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Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools

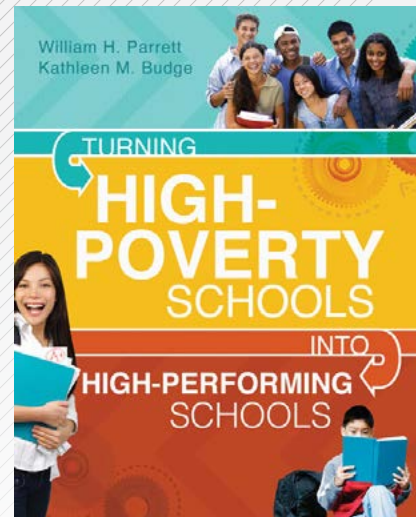### *by William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge*

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS TO BE HIGH ACHIEVING? OF COURSE IT IS! Real schools with students living in poverty do post high levels of student achievement. Learn what these schools do to help students succeed—and how you and your school can adopt the same practices—no matter what socio-economic climate students live in.

Lessons learned and practical advice from seven of these high-performing/high-poverty (HP/HP) schools, along with hundreds of others that have been the subject of intensive research, are the focus of this book. Authors William Parrett and Kathleen Budge have synthesized the research, studied the schools in depth, and show you critical components that set these institutions apart from their struggling peers.

After setting the context by examining poverty and its stunning effects on students, the authors then zero in on what HP/HP schools stopped doing or eliminated and what they started doing or improved on in three key areas of performance:

- Building leadership capacity;
- Fostering a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment; and
- Focusing on student, professional, and system learning.

Principals, teacher-leaders, and district leaders can benefit from the real-world examples and practical guidelines, all based on research and experience. Rather than suggesting a one-size-fits-all approach, the authors acknowledge the unique context of individual schools and urge readers to engage in self-assessment, reflection, and coordinated action to learn together and lead together, with rubrics and planning templates provided to guide the process. The reality is that any school willing to refocus its efforts can become a high-performing school.

Authors

WILLIAM H. PARRETT is the director of the Center for School Improvement & Policy Studies (CSI&PS) and a professor of Education at Boise State University.

KATHLEEN M. BUDGE is the coordinator of the Leadership Development Program at Boise State University.

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TURNING HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS INTO HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Part III | **Working Together: Continuing the Commitment to Lead Underachieving Students in Poverty to Success**

Introduction: We Must Keep Asking the Questions

The work of improving schools is about thinking… and asking questions.

—Andres Alonso, chief executive officer, Baltimore City Public Schools

As a nation, are we content that 70 percent of our entering 9th graders read below grade level? Is it acceptable that one out of every three minority students attends a high school where 40 percent of the students drop out? Are we willing to continue spending $2.6 billion a year replacing teachers, half of whom choose to leave the profession before they begin their sixth year in a classroom? Can we excuse the fact that kids are twice as likely to be assigned to inexperienced or uncertified teachers in schools with large enrollments of poor and minority students? As a country and as a profession, we have not systematically asked these questions, let alone answered them. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2010) and many others would say public education is in crisis, and we agree.

Overcoming the Crisis

Yet our crisis is one that is being successfully countered in hundreds of public schools across the United States. These schools enroll high proportions

of underachieving children and adolescents who live in poverty but have reversed long-standing traditions of low achievement and high dropout rates. They are "models of the possible," where the mind-set of "it's impossible" has been proven wrong. They provide blueprints for improvement from which other high-poverty schools can learn. More important, these schools are places where students who live in poverty experience success, which leads to optimism, hope, and self-efficacy. In these schools, the crisis *has* been overcome, because the educators sought to control what they could, held high expectations for student learning, and supported their students in surmounting the debilitating effects of poverty on learning.

Still, what of the thousands of other underachieving students living in poverty and failing in schools that have yet to transform? The plight of these children and adolescents *should* surely capture our attention. Their plight *should* become a priority of policymakers, parents, taxpayers, and other stakeholders. And it *must* capture the attention of educators, whose profession is arguably paramount to preserving our democracy. As a profession, we are poised to significantly improve all of our schools; we know enough and possess the capacity to do so. The question of whether we do is not one of knowledge and skill, but of will.

Improving schools alone can make a significant difference in reducing poverty. Yet systemically eliminating poverty is a *both/and* proposition, because transformation must occur in *both* the broader society *and* in schools. Educators must *both* become knowledgeable about issues related to poverty in the broader society *and* take action where they can have the most influence—in their own schools and school systems. As a profession, the question we must consider is not "Can schools solve all of society's perpetual problems, chief among them high rates of poverty?" Rather, the question is "Are we doing our part?" Must we, as a society, address poverty before we can improve schools? High-performing, high-poverty (HP/HP) schools demonstrate that successfully educating students who live in poverty significantly counters many barriers posed by poverty and improves children's life chances. Isn't that proof enough to compel us to act?

How to Use This Book: Learn Together, Lead Together

High-poverty schools do not become high performing by tinkering their way to success. As Harold Ott, former superintendent in Lapwai, Idaho, described

his elementary school's journey: "We could not continue to do what we knew would at best only minimally raise student achievement… and for only some of the kids. We simply had to fundamentally change the way we did business."

We have written this book to support schools in "doing business differently." Those in high-poverty schools can benefit from the information provided in this book, as can anyone working in a school where an achievement gap exists between students who live in poverty and their more advantaged peers. For your school to become high performing and to close the achievement gap, all of the theory, research, and practical ideas in this book must be applied to your unique context. Learning to do business differently in your school entails applying the information provided here to your situation. Throughout the book we have provided tools to help you do so.

The book is organized in three parts. Part I, Learning Together: Getting Ready to Lead Underachieving Students in Poverty to Success (Chapters 1 through 4), lays the groundwork for informed conversations among colleagues and future action planning. Although an individual can gain valuable knowledge, we encourage school stakeholders to learn together. These chapters provide information about poverty and the optimistic message that schools can and do make a difference.

In Part II, Leading Together: Taking Action to Lead Underachieving Students in Poverty to Success (Chapters 5 through 10), we provide specific examples of the actions that leaders in HP/HP schools have taken to build leadership capacity, foster the necessary learning environment, and improve learning. Integrated throughout these chapters is the manner in which these actions appear to influence the school's culture (values, beliefs, and norms). For each arena of action, we provide a chapter related to what leaders *stopped* doing or eliminated and a chapter focused on what they *started* doing or improved. Each of the six chapters includes a self-assessment rubric that can be used to assess your school's current situation, as well as to guide your reading and discussion. Additionally, a planning template is provided at the conclusion of each chapter to help you determine your next steps.

Throughout the six chapters of Part II, a number of inserts highlight the practical applications of strategies used in HP/HP schools. These highlights include Uncommon Sense (novel approaches to problem solving), School Culture Alerts (strategies for improving the culture of a school), and District "Ad-vantage Points" (successful supportive practices that a district could initiate to assist low-performing, high-poverty schools). In addition, end-of-chapter lists of recommended actions appear as Action Advice.

Uncommon Sense

As noted earlier, there is an extensive knowledge base from which we as educational leaders can gain insight into our own school improvement work, *and* there is no silver bullet. Leaders in the schools we studied consistently considered the research base in the context of their own schools. They also used strategies that were uncommon but made sense in the school context. We call this out-of-the-box thinking "uncommon sense." In the following chapters, we share specific examples of leaders using uncommon sense, which may prompt others to think creatively about how they might apply the Framework for Action described in this chapter to their unique setting. For example, the principal at Lapwai Elementary School used uncommon sense by hiring a local school bus driver to tutor students in reading.

School Culture Alerts

Because changes in a school's culture are inextricably linked with changes in action—and because culture is difficult to see—we use School Culture Alerts in Chapters 6, 8, and 10 to highlight actions taken by leaders in HP/HP schools that seem to lead to change. These alerts may provide insight into the opportunities other leaders have to improve their school's culture.

The District's "Ad-vantage Point"

Although research has begun to provide needed insight into the district's role in supporting high performance systemwide (Knapp et al., 2003; McFadden, 2009), the vast majority of our information regarding what works for educating students who live in poverty continues to originate from the school level. The Framework for Action takes an "inside out" look at effective practices at the school level that have implications for leadership needed at other levels of the system (district, state, regional, national). These implications are especially important for those education leaders who serve at the district level.

In many instances, school-level leaders have the authority to create the structures and processes needed to build leadership capacity within their school. Then again, in many other schools, school-level leaders report that district personnel, as well as district policies and procedures, place limitations on their authority, pose unintended barriers, or create inefficiencies. As one principal in an urban, high-poverty school described the problem in her context, district-level leaders continued to send pallets of workbooks linked to the district-adopted curriculum although the school had adopted a comprehensive school reform model with an altogether different set of curricular

materials. Several pallets of shrink-wrapped, unused workbooks were stored in the school's basement. The principal explained, "It was less trouble to store the workbooks in our basement than to fight the system and send them back to the central office." Throughout Chapters 6 through 10, we have inserted ideas, talking points, tips, and considerations for those who lead from the vantage point of the district office. Such a vantage point, as we see it, is an "advantage" that district-level leaders could use to support site-based leaders.

In Part III, Working Together: Continuing the Commitment to Lead Underachieving Students in Poverty to Success, we briefly reiterate the interactive, dynamic nature of the components of the Framework for Action and challenge all of us—educators and other stakeholders—to confront the reasons we have not yet ensured that every high-poverty school is high performing. Finally, we foreshadow the current research focused on moving beyond improvement in individual schools to improvement of entire systems at the district, regional, state, and national levels.

Begin by Taking Stock: What's Your School's Story?

Allow time to reflect on your unique situation as a school, department, grade-level team, collegial cluster, or individual by completing the self-assessments, Assessing Our Ability to Take Action, that appears in Figure I.1 and Assessing Our Willingness to Take Action in Figure I.2. The self-assessments are based on what we know about how leaders facilitate organizational change. We hope the assessments will provide support in two ways—first, by generating data related to your school's readiness to undertake an improvement effort, and second, by guiding your use of the resources and information provided in this book.

A school's readiness to benefit from a change initiative refers to how committed people are to the change and how capable or efficacious they believe themselves to be. In other words, the current state of a school's readiness to benefit from any change effort can be examined by assessing two factors: ability and willingness. There are many ways to evaluate both. The assessments elicit beliefs about an individual's *ability and willingness* to work with students who live in poverty, together with his beliefs about his colleagues' *abilities and willingness* to do so. It is a tool that provides leaders with information about the gap, if any, between an individual's beliefs about himself and beliefs about his colleagues. It also gauges stakeholders' beliefs about specific topics and issues presented and discussed in this book.

Although the questions in the assessment are designed to help you assess your school's readiness to benefit from change, this does not mean

FIGURE I.1	Assessing Our Ability to Take Action

Please rate each statement from highly unlikely (-3) to highly likely (3).

1	I have a good understanding of what is meant by "living in poverty" in the United States and in my local school. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues have a good understanding of what is meant by "living in poverty" in the United States and in my local school. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
2	I know the percentage of students in my school who live in poverty and who, of those students, are underachieving. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues know the percentage of students in our school who live in poverty and who, of those students, are underachieving. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
3	I know how poverty affects lives and learning. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues know how poverty affects lives and learning. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
4	I can provide a research-based answer to the question "How do schools make a difference in the lives of students who live in poverty?" -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues can provide a research-based answer to the question "How can schools make a difference in the lives of students who live in poverty?" -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
5	I know how high-performing, high-poverty schools develop the leadership infrastructure necessary for improvement. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues know how high-performing, high-poverty schools develop the leadership infrastructure necessary for improvement. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
6	I know how high-performing, high-poverty schools develop a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for students and adults. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues know how high-performing, high-poverty schools develop a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for students and adults. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
7	I know how high-performing, high-poverty schools improve student learning, support adult learning, and "work smarter" as a system. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues know how high-performing, high-poverty schools improve student learning, support adult learning, and "work smarter" as a system. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
8	I know which mind-sets, practices, policies, and structures perpetuate underachievement and how high-performing, high-poverty schools eliminate them. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues know which mind-sets, practices, policies, and structures perpetuate underachievement and how high-performing, high-poverty schools eliminate them. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
9	I can describe the beliefs, values, and norms that constitute a school culture conducive to the success of students who live in poverty. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues can describe the beliefs, values, and norms that constitute a school culture conducive to the success of students who live in poverty. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3

FIGURE I.2 Assessing Our Willingness to Take Action

Please rate each statement from highly unlikely (-3) to highly likely (3).

1	I believe I make a difference in the lives of my students, despite the challenges some of them face. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues believe, as teachers, they make a difference in the lives of students, despite the challenges some of those students face. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
2	I believe I am professionally responsible for learning and all students can meet high academic standards in my classroom, despite the challenges some of them face. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues believe they are professionally responsible for learning and all students, despite challenges, can meet high academic standards in their classrooms. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
3	I believe redistributing resources schoolwide would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues believe redistributing resources schoolwide would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
4	I believe learning more about how poverty influences life and learning would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty and are underachieving. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues believe learning more about how poverty influences life and learning would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty and are underachieving. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
5	I believe working more collaboratively would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty and are underachieving. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues believe working more collaboratively would help us better meet the needs of students who live in poverty and are underachieving. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
6	I believe our school has an organizational climate that encourages innovation, risk taking, and professional learning. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues believe our school has an organizational climate that encourages innovation, risk taking, and professional learning. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
7	I believe our school staff is open to new ideas and willing to make changes, even changes of significant magnitude. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues believe our school staff is open to new ideas and willing to make changes, even changes of significant magnitude. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
8	I believe in our ability, as a school, to succeed in making changes, even changes of a significant magnitude. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues are confident in our ability, as a school, to succeed in making changes, even changes of a significant magnitude. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3
9	I believe our school staff feels a sense of urgency about meeting the needs of all our students, particularly those who live in poverty. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	My colleagues believe our school staff feels a sense of urgency about meeting the needs of all our students, particularly those who live in poverty. -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3

that if a school isn't ready to change, it should do nothing. Rather, assessing readiness helps leaders tailor their actions to the needs of those whom they lead. For example, if school stakeholders score more positively in terms of their willingness than their ability, leaders may want to initiate conversations and professional development to build knowledge and skills. If the opposite is true, leaders will likely need to address the factors that are influencing a low level of willingness to step up to the challenge of successfully educating their students who live in poverty.

PART

I

Learning Together:

Getting Ready to Lead
Underachieving Students in Poverty
to Success

Any High-Poverty School Can Become High Performing

William and his four siblings had been homeless for an entire year until they found stable housing. He had a tough transition when he came to our school,... but as he spent more time with his teachers, his achievement steadily improved and the year ended really well; he moved on to the middle school. I was blown away when he came into my office to apologize [for his behavior the previous year]. He told me, "I know that was wrong and that's not the way I want you to remember me." He knows his short time here turned him around, and not just academically. This tough kid now cares how he will be remembered. He knows we cared about him. It's great to be reminded that what we're doing here makes a difference. Every school could be doing this.

—Andrew Collins, former principal,
Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School

The kids at Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary, a Minnesota school where most of the students' families live in poverty, believe in their school. Once a place where low achievement prevailed, the school now is a model of respect, achievement, and optimism. Getting there wasn't easy. The

school embarked on a goal-driven course to counter a host of long-standing obstacles to high achievement, and it succeeded. Indeed, high achievement at Dayton's Bluff Elementary and hundreds of other high-poverty schools across the United States with a similar sense of mission has become what is expected. Yet in many schools, particularly those where a large percentage of the students live in poverty, low achievement continues to be the norm.

A Crisis That Can Be Overcome

Most students who drop out—more than a million a year—leave school between the ages of 14 and 16 after enduring years of schooling in which minimal achievement, frustration, embarrassment, and failure were daily realities. Many simply lose hope, seeing little reason to stay in school. Of the roughly 70 percent who do make it to graduation, it is estimated that only one-third of that group (23 percent of the total) graduate prepared for the demands of the workplace or higher education. Graduation rates for Hispanic (56 percent), African American (54 percent), and Native American (51 percent) students are even more dismal. These rates reflect the failure of public schooling to work for a significant number of our children—our most precious resource (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

Dwarfing the number of students who leave early is the number of kids who remain in school and graduate woefully underprepared for postsecondary education or the workplace. More than two decades ago, Lizbeth and Daniel Schorr (1989) spoke eloquently to this crisis within a crisis, calling for schools to address the critical needs of the adolescents for whom this is true. A parade of national reports, along with countless CEOs and other business leaders, continue to echo this concern today. Combined, the number of students who drop out and the number who are unprepared for life beyond graduation illustrate the crisis that continues to plague the United States.

Not all students who drop out or who underachieve live in poverty, but many do. Despite recent modest progress in student achievement at the elementary and middle school levels, most of our high schools continue to demonstrate little success in closing long-standing achievement gaps between low-income and more advantaged students. Why are so many ambivalent about recognizing, let alone addressing, this crisis? Are the daily needs of underachieving children who live in poverty too immense for most of us to grasp? Are their lives too distant from our own for us to see? Are we too embedded in an unspoken reality of classism and racism, as many argue? What will it take to educate the "whole child" if that child lives in poverty?

Are We Asking the Right Questions?

Our children are the victims of this legacy. They suffer the consequences of a widespread unwillingness on the part of policymakers and education leaders to ask three key questions:

- Why are some high-poverty schools high performing and others not?
- What do we need to do to significantly improve our lowest-performing schools?
- What can we learn from high-performing, high-poverty (HP/HP) schools that can help underachieving students who live in poverty, regardless of where they go to school?

Asking and answering these questions could result in improved educational outcomes for virtually every underachieving child living in poverty. Although federal policy calls for all students to meet their state's established learning standards by 2014 and policymakers in all 50 states have defined proficiency through the use of mandated tests, far too little has been done to create the conditions that research has demonstrated are necessary to ensure that most, if not all, students will meet these standards. Thus our crisis continues, and the questions remain unasked and unanswered.

Solutions Are Out There

Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust, and her colleagues have observed and studied enough schools like Dayton's Bluff to know that any school, regardless of its condition, has the capacity to reverse long-embedded trends of low achievement. For more than a decade, Haycock has traveled the United States on a mission to help others understand this new reality. As she puts it,

> It is hugely important for both educators and the general public to know how powerful schools can be. And indeed, the stories of schools that serve very poor children, yet produce very high results, provide exactly the tonic of hope and inspiration that help restore the luster of a public education system that has lost considerable public confidence over the last two decades. (Haycock, 2007, p. xix)

Ron Edmonds, Asa Hilliard, Sam Stringfield, Charles Teddlie, and others first wrote and spoke passionately about the same possibility 20 to 30 years ago. Today, joining Haycock, noted scholars Richard Elmore, Daniel Duke, Michael Fullan, Rick Stiggins, and others fervently urge educators to study the

successes of high-performing, high-poverty schools to gain authentic insight and guidance regarding their sustained accomplishments.

Learning About the Critical Importance of Leadership

In 2007, Robert Barr and William Parrett synthesized the emerging work of many regarding how low-performing, high-poverty schools become high performing. Their synthesis identified eight strategies that were common to the high-performing, high-poverty schools studied. Of the eight strategies, *ensuring effective school and district leadership* was central to the successful execution of the other seven. (See Chapter 2 for more on the other strategies.)

Building on the contributions of Barr and Parrett, the continuing work of the Education Trust, and that of other scholars, we began a study to develop a greater understanding of the impact, influence, and inner workings of leadership in HP/HP schools. Drawing from the research base, we developed a framework to capture conceptually the function of leadership in these schools. We then selected a small, diverse group of schools against which we could "test"—or in research terms, "member check"—our framework. Each of the schools selected demonstrated significant and sustained gains in academic achievement for at least three years; enrolled 40 percent or more students who qualified for the free and reduced-price meals program; reflected racial, ethnic, organizational, and geographic diversity; and were willing to work with us. In addition, the Education Trust, the U.S. Department of Education, and individual state departments of education have recognized these schools for their significant gap-closing improvement.

Schools selected were Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary in St. Paul, Minnesota; Lapwai Elementary in Lapwai, Idaho; Molalla High School in Molalla, Oregon; Osmond A. Church School (K–8), in Queens, New York; Port Chester Middle School in Port Chester, New York; Tekoa High School (7–12) in Tekoa, Washington; and William H. Taft Elementary in Boise, Idaho.

A Framework for Action in High-Poverty Schools

The leaders we interviewed confirmed what the growing research base on HP/HP schools had identified and what was reflected in our framework: Leadership—collaborative and distributed—served as the linchpin of success. This included the critical role that the principal and often a small group of teacher-leaders played in *developing systemic, shared leadership capacity* throughout the school, which was a catalyst for the creation of a *healthy,*

safe, and supportive learning environment and an *intentional focus on improving learning*. Leaders' actions in each of these areas also led to changes in the school's culture. Leaders further noted that beyond influencing the classroom and the school at large, they *developed relationships and formed partnerships* with the district office, students' families, and the broader neighborhood and community to reach their goals.

In our Framework for Action (Figure 1.1), we have attempted to illustrate the complex interactions between the three arenas in which leaders take action, the nature of the culture found in HP/HP schools, and various spheres through which leaders influence the lives of students in poverty. In Chapter 2 we describe the schools we visited and our conclusions in greater detail. The Framework for Action is elaborated in Chapter 4.

It's Complex, but Doable!

Schools can disrupt the cycle of poverty, in both the long term and short term. An effective school can rescue a child from a future of illiteracy; it can save hundreds of students from the grim reality awaiting those who exit school unprepared. An effective school can directly impact and improve our society, but to do so, it must have leaders who are oriented toward social justice. Such leaders ask questions that cause themselves and others to assess and critique the current conditions in their schools. They identify whose interests are being served by the current conditions and whose are not. Although the administrators, teachers, school trustees, and other leaders whom we interviewed did not use the words "social justice" to describe their mission or purpose, their professional practice was consistent with what others have identified as "social justice leadership" (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2009). Their vision for the school and their professional practice centered on students who, for whatever reason, were not succeeding, and focused on inclusive practices ensuring that all students had equal opportunities for powerful instruction. They confronted structures, policies, practices, and mind-sets that perpetuated inequities and thus created more equitable schools where expectations were high, academic achievement improved overall, and achievement gaps were closing.

Excellence, Equality, and Equity: Compatible Goals

These leaders and those in other HP/HP schools aim for three ideals: excellence, equality, and equity. What do we mean by this? First, these leaders understand the distinction among the three words and the possible

A Framework for Action:
Leading High-Poverty Schools to High Performance
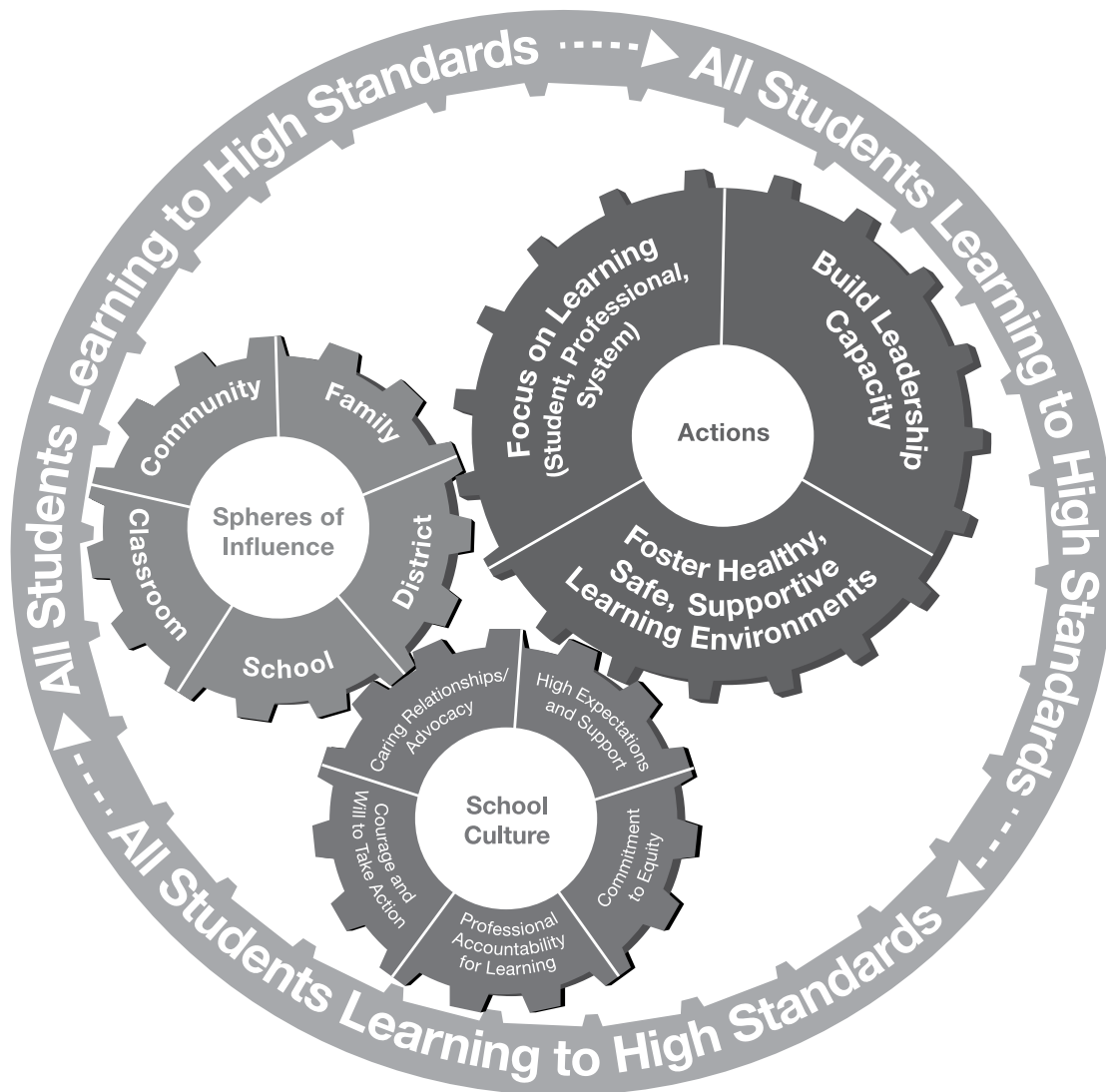
tension among them. Excellence *is* the expectation in HP/HP schools, and it is not sacrificed to attain the other two goals of equality or equity. These schools are not places where curriculum is watered down, standards are lowered, or the pace of instruction is slowed to ensure equality in outcomes (for example, everyone gets an *A*). Rather, these schools strive for equality in outcomes (for example, all students meet high standards; all students graduate ready for college) by committing to equitable opportunity for learning.

In the case of underachieving students who live in poverty, providing such opportunity often necessitates *equitable*, in contrast to *equal*, distribution of resources (time, money, people). In HP/HP schools, all students do not get the same thing—all students get what they need to succeed.

Academic Achievement: A Key Element in Social Justice

Although many high-poverty schools are criticized for focusing too much on standardized testing, which has been perceived as narrowing the curriculum and emphasizing the "wrong" things, this was not the case in the schools we visited. They focused on multiple indicators of high performance, including (but not limited to) increased attendance, improved graduation rates, fewer discipline violations, increased parent and community involvement, improved pedagogy, and improved climate.

At the end of the day, however, there can be no social justice without addressing academic achievement. These schools both increased academic achievement overall and closed achievement gaps, but as the framework in Figure 1.1 is intended to indicate, they did so by doing much more than simply focusing on raising standardized test scores. Our approach in writing this book is one of understanding how schools transform to better meet the needs of children and adolescents who live in poverty, in contrast to "fixing" these students so that they can better "fit" in the current system of schooling.

Poverty's Intersection with Race, Gender, Immigration, and Family Structure

In the United States, any discussion of poverty must acknowledge the inextricable link between poverty and race, gender, immigration status, and family structure. African American and Hispanic children are three times more likely to be poor than are their white and Asian counterparts (Danziger & Danziger, 2008). Additionally, children of single-parent households and first-generation immigrant parents have a greater chance of living in poverty than do children living in two-parent households and those living with native-born parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

When student outcomes are considered, these intersecting factors are often at play. Strategies such as book studies and other forms of professional learning related to multiculturalism and cultural relevancy, as well as critical conversations related to racial-identity development, white privilege, and institutional marginalization of those considered "different," have been central to social justice leadership in other studies (Theoharis, 2009). Although leaders in the schools we studied did not note specific strategies used to

confront racism or marginalization, in each case they knew their students, families, and communities well. This knowledge allowed them to form relationships of mutual respect, identify needs appropriately, and build on assets to create conditions in which students thrived.

Social Justice Leadership: The Importance of Place-Consciousness

Scholars who have studied the effect of poverty on students and schools assert, "When school leaders subscribe to conceptions of poverty that divorce individual instances from local and historical contexts, they risk employing prescriptive efforts that overlook individual and collective responses to poverty that can benefit learners" (Rodriguez & Fabionar, 2010, p. 67). By contrast, when they understand the broader history of the community, school leaders "are more likely to recognize community strategies that are used to cope with and counteract the conditions that maintain poverty" (p. 69).

Poverty looks different in every community. In a rural community where the formerly vibrant agriculture-based economy has struggled and the population is predominantly white, poverty will manifest itself differently than it will in a suburban community that is, for the most part, working-class but also serves as a refugee relocation site, or in an urban setting with a racially diverse population and opportunities for employment that have been severely compromised for decades.

Leaders in the HP/HP schools that we studied were in tune with the neighborhoods and communities they served. Their leadership was informed by knowing the answers to questions such as these: What has happened in our community that has shaped collective experience? How have the demographics of the community changed over the years? What is the community's social and political response to poverty? What support is available? How are wealth and income distributed in the community—who are the "haves" and the "have-nots"? Is there a "wrong side of the tracks"? If so, who lives there? Where is the school located? Where do our families come from? How long have they been in the community? What are the traditional places of employment? What is the economic structure of the community? Who are the major employers? What are the hopes and dreams of our families for their children's futures? How are educators viewed? What does our community believe to be the purpose of school?

Research can support or hinder leaders' efforts to meet the needs of students in poverty. To be of benefit, research and the practical strategies

it implies must be considered in light of unique factors found in the local context. Our intention is to present the lessons learned from HP/HP schools in a manner that supports what scholars refer to as "user generalizability" (Merriam, 1998). Although the schools we studied, and many others like them, had in common the foundational elements represented in the Framework for Action, there was no single silver bullet approach to success. These elements interact and play out differently in every school.

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