard as an expected requirement that teachers should fulfill regardless of the time
expectations, which created a disconnect in understanding how to support the teachers and provide this resource of time. As one administrator explained,

You have to create an action plan to address the students on the cusp and work with them and follow the action plan . . . not just on paper. This is extra work and that is what I am talking about—going the extra mile.

While teachers being held to high accountability standards was central to addressing achievement differences, it addressed only one perspective. High accountability standards did not address maturation of adolescent students, academic preparation of Feeder School students, or the special needs transition to special education, which were also plausible explanations of achievement differences, thus maintaining the ineffectiveness that Summit School experienced.

**After-School Programs and Small Group Instruction**

Another way in which Summit School addressed the difference in academic achievement was through development of a schoolwide after-school program that targeted specific skills to meet academic standards and concepts presented on the NJ ASK assessments. Students were referred to the after-school program if they were identified by the teacher as needing additional assistance to improve in areas of weakness in skill sets or had significantly low achievement scores on the NJ ASK assessment. The goal of the program was to target specific skill sets and work on strategies to improve the understanding of these concepts and skills specifically related to the NJ ASK assessment.

In addition to the after-school program, teachers reported utilizing small group instruction, including guided reading and cooperative learning and incorporated differentiation in their teaching. These instructional modalities enriched classroom
instruction and allowed teachers to focus on specific skill sets while working with individuals or groups of students. One teacher explained,

Guided reading has differentiated reading groups, which makes the instruction more focused on understanding similar concepts, even if it’s at a different reading level. . . . We would do a 15-minute read aloud and then 10 minutes of them reading on their own and then we would discuss what they read about.

Another teacher discussed cooperative learning as a strategy, not only focused on group work, but students learned from each other and engaged in gaining a deeper understanding of concepts related to the subject matter. As one teacher noted, “In cooperative learning students are working together in small groups more heterogeneously geared, but working on specific skills centered on an instructional concept.”

While these instructional modalities addressed student learning within the classroom, it was evident that the focus was primarily on ways in which Summit School met the instructional needs of the students. Although these strategies were important, they overlooked other aspects of explanations for achievement differences, including the academic preparation of Feeder School students, special needs to special education transition, and the adolescent maturation process. Thus, if these rationales are not similarly addressed, then Summit School’s ineffectiveness will persist.

**Differentiation**

Differentiation was employed by Summit School to respond to the explanations of achievement differences. Administrators initiated walk-throughs to address this difference and allowed teachers on the primary level to share best practices with the
upper-level teachers, who seemed to use less differentiation in their instructional practices. One administrator reported,

We let them do walk-throughs to examine the best practices of their peers. For example, I have sent the sixth-grade teachers to observe the third-grade teachers and the seventh grade to observe the fourth and the eighth to observe the fifth grade. . . . There is a lot more differentiation in those primary grades than the upper grades . . . so the upper-grade teachers can bring back some of the best practices to their classrooms.

Besides teachers differentiating their instruction in the classroom, administrators reported that teachers were provided skilled-level books in literacy and mathematics. As one administrator reported, “There are skilled-level books in literacy and mathematics that the teachers provide to the students so that the students do not feel left out of that activity, but they are doing the work at a different level.” This type of differentiation, along with teachers utilizing strategies in their instructional planning and execution, seemed most common in meeting the needs of the students on different skill levels.

Modification was another modality that teachers identified in addressing varied skill levels in their classrooms, particularly with their special education students. Modification allowed the special education students to work on similar content material that the general education students worked on but at a lower skill level. As one teacher noted, “The special needs students may work at a different skill level; the modification means that they are working on the same topic as the general education students.” Teachers reported that the most common form of modification employed at Summit School was adjusting the assignments. One teacher noted, “Instead of doing 20
multiplication problems, they would do 10, minimizing the number of the assignment and
maximizing their time.” Other teachers modified the assignment in terms of the end
product, making it more visual or providing the special education students with a model.
As one teacher explained,

Informative writing was assigned this month from the district. . . . The capable
classes did research reports, where they went online to get information and
organize this data, but for the special education students I had to provide a model
and scaffold the assignment.

While teachers frequently modified assignments for special education students,
minimizing the number of problems assigned, modifying exams, or allowing additional
time to complete an assignment, students were still held accountable and tested on their
grade level. As one teacher contended,

The special needs students are not up to par . . . . Modification does not help
because if the test is given on a fifth-grade level, even though you modify and
throughout the year you can test them on a third-grade level, they are still going to
be held accountable for the fifth-grade test. . . . It’s hard because you know they
are not going to be able to do it, even though they are in a regular classroom.

Although modification was utilized to meet needs of the special education
students and addressed achievement differences, NCLB required the special education
students to take the same standardized assessment, even if their IEPs indicated that they
were on a lower grade level. This challenged teachers at Summit School even more in
meeting the needs of special education students. As one administrator said, “Special
needs meeting AYP is very difficult. . . . They may show improvement, but they are
classified as special education because there is an underlying issue that affects their learning and cognitive abilities.”

Although modification accommodated the needs of special education students, this response was indicative of the second rationale that teachers presented to explain achievement differences at Summit School: special needs to special education transition. The other factors that were identified as plausible explanations of achievement differences were not addressed in teachers’ responses, including academic preparation of Feeder School students and the maturation theory. This is interesting, since teachers maintained that four specific reasons seemed responsible for achievement differences at Summit School, yet their responses on how Summit School addressed these concerns discussed only two of these explanations. This suggests that Summit School’s neglect in addressing the other two plausible explanations for the achievement differences will contribute to the ineffectiveness of Summit School.

**In-Class Support**

Another of Summit School’s responses to achievement differences was in-class support that allowed teachers to facilitate lessons, work with groups of students, and provide assistance to special education and lower-level students in the classroom. As one teacher maintained, “The resource teacher isn’t just for special education . . . they also help the lower-level students and work with groups of students in the classroom.” Another teacher noted, “Resource instructors work with small groups of students within the classrooms . . . or work with them outside of the classroom for those that are receiving services as pullout support.” However, as one administrator explained, “[Summit School] was not the lowest performing school; they received little resource
teacher assistance,” but the district provided some assistance once a month in the form of a visiting district resource specialist in literacy and mathematics.

Nevertheless, Summit School also met this need utilizing teachers’ aides and within-school resources, such as the literacy coach, lead science teacher, and mathematics coach. The administrator explained: “The instructional coaches visit the classrooms and model lessons working with different groups of teachers. . . . The teacher and coach then work with small group of students.” This allowed them to focus on specific skills and objectives, identify and address areas of weaknesses for the students, and execute instruction to improve the students’ understanding of the concepts.

Teachers contended that the in-class support was valuable. One teacher remarked, “The in-class support aide was beneficial. . . . While she was only slated to work with one student, she was also helpful in providing general classroom support.” Other teachers reported that the teachers’ aide assisted in the classroom through various means, including “taking notes for the special needs students; modified the assignments as the teacher taught and explained the instruction to the students,” while the teachers discussed various skills and subject-related content with the students.

In-class support was one of the mechanisms that teachers and administrators discussed when asked how Summit School addressed achievement differences. This response also focused on Summit School’s instruction actions, meaning that once the students matriculated at Summit School, this was one of the ways by which achievement differences were addressed.
Chapter Summary

Although teachers and administrators recognized four rationales as contributing to the achievement differences, they focused on addressing only two of these reasons. For example, the majority of the teachers claimed that the academic preparation of Feeder School students created achievement differences at Summit School. Yet, in discussing how Summit School addressed the causes of the achievement differences, this was not mentioned, suggesting that what people thought were the causes and what needed to be addressed to change academic differences was not what transpired at Summit School. Moreover, if the school addressed only two of these perceived causes, then academic achievement was not changed, since these rationales represented different reasons that require distinct measures to address them.

Many of the responses that identified causes of achievement differences focused on the students after they had matriculated at Summit School. The mechanisms that were identified as addressing the instructional modalities and practices at Summit School included accountability, small group instruction, differentiation, and in-class support. However, if academic preparation at Feeder School was a persistent issue in the achievement differences, then it would be necessary for Summit School to focus on specific ways to improve these students’ academics before they matriculate at Summit School, instead of focusing resources to make changes once students had matriculated. For example, a summer program for transfer students could address areas of weaknesses and skills deficiencies before students matriculated. A transition month in the fifth grade in which Feeder School students could visit Summit School and engage in the mathematics and literacy classes would familiarize them with the rigor of the curriculum
at Summit School. However, if the four explanations discussed as contributing to the achievement differences are not addressed in totality, then Summit School achievement differences will persist and the school will remain ineffective.
Chapter 7: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contributed to achievement differences at Summit School, a K-8 urban school where achievement at the K-5 level is high but declines at the 6-8 level. The perception of teachers and administrators is that the single factor contributing to this decline is transfer students who matriculate at Grade 6 from the neighboring K-5 feeder school. Based on that perception, research questions were designed to explore the phenomenon. The second research question was designed to explore specific factors that could explain achievement differences at Summit School and how school administrators, teachers, and parents respond to the differences in student achievement from Grades 6 through 8. Guided by the effective school theoretical framework, the study examined the question of within-school differences and the factors that interact at the K-5 level to produce positive gains in student achievement. Equally, this research was designed to determine whether these factors were present at the 6-8 level, since student performance is less effective there. For example, school-level data from the New Jersey Department of Education Report Cards for the academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 demonstrated significant achievement differences between Summit School and Feeder School in mathematics and LAL. Moreover, these data suggest that the Feeder School population matriculated at Summit School at a significantly lower level of achievement. As a result, when the populations merged, data revealed a drop in Grade 6 scores in comparison to Summit’s Grade 5 assessment scores in both mathematics and LAL.

The study employed a mixed-methods design to address the research questions, first analyzing quantitative data to determine whether there was a difference in student
achievement between transfer and nontransfer students at Summit School. Where difference existed, multiple and fixed effect regressions was used to identify the most likely predictor(s) of this difference. Three statistical measures were employed to analyze this phenomenon: (a) independent \( t \) tests to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in student performance between transfer students and nontransfer students, (b) multiple regression to identify the most likely predictor(s) of this difference, and (c) fixed effect regressions to measure the degree of those differences among individual students.

Qualitative data were analyzed based on the grounded theory framework. This data analysis investigated differences in student achievement between transfer students and nontransfer students through interviews, observations (classroom and schoolwide), and examination of documents, such as the annual report, PDA, and statewide CAPA reports. Interviews were conducted with 43 participants (30 teachers, 3 administrators, and 10 parents) who provided insights on student performance, the school culture, and instructional pedagogy. The quantitative data were analyzed to determine whether there were differences in student achievement between these two groups and the qualitative data were analyzed to substantiate these findings regarding Summit School’s effectiveness...

The qualitative findings revealed that the determinants of Summit School’s effectiveness were dependent on key factors. Qualitatively, the findings indicated that teachers’ perceptions of accessible resources—including feeling supported and having time designated within the schedule to perform nonteaching tasks—allowed them to meet the high expectations and accountability standards of the school and state. In contrast,
when teachers perceived that adequate support or time were not present, the identical environment was viewed as demanding and unyielding. This demand created an environment in which meeting high expectations and accountability standards seemed unattainable.

High expectations, coupled with support, accountability, and team work, allowed teachers to meet and maintain expectations levels for their students. Given these factors, teachers felt supported and were motivated to meet high expectations and accountability standards, which produced an effective Summit School. In such an environment, student performance was seen as a variable to be dealt with through various interventions, such as after-school programs, small group instruction, guided reading and cooperative learning, differentiation, in-class support, data analysis, instructional coaching, and modification of assignments to increase student performance.

Conversely, inconsistent guidance and planning, coupled with inadequate time, lack of collaboration, pressure of accountability, and little parental involvement prevented teachers from meeting high expectations and accountability standards. The very factors that motivated teachers when they felt supported could create a demanding environment and a less effective school. In such an environment, student performance was seen as an intractable barrier that could not be affected by the interventions cited above.

In the qualitative portion of the study, teachers and administrators reported four reasons for the decline in achievement scores and the achievement differences at Summit School: (a) Feeder School’s quality of preparation of their students, (b) increased special education classification in the higher grades, (c) the maturation process of students,
including physical/emotional/social changes, and (d) Summit School’s instruction actions (pedagogical and instructional practices). In response to these achievement differences, teachers and administrators employed various means, such as accountability, after-school programs, small group instruction, guided reading and cooperative learning, differentiation, in-class support, data analysis, instructional coaches, and modification of assignments to increase student performance. While these factors addressed achievement differences at Summit School to some degree, each factor addressed that performance through a one-dimensional lens, failing to explore interventions to address other plausible explanations for achievement differences at Summit School.

Although the teachers and administrators cited four areas of concern that, in their view, had contributed to the decline in achievement scores at Summit School, their interventions had a singular approach: The interventions focused mostly on instructional and pedagogical practices that could be implemented at Summit School once the transfer students had matriculated, as opposed to addressing factors that were relevant before the students had matriculated. For example, one of the major perceptions was that, when transfer students matriculate, schoolwide achievement scores at Summit School drop dramatically. Their view was that transfer students should be targeted to address the academic gap before they matriculate at Summit School, rather than after matriculation. These interventions dealt only with transfer student performance and not with behavioral changes in students from Grade 6 through Grade 8. Since there are other possible causes for lower performance scores but no corresponding interventions, it is necessary to develop more holistic interventions to address the rationales in totality.
The quantitative analysis failed to support the hypothesis that transfer students were the singular cause for achievement differences between transfer and nontransfer students. Although transfer students contributed to the overall decline, the findings indicated that the issue was more complex, suggesting that the decline at Summit School had begun at Grade 4, before the transfer students matriculated, gradually declined, and then was compounded at Grade 6 when the transfer students who matriculated at Summit School demonstrated lower levels of academic skills. This is a key finding, since the major perception of teachers and administrators was that the transfer students were the major source of the decline. The finding implied that, even if transfer students had not matriculated at Summit School, overall achievement would have declined by the point at which students had completed Grade 8.

**Discussion of Findings**

The research findings indicated that transfer students were not the singular reason for the decline in student achievement, as had been hypothesized by teachers and administrators at Summit School. In fact, the findings indicated an overall decline in achievement at Summit School beginning as early as Grade 4 that was compounded by matriculation of the transfer students at Grade 6. The population of special education students, which was the largest predictor of low performance scores, increased gradually as students moved from the K-5 level to the middle school level.

This finding suggests that, as the characteristics of the population changed, it became more challenging for Summit School to adapt the effective school model to meet these changing characteristics. That is, the rise in the proportion and number of special education students and merged transfer students resulted in a less effective school on the
middle school level. Although the early effective school literature (Brookover et al., 1979; Cohen, 1983; Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1982, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1986; Klitgaard & Hall, 1974; Lezotte & Passalacqua, 1978; Weber, 1971) suggests four key criteria of effective schools, including strong principal leadership, rigorous instruction, high expectations and structured and safe environment, later effective school literature (Andrews & Morefield, 1991; Bell, 2001; Marzano, 2003; Purkey & Smith, 1983) expanded these findings to include other factors, such as shared leadership among administrators, faculty, and parents, data assessment, clear goals, collaborative models with teachers involved in decision making, collaborative planning and collegial relationship, a sense of community, faculty and students supportive of the school’s vision and mission, and parental and community involvement. While these factors are central to promoting student achievement and provide insights to the conceptual framework of the current study, they seemed more evident on the K-5 levels, which produced a more effective Summit School, but less evident on the 6-8 levels, which created a less effective Summit School on the middle school level.

The conceptual framework of this study suggests that effective high-performing schools engage in interrelationships and intrarelationships between the variables of school and classroom factors to create effectiveness. These include classroom factors such as qualified faculty, curriculum, data-driven assessment, accountability, high expectations, professional development, and teacher collaboration, as well as school factors such as instructional and transformational leadership, parental involvement, clear and focused school vision/mission, and school culture. The findings of this study suggest that, while the K-5 levels demonstrated these characteristics and created a complex
interaction between these variables to produce an effective Summit School, the middle school level exhibited less effective interaction among these variables. For example, based on observations, the curriculum seemed more rigorous on the K-5 levels, where students were encouraged to engage in critical analysis of various concepts and where projects were employed to connect the instructional pedagogy in an interdisciplinary approach. Conversely, with the exception of a few teachers on the middle school level who incorporated technology and more comprehensive projects in the sciences, the curriculum seemed less rigorous and engaged students in more rote learning. Likewise, the expectations of the teachers seemed higher on the K-5 levels than on the 6-8 levels.

With the influx of lower-achievement students and a shift in the ethnic distribution of the school, teachers were likely to consider the transfer students to be the main cause of the decline at Summit School. Their expectations seemed lower than the expectations held by teachers at the primary grade levels. Teachers often shared that they could identify the transfer students based on the way they acted and thus they negatively labeled the transfer students. However, as the quantitative findings suggest, the decline was more complex, exacerbated by other factors, particularly the special education population, LEP students, and ethnicity, all of which played an important role in the school’s overall decline.

While transfer students played an important role in the decline, they were neither the singular reason nor, in some instances, even the most prominent cause of the decline; the special education students had a greater effect on the quantitative findings than did the transfer students. Although the data indicate that ethnicity plays a role in achievement differences and that low-income students and African American and Hispanic students have lower achievement levels, the interplay of poverty and socioeconomic status may be
a plausible explanation for the achievement differences. That is, the poverty level of the geographic area of Feeder School, from which students transferring to Summit School are likely to matriculate, is at 36% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), in contrast to 6.3% at Summit School (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), as shown in Table 18. The profound difference between Summit School and Feeder School in incidence of poverty suggests that transfer students, more likely to be African American, are also more likely to be poor. The higher poverty levels of Feeder School students are significant in that, based on more than 40 years of sociological research on educational inequality, poverty influences academic attainment.

Table 18

*Poverty Levels of Students and Families in the Summit School and Feeder School Zones*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School zone</th>
<th>Families below poverty level (%)</th>
<th>Individuals below poverty level (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summit School zone</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeder School zone</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Quantitatively, the findings suggest, that because the decline continued as students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 8 instead of sharply declining at Grade 6 when the populations merged and then leveling off, transfer students were not the singular cause of achievement differences at Summit School. This suggests that
appropriate interventions should occur in the earlier grades to redress the gradual decline in achievement by nontransfer students. Current retention policy, for example, retains students only at Grades 3 and 8. This policy is ineffective if students perform poorly in Grades 4 through 7, since they are passed on without having foundational skills. Any deficiency is compounded as the students progress through Grades 4 through 7 and comes to a head when the Summit School students merge at Grade 6 with the transfer students, who are also lower skilled. These findings call for modification of current policy. That is, students who do not have necessary foundational skills to be successful in the next grade, perform poorly, or demonstrate lower levels of academic achievement that would impede their progress should be retained. If students are passed on annually from grade to grade without accountability for their performance, deficits not only are not addressed but compound as students move to higher grade levels. Failure to make effective changes may contribute to the gradual decrease in achievement of nontransfer students and an increased number of special education students at the middle school level.

The qualitative findings indicate that, while goals were similar in meeting high expectations and high-stakes accountability standards, outcomes varied when basic resources (time and support) were understood and recognized, as opposed to when those resources were unavailable or not evident. The school leadership can respond to these conditions in two ways: (a) reexamine and change the goals, or (b) provide necessary resources by offering support and creating specific time in the infrastructure for teachers (particularly bilingual, special education, and general education teachers) to meet and collaborate. Without these factors in place, the leadership will fail to address this problem.
and Summit School will continue to produce a large percentage of students who fail to meet the state-required level of proficiency.

Four explanations were offered for the declines identified in this study: (a) Feeder School’s inadequate preparation of their students, (b) increases in special education classification in the higher grades at Summit School, (c) maturation of students, including physical/emotional/social changes, and (d) the limited effectiveness of Summit School’s instruction actions (pedagogical and instructional practices). However, qualitative findings implied that the reasons for achievement differences given by teachers and administrators addressed only two of these explanations, both focused on implementation of interventions at Summit School. If the school addresses only two of the four perceived causes, academic achievement is not likely to change, since these reasons require distinct measures to address them.

Empirical evidence of effective schools suggests four key factors in addressing schools in high-poverty districts: (a) strong principal leadership, (b) quality instructional programs, (c) high expectations of students, and (d) structured and safe environment. However, findings in the current study suggest a different combination and order of factors that could be effective in redressing academic achievement at Summit School: (a) strong and consistent leadership and guidance, (b) rigorous instructional program, (c) specific time in the schedule for teachers to collaborate, and (d) consistent high expectations for students. While slightly different in emphasis and order, these findings over all support the essential tenets of school effectiveness.

Maintaining a structured and safe environment was not one of the factors identified in the findings in the current study, possibly because other factors superseded
its effect on achievement differences. Similar goals were evident in meeting high expectations and high-stakes accountability standards. Nevertheless, the criterion that influence teachers’ motivations to meet high expectations and accountability standards was leadership support, in the form of consistent guidance, planning, and time built into the schedule that would allow teachers to collaborate. When these factors were not perceived, teachers viewed the expectations and accountability standards as unattainable. This produced an ineffective Summit School as teachers saw student problems in the same light as insurmountable because there was no time to prepare or remediate. Conversely, when these factors were evident, teachers were motivated to meet the high expectations and accountability standards, which led to an effective Summit School.

The empirical evidence suggests that the meshing of instructional and transformational leadership provides a supportive framework to redress achievement differences. Such leadership includes individualized support, high expectations, articulating goals that are clear and consistent, and strong leadership and guidance. The empirical evidence suggests that leaders play an integral role in the school’s effectiveness. Likewise, the conceptual framework for this study suggests that, from a leadership perspective, the most effective way to address achievement at Summit School is to integrate the characteristics of instructional and transformational leadership. Yet, the leadership at Summit School was more stable on the K-5 levels and less stable on the 6-8 levels. For example, the principal, an early childhood specialist, worked closely with the early grades, while one of the assistant principals supervised the primary grades (3-5) and the other assistant principal supervised the middle school grades (6-8). In a 10-year period in which stability of leadership was evident on the K-5 levels, the middle school
leadership underwent a change of five assistant principals. This inconsistent leadership and guidance may be a plausible explanatory factor for a less effective Summit School on the middle school level. Thus, while the effective school framework and the conceptual model suggest that leadership is an integral component of effective schools, inconsistency and lack of stable leadership at the middle school level point to a plausible explanation for achievement problems at this level.

Current interventions at Summit School to redress achievement differences focus on a single approach, although four rationales were given as plausible explanations for the achievement differences. This single approach fails to acknowledge other factors that are equally important in explaining the achievement differences. Teachers who may not recognize multiple contributing factors may use the findings from this study to develop targeted interventions and best practices to meet the goals of the other rationales. A coordinated approach to addressing all pertinent rationales will target the instructional and pedagogical practices through various structures, including increased accountability and data analysis, after-school programs, focus on small group instruction, guided reading and cooperative learning, differentiation, in-class support, instructional coaching (mathematics and literacy), and modified assignments. These intervention mechanisms could contribute to producing a more effective Summit School, with more rigorous instructional and pedagogical practices, focused instructional interventions through guided reading and cooperative learning, differentiation, and modified assignments for increased student performance.

Although the majority of these intervention systems have, to date, been based on instructional and pedagogical practices at Summit School, little has been done to address
other plausible explanations, such as possibly ineffective preparation of Feeder School students. The findings of this study refuted the Summit School teachers’ perceptions that transfer students were the single cause of a general decline in student achievement at Summit School; however, Summit School has not address these concerns by implementing solutions to redress the achievement decline. Understanding that additional factors such as LEP students and increasing numbers of special education students at the middle school level significantly influence the achievement decline at Summit, teachers and administrators can use these findings to create interventions plans to address issues: (a) alignment of the fifth-grade curriculum of Summit School and Feeder School, (b) initiation of summer intense remediation programs mandatory for all incoming transfer students, (c) changes in retention policy to reflect retention requirements at all grade levels, and (d) rigorous curriculum that infuses technology and implements a mastery grading system. Each of these suggested interventions is described below.

1. Alignment of the Grade 5 curricula between Summit School and Feeder School could be accomplished through bimonthly collaboration meetings between Summit and Feeder Grade 5.

2. Intense summer school programs could be offered to remediate students and provide rigorous instructional practices to meet their needs and improve their academic skills.

3. Retention policies could be modified to reflect consistent retention patterns at each grade level, rather than being limited to Grades 3 and 7.

4. The maturation process of students, including physical/emotional/social changes, could be addressed by interventions such as rigorous curriculum, increased use
of technology in designing lessons, and focusing lessons on their relevance to real-life situations.

5. A systemwide grading system could be based on mastery of the academic content and classroom objectives to give a more accurate reflection of students’ actual understanding of objectives. Students could retake tests and quizzes until they mastered at least 80% of the content.

**Limitations**

Although the study makes valuable contributions, it also has limitations. First, it was difficult to disaggregate the differential effects of adolescence for different groups of students, particularly, the maturation process of students in adolescence, including physical/emotional/social changes, and its effect on academic achievement. Roeser and Peck (2003) argued that “early adolescence has consistently been shown to be an important juncture in young people’s evolving educational trajectories (p. 39). Understanding the differential effects of adolescence on groups such as transfer and nontransfer students, special education students, LEP students, and economically disadvantaged students may suggest various educational trajectories.

Second, access to valid and reliable longitudinal student-level achievement data from Summit School and Feeder School presented challenges due to mobility and attrition rates in urban schools. While these characteristics are not favorable, they are typical qualities of urban schools. This limitation influenced the sample size ($N = 136$), since students who did not meet the criterion of transfer student (matriculating to Summit School at Grade 6 and graduating from Summit School at Grade 8) or nontransfer student (matriculating at Summit School before Grade 4 grade and graduating from Summit
School at Grade 8) were eliminated from the sample population. For example, students who attended Summit from K-6 but matriculated to another school at Grade 7 were excluded from the sample population.

Third, this case study research has limitations in that it was exploratory and nongeneralizable. While the findings provide valuable insights regarding achievement differences within a school, they are not definitive and should not be generalized to the general population. The findings should be used as suggestions, not empirically, given the limitations of the data.

**Policy Implications**

NCLB was implemented in 2001 under the Bush administration, with the premise that “too many of our neediest children are being left behind” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 1). While the NCLB has several goals of accountability, the policy implications for this study focus on the transfer provisions. According to federal policymakers (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), “transfer policies should ideally create more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds” (Kim & Sunderman, 2004, p. 8).

Under NCLB, districts are *required* to offer transfer options to all students in a school failing to make adequate yearly progress for two or more consecutive years— that is, any school identified as needing improvement. According to the federal statute, districts must provide all students enrolled in an improvement school “with the option to transfer to another public school served by the district, which may include a public charter school, that has not been identified for school
improvement . . . unless such an option is prohibited by state law.” (P.L. 107-110, Sec. 1111, (b)(2)(D)(ii); Kim & Sunderman, 2004, p.10)

The policy implications of NCLB, specifically the transfer provisions, are that students in failing schools have the opportunity to transfer to effective ones. However, this is a simplistic solution because it has the potential of turning effective schools into ineffective ones. In addition,

the NCLB accountability system imposes a single sanction . . . and mandates transfers as a sanction for all schools that are identified as needing improvement . . . not all schools identified as needing improvement are “failing” to improve student achievement.” (Kim & Sunderman, 2004, p. 33)

This rather simplistic solution fails to take into account other key factors to address the issue but instead takes a “one size fits all” approach to a more complex problem.

This study demonstrates how an effective school is affected by changes in its student characteristics and provides plausible explanations for the implication of the transfer option of the NCLB. Similarly, Kim and Sunderman (2004) noted,

The NCLB transfer provisions failed to provide economically disadvantage students with opportunities to move to schools with high achievement levels and low poverty rates in the districts studied. . . . Schools that were chosen to accept transfers did not have substantially higher achievement levels or lower poverty rates, on average, than schools required to offer the NCLB transfer option. As a result, many students who transferred went from one school with low achievement levels to another with similarly low achievement levels.” (p. 6)
This is a key implication and suggests that the transfer provision of NCLB should provide schools needing improvement with a more creative solution. Despite achievement differences and the achievement gap, if the NCLB school choice provision mandates that students from ineffective schools transfer to effective schools, the implication is that such action may turn effective schools into less effective schools. Given the strong negative effect of special education students on academic achievement levels at Summit School, the inclusion of a larger percentage of special education students in NCLB’s AYP measures punishes schools with large special education populations, such as Summit School.

**Future Research**

Given the policy implications of the NCLB and the effect of special education and transfer students on academic achievement, the findings of this study suggest that more research should be undertaken to understand factors that explain achievement differences within schools.

First, the findings suggest that, to understand the reasons for the gradual increase in the special education population in Grades 6 through 8, it is necessary to examine the special education population in more depth. That is, what specific factors trigger these outcomes? To what extent are transfer and nontransfer students in the general education population contributing to the increase in the special education population? That is, what percentage of the transfer or nontransfer students are entering the special education track once they are in Grades 6, 7, and 8?

Second, while the sample size \((N = 136)\) was adequate for multiple and fixed regression analysis, a larger sample size would be likely to “generate a representative
sample of a population” (Teddle & Tasshakkori, 2009, p. 182). As Aron, Aron, and Coups (2008) argued, “The larger the sample, the smaller the variance of the distribution and the likelihood of less overlap between the distribution means” (p. 230). Research could be designed to be conducted at the state level, which would increase the size of the sample population and generate conclusions drawn from the findings that could be generalized to a population. State-level data could include meaningful longitudinal data from schools in urban districts that reported within-school achievement differences.

Third, the findings imply that pedagogical and instructional practices at the K-5 and 6-8 levels may have different trajectories. The findings showed that achievement not only declined when transfer students matriculated to Summit School but had gradually decreased before the populations merged. Thus, the decline in achievement occurred with both transfer and nontransfer students. Further research should investigate the trends of pedagogical and instructional practices in Grades 6 through 8. That is, to what extent are the conditions that contribute to a school’s effectiveness in Grades K-5 reflected in Grades 6-8? This may provide plausible explanations for a gradual decrease in achievement by the entire school population, both transfer and nontransfer students, as they progress through the middle school grades.

Fourth, further research should explore peer effects. That is, how and to what extent do transfer students affect individual nontransfer students in terms of achievement? Research could examine class-level data versus student-level data for the entire group to understand the effects of peer achievement when lower-achieving peers merge with higher-achieving peers. That is, do achievement levels decrease, increase, remain the same? The study of peer effects could determine which students improved,
both transfer and nontransfer students. This could provide plausible explanations for the gradual decrease in achievement by the entire school population, both transfer and nontransfer students, from Grade 6 through Grade 8.

Fifth, although this study has only limited data to support the effects of adolescence, it is generally the case that achievement declines in most middle schools, presumably based on the maturation theory and its effect on achievement. Future research should address the role of maturation during adolescence on declines in academic achievement.

Sixth, future research should interview more parents from each ethnic group (Portuguese, Brazilian, Hispanic, and African American) to be able to get at the effects of parental involvement. As the empirical evidence suggests, parental involvement is an important component of student achievement. Although the findings indicated that parental involvement was marginal at Summit School and decreased during the middle school years, it is important to understand the effects of parental involvement, which may provide insights and indicate appropriate interventions to address minimal parental participation at Summit School. Although this research suggests that race and ethnicity are related to student achievement, more evidence is needed on the role of culture, community, and parents in the educational process. It is important to note that, although a majority of higher-achieving students at the K-5 level at Summit School were white (Portuguese and Brazilian) and the majority of lower-achieving students at Feeder School were African American, it is also the case that the latter were significantly poorer economically. Future research could disentangle the complex interactions among social class, race, and ethnicity.
Seventh, this study provided no information on the educational processes at Feeder School that might help to explain its lower achievement levels. This information would provide insight into the school, community, parent, and student effects as they influenced academic achievement at Feeder School.

**Conclusion**

Summit School is considered an effective school at the K-5 level but less effective at the middle school level. The research questions that guided this study were (a) What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and student levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels? and (b) What factors explain the achievement differences at Summit School? That is, how does a school that is very effective (based on test scores) at the K-5 level become less effective at the 6-8 level?

Findings in this study indicated that the effectiveness of Summit School was dependent on a combination of several key factors, including student-level factors, consistent and stable leadership, accessible resources (defined in this study as support and time), teacher expectations, lower curricular rigor, and parental involvement.

Qualitatively, while the goals were similar in improving academic achievement and meeting high-stakes accountability standards, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Summit School was dependent on accessible resources, such as support and time, and effective and stable leadership. That is, teachers perceived that they had support from the administration and had designated time within the schedule to work as a team. The findings suggest that, when resources such as support and time, were recognized as readily available, teachers met these high expectations and accountability with few problems, which produced an effective school. Conversely, given similar circumstances
when teachers perceived that adequate support or time were not present, the environment was viewed as demanding and unyielding. That is, inconsistent guidance and planning were reflected in the instability of leadership at the middle school level; inadequate time to plan, collaborate, and work as a team; pressure of accountability; and minimal parental involvement—all factors that created a less effective school. This challenge created an environment in which meeting the high expectations and accountability standards seemed unattainable and insurmountable, producing a less effective Summit School.

Quantitatively, the findings indicate that a combination of student-level factors, such as special education status, LEP status, status as transfer students, race/ethnicity, and poverty played important roles in the achievement differences at Summit School, demonstrating that this is a complex problem. The interplay of these factors demonstrated that it is a combination of factors, as opposed to a singular variable, that produced the decline in achievement.

Another key finding suggested that, while transfer students contributed to depressing academic achievement in Mathematics and compounded the gap between transfer and nontransfer students in Mathematics, this decline had begun as early as Grade 4, before the transfer students had merged with Summit School students. This does not support the perceptions of Summit School administrators and teachers that transfer students were the singular reason for the overall decline in performance at Summit School. The fact that the decline increased rapidly and that nontransfer students’ mean scores also declined significantly suggests that additional factors influenced the overall decline. Key findings in LAL suggest that, while several factors had depressed overall achievement at Summit School, special education status was a major influence on the
decline, even more dominant than transfer status. Findings show that, as transfer students remained at Summit, their performance in LAL improved slightly. This suggests that, while transfer students did not “catch up” with nontransfer students in LAL achievement, they improved slightly in performance. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that transfer students could not be the singular factor of the decline in achievement at Summit School; other variables, such as special education status and LEP status, along with ethnicity and poverty, played crucial roles.

This study provides important quantitative and qualitative evidence to explain the decline in achievement at the middle school level at an urban school with high achievement at the K-5 levels. It suggests that a complex combination of school- and student-level factors were related to this decline and presents important policy implications, especially with regard to the problems associated with the transfer component of NCLB. The study captures the struggles of teachers and administrators to address the achievement decline and provides recommendations for strengthening their efforts. Overall, it suggests that the factors affecting student achievement are multidimensional and that solutions are very difficult but not insurmountable.
References


Lunenburg, F. D. (2003, August). *Emerging perspectives: The usefulness of the construct of transformational leadership in educational organizations*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council of Professor of Educational Administration, Sedona, AZ.


Other Sources Consulted


Appendix A: Interview Protocol: Teachers

Interview Protocol Teachers 2008-2009 “Summit School”

1. How many years have you been teaching? (b) What brought you to Summit and how many years have you been here?
2. Please describe the school culture and climate of the Summit school (b) What role do transfer students play in the school culture and climate of the Summit school?
3. Please describe the academic standards of your school with respect to curriculum, teaching methods, curriculum alignment with state standards.
4. Please discuss the involvement of teachers in curriculum decision making
5. Please discuss how leadership supports instruction and learning in your school.
6. Please describe your transfer students with respect to academic preparation and performance
7. Please discuss how the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in grades 6th to 8th
8. Please discuss how you meet the needs of students who are classified “special needs” in your class (b) What modifications are made to accommodate students with special needs?
9. Please discuss how the school addresses the decline in student achievement in the 6th-8th grade.
10. Please discuss how leadership promote/maintain school culture that emphasize teachers working and learning together as a community?
11. Please describe your principal’s leadership style and abilities. (b) If you were principal of your school what are the things you would change? What are the things you would continue?
12. Are you able to identify your transfer students without looking at their cumulative records?
13. Please discuss how special needs students are included in the instructional learning in your classroom.
14. Please discuss the academic expectations that you and teachers in your school have for the students
15. Please discuss how much instructional time is spent teaching to state achievement tests
16. Please discuss the challenges that you encounter as a teacher in the 6th-8th grade level (3rd-5th grade)
17. Please discuss how often you work with other teachers on your grade level or vertically on planning, curriculum development, data assessment or anything that supports student learning.
18. Please describe the students in your class and your school with respect to their motivation, academic abilities, family backgrounds and anything else relevant to student learning
19. Please describe the types of professional development teachers in your school receive. Please discuss the effectiveness of professional development
20. Please discuss the level of parental involvement in your school.
   (b) What does the level of parental involvement look like for transfer students?
   (c) Is it any different from those of the nontransfer students?
21. CAPA Review: How would you describe the CAPA Review process? (b) How beneficial is it for you as a teacher?
22. Please describe how data driven instruction is addressed at the Summit School.
23. Please describe the accountability standards for teachers and students in your school.
24. Please discuss the collaboration between Sped teachers and classroom teachers with respect to planning and meeting the needs of “special needs” students.
25. (b) Please discuss the collaboration between bilingual teachers and classroom teachers with respect to planning and meeting the needs of “bilingual” students.
## Teachers’ Interview Questions Mapped to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R3</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How many years have you been teaching? (b) What brought you to Summit and how many years have you been here?</td>
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<td>2. Please describe the school culture and climate of the Summit school; (b) What role do transfer students play in the school culture and climate of the Summit school.</td>
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<td>3. Please describe the academic standards of your school with respect to curriculum, teaching methods, curriculum alignment with state standards</td>
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<td>4. Please discuss the involvement of teachers in curriculum decision making.</td>
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<td>5. Please discuss how leadership supports instruction and learning in your school</td>
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<td>6. Please describe your transfer students eg. academic preparation and performance</td>
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<td>7. How does the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in grades 6th to 8th?</td>
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<td>8. Please discuss how you meet the needs of students who are classified “special needs” in your class; (b) What modifications are made to accommodate students with special needs.</td>
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<td>9. Please discuss how the school addresses the decline in student achievement in the 6th -8th grade.</td>
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<td>10. How does leadership promote/maintain school culture that emphasize teachers working and learning together as a community?</td>
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<td>11. Please describe your principal’s leadership style and abilities; (b) If you were principal of your school what are the things you would change? What are things you would continue?</td>
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<td>12. Are you able to identify your transfer students without looking at their cumulative records? (6-8)</td>
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<td>13. Please discuss how special needs students are included in the instructional learning in your classroom.</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Please discuss the academic expectations that you and teachers in your school have for the students</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Please discuss how much instructional time is spent teaching to state achievement tests.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Please discuss the challenges that you encounter as a teacher in the 6th-8th grade level. (3rd-5th grade)</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Please discuss how often you work with other teachers on your grade level or vertically on planning, curriculum development, data assessment or anything that supports student learning [Teacher Collaboration]</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Please describe the students in your class and your school with respect to their motivation, academic abilities, family backgrounds and anything else relevant to student learning</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Please describe the types of professional development teachers in your school receive. Please discuss the effectiveness of professional development</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Please discuss the level of parental involvement in your school; (b) What does the level of parental involvement look like for transfer students? (c) Is it any different from those of the nontransfer students.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>CAPA Review: How would you describe the CAPA Review process? (b) How beneficial is it for you as a teacher?</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Please describe how data driven instruction is addressed at the Summit school.</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Please describe the accountability standards for teachers and students in your school.</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Please discuss the collaboration between Sped teachers and classroom teachers with respect to planning and meeting the needs of “special needs” students. (b) Please discuss the collaboration between bilingual teachers and classroom teachers with respect to planning and meeting the needs of “bilingual” students.</td>
<td>x</td>
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</table>
## Research Questions Mapped to Teacher’s Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Processes/Factors</th>
<th>Data Collection (How will you get at ques. w. data?)</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1: What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and students levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?</td>
<td>School/microlevel: leadership instructional and transformational, clear vision/mission, school culture Classroom-level factors: qualified or tenured faculty, curriculum and instructional practices, data driven assessment, data driven instruction, teacher collaboration, professional development</td>
<td>a) Interviews (administrators, teachers) b) Classroom observations c) School level observations (hallway, cafeteria, playground)</td>
<td>2, 4, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQ1a: To what extent are the conditions that contribute to the school’s effectiveness in grades K-5 reflected in grades 6-8?</td>
<td>School/microlevel: leadership instructional &amp; transformational, clear vision/mission, school culture Classroom level factors: qualified or tenured faculty, curriculum and instructional practices, data driven assessment, data driven instruction, teacher collaboration, professional development</td>
<td>d) Interviews (admin, teachers) e) Classroom observations f) School level observations (hallway, cafeteria, playground)</td>
<td>2, 4, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2: How do transfer students and non-transfer students compare along the following social, economic, and academic dimensions: demographics, parental and community involvement, social capital, social economic status (SES), attitudes toward schooling, academic preparation, and academic performance.</td>
<td>Processes/Factors: NJASK test, academic performance, academic preparation (teacher expectation, special education classification), demographics, parental and community involvement, attitudes toward schooling</td>
<td>a) Classroom observations (grade 5 level w/o transfer stud) and 6-8 levels (with transfer stud) b) Documents (In school: student level data of transfer (6-8) &amp; continuing stud. (K-5) of the 8th grade cohort of 2007-2008</td>
<td>2, 14, 18, 20, 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### R3: What factors account for the academic performance on these two levels (K-5 and 6-8) at the Summit school?

**Processes/Factors:**
- Academic preparation (teacher expectations, tracking, special ed. classification), academic performance, teacher quality, teaching methods, leadership

**Method:**
- Interviews (admin, teachers)
- Classroom observations
- Documents (In school: student level data of transfer (6-8) & continuing stud. (K-5) of the 8th grade cohort of 2007-2008)

### SQ3a: How does the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in grades 6 to 8?

**Processes/Factors:**
- Academic preparation (teacher expectations, tracking, special ed. classification), academic performance, teacher quality, teaching methods, leadership

**Method:**
- Interviews (admin, teachers)
- Classroom observations
- Documents (In school: student level data of transfer (6-8) & continuing stud. (K-5) of the 8th grade cohort of 2007-2008)

### SQ3b: If the decline is not due to transfer students, then what differences at the 6-8 level explain the decline?

i) Do school level differences in curriculum, teacher quality, teaching methods and leadership at the 6-8 level explain this school-wide decline?

ii) Do external forces such as peer and community processes affect this decline?

iii) Does the special education population at the 6-8 level explain this school-wide decline?

**Processes/Factors:**
- Special education classification, leadership, teacher quality, qualified or tenured teachers, curriculum, instructional practices & methods

**External forces:**
- Peer & community processes, social and cultural capital, SES, parental involvement, parent/family and student culture, peer group networks, after school programs

**Method:**
- Interviews (admin, teachers, parents)
- Classroom observations

### SQ3c: How do school administrators,

**Processes/Factors:**
- Academic achievement,

**Method:**
- Interviews (admin, teachers, parents)
| teachers, and parents respond to the difference in student achievement between grades K-5 and 6-8 levels? | curriculum & instructional practices, academic preparation: teacher expectation, tracking, special education classification, SES, demographics | b) Classroom observations |

Note. SQ = subquestion.
Appendix B: Interview Protocol: Administrators

Interview Protocol Administrators 2008-2009 “Summit School”

1. How many years have you been an administrator? (b) What brought you to Summit and how many years have you been here?

2. Please describe the school culture and climate of the Summit school (b) What role do transfer students play in the school culture and climate of the Summit school?

3. Please describe the academic standards of your school with respect to curriculum, teaching methods, curriculum alignment with state standards.

4. Please discuss how often you work with other administrators and teachers on curriculum development and planning. How often do teachers work together outside of the classroom in team planning?

5. Please discuss how leadership supports instruction and learning in your school.

6. Please describe your transfer students with respect to academic preparation and performance.

7. Please discuss how the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in grades 6th to 8th?

8. Please discuss how the school and your teachers meet the needs of students who are classified “special needs”

9. Please discuss how special needs students are included in the instructional learning in the classroom.

10. Please discuss the modifications that are made to accommodate students with special needs at your school.

11. Please discuss how the school and leadership address the decline in student achievement in the 6th-8th grade.

12. Please discuss how the administrators promote/maintain a school culture that emphasize teachers working and learning together as a community.

13. Please describe your leadership style and abilities (your principal’’s/vice principals) (b) What do you think are the most important qualities of leadership?

14. Please discuss the academic expectations that you and teachers in your school have for the students.

15. Please discuss how much instructional time is spent teaching to state achievement tests.

16. Please describe how data driven instruction is addressed at the Summit school.

17. Please discuss how often you work with other administrators and teachers on curriculum development and planning. How often do teachers work together outside of the classroom in team planning.

18. Please discuss the level of parental involvement in your school.

(b) What does the level of parental involvement in your school look like for transfer students?

(c) Is it any different from those of the nontransfer students?

19. Please describe the types of professional development teachers in your school receive.
20. CAPA Review: How would you describe the CAPA Review process? (b) How beneficial is it for you as an administrator? (c) For your teachers?

21. Please discuss the challenges that you encounter as an administrator

22. Please describe the accountability standards for administrators, teachers and students in your school.

23. Please discuss the collaboration between Sped teachers and classroom teachers with respect to planning and meeting the needs of “special needs” students.

(b) Please discuss the collaboration between bilingual teachers and classroom teachers with respect to planning and meeting the needs of “bilingual” students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R3</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How many years have you been an administrator? (b) What brought you to Summit and how many years have you been here?</td>
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<td>2. Please describe the school culture and climate of the Summit school; (b) What role do transfer students play in the school culture and climate of the Summit school</td>
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<td>3. Please describe the academic standards of your school with respect to curriculum, teaching methods, curriculum alignment with state standards</td>
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<td>4. Please discuss how often you work with other administrators and teachers on curriculum development and planning. How often do teacher work together outside of the classroom in team planning?</td>
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<td>5. Please discuss how leadership supports instruction and learning in your school.</td>
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<td>6. Please describe your transfer students with respect to academic preparation and performance</td>
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<td>7. Please discuss how the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in grades 6th to 8th?</td>
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<td>8. Please discuss how the school and your teachers meet the needs of students who are classified “special needs”</td>
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<td>9. Please discuss how special needs students are included in the instructional learning in the classroom.</td>
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<td>10. Please discuss the modifications that are made to accommodate students with special needs at your school.</td>
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<td>11. Please discuss how the school and leadership address the decline in student achievement in the 6th-8th grade</td>
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<td>12. Please discuss how the administrators promote/ maintain a school culture that emphasize teachers working and learning together as a community.</td>
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<td>13. Please describe your leadership style and abilities (your principal’s/vice principals); (b) What do you think are the most important qualities of leadership?</td>
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<td>14. Please discuss the academic expectations that you and teachers in your school have for the students</td>
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<td>15. Please discuss how much instructional time is spent teaching to the state achievement tests</td>
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<td>16. Please describe how data driven instruction is addressed at the Summit school.</td>
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<td>17. Please discuss how often you work with other administrators and teachers on curriculum development and planning. How often do teachers work together outside the classroom in team planning</td>
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<td>18. Please discuss the level of parental involvement in your school; (b) What does the level of parental involvement in</td>
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<td>your school look like for transfer students?; (c) Is it any different from those of the nontransfer students?</td>
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<td>19. Please describe the types of professional development teachers in your school receive.</td>
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<td>20. CAPA Review: How would you describe the CAPA Review process? (b) How beneficial is it for you as an administrator? (c) For your teachers?</td>
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<td>21. Please discuss the challenges that you encounter as an administrator</td>
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<td>22. Please describe the accountability standards for administrators, teachers and students in your school</td>
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<td>23. Please discuss the collaboration between Sped teachers and classroom teachers with respect to planning and meeting the needs of “special needs” students; (b) Please discuss the collaboration between bilingual teachers and classroom teachers with respect to planning and meeting the needs of “bilingual” students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>Processes/Factors</td>
<td>Data Collection <em>(How will you get at ques. w. data?)</em></td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>R1: What conditions (or factors) at the school, classroom, and student levels contribute to the effectiveness of this school at the K-5 levels?</td>
<td>School/microlevel: leadership instructional &amp; transformational, clear vision/mission, school culture Classroom level factors: qualified or tenured faculty, curriculum and instructional practices, data driven assessment, data driven instruction, teacher collaboration, professional development</td>
<td>1. Interviews (admin, teachers) 2. Classroom observations 3. School level observations (hallway, cafeteria, playground)</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>SQ1a: To what extent are the conditions that contribute to the school’s effectiveness in grades K-5 reflected in grades 6-8?</td>
<td>School/microlevel: leadership instructional &amp; transformational, clear vision/mission, school culture Classroom level factors: qualified or tenured faculty, curriculum and instructional practices, data driven assessment, data driven instruction, teacher collaboration, and professional development</td>
<td>4. Interviews (admin, teachers) 5. Classroom observations a) School level observations (hallway, cafeteria, playground)</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>R2: How do transfer students and nontransfer students compare along the following social, economic, and academic dimensions: demographics, parental and community involvement, social capital, social economic status (SES), attitudes toward schooling, academic preparation, and academic performance.</td>
<td>Processes/Factors: NJASK test, academic performance, academic preparation (teacher expectation, special education classification), demographics, parental and community involvement, attitudes toward schooling</td>
<td>a) Classroom observations (grade 5 level w/o transfer stud) and 6-8 levels (with transfer stud) b) Documents (In school: student level data of transfer (6-8) &amp; continuing stud. (K-5) of the 8th grade cohort of 2007-2008</td>
<td>2, 6, 7, 13, 14, 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Processes/Factors:</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>References</td>
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<td>R3: What factors account for the academic performance on these two levels (K-5 and 6-8) at the Summit school?</td>
<td>academic preparation (teacher expectations, tracking, special ed. classification), academic performance, teacher quality, teaching methods, leadership</td>
<td>d) Interviews (admin, teachers)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>e) Classroom observations</td>
<td>5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23</td>
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<td>f) Documents (In school: student level data of transfer (6-8) &amp; continuing stud. (K-5) of the 8th grade cohort of 2007-2008)</td>
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<td>Method: t tests and multiple regression</td>
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<tr>
<td>SQ3a: How does the academic preparation and performance of transfer students contribute to the school’s academic performance in grades 6 to 8?</td>
<td>academic preparation (teacher expectations, tracking, special ed. classification), academic performance, teacher quality, teaching methods, leadership</td>
<td>g) Interviews (admin, teachers)</td>
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<td>h) Classroom observations</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16,</td>
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<td>i) Documents (In school: student level data of transfer (6-8) &amp; continuing stud. (K-5) of the 8th grade cohort of 2007-2008)</td>
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<td>Method: t tests and multiple regression</td>
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<tr>
<td>SQ3b: If the decline is not due to transfer students, then what differences at the 6-8 level explain the decline?</td>
<td>Special education classification, leadership, teacher quality, qualified or tenured teachers, curriculum, instructional practices &amp; methods</td>
<td>c) Interviews (admin, teachers, parents)</td>
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<tr>
<td>iv) Do school level differences in curriculum, teacher quality, teaching methods and leadership at the 6-8 level explain this school-wide decline?</td>
<td>External forces: peer &amp; community processes, social and cultural capital, SES, parental involvement, parent/family and student culture, after school programs</td>
<td>d) Classroom observations</td>
<td>5, 8, 9, 10,</td>
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<tr>
<td>v) Do external forces such as peer and community processes affect this decline?</td>
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<td>vi) Does the special education population at the 6-8 level explain this school-wide decline?</td>
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<td>SQ3c: How do school administrators, academic achievement,</td>
<td></td>
<td>c) Interviews (admin, teachers, parents)</td>
<td>5, 11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
teachers, and parents respond to the difference in student achievement between grades K-5 and 6-8 levels?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>curriculum &amp; instructional practices, academic preparation: teacher expectation, tracking, special education classification, SES, demographics</th>
<th>d) Classroom observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note. SQ = subquestion.
Appendix C: Interview Protocol: Parents

Interview Protocol Parents 2008-2009 “Summit School”

1. Please describe your role at the Summit school? (b) How many years have you been at the Summit school?
2. Please discuss how many children you have enrolled at the Summit school? (b) What grade level? and (c) How old are your children?
3. How many years have your children attended the Summit school?
4. Please share your overall satisfaction with the school.
5. Please discuss how you are involved in your child’s education i.e. checking homework, talking to teachers, getting tutoring when needed, attending back to school night, or progress/report card night?
6. Please discuss your view of the challenges/rigors of your children’s classes.
7. Do you feel comfortable attending school events, such as back to school night, progress report night or report card night?
8. If your child has attended the Summit school for K-5 and 6-8… have you noticed any change in their upper grade performance? (b) If so, what do you believe contributes to this change?
9. If your child has transferred into grade 6- how does the Summit school compare to their former school?
10. If your child has transferred from the Summit school in grades 6 or the upper grades to another school- why did they transfer?
11. If your child is classified as “special needs” what types of services does he/she receive?
12. Please describe how involved you are in the school.
13. Please discuss your overall view of parental involvement at the school.
14. Please discuss your view of the teacher quality at the Summit school.
15. Please discuss your view of the quality of the principal at the Summit school; of other administrators, such as the Assistant Principals
16. Please discuss your view of the expectations of your child for achievement by (a) the school and (b) your children’s teacher.
17. Please discuss the challenges that you face as a parent in supporting your children’s education. (i.e language barrier, child care, transportation etc.)
18. How do you get information/news from your children’s school i.e. letters home, flyers?
19. Please discuss what types of services you have experienced when you attend the school for events such as back to school night, progress/report card night, meetings with teachers etc. (i.e. translation, child care, flexibility in the scheduling of appt. etc.)
## Parents’ Interview Questions Mapped to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R3</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Please describe your role at the Summit school? (b) How many years have you been at the Summit school?</td>
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<td>2. Please discuss how many children you have enrolled at the Summit school? (b) What grade level? and (c) How old are your children?</td>
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<td>3. How many years have your children attended the Summit school?</td>
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<td>4. Please share your overall satisfaction with the school.</td>
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<td>5. Please discuss how you are involved in your child’s education i.e. checking homework, talking to teachers, getting tutoring when needed, attending back to school night, or progress/report card night?</td>
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<td>6. Please discuss your view of the challenges/rigors of your children’s classes.</td>
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<td>7. Do you feel comfortable attending school events, such as back to school night, progress report night or report card night?</td>
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<td>8. If your child has attended the Summit school for K-5 and 6-8… have you noticed any change in their upper grade performance? (b) If so, what do you believe contributes to this change?</td>
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<td>9. If your child has transferred into grade 6- how does the Summit school compare to their former school?</td>
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<td>10. If your child has transferred from the Summit school in grades 6 or the upper grades to another school- why did they transfer? If your child is classified as “special needs” what types of services does he/she receive?</td>
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<td>11. Please describe how involved you are in the school.</td>
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<td>12. Please discuss your overall view of parental involvement at the school.</td>
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<td>13. Please discuss your view of the teacher quality at the Summit school.</td>
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<td>14. Please discuss your view of the quality of the principal at the Summit school; of other administrators, such as the Assistant Principals.</td>
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<td>15. Please discuss your view of the expectations of your child for achievement by (a) the school and (b) your children’s teacher.</td>
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<td>16. Please discuss the challenges that you face as a parent in supporting your children’s education. (i.e. language barrier, child care, transportation etc.)</td>
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<td>17. How do you get information/news from your children’s school i.e. letters home, flyers?</td>
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<td>18. Please discuss what types of services you have experienced when you attend the school for events such as back to school night, progress/report card night, meetings with teachers etc. (i.e. translation, child care, flexibility in the scheduling of appt. etc.)</td>
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Appendix D: Observation Protocol

Case Study: Understanding the academic achievement differences in an urban school

School and classroom climate variables
The characteristics of the effective school literature as it relates to this research project are listed below. The observations will examine additional themes that emerge in the observation process.

Factors of effective schools: strong principal leadership, quality instructional program, high expectations of students, structured and safe school environment, clear school vision and mission, teacher collaboration, school culture, professional development, parental involvement

Describe the following themes in observing the classrooms and/or the school:

Observation Protocol:

Classroom
- Teacher-student relationships
- Teacher-student interactions (in classroom)
- Peer-peer relationships
- Student engagement (Are students on-task? Off task? Inattentive, focused?)
- Are there aspects of the lessons in which students are more engaged? (eg. lecture? Doing a project? Completing the practice activity?)
- Instruction: How is instruction delivered? (Didactic? Interactive? Other?)
- Types of pedagogy (teacher directed; student directed; cooperative learning; lecturing)
- Differentiation: How is instruction differentiated to meet the needs of the various types of learners?
- Teacher use of questions and questioning
- Amount of test preparation
- Time on instructional task
- Teacher expectation (ie. Assignments, level of challenges? How is teacher expectation communicated to students?)
- Level of teacher expectations from student learning
- Types of assignments and level of difficulty
- Types of assessments, assignments, homework, projects
- Teachers knowledge of subject-matter
- Tenure vs. non-tenure teachers (%)

Faculty
- Faculty Collaboration
- Teacher-Teacher interactions (grade level)
- Collegial Support
Leadership

- Administrator-teacher relationships
- Administrator-students relationships
- Principal leadership characteristics (charismatic, dynamic, bureaucratic, etc.)

Classroom Management

- Students behavior/conduct in the classroom?
- How does teacher address behavioral challenges?
- How much time is spent on addressing behavioral issues in the classroom in the context of instructional time spent teaching/learning?

Structure of the Classroom

- How is classroom organized? (eg. rows, groups of tables, horse shoe format?)
- Describe the environment of the classroom? (i.e technology, learning centers, books/library, location of the teachers’ desk, students desks/tables)
- Class size (teacher: student ratio, boys: girls )
- Ethnicity of students
- Student grouping, including tracking, ability grouping, heterogeneous or homogeneous and differences among them; special education and ELL groupings, including pull out or push in resource, inclusion (number of teachers and teacher assistants, separation)

School Culture

- How is achievement/effectiveness communicated?
- Describe hallway of building? (Are there displays etc.)
- Discipline of students?
- How do students make transition in the hallway from one class to another? (eg. are teachers walking students from one class to another or are students walking to class on own? Are students orderly? )
## School/Classroom Observation Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Measures</th>
<th>None (%)</th>
<th>Rarely (%)</th>
<th>Occasionally (%)</th>
<th>Frequently (%)</th>
<th>Extensively (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Orientation</strong></td>
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<td>• Direct Inst. (Lecture)</td>
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<td>• Team Teaching</td>
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<td>• Cooperative/ Collaborative Learning</td>
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<td>• Individual Tutoring (teacher, peer, aide, adult volunteer)</td>
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<td><strong>Classroom Organization</strong></td>
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<td>• Ability Groups</td>
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<td>• Work Centers (individual &amp; group)</td>
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<td><strong>Instructional Strategies</strong></td>
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<td>• Higher Level Instructional Feedback to enhance stud. learning</td>
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<td>• Integration of subject areas (interdisciplinary/thematic)</td>
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<td>• Project based learning</td>
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<td>• Use of Higher level Questioning Strategies</td>
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<td>• Teacher acting as coach/ facilitator</td>
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<td>• Parent/ community involvement in learning activities</td>
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<td>• Student activities</td>
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<td>• Independent seat work</td>
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<td>• Experiential Hands on learning</td>
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<td>• Systematic individual instruction</td>
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<td>(geared to diff. levels of stud)</td>
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<td>• Sustained writing/ composition</td>
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<td>• Sustained Reading</td>
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<td>• Independent inquiry/research on part of student</td>
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<td>• Student discussion</td>
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<td>• Technology Use</td>
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<td>• Computer for instructional delivery</td>
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**Assessment**

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<td>• Performance assessment strategies</td>
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<td>• Student self-assessment (portfolios, individual record books)</td>
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<td>• Summary items</td>
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<td>• High Academically Focused class time</td>
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<td>• High level of student attention/ interest/ engagement</td>
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Appendix E: Informed Consent Forms

Teacher Consent Form 2008-2009 “Summit School”

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study of an effective urban school on the K-5th level. The purpose of this research is to understand the difference in academic achievement on the 6th-8th levels of an urban school with high academic achievement at the K-5 levels.

The research is designed to help us understand the instructional techniques, curricula, teaching methods, leadership, characteristics of an effective school on the K-5th and 6th-8th levels, school culture, and parental/community involvement. Your participation in this study includes a one-time interview that will last approximately an hour.

The interview will be audio-taped and used for the sole purpose of this research. After data analysis, the tapes will be destroyed. Your name and audio-taped interview will be held in strict confidentiality and will not be revealed to anyone but the researchers.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to answer any particular questions, and your privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

If you have any questions regarding the research, you may contact the following principal investigators at Rutgers University—Newark: Paula Gordon, Doctoral candidate of Education Policy/Urban Systems at (973) 353-3520 or email at pgordon3@andromeda.rutgers.edu or my faculty advisor Alan Sadovnik, Professor of Urban Education and Sociology at 973-353-3532 or email at sadovnik@andromeda.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonimously, if you wish—the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at Rutgers University, located at 3 Rutgers Plaza, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 (Cook Campus). You may also call them at 732-932-0150 ext. 2104 or email at <humansubjects@orsp.Rutgers.edu>.

Principal Investigator

_____________________________ Date ______________________

Participant

_____________________________ Date ______________________
Administrator Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study of an effective urban school on the K-5th level. The purpose of this research is to understand the difference in academic achievement on the 6th-8th levels of an urban school with high academic achievement at the K-5 levels.

The research is designed to help us understand the instructional techniques, curricula, teaching methods, leadership, characteristics of an effective school on the K-5th and 6th-8th levels, school culture, and parental/community involvement. Your participation in this study includes a one-time interview that will last approximately an hour.

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Principal Investigator

________________________________________

Date __________________________

Participant

_________________________________

Date __________________________
Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study of an effective urban school on the K-5th level. The purpose of this research is to understand the difference in academic achievement on the 6th-8th levels of an urban school with high academic achievement at the K-5 levels.

The research is designed to help us understand the characteristics of an effective school on the K-5th and 6th-8th levels, school culture, parental/community involvement, instructional methods, leadership and the curricula. Your participation in this study includes a one-time interview that will last approximately an hour.

The interview will be audio-taped and used for the sole purpose of this research. After data analysis, the tapes will be destroyed. Your name and audio-taped interview will be held in strict confidentiality and will not be revealed to anyone but the researchers.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to answer any particular questions, and your privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

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Principal Investigator

________________________________________  Date ______________________________

Participant

________________________________________  Date ______________________________
Curriculum Vita

Paula J. Gordon

Education

Ph.D., Urban Systems-Educational Policy
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Newark, NJ

M.S.W., Community Organization
Howard University, Washington, DC

B.A., Psychology
Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

Employment

Dean of Students, Uncommon Charter High School, Brooklyn, NY (2010-present)

Director of Summer School, North Star Academy Charter School of Newark, Newark, NJ (2009, 2010)

Adjunct Faculty, Mercy College, Bronx, NY New Teachers Residency Program (2007-2008)

Graduate Assistant, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Newark, NJ (2004-2007)

Research Assistant, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Newark, NJ (2004-2007)

Instructor, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Newark, NJ (2004-2007)

Dean of Students, North Star Academy Charter School of Newark, Newark, NJ (1999-2004)

Graduate Assistant, Howard University, Washington, DC (1997-1999)

Teacher, Elizabeth Public Schools, Elizabeth, NJ (1993-1997)

Publications/Reports

_Pockets of excellence: Findings from effective schools in Newark and Jersey City_ (Report to the Goldman Sachs Foundation, Institute on Education Law and Policy, Rutgers University-Newark).