A case study of three rural schools: Factors, characteristics, and conditions that influence school performance scores

Jacqueline L. Mason
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A CASE STUDY OF THREE RURAL SCHOOLS: FACTORS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND CONDITIONS THAT INFLUENCE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SCORES

by

Jacqueline L. Mason, B.S., M.Ed.

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

November 2007
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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to explore three rural Louisiana PK-12 schools with high percentages of minority and high poverty populations and to examine how activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures in these schools might be associated with their consistent growth in School Performance Scores across the period 2001-2005. Qualitative data were collected from individual interviews, researcher observations, focus groups, and analyses of school documents. Constant comparison theory was used to triangulate data across the three schools and to identify emerging themes and patterns common to all schools. The study was one of mixed methods; most of the data were collected using qualitative methods but quantitative data were used to describe teacher quality.

Several themes emerged that appeared to have had a positive effect on student achievement in the three schools including (a) a focus on testing and test preparation, (b) strong informal communication between parents and schools in all three schools, (c) culturally responsive teaching in two schools, and (d) highly qualified and home-grown teachers in all schools. Alternatively, other themes emerged that contradicted the effective schools research and are generally not considered to be positive characteristics of successful schools, such as the following: (a) a lack of culturally responsive teaching in one school, (b) inadequate formal communications between parents and school in all
schools, and (c) professional development opportunities not aligned with school needs assessment in all schools.

Findings of the study indicated that the three rural schools experienced many of the same problems as do their urban school counterparts with high minority and low socioeconomic status (SES) populations, as addressed in other research studies (DeYoung, 1989; Diamond & Spillane, 2004). However, factors such as school culture, community relations, and interactions among parents, students, and teachers appeared to have ameliorated at least some of the negative influences associated with these types of schools. These findings have implications for future research, particularly in terms of the effect of school culture and informal communications among stakeholders on student achievement in rural schools with high-minority and low socioeconomic student populations.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Study

In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity where the state has undertaken to provide it is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954)

The Brown v. Board of Education ruling was representative of the ideological alteration of American education. Rogers and Oakes (2005) described Brown as being central to the struggle for equality in education. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, set a precedent that continues in education today. The Court ruled against the constitutionality of laws segregating children by race, but the unambiguous assertion of the ruling backed by the authority of the Supreme Court spoke not only to racial equity but to cultural and political equity as well. Through Brown v. Board of Education, it was declared that educational opportunities “must be made available to all on equal terms” (Rogers & Oakes, p. 2180).

The decision of the Supreme Court represented a significant departure from the passive role that the federal government had played in education in the past. Although
the Tenth Amendment extended authority over education policies and procedures to the individual states, the Court opened doors for expanded control of education by the federal government. The *Brown* ruling began the evolution of equity reform of education in America (Rogers & Oakes, 2005).

The central focus of educational legislation from the time of the *Brown* ruling to present day legislation in the form of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) was the creation of educational opportunities for minority and low SES students (New York State Education Department, 2003). This focus stemmed from views of educational reform developed by theorist John Dewey. Dewey described progressive education philosophy as being driven by what was termed the “New Deal” liberalism. This philosophy included interest in federal aid to education which focused on correcting (a) unequal educational opportunity, (b) disparities between North and South, urban and rural, (c) inequalities between black and white segregated schools, (d) inadequate physical plants, (e) teacher shortages, and (f) outdated curriculum. Controversy over aid to sectarian schools, segregation, and local control prevented enactment of federal programs that addressed these issues, but they remained embedded in the educational landscape.

In 1960, the National Science Foundation (NSF) authored a conference report supporting the active engagement of students in the learning process versus passive students and active teachers. This report led to Jerome Bruner’s book, *Man: A Course of Study*, that called for research-based curriculum stressing critical thinking, collaboration, and questioning of traditional pedagogy, thought, and values. At that time, 1962, these ideas met strong resistance and were never implemented (as cited in New York State Education Department, 2003).
In 1960, President John F. Kennedy became the 35th president of the United States by a narrow margin, with Lyndon Baines Johnson as his vice president. With the Democratic Party as the majority party, the federal government became more active in social reforms. During this term, Vice President Johnson developed an education agenda for the administration. This agenda became the focal point of the “Great Society” platform of the Democratic Party in 1964 (National Conference of State Legislators, 2004).

Following the death of President Kennedy in 1963, Vice President Johnson became the 36th president of the United States. He committed himself to supporting the Kennedy agenda, which included civil rights and education legislation. President Johnson introduced the “Great Society” agenda in 1964, which birthed Title VI, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 1965.

With the introduction of ESEA, there was a focus on meeting the needs of educationally deprived children in public and non-public schools. The major focus of ESEA was Title I, a compensatory program designed to compensate for inequities in educational opportunity experienced in the past by underserved populations. Populations benefiting the most from ESEA were minority and low socioeconomic status students. ESEA culminated more than 40 years of federal intervention in education and ultimately extended the principle of equality for all initiated by the Brown v. Board of Education decision (National Conference of State Legislators, 2004).

President Johnson did not choose to seek a second term as president, and the Republican Party moved into the majority. Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, at which time the administration platform began to change. President Reagan did not feel
it constitutionally appropriate for the federal government to intervene in social policy, including education. He believed educational policy to be the responsibility of the state as provided for in the Tenth Amendment of the Constitution. He sought the dissolution of the newly created Department of Education cabinet post but was unable to obtain support to achieve that goal. However, in 1983, Secretary of Education Terrell Bell and President Reagan assembled the National Commission on Excellence in Education to report on the condition and quality of education in the United States (National Conference of State Legislators, 2004). This report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) found that the nation had begun to deteriorate academically, and students were unable to compete academically on international assessments, the First International Mathematics Study (FIMS) and the First International Science Study (FISS). These assessments are now called Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Several areas of academic risk were effectively identified in the report including areas of risk that would cause the disenfranchisement of populations lacking education. Recommendations by the Commission included the establishment of academic standards for all students.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education stated

> Part of what is at risk is the promise first made on this continent:

> All, regardless of race or color or economic status are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not
only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (§ 10)

Ultimately, the *A Nation at Risk Report* indicated that national education had reached a level of mediocrity that would affect not only student achievement but also the position held by the United States in the global economy. The report further illustrated a national commitment to equality in education for all students made in 1954 by the Supreme Court, the “Great Society” agenda of 1964, the Title VI Civil Rights Act, and ESEA (1965). Recommendations made by the Commission led to the genesis of the standards-based education movement in the United States. This movement provided for the development of standards and assessments to measure student achievement in all states so that all students had an opportunity for an effective and productive education.

In 1989, American President George H.W. Bush, in association with the National Governors Association, convened the Inaugural National Education Summit. The governors of the summit established six broad objectives to be reached by the year 2000, and which was dubbed America 2000. The objectives of America 2000 were

Goal 1: All children in America would start school ready to learn.

Goal 2: The national high school graduation rate would increase to at least 90%.

Goal 3: American students would leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, and every school in America would ensure that all students learned to use their minds well in order to be prepared for responsible citizenship, lifelong learning, and productive employment in a global economy.
Goal 4: U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

Goal 5: Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Goal 6: Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

In 1994, American President William Jefferson Clinton adopted most of the recommendations that came out of the first education summit, and signed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The federal government re-engaged in the accountability issue when President Clinton signed the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) of 1994. IASA was a reauthorization and revision of the original ESEA. Requirements of IASA included the following:

1. Development of challenging content standards for what students should know in language arts and mathematics.

2. Development of performance standards representing three levels:
   (a) partial-proficiency, (b) proficiency, and (c) advanced proficiency for each of the performance standards.

3. Development and implementation of assessments aligned with the content and performance standards in at least language arts and mathematics at grade spans 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12.

4. Creation of unified standards and assessment system to measure the performance of students served by Title 1 and all other students.
5. Implementation of performance and content standards established as benchmarks for improvement in all schools. The measure of improvement in schools was referred to as Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP. All schools had to meet AYP or were subject to possible consequences.

IASA retained most of the requirements of ESEA by expanding the purposes of the original law to ensure that (a) all states created standards and benchmarks to assess what students should know and be able to do in language arts and mathematics between the grade spans 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12; (b) all students were able to master the benchmarks and standards established by the state; and (c) all schools made continuous growth toward all students demonstrating proficiency in the standards and benchmarks developed by the states. The act also included provisions that would create partnerships between parents and schools by including parental involvement as an important piece of the enactment. Another component of IASA retained by ESEA was the inclusion of a component that allowed for professional development for teachers (National Conference of State Legislators, n.d.). Professional development has been demonstrated to raise the quality of teachers and illustrate the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement. This connection is discussed further in Chapter 2, the review of the literature.

In 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. This enactment reauthorized IASA and retained many of its provisions including the use of standardized tests to measure student proficiency in academics. It also extended funding for underserved populations, but Barton (2006) stated that the law "puts teeth into the practice of using such tests to measure school accountability by providing rewards for schools that achieved AYP and sanctions because it requires states
to impose sanctions on schools whose students do not reach designated cut points for ‘proficient’ performance on schedule” (p. 28). The purpose of NCLB (2001) was to ensure that all students would demonstrate proficiency in reading and language arts by the year 2013-2014.

Simpson, LaCava, and Graner (2004) identified accountability as the centerpiece of NCLB (2001). State education departments and school districts, as well as school administrators, faculty, and students were held accountable for positive student outcomes and results in education. Mandates of the law addressed assessment and accountability across all states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The focus of federal education law was to eliminate gaps in test scores among racial and ethnic, SES, language, and special education status groups (Simpson et al.). The accountability system rewarded or punished school districts, schools, and teachers for the academic performance of students. It did not prescribe high stakes consequences for students but promoted high stakes testing in that it linked promotion or graduation to the results of standardized testing (Barton, 2006).

The Education Trust (2003) stated that NCLB (2001) could serve as an important tool for improving academic achievement for all students. Research demonstrated that there is a major achievement gap affecting poor and minority students. The Education Trust asserted that these students entered school behind but rather than accelerating students to grade level, schools often made the situation worse.

Goertz (2003) identified four provisions of NCLB (2001). These four areas were (a) parental involvement and choice, (b) accountability, (c) teacher quality, and (d) scientific research-based instruction. Many schools, both urban and rural, frequently
found it difficult to meet the mandates of NCLB (2001) or to integrate the provisions of NCLB (2001) into their school programs (Simpson et al., 2004).

Hill (2000) asserted that the federal government had transformed public schools from intimate communities into complex, rule-driven institutions, and that many of the weaknesses of public schools could be the result of bureaucratic intervention by the government into education. McDonnell (2005) claimed that NCLB (2001) was not the evolution of a better law for ensuring student success in American schools, but a revolutionary means of increasing federal control in schools.

Research by Diamond and Spillane (2004) indicated that school responses to accountability were dependent upon school accountability status. Schools that were successful in meeting the mandates of NCLB (2001) emphasized enhancing the academic growth of all students while schools in probation were more likely to concentrate on improving the performance of students in specific grades and across certain subject areas. Moreover, because students from minority and low SES backgrounds were more likely to be concentrated in the lowest performing schools, many of these schools had trouble making adequate yearly progress (AYP).

In the Why Rural Matters Report 2003, Beeson and Strange (2003) ranked Alaska, Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky, North Dakota, South Dakota, Arkansas, West Virginia, South Carolina, and Louisiana as the 10 states most in need of policy changes for rural education. The challenges and obstacles that faced school districts in these states, however, challenged other school districts as well. Researchers at the Northwestern Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) identified recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff and difficulties in making AYP as two major
difficulties for schools identified as rural. Williams (2003a) stated that one in three students in the United States attended a school in a rural area, and about one-half of the schools were located in areas identified as rural locations (Beeson & Strange).

Low levels of student achievement on standardized tests negatively influenced many rural schools because standardized test scores contributed 60% to each School Performance Score (SPS). Composite reports for subgroup components for school districts and individual schools in Louisiana indicated large numbers of students from minority and low SES backgrounds as being unable to meet the approaching basic level of mastery on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) test. Thus, rural schools with large populations of minority, low SES students possibly experienced difficulties making AYP (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005).

The focus for reform in public education from the rendering of the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 to reauthorization of NCLB (2001) at the time of the study was equality and equity in education for all students. The assertive description of NCLB (2001) specifically utilized the words “all students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The researcher of this study was interested in demonstrating whether the provisions and mandates of NCLB (2001) met the overarching goal of ensuring quality education for all students, including students of minority and low SES backgrounds who attended three rural schools. Additionally, the researcher sought to discover what activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures in each school contributed to success in demonstrating consistent growth in SPS during the 2001-2005 period.
implementation of NCLB (2001) would have on minority and low SES populations in rural schools such as those in which the researcher served. Research by Williams and King (2002); Howley, Strange, and Bickel (2000); and Altshuler and Schmautz (2006) asserted that although the intent of NCLB (2001) was to ensure all students equitable opportunities for effective instruction, other negative influences were included such as inherent testing bias of standardized tests for African American students. Interest in these assumptions led the researcher to select an intrinsic case study methodology wherein activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures in schools similar to the ones in which the researcher observed could be explored. Selected sites demonstrated continuous growth in SPS even though the schools involved in the study began their baseline cycle below what was considered the acceptable level, and the term "successful" in its purest sense could not be attached to these schools. These schools were, however, persistent in demonstrating growth in SPS.

Purpose of the Study

The researcher believed that although the provisions of NCLB (2001) might be difficult for rural schools to implement, such implementation in these schools could possibly influence student success. The purpose of this study was to explore three rural Louisiana PK-12 schools with high percentages of minority, low SES populations and to find out how activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures in each school might be associated with their consistent growth in SPS across the period 2001-2005. The study investigated such factors as SES, parental involvement, quality of teachers, types of instructional strategies, stakeholder perceptions of NCLB (2001), and the influence of some facets of school culture on school achievement. Darling-Hammond (2000) stated
Despite the rhetoric of American equality, the school experiences of African American and other minority children in the United States continue to be substantially separate and unequal. Dramatically different learning opportunities—especially disparities in access to well-qualified teachers, a high quality curriculum, and small schools and classes—are strongly related to differences in student achievement. (Darling-Hammond, 2003)

These differences for students of minority and low SES background have widened the gap between minority and non-minority student achievement. As a result, schools experiencing such disparities have been identified as ineffective or failing. It is important to note that these three schools were not selected necessarily because they were exemplary schools characterized by qualities reflected in the effective schools research but because each school met specific criteria for minority, poverty, demographic location, and consistent growth in SPS over a four-year period.

Orlich (2004) asserted that accountability demands of NCLB (2001) required that these conditions be met:

1. Challenging academic content and student standards;
2. Uniform standards applied to all students in all schools;
3. Testing in mathematics, language arts and reading, and science for all students once between grades 3-5, once between grades 6-8, and once between grades 9-12.
4. Demonstration of AYP by all schools such that by 2013 all students meet all standards; and
5. Separate measures reported for (a) all k-12 students, (b) low SES students, (c) students from major ethnic and racial groups, (d) students with disabilities, and (e) students with limited English proficiency.

Several research studies summarized by Gross and Supovitz (2005) described characteristics that enabled 48 high achieving high schools to be successful. These characteristics included (a) school interpretation of the provisions of NCLB (2001), (b) instructional strategies utilized by schools, (c) decision-making processes for successful schools, and (d) remedial strategies employed by successful schools. These characteristics could, in conjunction with the implementation of provisions of NCLB (2001), encourage consistent growth in SPS. This study examined the influence of the implementation of these four provisions of NCLB (2001) identified by Goertz, 2003 on three rural schools. Additional research on the implementation of these four provisions is provided in Chapter 2.

Rural education research such as that conducted by Bernhardt (2003); Benard (2004a, 2004b); and Howley, Strange, and Bickel (2000) indicated that aspects of school culture such as (a) school size, (b) classroom size, (c) pupil-teacher ratio, and (d) condition of facilities directly influenced effectiveness of schools and academic achievement of students. Other facets of school culture such as interactions among stakeholders of the school and beliefs, attitudes, and traditions of the community also influence school success. These factors were included in the scrutinization of each of the school sites in this researcher's study.
Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Phillips, Swanepoel, and Coetsee (2005) identified a variety of factors that played a role in academic achievement in schools. These factors were grouped into three categories, which included

1. Teaching related factors such as classroom interaction, teaching strategies, teaching styles, class size, and the language of instruction and learner support;

2. Learner and/or learning-related factors such as learning motivation, achievement motivation, learning styles, learning strategies, abilities and talents, attention, self-efficacy, behavior, understanding, career aspirations, psychological support, and peer relations; and

3. Other factors including socioeconomic status (SES), level and development of society, block scheduling programs, teacher performance incentives, and administration leadership.

Chapter 2 contains an extension of the discussion of these factors as components of school culture.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question in this study was “What activities, conditions, events, policies, and practices related to the provisions of NCLB (2001) in three rural schools contributed to the growth of SPS in the three schools?” This question served as the overarching focus for the study. Secondary questions supporting the overarching query included

1. What perceptions did stakeholders have of the implementation of NCLB (2001) in the three schools?
2. How did implementation of research-based strategies occur in each of the three schools?

3. In what way was parental involvement accomplished in the three schools?

4. What was the proportion of highly qualified faculty in the three schools?

5. What school culture existed in the three schools?

6. How did school culture contribute to the consistent growth of SPS in the three schools?

Definitions and Terminology

Accountability System: Each state set academic standards for what every student should know and be able to do and for what every child should know and learn. Student academic achievement is measured for every child, every year. The results of these annual tests are reported to the public (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Achievement Gap: The difference between how well low-income and minority children perform on standardized tests as compared to their peers. For many years, low-income and minority children have been falling behind their peers in terms of academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. "Adequate Yearly Progress" is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year.

States were allowed the opportunity to determine how they would measure adequate yearly progress using the assessment system that they had in place. In the state of Louisiana, a target growth score was determined based on data and statistics for
specific schools and districts. Once these scores were established, specific criteria were used to calculate the school performance score. If schools did not make this score, they did not meet the AYP criterion for NCLB (2001) (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Assessment: Assessment is defined as the processes and tools teachers use to collect data and make decisions about student learning. Assessment is composed of two parts: (a) measurement which includes information gathered using processes and tools of assessment such as observations of student seatwork and homework, oral responses to questions, and student results on teacher-made and standardized tests; and (b) evaluation, which refers to the decisions that teachers make on the basis of measurements (Eggen & Kauchak, 1997). Under NCLB (2001), standardized tests were aligned with academic standards and benchmarks. The State of Louisiana created a standardized criterion-referenced assessment to be used to measure student proficiency in the standards and benchmarks determined by NCLB (2001). Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, Louisiana schools began administering the assessment in each of three grade spans: grades 3-5, grades 6-9, and grades 10-12. Beginning the 2007-2008 school year, science achievement was to be tested (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005).

Corrective Action: When a school or school district does not make adequate yearly progress, the state will place it under Corrective Action and create a plan for assistance. The plan will include resources to improve teaching, administration, or curriculum. If a school continues to be identified as in need of improvement, then the state has increased authority to make any necessary, additional changes to ensure improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).
Disaggregated Data: "Disaggregate" means to separate a whole into parts. In education, this term means that test results are sorted into groups of students who are economically disadvantaged, from racial and ethnic minority groups, have disabilities, or have limited English fluency. This practice allows parents and teachers to see more than just the average score for their children's schools. Instead, parents and teachers can see how each student group is performing (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Highly Qualified Teacher: The term highly qualified means that the teacher has obtained full state certification as a teacher (including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification) or passed the state teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in such state, except that when used with respect to any teacher teaching in a public charter school, the term means that the teacher meets the requirements set forth in individual state public charter school law (ESEA, 2003, p. 107).

Minority: For the purposes of this study, the term “minority” is representative of black, or African American, people in Louisiana as the major group of minority individuals in Louisiana (Nieto, 2004).

No Child Left Behind Act 2001: NCLB (2001) reauthorized the ESEA of 1965. Its purpose was to provide quality education for all students in America. Its major tenets included school accountability, parental choice, teacher quality, and high stakes testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Parent: The term “parent” includes a legal guardian or other person standing in loco parentis such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).
Parental Involvement: The term "parental involvement" means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including volunteerism, parent-teacher conferences, parenting workshops, and Title I Activities which ensure that:

1. Parents play an integral role in assisting their children’s learning;

2. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their children’s education at school;

3. Parents are full partners in their children’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their children; and

4. Other activities such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Rural: NCLB (2001) used the official U.S. Census Bureau definitions of rural areas as those areas and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents. Most geographical areas (counties or parishes) were composed of both urban and rural areas (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003c).

School Performance Score (SPS): SPS was determined using a combination of elements including attendance, student achievement on standardized tests, suspension and expulsion rates, and student retention rates for each school. Student achievement on standardized tests determined 60% of the SPS (Louisiana Department of Education, 2003).

School Report Card: The school report card reports the progress that schools make toward achieving adequate yearly progress. The school report card documents the
progress of students on standardized tests, overall school retention rate, and school attendance rate. Each of these statistics was included in the calculation of the SPS (Louisiana Department of Education, 2003).

School Culture: School culture can be defined as the historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood in varying degrees by members of the school community (Stolp & Smith, 1994).

Socioeconomic Status (SES): SES is defined as student eligibility for the subsidized lunch program (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). In this study, schools are selected in terms of a student population of 45% or more eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Stakeholder: This study defines stakeholder using the United States Department of Education Title One definition. A stakeholder is one who has a stake in the local school site. Stakeholders include parents, students, faculty and staff, and administration of each individual school (U. S. Department of Education, 2002).

Significance of the Study

The NCLB (2001) legislation was a concerted effort by the United States to raise academic achievement for all students. Still, these efforts presented challenges for both urban and non-urban schools. Many schools were unable to meet the challenges of NCLB (2001) while others were successful in spite of the challenges that NCLB (2001) represented. This study describes how three rural schools implemented the provisions of NCLB (2001) and demonstrated consistent growth in SPS.
This study is of significance to rural education research in that it extends the knowledge base currently existing in that field. Very little research has been generated concerning education for minority, low SES students in rural schools. Chopin (2003) conducted a study in rural schools in Louisiana to examine the relationship among school social climate, race, gender, and student achievement. The study consisted of three schools wherein the researcher investigated the relationships among the variables and student achievement. Therefore, research exploring activities, conditions, policies, and procedures in these three schools should help to raise awareness of the possible benefits that activities, conditions, activities, policies, and procedures hold for other rural schools with similar demographics and characteristics.

Additionally, research relative to education for underserved populations exists, but the findings are often controversial, contradictory, or inconclusive. This study sought to bridge gaps in the research about rural schools and high minority, low SES populations and to enable educators to understand how some physical characteristics, conditions, activities, policies, and procedures contributed to the success of three schools catering to these populations.

Limitations of the Study

This study had four limitations. First, this was an intrinsic case study and, therefore, was limited to three Pk-12 rural schools in North Louisiana. The researcher entered each school for a period of one day per week for a period of six weeks. During this time, the researcher acted as an overt participant observer and recorded interactions between teachers and students and among students. Activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures unique to these three schools might not exist in other schools.
with similar demographics. Therefore, according to Stake (1994) the findings of this study might not be generalizeable to other schools. The intrinsic case study allows the researcher to tell the story of the participants observed within the case, and provide a narrative from which the reader can make inferences that may apply to his or her own situation.

Secondly, limitations resulted because of the period in which data collection took place. Research was conducted during months immediately following Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, which directly influenced the landscape of education within the state. Changes in education included

1. Schools in the state were operating under severe financial strain due to fiscal conditions that led to budgetary constraints in all areas. Fiscal reports indicated deficits in state funding as high as $1.5 billion. This deficit required cuts at all levels of government, including PK-12 education.

2. School closings in the southern part of the state led to the placement of students from those schools into schools in the northern part of the state. This included placement of urban students into rural settings as well as placement of students with exceptional needs into regular education classrooms until student records were located and students with exceptional needs appropriately placed. Displacement of both high and low-SES students occurred, and it was difficult to determine where students fit along the spectrum of SES. The researcher was aware that the shift in SES could influence the findings of the study. These shifts
influenced the scores of displaced students, and this influence could have negatively affected student test scores that in turn would affect SPS.

Thirdly, data collection began during the month of April, and school events and activities interfered with interview times or observation times. During this period, faculty and staff were in the process of completing tasks necessary for the closing of the school year. These changes created small samples from which to draw participants for focus groups and interviews.

Lastly, possible bias of the researcher as instrument (Patton, 1990) set limitations on the study as well. The researcher hoped that the results of the study would produce positive results and, while efforts were made to confront researcher bias, these hopes may have affected the outcome of the study. Researcher bias is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Summary

Over the past 53 years the U.S. has sought to increase opportunities for equitable education among all students. NCLB (2001) is culminating legislation which is designed to provide all students, regardless of diverse needs, an opportunity to equal education. Stake (1994) has defined an intrinsic case study as research in which the intent of the researcher is to study a specific attribute or property in which he or she is interested. In this research, the researcher examined how the confluence of school factors, activities, events, policies and procedures, and school culture, and the implementation of NCLB (2001) enabled these rural schools to provide equitable opportunities for student success. Further, Glesne (2005) stated that findings of a study may be unique to the schools involved and not generalizeable across all schools, but that schools with similar
demographics and cultures might be able to utilize these findings to provide equitable opportunities for other schools.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the evolution of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. Chapter 2 will review the literature relative to the provisions of NCLB (2001) and will discuss characteristics and attributes of school culture that influence student achievement and school success.
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

This study examined three schools in north Louisiana and analyzed activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures in each school that might be associated with their consistent growth in SPS across the period 2001-2005. The review of the literature is divided into four sections. In each section, the researcher provides a foundation for and insight into the four components of the study.

In section one of the literature review the reader is provided background and insight into the basic premise of NCLB (2001) as a means of ensuring that all students have an opportunity to an effective and productive education. The history of the standards-based movement and federal government intervention in education described in chapter one is further explained.

Section two of the review includes a discussion of the provisions of NCLB (2001) and empirical research both supporting and opposing its implementation as a means of improving education. Each provision is discussed at length along with its relationship to student achievement. This section of the review will provide support for including the following research questions 1-4 in this study:

1. What perceptions did stakeholders have of the implementation of NCLB (2001) in the three schools?
2. How did implementation of research-based strategies occur in each of the three schools?

3. In what way was parental involvement accomplished in the three schools?

4. What was the number and percentage of highly qualified faculty in the three schools?

The researcher discusses rural schools and demographics of rural schools in section three. This section also includes definitions of rural schools and rural areas and will compare and contrast the effects of NCLB (2001) on rural and urban schools, and describe how rural schools in general meet the requirements of NCLB.

Section four of the review includes a discussion of the characteristics of effective schools and the ways in which these characteristics influence student achievement of minorities and students in rural schools. The researcher answers the following secondary questions in this section:

1. What school culture existed in the three schools?

2. How did school culture contribute to the consistent growth of SPS in the three schools?

No Child Left Behind (2001) and Educational Reform

The purpose of NCLB (2001) was to ensure that all students had an opportunity for effective education on equal terms. In addition to intensifying federal support for increased academic success for all students, the law increased federal control of education policy in the states. Previously each individual state controlled education, a power clearly granted to the states by the Tenth Amendment of the Constitution (Mitchell, 2000).
In 1994, the *Improving American Schools Act* (IASA) reauthorized ESEA and allocated funding that would increase the amount of federal aid provided to enhance and ensure American student achievement in academics, particularly the sciences and mathematics. In addition to increasing ways to fund academic achievement for all students, IASA also increased educational accountability and, to some degree, provided parental choice of schools (DeBray, McDermott, & Wohlstetter, 2005).

In 2001, Congress reauthorized the IASA in the form of the first nationwide comprehensive education legislation, and it was renamed the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (*NCLB*). President George W. Bush signed the legislation in 2002 and *NCLB* (2001) became the law of the land. *NCLB* (2001) differed from its predecessors in that it provided extensive measures to ensure uniformity of expectations for all students. Restructuring the law required all American students to demonstrate proficiency in the same standards in all states and across all groups of students. State Departments of Education retained the ability to create assessments to measure student achievement in order to maintain federal funding, but continued federal funding was dependent upon meeting the mandates of *NCLB* (2001) (DeBray et al., 2005; Hill, 2000; McDonnell, 2005).

The idea of widespread improvement of schools was not new. Provisions of the predecessor to *NCLB* (2001), ESEA, also required schools to make AYP; however, Craciun and Snow-Renner (2002) indicated the provisions of ESEA allowed states more latitude in defining AYP than *NCLB* (2001), and no common performance goal among the states existed. Barton (2006) stated that *NCLB* (2001) "puts teeth in the practice of the use of standardized tests to measure school accountability because it authorizes states to
impose sanctions on schools whose students do not reach designated cut points” (p. 28).

The effectiveness of NCLB (2001) was purportedly strengthened by the imposition of sanctions on schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress and the provision of rewards for those that did.

NCLB (2001) required that all students in all states meet a common goal of performing at proficient or higher levels on state assessments by 2013-2014. This requirement allowed states to analyze those groups that were unsuccessful with the state assessments, divide that number by 12, and establish that figure as the adequate yearly progress for each individual school (Craciun & Snow-Renner).

The United States Department of Education (2003) defined AYP as the assessment of annual objectives that states were required to set under the requirements of NCLB (2001). These objectives measured the progress of schools and districts toward ensuring that all students, including low-income students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency reach proficiency by 2013-2014. In order to make AYP, schools were required to test at least 95% of their students in each of the four designated subgroups. The AYP definition for each state included a timeline that ensured that no later than the 2013-2014 school year all students would meet or exceed the proficient levels for academic achievement set by officials in each state’s department of education.

Schools that were able to meet these requirements showed consistent academic growth while schools that did not meet the requirements frequently did not. Typically, schools characterized by high percentages of minority low SES students, particularly in rural areas, struggled academically (Fritzberg, 2004). This study examined exceptions to
the rule addressing questions such as: Why do some schools with high percentages of minority, low SES students show consistent academic growth, while other schools with similar demographics do not? How have requirements of NCLB (2001) influenced student achievement in these schools?

This policy began the genesis of what would become standards-based reform consistent with the intent of IASA (Goertz, 2003). It required that all states develop standards, assessments, and consequences for determining and evaluating academic growth and allowing all students opportunity for academic success. Criteria for meeting the expectations of the legislation were clear, but each state was able to determine in its own way what standards were necessary to indicate that a school was successful. This variability was a major flaw in the legislation. Because states were able to determine their own benchmarks and standards, there was no consistency nationally in evaluating the standards.

The goal of NCLB (2001) was to ensure that all students performed at the proficient level in language arts and mathematics by the year 2014. Before NCLB (2001) expectations were that schools would meet clearly defined goals for teaching all students to state standards, but there was no consistency of standards across states. In 1997, states began the process of deciding what all students should know and be able to do.

Equally important, academic achievement of all student subgroups determined the level of success of individual schools and school districts. NCLB (2001) was the vehicle by which educational reform was accomplished. Explicit improvements were required of schools at all levels of achievement, and the legislation delineated specific sanctions for low performing schools, districts, and states. The primary means of
determining success of NCLB (2001) had been standardized tests (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006), and ample research had been generated indicating the inherent biases of standardized tests for minorities (Lee, 2001; Madaus & Clarke, 2001).

When Congress passed NCLB (2001), each state was required to set benchmark goals that would indicate whether schools and school districts were on target toward meeting the goal of bringing all students to proficiency in benchmark goals by 2014. Each year assessment of schools and school districts determined whether they were on track toward reaching this goal. This assessment was a measurement of AYP. Education Trust (2003) identified attributes of NCLB (2001) that allowed all states many opportunities to successfully meet AYP each year, but individual states required that schools also demonstrate student mastery. If a school or school district failed to make AYP, NCLB (2001) defined non-performing schools as “schools needing improvement” (Education Trust). Louisiana placed schools into five categories: (a) School in Decline, (b) School of No Growth, (c) School of Minimal Academic Growth, (d) School of Recognized Academic Growth, and (e) School of Exemplary Academic Growth. These titles, or labels, were applied based on the SPS that schools obtained annually (Horn, 2003).

NCLB (2001) allowed all schools two years in which to meet the state determined AYP. If the school was unable to do so, a label of needs improvement was assigned it and assistance was provided in removing the label. The school then had two years in which to reach AYP and remove the “needs improvement” label. If the school was unable to do so, it was then labeled “in corrective action,” and other sanctions and
consequences were applied (U.S. Department of Education, 2002; Horn, 2003; Education Trust, 2003).

Placement into these categories occurred at the beginning of a school’s accountability cycle and was determined by a school’s success in meeting baseline growth scores established at the beginning of its cycle. Uniform scores allowed states to approach AYP in incremental steps. The beginning growth target was determined by looking at the proficiencies of subgroups (e.g., ethnicity, SES, exceptionalities). States used 2000-01 data to calculate separate baselines in mathematics and language arts (Education Trust).

The definition for non-performing school changed drastically from the inception of NCLB (2001) to the time of the study. Kernan-Schloss (2004) stated that “the term ‘failing,’ terminology used by NCLB (2001) to describe schools that had not made AYP, was used to identify a lack in both schools that had traditionally served their population well and schools that had been identified as non-performing” (p. 24). Kernan-Schloss indicated that use of this definition implied that all schools could be assessed using the same measuring stick although neither population nor conditions in all districts was the same. Research by Carter (2003) asserted that the numbers of students enrolled in rural schools and the inability to hire, recruit, and retain highly qualified teachers placed rural schools in the untenable position of being unable to meet the AYP requirement established by NCLB (2001). In July 2004, Secretary of Education Rod Paige responded to claims that NCLB (2001) did not address the needs of rural schools and introduced the creation of the Rural Education Assistance Program to
provide needed assistance for schools located in rural areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Provisions of No Child Left Behind (2001)

Borman and Rachuba (2001) indicated that a substantial amount of research focused on academically successful Black children. This focus would be reasonable in that minority students tend to be affected more by negative environmental stressors and adversities than majority students. Although considerable research on student resilience continues, other researchers such as Benard (1991) and Wang, et al. (1998) have focused considerable attention on attributes, processes, and conditions within schools that might affect academic resilience in students. These attributes, processes, and conditions that positively influenced student achievement in effective schools included quality resources, well built facilities, high quality teachers, and more advantaged and academically successful peers (Benard).

Accountability

The accountability component of NCLB (2001) was not a new concept. Standardized testing was a component of educational reform in the United States from the publication of the A Nation at Risk Report (1983). Additionally, the Improving American Schools Act (IASA), the reauthorization of ESEA, also included standardized testing as a means of measuring academic outcomes and results in school. The Improving American Schools Act differed from NCLB (2001) in that there was little consistency across states and schools when determining proficiency in benchmarks and standards. The major emphasis of NCLB (2001) was accountability in which states,
school districts, and schools were held accountable for positive academic outcomes and results for students and schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Student and school success had historically been measured using standardized assessments. Accountability in NCLB (2001) consisted of measures in which students were expected to demonstrate proficiency in standards and benchmarks established by individual states by 2014. States established a baseline level of achievement from which all schools were expected to demonstrate yearly improvement, AYP, toward the goal of all students reaching the proficient level of mastery on standardized tests. If schools did not demonstrate AYP each year, a series of corrective actions were delineated in the law. Students who did not demonstrate mastery of standards and benchmarks identified by states were unable to continue to the next grade. Standardized testing was required once in grades 3-5, once in grades 6-8, and once in grades 9-12 (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006).

Rural schools with small populations frequently experienced negative effects when standardized tests were administered. If tests were administered to fewer than one hundred students, average scores fluctuated dramatically. Scores could also be influenced by factors other than overall school performance. These factors might also include differences in student ability, motivation, and attitude or, as in the case of Louisiana in 2005, dramatic changes in the teaching environment.

*Parental Involvement*

Section 1118 of NCLB (2001) required that all schools develop a detailed plan for parental involvement in all schools. Parents must have a voice in making these decisions. In a telephone interview of 234 low SES parents, Drummond and Stipek
(2004) indicated that parents rated helping students with schoolwork highly important. Identifying strategies that encourage collaboration between schools and parents might influence success of schools (Fege & Smith).

A study of low-income mothers conducted by Thurston and Naverette (2003) to examine the impact of poverty on children’s development and learning reported concern for the impact of poverty on children’s development and learning. Miedel and Reynolds (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of thirteen years on the association of parental involvement in early childhood intervention and academic achievement through age 14. Researchers surveyed parents about parental involvement during kindergarten intervention with follow-up through grade eight. Findings showed a positive association between the frequency with which a parent reported being involved in kindergarten interventions and reading achievement for students in kindergarten through eighth grade as well as student retention in the eighth grade.

Research by Jeynes (2003) indicated that the effects of parental involvement were consistent across a variety of diverse populations and settings including all levels of economic background and parental education. He also stated that parents were more likely to be involved if a child comes from an intact family, if the parents were enthusiastic generally, and if the family was religious. Jeynes conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies across Asian American, Hispanic, and African American populations. The results of this study indicated a positive relationship between the degree of parental involvement and student achievement across all ethnic groups. Findings indicated that parental involvement appears to affect all levels of student achievement including grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores.
A study conducted by Fields-Smith in which she interviewed 19 African American parents from five different schools in a southeastern school district, indicated that African American parents value education in their students' lives. The study contrasted the beliefs of parents before Brown v. Board of Education and after the Brown decision. Findings indicated that all parents were interested in student achievement, but parents held varying levels of trust of teachers. As a result, parents believed that parental involvement needed to go above and beyond to ensure the academic success of their children. Participants in the study also revealed a number of perceived reasons such as parents feeling that they had to engage in learning activities at home. Limitations of the study were that the study was conducted with a small sample and did not include a cross sample of parents from other regions and areas in the nation.

Teacher Quality

A study conducted by Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, and Madaus (1995) identified a correlation between the quality of instruction that minority students received in classrooms and student achievement, and performance on mandated standardized tests. Lomax et al. asserted that if classroom instruction for minority students included higher order thinking skill activities and authentic assessments, minority students would be better prepared to respond to mandated standardized tests at higher levels.

Research conducted by Rubie-Davis, Hattie, Townsend, and Hamilton (2004) determined if and how teacher expectations directly affected student resilience in schools. Their findings corroborated those of Good and Brophy (2000); Babad (1990); Babad, Bernieri, and Rosenthal (1991); Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1966, 1968); Rosenthal (2002); and Wentzel (1997) that demonstrated how interactions between
teachers and students and the expectations held for students directly influenced academic achievement. Rubie-Davis et al. (2004) indicated that other factors enter into student success in effective schools, although high teacher expectations influence student achievement. Darling-Hammond (2000) asserted that skilled teachers who have high expectations for students and employ effective and diverse teaching strategies to ensure that all students learn are the linchpin of effective school systems, and that every rural student has a right to an education by such teachers.

One of the most overt deficiencies in rural schools was the lack of professional development and support for teachers. This deficiency especially influenced the skills and expectations of new teachers or teachers who were teaching out of field (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Malhoit, 2005). Malhoit stated that programs that offered teachers ongoing support and professional development were most successful in providing improved instruction and improved student outcomes. These strategies worked in both rural and non-rural areas; however, implementation of these strategies in rural schools was difficult given the distance between schools and communities and the isolation experienced by teachers in rural areas (Malhoit).

Another challenge to teacher quality in rural areas was recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers. Malhoit (2005) and others asserted that rural schools were challenged on three fronts in retention and recruitment: they had to compete with pay for other professions, they had to compete with surrounding states that might pay their teachers more, and they had to compete with other schools in their own states (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Malhoit; Malhoit, Perry & Lazo-Chadderton, 2000).
Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) asserted that there was no overall teacher shortage nationally, but a shortage of teachers existed in some areas. Areas that might have experienced teacher shortages were those challenged by teacher recruitment and retention. For example, areas where teachers might feel isolated, where teacher compensation was limited, and where there might have been deficiencies in resources and facilities might experience teacher shortages. Thus, schools in rural areas would experience teacher shortages. Because of the highly qualified component of NCLB (2001), all schools were required to have a highly qualified teacher in each classroom (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2004) including schools located in rural areas. NCLB (2001) identified ways in which officials in more than half of rural areas discussed difficulties and challenges in meeting the highly qualified teacher component of NCLB (2001) and concluded that the two greatest challenges of the rural districts were inability to recruit and retain teachers when the salaries offered in these districts were low and the inability to offer extensive professional development opportunities for teachers. A third factor in recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers was the isolation, both social and geographic, that many teachers felt in rural areas (Darling-Hammond & Sykes).

Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) contended that while the intentions of NCLB (2001) were admirable, turning those intentions into reality required that the nation overcome serious labor market difficulties. These difficulties included inequities in school funding, varying student needs, large differentials in staff salaries and working conditions, and changes in the teaching market. The schools suffering most would
chiefly serve poor, minority, low achieving children whose learning must show a significant increase if the central goal of NCLB (2001) was to be achieved.

Benard (1991) and others contended that teacher quality was one of the major factors that influenced academic achievement of at-risk students. Using data collected from the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, Wayne (2002) maintained that there was a disparate flow of teachers from undergraduate institutions to high SES schools rather than low SES schools. Additionally, Wayne asserted that most candidates who entered low SES schools frequently were there only long enough to be accepted into high SES schools. This flow resulted in movement from low quality low SES schools to higher SES schools. According to the evidence presented in this study, an academic skills gap did exist.

Further study by Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) and Wenglisky (2002) demonstrated the relationship between student achievement of eighth grade students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam and measures of teaching quality and teacher characteristics. Wenglisky found that student achievement was influenced by teacher content, teacher education, and professional development coursework. He contended that measures of teaching practices and effectiveness were related to the quality of teacher education that teachers received.

Aggregation of study results indicated that teacher quality in small rural schools contributed extensively to academic success of small schools. Other research substantiated statements by Darling-Hammond (1999, 2000), Darling-Hammond &
Sykes (2003), Wayne (2002), and Benard (1991, 2004a, 2004b) that teacher quality might be used as a valuable measure of school success.

**Scientific Research-Based Instructional Strategies**

One provision of NCLB (2001) related to the implementation of scientific research-based instructional strategies in all schools. K-12 instruction included a wide range of instructional strategies and interventions for students at risk of academic failure including various reading and math programs, school-wide reform programs, extended day programs, and technology programs designed for remediation and acceleration of learners that purport to be supported by scientific research. However, NCLB (2001) required that schools implement instructional strategies and interventions into schools that have been tested using randomized controlled trials, that is, they were tested using a control group and a test group. Scientific, research-based interventions were demonstrated to be effective for all learners. An intervention was defined as an educational practice, strategy, or activity.

It was important that teachers provide all children, including minorities and students with exceptionalities, learning experiences that suited their learning styles. Additionally, teachers must provide a learning environment that encouraged all students to learn. Historically, educators had selected interventions as a result of suggestions made by other administrators, because of group discussions at meetings, or because a specific intervention was the trend at a given time. Implementation of NCLB (2001) required that teachers read the research and ascertain that the intervention selected had undergone a rigorous process of testing under controlled conditions. One method to make sure that the intervention was suitable for use in a specific classroom was to
ensure that the experimental population was similar in demographics and composition to the population for which the intervention was intended.

*No Child Left Behind (2001) and Rural Schools*

Beeson and Strange (2003) identified ten states as most in need of changes for rural education. The challenges and obstacles in these states, however, challenged other states as well. Researchers at the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory identified two major difficulties for districts identified as rural-recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff and difficulties in making AYP. Williams (2003a) stated that one in three students in the United States attended a school in a rural area.

In a study identifying the attributes of highly effective schools in West Virginia, Hughes (1995) identified a significant difference in academic achievement of minority students when compared with non-minority, specifically White, students. Hughes conducted a comparative case study comparing 33 high and 33 low achieving schools. Her findings indicated that the low-achieving schools were more likely to enroll large populations of low SES students, had higher teacher turnover, low teacher expectations, and low teacher self-efficacy. High-achieving schools were polar opposites in that high-achieving schools were more likely to enroll large populations of high SES students, experience higher rates of teacher retention, high teacher expectations, and high teacher self-efficacy. Other research conducted by Howley, Strange, and Bickel (2000) and Beeson and Strange (2003) demonstrated that small schools are able to meet the needs of White students, but schools with high minority populations frequently exhibited lower subgroup component scores for minority students. Beeson & Strange (2003) confirmed
that one third of students attending school in a small town or rural area was located in an area with a population of fewer than 2500 people.

The provisions of NCLB (2001) challenged rural schools in much the same way as they did urban schools. Both urban and rural schools found it difficult to meet the teacher quality and student achievement mandates of NCLB (Williams, 2003b). A large body of research suggested that although NCLB (2001) provided an ideal opportunity to insure that all American children have an opportunity to achieve the best education possible, it was impractical financially (Sherman, 2002; Simpson et al., 2004; Sunderman, 2004; Winston, 2003). Many school districts were finding it difficult financially to support the activities, strategies, and programs necessary to raise academic achievement as measured by increased test scores. Opponents of NCLB (2001) continuously alerted the nation to the inherent possibility of financial bankruptcy as a by-product of the implementation of the law.

Rural schools experienced an additional set of problems in response to NCLB (2001) along with difficulties experienced by other schools. Reeves (2003) stated that despite efforts to eliminate perceived inequities in the mandates and expectations of NCLB (2001), rural schools continued to face unique and crucial challenges. These challenges included (a) poverty; (b) insufficient funding for programs; (c) professional isolation that directly creates and sustains a high level of teacher and administrator turnover; (d) professional, social, and cultural isolation; (e) poor facilities; and (f) insufficient classroom resources (Williams, 2003a, 2003b).

In 1995 The Rural School and Community Trust was created as the Annenberg Rural Challenge with the function of ensuring that the voices of rural schools and
communities were heard throughout the nation. In a study conducted by Williams and King (2002), a group of administrators, supervisors, and teachers from the rural regions of the South met and discussed problems found in these areas. This group included representation from the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama. Williams and King believed that studying the profiles and statistics of these states would increase understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented in these and other rural areas.

Research by Beeson and Strange (2003) indicated that the majority of rural students in the United States were predominantly White; however, in seven of the 10 rural states identified by the Rural School and Community Trust as requiring urgent attention, large numbers of students in rural schools were predominantly minority (i.e., Black). In rural schools throughout the United States, teachers who lacked proper qualifications and licensure in the areas in which they taught were more likely to teach poor students and minority students than non-minority students (Jimerson, 2004a).

Officials in the Louisiana Department of Education began the process of preparing a state-designed criterion-referenced instrument for assessing student achievement in late 1997, and in August 1998, officials at the Department of Education announced its completion. The Louisiana Department of Education piloted The Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) in the spring of 1999 to establish baseline scores to measure academic achievement.

On the spring 2000 exam, all students in the fourth and eighth grades were required to make a minimum passing score of 37%, which was designated "Approaching Basic" for both language arts and mathematics on the pilot exam (Horn, 2003). The
Louisiana Department of Education accurately predicted that 20% of students statewide would fail to meet the approaching basic level of achievement in English but inaccurately predicted that 20% of fourth and eighth grade students would fail to meet the approaching basic level in mathematics. Instead, 28% of fourth and eighth graders initially failed to meet the approaching basic level of achievement in mathematics. Subgroup components identified high percentages of minority students as not having the necessary skills to perform at the approaching basic level of achievement in mathematics. Large numbers of small rural schools with high percentages of minority populations and low socioeconomic status (SES) populations (as determined by eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program) were not able to meet the criteria for successful performance on the assessment (Picard, 2003; Horn). Students who failed the initial assessment had an option of summer remediation and retesting. Horn stated that only 5% of students retesting in the summer were able to pass the LEAP.

Low levels of student achievement on standardized tests negatively influenced many rural schools because standardized test scores contributed 60% to each school’s School Performance Score (SPS). Composite reports for subgroup components for school districts and individual school sites in Louisiana indicated large numbers of students from minority and low SES backgrounds unable to meet the approaching basic level of mastery on the assessment. Thus, rural schools with large populations of students such as these possibly experienced difficulty making Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005).

The State of Louisiana Subgroup Component Report (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005) identified 853 teachers in high minority, high poverty schools in the
state as teaching with emergency licensure and out of their fields. This number reflected 9.6% of all teachers with licensure in high poverty schools. This number did not include teachers who were presently working toward advanced degrees or toward licensure in alternate certification programs. The total number of teachers with emergency credentials in both low poverty and high poverty schools was 2,359, or 6.5% of all teachers in the state.

Definitions of Rural Areas and Rural Schools

The U.S. Department of Education (2004) stated that one of the major issues in conducting educational research was determining a consistent definition for the term "rural." In the year 2000, the Office of Management and Budget developed new standards for defining metropolitan areas. This new definition was used to determine what rural really means (Economic Research Service [ERS], 2003). The term rural, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (2003b), identified areas comprised of up to 2500 residents. Additionally, the ERS report (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003a) indicated changes in the definition as published by the 2000 census that did not define areas as rural or urban, but as either metropolitan or non-metropolitan. These areas might have been either rural or urban. According to this definition, rural areas consisted of all territory located outside of urbanized areas and urban clusters. According to the ERS, urban clusters were composed of 2500-50,000 people. The 2000 census designated 3,158 urban clusters, containing 11% of the population. Rural areas consisted of all territory located outside of urbanized areas and urban clusters (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003b).
The United States Department of Agriculture (2003c) identified the states of Alaska, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and Washington as rural based on one major criterion measuring rurality of a school district: average daily attendance of fewer than 600 students or location in counties with fewer than 10 persons per square mile. These five states were listed as rural, but the challenges and obstacles that faced school districts in these five states faced other school districts as well. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2003) and the National Center for Educational Statistics (2000) identified the two largest concerns of rural areas as difficulty in making adequate yearly progress, and the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teaching staff.

DeYoung (1994) compared several attributes of both rural and non-rural schools and found that rural schools suffered several weaknesses not common in non-rural schools. Weaknesses included (a) difficulty in providing equal educational opportunities, (b) difficulty in funding, (c) difficulty in providing programs for gifted and talented students, and (d) difficulty in the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers. Rural teachers were usually less well trained and less experienced compared to teachers in non-rural schools (DeYoung, 1989; DeYoung & Kannapel, 1999; Trahan, 2004).

Demographics in rural schools in Louisiana indicated that many schools were located in rural areas and that many of the students in these schools came from low SES, minority backgrounds. A study conducted by Borman and Rachuba (2001) for the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At-Risk identified several individual and school level features that distinguished academically successful, resilient, low SES students from their less successful, non-resilient, counterparts. Investigators

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contrasted outcomes for three racial/ethnic groups: Black, Hispanic, and White students. Research has historically investigated the resilience of Black students. Borman and Rachuba cited other studies and concluded, “This would seem highly appropriate as the large body of research indicates that Black students are affected not only by lower SES, but also because of their ethnic/racial status of minority” (p. 24). Winfield (1994) also identified other risk factors associated with being Black such as experiences with discriminatory behavior from individuals and institutions, and restrictions motivated by race. Donnelly (1987) defined students at risk as those who were at risk for academic failure because of environmental, social, or emotional factors. Characteristics of at-risk students included experiencing low levels of academic success in school, suffering from low self-esteem, being male or minority, and being from low SES home environments. Beeson and Strange (2003), Howley et al. (2000) and Williams and King (2002) asserted that schools in rural areas were negatively influenced by the same characteristics that would affect students who were at risk for academic failure. According to research by Williams and King (2002), Borman and Rachuba (2001), and Howley et al. (2000), schools that have high percentages of both minority and low SES populations were likely to have trouble meeting criteria for AYP.

*Rural Education Research*

In the past, the transitory nature of a definition for “rural” had caused frustration for rural education researchers. Without a clear definition for this term, it was difficult to determine what areas rural education would serve. Rios (1988) defined rural education as “that education provided the school-age children residing in rural areas”
Dunn (2001) agreed that there was such a thing as rural education but no consistent and clear characteristics of it. Attributes attached to rural schools may or may not be present in all rural schools. Dunn identified five strengths of rural schools:

1. Lack of distinction between what belongs in school and what belongs in the community;

2. Generalization of responsibility that expects people to do whatever they can without filling specialized roles or performing strictly age-graded functions;

3. Close and supportive ties between families and schools;

4. Sense of comfort and cooperative spirit among school children; and

5. Rural independence and self-reliance translated into the school setting.

Sherwood, (2001) stated that research relative to issues in rural areas had been addressed as an isolated part of the national education research program. There was little substantive research into the characteristics or difficulties of rural research. The lack of hard data to make decisions about rural areas led to rural schools largely being ignored and having to create innovations and ideas that would improve education in each individual school (Sherwood).

Lee (2001) described variations on attributes of rural and non-rural schools, reporting that between 1992 and 1996 rural students began to outperform non-rural students on the eighth grade National Assessment of Educational Progress. Results of a meta-analysis by Cotton (1996) found that the effects of size on student achievement indicated no relationship between school size and academic achievement. Additionally, Cotton and others (Carter, 2003; Huang & Howley, 1993; Smith & DeYoung, 1988)
asserted that there was no significant relationship between location of schools and academic achievement. However, studies by Bates (1993); Eberts, Kehoe, and Stone (1982); Eichenstein (1994); Fowler and Wahlberg (1991) indicated that, in at least 50% of cases, student achievement in rural schools was superior to that of non-rural schools. Cotton (1996, §8 ¶1) summarized these findings by stating,

None of the research finds large schools superior to small schools in their achievement effects.

*Minorities and Rural Schools*

According to Horn (2003), White students were predominant in most rural schools, but in rural schools in the South, there were large numbers of students from minority, low SES backgrounds. Table 1 illustrates a comparison between schools in Louisiana and schools in the United States.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural School Statistics—A Comparison between Louisiana and United States</th>
<th>Louisiana</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural population</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public schools in rural areas</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public school students enrolled in rural schools †</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students enrolled in rural schools who are minorities †</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students attending rural schools †</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural children in poverty †</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural students eligible for subsidized meals †</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Relative characteristics to the current study are indicated by the symbol †.
Minority students were more likely to have difficulties successfully reaching the cut scores for standardized tests than were White students. Several factors affected educational outcomes for Black students attending rural schools. National data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2000) indicated that Black students, as a subgroup, did not score as well as their White counterparts in rural schools.

Furthermore, rural schools in all states had less money and poorer quality instructional programs than urban schools. In rural schools throughout the United States, teachers who lacked proper qualifications and who might not have been licensed in the areas in which they taught were more likely to teach poor and minority children than White and affluent students.

Although the smallness of schools, regardless of location, was beneficial to all students, research by Huang and Howley (1993) and others demonstrated that small schools were exceptionally beneficial to minority low SES students. Cotton (1996) stated it another way by saying that small schools had a positive effect on minority and low SES students while larger schools had a negative impact.

*Socioeconomic Status and Rural Schools*

Dayton (2003) acknowledged that one of the major difficulties faced by rural schools was the lack of equity in funding. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (2003a) confirmed that some of the poorest areas in the nation were rural. Moreover, large numbers of poor areas existed in the South, where the poorest individuals were minorities, women, and children. A severe challenge facing rural schools was continuing high poverty among rural populations. While poverty existed in both rural and non-rural areas, the effects of poverty increased rural vulnerability to the effects of...
changes in national and regional economies. Single parents headed a disproportionate number of families in rural areas. Usually a female, the head of the family, or other members of the family were employed with marginal incomes that caused families to live slightly above the poverty line (U.S. Department of Agriculture).

Huang (1999) indicated that poverty was more prevalent among rural Blacks and Hispanics. Poverty rates for these two groups were 34.8% for Blacks and 35.6%, for Hispanics compared to 12.2% for rural non-Hispanic Whites. The total poverty rate for rural families headed by females was 39.3% in 1995. These conditions directly influenced academic achievement of rural students living at the poverty line (Huang).

Rural schools were at a disadvantage when competing for qualified teachers because of the relative poverty in rural locations. This directly influenced ability to hire highly qualified teachers. Challenges facing rural schools included low pay, isolation, lack of suitable housing, and lack of amenities (professional, social, and cultural). Rural schools found themselves waiting to hire teachers until other schools had made their selection of educators (Williams, 2003a).

*School Culture and Effective Schools*

The effective schools model of the 1970s and 1980s promoted academic success among traditionally low-performing disadvantaged minority students (Masten, 1994). One feature included in the effective schools model, the goal of achieving a safe and orderly school environment, was linked to the affirmation of healthy social behavior characteristic of resilient children.

Beyond the individual characteristics of resilient children, researchers had begun to pay more attention to understanding how schools affected students’ academic
resiliency. Resilience researchers noted that school environments provided protective factors that diminished school failure or introduced additional stressors and adversities that placed students at even greater risk of academic failure. Benard (1991), Henderson and Milstein (1996), and Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1998) devoted considerable attention to the issue and formulated theoretical models of how schools fostered resiliency in students. However, little structured research had formally tested these models or provided evidence concerning the processes and characteristics of schools that foster academic resilience.

The effective schools model focused on developing students academically. Developing into successful students shielded children from adversity by enhancing self-esteem, efficacy, and a sense of belonging within the school. Other researchers also listed effective school characteristics that fostered resilience. These attributes included (a) strong principal leadership, (b) a clear school mission, (c) a safe and orderly environment, (d) high teacher expectations, and (e) quality resources (Hughes, 1995; Borman & Rachuba, 2001). Deficiencies in these attributes directly placed students at risk for academic failure. Studies by Dunn (2001), Benard (1991) and others have indicated the relationship of these attributes and student resilience.

There is extant literature about school culture and effective schools, but limited research about school culture in rural schools and its effect on minority students. School culture was an important element in the success of any school. The type of culture that forms from the interaction of all stakeholders can determine whether schools succeed or fail. Although school culture was not the only factor that contributed to success or failure in a school, it played a significant role in the type of school environment to which
students were exposed. Barth (2002) defined school culture as "a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization" (p. 7). Peterson and Deal (1998) described school culture as the norms, values, beliefs, traditions and rituals established by a group of individuals as they work together over time to solve problems and confront challenges. Culture plays an essential role in how stakeholders in a rural school think and behave (Blake & Swartz, 2002).

As schools endeavored to meet the directives of NCLB, educational researchers attempted to identify the most salient factors in creating effective and productive environments for learning, that is, creating the most effective school cultures possible. A growing number of studies have begun to provide rich narrative descriptions of schools that promote student achievement (Blake & Swartz, 2002). Byrk and Schneider (2002) identified a set of prominent qualities of successful schools that represent the findings of many of these studies. These findings include engagement of parents and community resources, access to new and innovative ideas, collaboration among teachers and community, internalization of responsibility for change, and strategic educational planning that brings coherence to the educational program.

Deal and Petersen (1998) noted that the definition of culture includes deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the course of a school’s history. Thus, school culture can be defined as the historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood, maybe in varying degrees, by members of the school.
community (Stolp & Smith, 1994) and which often shape what people think and how they act.

Fyans and Maehr (1990) examined five dimensions of school culture including (a) academic challenges and achievements, (b) perceptions of shared school goals, and (c) interactions within school community. The population surveyed included 16,310 fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth grade students from 820 public schools in Chicago, Illinois. Findings of the study indicated that students are more likely to achieve in schools with positive school cultures.

These findings were supported by a study conducted by Thacker and McInerney (1992) in a study exploring the effects of school culture on student achievement. The study focused on school mission statements, goals based on student outcomes, professional development, and building level decision making. Findings indicated a significant change in mean test scores on the annual statewide exam.

Renchler (1992) indicated that attitudes and beliefs of the educational leader in schools directly influence culture of the schools. The influence of the school principal on student achievement was indirect and proceeded from the principal’s roles of obtaining and maintaining resources for the school and facilitating positive organizational change for the school. Glascock (2003) indicated that principals perform three roles in the school culture. These three roles include (a) purveyor of resources and information between the school and central office, (b) facilitator of positive organizational change for the school, and (c) liaison between the central office, teachers, students and parents in the school site.
Conclusion

The literature review first examined the provisions of No Child Left Behind (2001) and the mandates of the law relative to all schools. It was determined that these mandates affect all schools in the same way and to some degree, but there are additional factors that make their implementation difficult in rural schools. The review also analyzed some factors that directly influence achievement of at-risk students in all schools, and how these factors contribute to the effectiveness of schools.

Research indicated that the provisions of NCLB (2001) have the potential to provide an equal opportunity for all students to learn, but the law also provides opportunities for negative factors to influence school and student success. This research also indicated that further research was needed to determine how NCLB (2001) can best be utilized to provide equitable education opportunities for all children.

Lastly, an atmosphere where students learn to love learning for learning’s sake, especially insofar as it evolves into academic achievement, is a chief characteristic of an effective school. Attributes representative of this atmosphere include (a) high standards of achievement in academics, and (b) a culture characterized by a well-defined set of goals that all members of the school—administration, faculty, and students—value and promote (Renchler, 1992). These attributes contribute to the successful development of positive school culture characterized by small class size, high teacher expectations, high student efficacy, and positive instructional leadership.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

Stake (2000) described the intrinsic case study as being one in which the researcher seeks to know about some unique phenomenon in the case that is valuable to the researcher. To understand how activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures affecting implementation of NCLB (2001) influence growth in School Performance Score (SPS) in three rural schools, the researcher delved into perceptions of and interactions among stakeholders in the schools.

Qualitative research allowed the researcher to identify relationships among parents, teachers, students and administrators, activities utilized to increase student achievement as measured by standardized test scores, methods of implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001), and school culture in three rural schools, and to provide descriptive data on these variables. By allowing participants to tell their own stories, the researcher was able to provide a collective narrative that gives voice to the perceptions and understandings of stakeholders in each site. Thus, the researcher utilized qualitative research as the research perspective of choice for this study (Patton, 1990).

Methods used to gain information about the school as an institution and its members included (a) participant observation, (b) focus groups, (c) interview, and (d) document analysis. These data collection tools made it possible for the researcher to explore school context, assess patterns of interaction among school community members,
interpret events and activities within the school and, ultimately, assess the meaning that participants ascribed to the day-to-day events that occurred in the school setting (Roach & Kratochwill, 2004).

The present study explored how activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures at three rural schools relative to the implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) contributed to the consistent growth of SPS in the three rural schools selected. The methodology of the study will be discussed under the following sections: (a) research perspective, (b) research paradigm, (c) sampling considerations, (d) research design, (e) selection of the case, (f) data collection methods, (g) setting and participants, (h) ethical considerations, (i) data organization and analysis, and (j) summary.

The primary research question in this study was, “What activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures relative to the implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) in each of three rural schools contributed to the consistent growth of SPS?” This question served as the focus for the study. Secondary questions supporting the research question included:

1. What perceptions did stakeholders have of the implementation of NCLB (2001) in the three schools?
2. How did implementation of research-based strategies occur in each of the three schools?
3. In what way was parental involvement accomplished in the three schools?
4. What was the number and percentage of highly qualified faculty in the three schools?
5. What school culture existed in the three schools?

6. How did school culture contribute to the consistent growth of SPS in the three schools?

Research Perspective

The researcher was interested in understanding how the confluence of activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures in each school relative to the implementation of NCLB (2001) and each school’s culture contributed to consistent growth in SPS (see Appendix A and B). To gain this understanding, the researcher became a part of the school setting to observe and interpret the actions, thoughts, and perceptions of the stakeholders at the sites. The researcher chose qualitative research as a primary means of gathering extensive thick, rich narrative data to describe events and actions at the sites selected for study (Warren, et al., 2000). Additional quantitative data included student test scores by subcomponent groups, percentage and number of teachers with masters’ degrees or higher, percentage and number of core courses taught by highly qualified teachers, student retention scores, and SPS. Thus, even though the primary research perspective was qualitative, the inclusion of quantitative data made the study a mixed methods study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) characterized qualitative research as focusing on the qualities of entities and processes not measured in terms of quantity, amount, frequency, or intensity. Additionally, qualitative research emphasizes a relationship between those studied, the researched, and the one studying, that is, the researcher. Qualitative researchers search for answers that stress how participants create social experiences and give meaning to accumulated experiences. Miles and Huberman (1994) contended that
the main task of qualitative research is an explication of the ways in which persons in a particular setting understand, manage, and make meaning of their day-to-day situations.

Student test scores and SPS were used as indicators of the success of programs in schools with high percentages of low SES minority populations, but test scores and SPS cannot tell the story of how these schools were able to show consistent growth. Additionally, test scores for these schools did not necessarily indicate success as the schools initially had low baseline SPSs. In spite of this fact, all three schools were designated as “Schools of Exemplary Academic Growth” (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005). Thus, knowing test scores and SPSs did not reveal how stakeholders perceived the activities, conditions, events, procedures and policies implemented in the sites. Test scores did not indicate how components of school culture influenced school or student success. Furthermore, they did not provide insight into the perceptions of participants relative to the impact that culture and implementing the provisions of NCLB (2001) had on student achievement.

Denzin and Lincoln (2009) stated that qualitative research means different things at different times. However, a generic definition of qualitative research is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Glesne, 2005, p. 42). This definition changes the research process into a series of representation. That include field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the researcher as instrument. Qualitative research at this level becomes interpretive and materialistic as the researcher studies phenomena in their natural settings and attempts to bring meaning to those phenomena in terms of the meanings that participants bring to them (Denzin A. Lincoln).
Schwandt (2000) stated that all qualitative researchers are philosophers in the sense that all human beings are guided by abstract principles. These principles combine beliefs of ontology (What is the nature of reality?), epistemology (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?), and methodology (How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?). Schwandt combines all of these premises into the term “paradigm,” or a basic set of beliefs that guide action. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) indicated that the research process includes several theoretical paradigms and perspectives. The constructivist paradigm assumes relativist ontology and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln). The constructivist interpretive paradigm asserts that there may be multiple realities, and the participant constructs or interprets reality based on his or her understanding. The constructivist interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to understand how participants make sense of the day-to-day events and situations that occur in specific settings.

This study fits into the framework of naturalistic ontology, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained as a major attribute of the constructivist interpretive paradigm. This naturalistic research included the following attributes: natural setting (to keep realities in their contexts), qualitative methods, purposeful sampling, inductive analysis, case study reporting mode, tentative application of findings, and unique measures of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba). A qualitative method was appropriate because observations, analysis of responses, and data allowed the researcher to discover concepts and themes derived from an exploration of three purposively selected school sites.
Hoepfl (1997) stated that qualitative methods allow educators to “engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features” (§ 2). Additionally, qualitative methodologies are “powerful tools for enhancing our understanding of teaching and learning” (§ 2).

Merriam (1998) stated that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding meaning that participants make out of particular situations and day-to-day circumstances and experiences. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that the qualitative researcher does not participate as an objective onlooker. The qualitative researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Lincoln and Cuba (1985) identified several ways that the human researcher differs from quantitative data collection instruments. These differences included that the researcher (a) might be responsive to the context of the phenomena and could adapt to the particular circumstances of the study; (b) could consider the overall context of the phenomena and expand what is known about the situation by sensitivity to non-verbal cues, and (c) could immediately process data, clarify data, and summarize the data as they evolved. Merriam identified the researcher as being a human instrument limited by humanity. Humanity means that the researcher can make mistakes and miss opportunities, and that researcher’s biases might interfere.

Hoepfl (1997) defined qualitative research, as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (§ 5). Hoepfl stated that it was not necessary to pit the two perspectives of quantitative and qualitative research against one another. Patton (1990) advocated a “paradigm of choice” (p. 39) in which the researcher considered which of the two
research methods, qualitative or quantitative, produced the knowledge necessary for either understanding or quantification of the study. Patton referred to this perspective as “methodological appropriateness” (p. 39). The researcher chooses the paradigm or combination of paradigms most likely to produce a wide range of thick, descriptive data. Quantitative data provided an opportunity to demonstrate comparison in the analysis of the three sites selected for the study. Use of the data allowed the researcher to track change over time for each site.

Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) described the interpretivist/constructivist approach as an attempt to understand the human experience. Their description intimated that reality is socially constructed. With this definition in mind, the researcher did not begin the study with a preconceived theory but developed themes and patterns as the study progressed. Hannah (2005) described incorporating the constant comparative method, generally used with grounded theory method to develop and write hypotheses, as a means of analyzing data. According to Patton (1990), one must choose whether one is going to analyze the case in terms of one case or multiple sites that make up the case. The present study analyzed the three sites as one case, and data observed and collected was analyzed across all components of the case. The constant comparative method of analyzing data allowed the researcher to compare bits and pieces of data across all sites and to use the bits and pieces to find patterns and themes. This method also allowed the researcher to categorize and code pieces of data (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). The researcher used quantitative data in the study to support qualitative data and strengthen the description provided in the qualitative narrative, but the study employed predominantly qualitative methods. Patton allowed integration of quantitative data into
the study if the inclusion of such data provided thicker, richer description of the qualitative data. The researcher kept data generated by each method separate and analyzed the data using methods unique to each.

**Sampling Considerations**

Yin (1994) suggested that for specific phenomena it was highly desirable that researchers conduct single case studies using a holistic design. The case selected for this study was indicative of the kinds of activities, conditions, events, policies and procedures, school culture, and behaviors that could cause a school to be resilient, and focused on three combination high schools with high minority, low SES populations that exhibited consistent growth in SPS by imparting rich descriptions of interactions within learning communities. Merriam (1998) described the deliberate selection of a site that provided the most information-rich narrative and descriptive data as purposeful, or purposeful sampling. Purposeful selection of these three sites resulted in rich narrative descriptions of each site and allowed the researcher to explore how the confluence of activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures of the three schools relative to the implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) and culture influence consistent growth in SPS.

Merriam (1998) identified several forms that a purposeful sample might take. Merriam described a unique sample as one based on unique or atypical occurrences of the phenomena of interest. The phenomenon of interest in this study was the consistent growth of SPS in schools with high minority, low SES populations. Criteria for inclusion in this study were rurality, minority population, SPS, subsidized lunch eligibility, and school configuration.
The population included schools located in areas with populations of less than 2500. Additionally, each school had a minority population greater than 40% with one of the schools being 97% minority, one school being 100% minority, and one school being 48% minority. SPSs placed the schools in a position of consistent growth between the years 2001 and 2005.

Research Design

Stake (2000) defined the case study as “a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p.19). Moreover, he identified three forms that case studies may take. The first of these is the intrinsic case study wherein the researcher studies the case because of its intrinsic interest. There is no desire to extend theory or to develop new theory. The study is initiated because of researcher interest. A second form of case study is that of the exploratory, or instrumental, case study. This form of case study allows the researcher to understand factors that contribute to the case, but which are more general than the case. Stake asserts that the instrumental case study plays a supportive role in the research in that it helps the researcher to understand some part of the actual research study. Data gathered in the instrumental case study is important, but it is not the emphasis of the research. Lastly, collective case studies are those in which collected data collected in several studies is used to identify a comparison between phenomena that occur in a group or collection of studies.

The researcher chose the intrinsic case study as the research design because of the researcher’s inherent interest to understand how activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures relative to the implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) and
culture in three rural schools contributed to consistent growth in SPS. The study examined the organizational members’ interactions in the sites. The three schools, Alpha, Beta, and Chi, composed the case. The researcher used information provided by participants and documents as well as observations in each school to make meaning about events and conditions in the schools and to understand meanings and perceptions of participants (Stake, 2000).

Selection of the Case

The Louisiana Department of Education (2005) provided the information necessary to locate District Performance Scores (DPS) for school districts with high percentages of minority and low SES populations. The researcher analyzed the demographics of combination schools in northern Louisiana and purposively selected three schools that met criteria for demographics (greater than 40% minority) and greater than 50% eligibility for subsidized lunch.

Selection of interview respondents occurred across a wide range of participants. Schools, as social institutions, perform as functions of the interactions between stakeholders from all areas of the community, i.e., interactions between students and teachers, parents and teachers, and teachers and administrators. Warren (2001) stated, “Interviewers should select respondents because they are capable of narrative production.” (p. 87). The researcher interviewed administrators, faculty, students, parents, and support staff (Warren et al., 2000). Interview questions consisted of semi-structured questions designed to elicit information from each respondent. New questions developed as participants provided responses (see Appendix F).
Wolcott (1990) proposed that qualitative research should allow participants voice in their perceptions. They should be able to tell their story and, in doing so, make sense of those activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures that they are involved in day to day. Wolcott proposed

That the full range of data-gathering techniques employed in qualitative study can be subsumed under three categories of activity. In turn, it is possible to identify categories in simple, everyday terms such as watching, asking, and reviewing. Restated with more sophistication, but without further enlightenment, we often hear these activities referred to as observing, interviewing, and archival research. For alliterative as well as pedagogical emphasis on sensory data, particularly watching and listening, enquiring, in which the researcher’s role becomes more intrusive than that of a “mere observer”; and examining, in which the researcher makes use of materials prepared by others (p. 18).

Wolcott (1990) alluded to the findings of Morris Zelditch to categorize three methods of collecting data qualitatively. He identified the three methods employed by the researcher as (a) participant observations, (b) informant interviews, and (c) enumerations and samples. He modified these categories by stating that the researcher may both accomplish enumerations and obtain samples through the first two categories. He stated, however, that the beginning field worker must realize that observation and interview yield complementary rather than comparable data. “What people tell us tends to reveal how they believe things should be. What we ourselves observe firsthand is more likely to
reveal how things are, assuming that field observations extend throughout an adequate time period” (p. 54).

Using the constructivist interpretive approach, this research included extensive narrative describing the interaction and relationship among stakeholders in the schools and the influence of specific factors on student achievement. Data analysis included construction of interpretive narratives including direct quotations from participants, documents, and journal entries to illustrate the complexity of the processes contributing to each school’s consistent growth in SPS as is requisite of qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

Each of the methods of collecting data served a specific purpose. Warren (2001) stated,

the lens of the intensive interview is verbal—what people say and mean—but its temporal range is biographical, extending into the past and the future. Researchers often choose qualitative interviews over ethnographic methods when their topics of interest do not center on particular settings, but their concern is with establishing common patterns or themes between particular types of respondents (p. 85).

Warren (2001) used the metaphor of a traveler to describe the concept of qualitative interview research:

The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of the lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as “wandering together with.” The design of qualitative research is open-ended in the sense that it is more concerned
with being attuned to who is being traveled with, so to speak, than with setting out a precise route for all to follow (p. 86).

The one-on-one interview is the most widely used research tool, but the researcher included focus groups for students and teachers to help ensure the collection of trustworthy data. According to Madriz (2000), focus groups allow social scientists to observe human interaction. Often these processes include spontaneous responses from the members of the group that ease their involvement and participation in the discussion. With one group, the focus group quickly evolved into a session where student responses to group participants evoked more insightful answers than the semi-structured questions the researcher asked.

The researcher accumulated thick descriptive data through in-depth inquiry in focus groups and individual interviews. Madriz (2000) described how focus groups provide an opportunity for all voices to be heard describing this as "collective testimony" (p. 838). The current study formed focus groups with the goal of obtaining collective testimony in mind. Triangulation of data across responses of the two diverse groups of individuals that possess a stake in the academic success of each school provided rich descriptions of perceptions of participants (Krueger, 1994).

Glesne (2005) suggested that researchers should select research methods that will contribute to the trustworthiness of data. Data prove trustworthy through triangulation of several kinds of data collected in several ways. Several methods of data collection counteract threats to validity found when using only one method or the threat inherent in analyzing each form of data separately. The researcher employed four qualitative methods of collecting data: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) focus groups, (c)
participant observation, and (d) document analysis. Quantitative components included (a) analysis of subgroup component scores, (b) SPS, and (c) number and percent of teachers with masters’ degrees or higher.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Informant interviews are a mainstay of qualitative research and were particularly effective in this case in that the interviews allowed the researcher to uncover beliefs and perceptions of the informant that directly influenced the performance of the case site. Interviews with stakeholders from several different groups also allowed the researcher to make meaning of events that occurred at individual sites (Warren, et al., 2000; Warren, et al., 2003). Warren (2001) stated,

Of course, designing the research may involve reviewing the existing qualitative (and perhaps, quantitative literature on a topic) to determine whether a new qualitative interview study would add anything to it. The researcher also considers the time available to complete the study, access to respondents, and the financial and emotional costs of conducting the study. Emotional costs are particularly relevant in qualitative interviews because of the open-ended exploratory character. Probing for details and depths of experiences can be stressful for all participants. Interviews are particularly effective for this study in that they allow the researcher to unveil the distinctive meaning-making actions of interview participants. (p. 86)

Focus Groups

Morse (1994) described a focus group as “a semi-structured group session, moderated by a group leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of collecting
information on a designated topic” (p. 87). He suggested that, with effective guidance from the focus group leader, the researcher could obtain information-rich details of complex experiences from group members as well as obtain understanding of the reasoning behind their actions. The researcher used focus groups to obtain rich thick descriptions from faculty members and students within each site (see Appendixes C, D, E, F, and G).

Krueger (1994) suggested several rationales for employing focus groups as a means of obtaining information-rich narrative. First, participants who would be reticent to answer questions in an interview might be more comfortable responding in a group session, which would allow the researcher to obtain more information. The researcher found that focus groups worked well for students but did not work well with parents. Parents responded more readily in one-on-one conversations than in groups.

Krueger (1994) identified six focus group interviews. He defined a focus group as people: (a) assembling in a series of groups, (b) possessing certain common characteristics, (c) providing data of a qualitative nature, (d) in a focused discussion, (e) small enough for everyone to have opportunity to share insights, and (f) large enough to provide diversity of perceptions. The researcher conducted focus groups with two groups of students and two groups of teachers at two of the sites. The third school had one focus group and several faculty interviews. The use of multiple groups with similar participants allowed analysis for detection of patterns and trends across groups.

Focus groups produce qualitative data that provide insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of participants. Some of the responses were particularly insightful in that they demonstrated contradictory information to documents and participant observations (Krueger, 1994).
Nonprofit organizations may have a variety of educational or service related programs. Some of the programs may be more intensive or popular than others. The researcher should give thought to the diversity of people who participate in programs as well as their exposure to the variety of program opportunities. Nonprofit and service organizations typically have three categories of people who are of special importance: advisory or decision groups, employee groups, and clients or donors. Krueger (1994) stated, "Each of these three audiences could represent an area of study with focus group interviews" (p. 47). Table 2 provides a description of participant groups in each school.

Table 2
Focus Group and Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Function in the Organization</th>
<th>Audience in Each School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisory and decision-making</td>
<td>Individuals responsible for developing policy and implementing mandated policy at the district and school level</td>
<td>Principals, assistant principals, and superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decision-making bodies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>Employees who can deliver programs and services Support staff who perform clerical functions Volunteers Administrators and managers</td>
<td>Faculty members, support personnel (bus drivers, para-professionals, cafeteria workers, custodial staff, librarians, etc.) Secretaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers or clientele</td>
<td>Clients who use the program (limited, moderate or heavy users)</td>
<td>Students, parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this research, audiences considered for focus group interviews included representative stakeholders at each site. Participants from these three groups included the following (a) advisory and decision groups that included principals and superintendents,
(b) employee groups including paraprofessionals and faculty, and (c) client or donor
groups that included students and parents. Final selection of participants for focus groups
was limited to students and faculty.

Triangulation of responses from all groups with individual interviews supplied
rich descriptive narrative data that ensured “face validity of the study” (Stewart &
Shamdasani, 1990, p. 75). Research and secondary questions determined what focus
group queries were integrated into the study. These questions were refined and responses
triangulated with responses obtained through semi-structured individual interviews.

Questions play an important role in not only getting at answers to research
problems but also in setting the tone or setting the climate for interaction. The opening
questions in a group interview can help put participants at ease or on the defensive
(Fontana & Frey, 2000). Stewart and Cash (1978) provided a detailed discussion of
different types of questions and their uses. Questions fall into one of two categories:
open-ended or closed-ended. Open-ended questions tend to be broader in nature and
allow respondents a great deal of freedom to provide the amount of information they
want to give. Both types of questions may be appropriate, but “closed ended questions are
more restrictive and tend to limit the answer options available to respondents” (Stewart &
Shamdasani, 1990, p. 74).

Patton (1990) identified six forms that questions might take. These groups of
questions included

1. Experience/behavior questions require that participants describe events
   and activities that they have participated in at the site.
2. Opinion/values questions are aimed at understanding the cognitive and understanding processes of participants. These questions enable the researcher to explore what participants think about issues relative to the study.

3. Feeling questions allow the researcher to understand emotional feelings of participants. Feeling questions differ from opinion/values questions in that they require that participants provide responses that address emotions and not opinions.

4. Knowledge questions are asked of participants to determine what kinds of factual information participants possess.

5. Sensory questions require that participants respond to queries about what is seen, heard, felt, smelled or tasted at the site.

6. Lastly, the researcher may ask questions that concern identifying attributes and characteristics of the participant. This form of question can be used to enable the researcher to make comparisons among and between participants as well as to compare responses based on characteristics of different groups of participants.

The research questions of this study generated 8-10 primary open-ended questions for participants. The researcher used secondary questions to extend the data obtained from primary questions. Similar questions were asked of participant interviewees and focus groups. Follow-up questions were unique to the role that the participant played in the site (see Appendixes C, D, E, F, and G).
Document Analysis

Another source of information that can be invaluable to qualitative researchers is analysis of documents. Such documents might include official records, letters, newspaper accounts, diaries, and reports, and published data (Hoepfl, 1997, § 5). The primary method of data collection in this study was interview, but documents produced by each site served to corroborate researcher observations and participant interviews, and focus groups. Glesne (2005) stated, “Beyond corroboration, they [documents] may raise questions about your hunches and thereby shape new directions for observations and interviews. Documents also provide historical, demographic, and, sometimes, personal information that may be unavailable from other sources” (p. 65).

The study included analysis of school records including school improvement plans, school report cards, suspension and expulsion records, attendance documents, parent-teacher-student-school contracts, school vision and mission statements, and other documents that illustrated school operation, performance, and beliefs. Other documents, such as lesson plan books and student work samples provided insight into processes and procedures in the schools, expectations of students as components of the school culture, and kinds of instructional strategies and activities used at the individual schools. Triangulation among documents and individual interviews, focus groups, and participant observations ensured trustworthiness of the study.

Participant Observations

Glesne (2005) described a continuum of roles researchers play as observers in research. The continuum ranges from the observer to the participant and points in between. “The researcher remains primarily an observer but has some interaction with student participations” (p. 50). Glesne stated that the position that the researcher takes on
the continuum is determined by the question being investigated, the context of the study, and the theoretical perspective. For this study, the researcher fit most appropriately on the continuum as participant observer.

Participant observations were included to collect data that could be triangulated across responses from the interviews, the focus groups, and information from documents. Collection of observational data was accomplished using observer journal entries, observation notes, setting notes and descriptions, and descriptions of participants in the setting. Glesne (2005) implied that to make observations effective, the researcher must "make the familiar strange" (p. 53). Observing participants in the setting, recording what the participants do, and taking notes of events and the interactions between participants from a purely objective perspective, accomplishes this process.

The researcher chose to be a participant observer in the study. Including field observations in the study allowed the participant observer to establish personal contact stakeholders in each school (see Appendix G). Observations were both obvious and hidden depending on the setting and the participants or participant group. Studies based on direct interviews employed observational techniques to note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the persons being interviewed. Social scientists are observers both of human activities and of the physical settings in which such activities take place (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000), thus, observations included instructional activities, student lunch and recess observations, faculty-meetings, and activity or events. Field notes of each observation included a detailed description of the setting, statements from participants, gestural and non-gestural cues for participants,
and observer interpretations, thoughts, and insights into what took place during the observation.

The naturalistic nature of the study required that it be conducted in its natural setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, data collection took place in classrooms, lounges, libraries, and offices of the school sites. Participant observations took place in school halls, classrooms, gymnasiums, and cafeterias. Interviews took place during school hours, planning periods, lunchtime and, in some cases, during recess or physical education classes. Scheduled student interviews took place in the counselor’s office at one site, in the library at another, and in an all-purpose room at the third. Faculty focus groups occurred during regularly scheduled faculty meetings. Parent focus groups took place at two sites, but parent attendance at both was low. Parent interviews were conducted by phone at one site. It is assumed that naturalistic observation does not interfere with the people or activities under observation. Most social scientists have long recognized the possibility of the observer affecting what he or she observes, but careful researchers are supposed to adhere to rigorous standards of objective reporting designed to overcome that potential bias (Glesne, 2005).

Objectivity remains central to the self-images of most practitioners of the social and behavioral sciences. Objective rigor has most often been associated with quantitative research methods. The harmonization of empathy and detachment has been so important that even those dedicated to qualitative methods have devoted considerable effort to organizing their observational data (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000).

Participant observations provided journal entries for reflection over events, activities, and other data collected at the schools. The researcher collected observation
data using observer journal entries, observation notes, setting notes and descriptions, and
descriptions of participants in the setting. Data collection was accomplished by observing
participants in the setting, recording what participants did, and taking notes of events and
the interactions between participants from a purely objective perspective.

Setting and Participants

Common criteria for selection of research sites included rural location, as defined
by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. All schools were located in an area outside an
urban area with a population of less than 2500. Schools shared a common grade
configuration (PK-12) and were designated as combination schools. Additionally, all
schools had an enrollment of less than 600, had a minority population greater than 40%;
and had a free lunch population greater than 50%. However, the geographic location,
actual percentage of students who were minorities and percentage of free lunch eligible
students, structure and condition of the physical facilities, characteristics and
personalities of the administration, and experience and composition of the faculties
differed among schools. Written approval for entry into each school was requested and
received from participants in each school and district (see Appendixes H, I, and J).

indicated that understanding of student cultures and environments is essential to creating
effective instruction for Black students. Demographics of each faculty differed by site.
The most common gender at all sites was female, but racial distribution differed at the
three schools. Faculty at both Alpha and Beta High Schools were predominantly Black
whereas faculty at Chi High School were predominantly White. Table 3 displays faculty
demographics by gender and race.
Table 3
Faculty Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Black Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>Black Females</th>
<th></th>
<th>White Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>White Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research by Winston (2003), Wayne (2002) revealed that minority students and low SES students were more likely to be taught by teachers who were under-prepared or who were teaching out of their fields. Table 4 shows the number of years of experience of faculty in each site. Studies conducted by Altshuler and Schmautz (2006) and De Young and Kannapel (1999) asserted that students in rural schools and minority and low SES students are more likely to be taught by less experienced teachers than their more affluent counterparts.

Table 4
Faculty Years Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>1-5 Years</th>
<th>6-10 Years</th>
<th>11-15 Years</th>
<th>16-20 Years</th>
<th>20+ Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further studies conducted by Williams (2003a, 2003b) and Williams and King (2002) ascertain that rural schools are more likely to have difficulties recruiting and
retaining experienced teachers than urban schools and thus, experience higher turnover rates than urban schools. Table 5 displays numbers and percentages of faculty with master’s degree or higher.

Table 5
Faculty with a Master’s Degree or Higher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NCLB (2001) defines a highly qualified teacher as one who has either successfully completed a licensure examination in a content area or who has completed a course of study for a content area (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Table 6 provides the number and percentage of courses taught by highly qualified faculty.

Table 6
Number and Percent of Core Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Data were insufficient, not available, or not applicable during this school year.
Setting

Alpha High School. Alpha High School (enrollment 260) was located in the northern end of a small parish in north Louisiana. The village itself had a population of 252 with no stores or businesses and was located within 20 minutes of the parish seat and within 30 minutes of an urban area. Students were bused in from rural areas outside the village. Alpha High School was 93% Black, 5% Hispanic and 2% White.

Alpha High School was founded in the early 1900s and began service as the Black school in the dual system in the village. This school differed from the other two sites in that the elementary school was located in a separate building from the high school and students shared a cafeteria area. Table 7 displays school characteristics and accountability information for Alpha High School.

Table 7
School Characteristics and Accountability Information for Alpha High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1 Enrollment</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number eligible for free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent eligible for free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of faculty</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPS</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in SPS</td>
<td>-.5</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline SPS</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Data were insufficient, not available, or not applicable during this school year.
All elementary students spent 30 minutes per day in the computer lab and all grades participated in the Accelerated Reader program.

This school’s SPS was not high as evidenced by its one star rating (60.0-79.9). However, the school had made consistent growth in SPS identified for this study as evidenced by the four banners in the school’s entrance indicating that for the four school years 2000-01 to 2004-05, the school had been designated a School of Exemplary Academic Growth.

Beta High School. Beta High School (enrollment 189) was located in the same district as Alpha High School, but is located farther from the urban area. There were no major stores or businesses in the community where the school is located, but there was a small diner and several churches in the community. Students at Beta were 100% minority students. The principal at Beta High School was in her second year in the position, but continued to implement programs and activities implemented by the previous principal. The use of the same programs for the SIP allowed the researcher to use data from both administrations to relate how implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) contributed to consistent growth in SPS.

The facility was large, clean, and bright. There was a field behind the school, but portable buildings took up part of the space. These buildings once housed self-contained classes of students with exceptionalities and overflow classes, but with the decline in enrollment and inclusion of students with exceptionalities into regular classrooms, the buildings were no longer necessary for classroom space. The principal used one of the buildings as a “store” for the Positive Behavior System. The library and the gymnasium separated the elementary wing and secondary wings of the building.
Beta High School differed from the other schools in that this site had multi-grade classrooms. SPS in this school was not high as was indicated by its performance level of two stars (80.0-99.9). The school had made consistent growth over the preceding four years and had earned one \textit{School of Exemplary Academic Growth} banner. Table 8 shows school characteristics and accountability information.

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{School Characteristics and Accountability Information for Beta High School}
\begin{tabular}{lcccc}
\hline
\hline
Oct. 1 Enrollment & 186 & 199 & 199 & 189 & 178 \\
Number eligible for free/reduced lunch & 163 & 176 & 175 & 164 & 162 \\
Percent eligible for free/reduced lunch & 87.6 & 88.4 & 87.9 & 86.8 & 91.0 \\
Number of faculty & 18 & 19 & 19 & 20 & 21 \\
SPS & 71.6 & \textsuperscript{--}\textsuperscript{1} & 76.3 & 76.0 & 86.1 \\
Change in SPS & 1.2 & 6.5 & 7.4 & -.3 & 8.6 \\
Baseline SPS & 68.9 & \textsuperscript{--}\textsuperscript{1} & 77.3 & 77.5 & 80.9 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{1}Data were insufficient, not available, or not applicable during this school year.

\textit{Chi High School.} Chi High School (enrollment 340) was located in the northern end of a small parish in Louisiana. The school was located near a small town with a population of 592 and about 15 minutes from a small city. The physical plant consisted of two main buildings, a greenhouse, and a football field and playground area.
Students were bused from rural areas outside the town. Chi High School was the only school in the study that had a minority population less than 50%. The school met the criteria for the study, but enrollment was more racially balanced than at the other schools.

This school’s SPS was not high as evidenced by the school’s two-star rating (80.0-99.9). The school had shown growth during the years 2004-05 as evidenced by the School of Exemplary Academic Growth banners in the entrance to the school. Table 9 illustrates school characteristics and accountability information for Chi High School.

Table 9
School Characteristics and Accountability Information for Chi High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1 Enrollment</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number eligible for free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent eligible for free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of faculty</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPS</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>--¹</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in SPS</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline SPS</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>--¹</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>89.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Data were insufficient, not available, or not applicable during this school year.

Participants

The superintendent of district #1 was a veteran of more than 30 years service in this district. He had served earlier in the capacities of teacher and principal in the parish. He had retired and, at the request of the school board, had returned to the position of
superintendent to lead the district into financial solvency. During the current study he was completing his third year as superintendent.

The superintendent of school district number two was a veteran of more than 20 years service and had been serving as superintendent for seven years. He had served in the capacities of teacher and principal in the system and was promoted from principal to superintendent of the system.

*Alpha High School.* Data sources at Alpha High School included interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and participant observation. Table 10 lists participants and data sources.

Table 10
Participant and Data Sources for Alpha High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Participant Observation</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fourth grade teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth grade teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical science teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The principal of Alpha High School had been in the position for 12 years. He was a middle-aged Black male who graduated from Alpha High School and returned there to teach. He was a very visible part of the learning community at Alpha and allowed faculty and student input into decisions made at the site. His philosophy was “the school is only as strong as its weakest link” (PA).

The fourth grade teacher was a Black female with three years of classroom teaching experience. Prior to teaching fourth grade, she had served as a special education teacher at the site while completing an alternative certification program. She was an alumna of Alpha High School. The researcher observed this teacher during a reading lesson.

The fifth grade teacher was a Black female with six years of classroom teaching experience. She was an alumna of Alpha High School who returned to Alpha upon completion of a traditional teacher education program. The researcher observed a lesson being taught in this participant’s classroom, reviewed the participant’s plan for the lesson, and reviewed a student work sample for the lesson.

The eighth grade English teacher was a Black female with more than 30 years of classroom experience. She had taught at Alpha prior to 2006 and had retired after completion of a Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP). The principal requested that she be rehired for another year. She obtained her degree from a traditional teacher education program and spent all of her professional years at Alpha.

The physical science teacher was a young adult White male. This was his second year teaching at Alpha High School. He had been in another profession and had completed alternate certification so that he could teach science. He taught physical
science, biology, and earth science. Additionally, he served as a sponsor for several organizations. In addition to interviewing this participant, the researcher observed him during a physical science class and a biology class.

The paraprofessional was a White female with 25 years experience in this school district. She had been at Alpha for 15 years. She worked with the kindergarten classes, but she frequently changed classes so that she could work with others.

Student #1 was a 16-year-old Black female. She was an honor student with a GPA greater than 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. She lived with both parents. Her mother was a nurse at a local hospital, and her father worked at a local mill.

Student #2 was a Black 14-year-old male. He played basketball at the school and was not overly interested in academics. This participant was minimally forthcoming, but he responded more when other students began to respond.

Student #3 was a 13-year-old Black female who had always attended Alpha High School. She resided with her grandmother in the community. This student had a GPA greater than 3.0 on a 4.0 scale.

Parent #1 was a Black female, between the ages of 40 and 60 years old, retired. This participant was rearing three grandchildren. Her children were alumnae of Alpha and had left the village for a large city. She did not explain why she was rearing the children.

Beta High School. Data sources at Beta High School included interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and participant observation. Table 11 describes participants and data sources for Beta High School.
The third and fourth grade teacher at Beta High School was a Black female and a 30-year veteran at Beta. She taught a multi-age, multi-grade class. She had completed all her elementary and secondary schooling at Beta and her professional career was spent at this school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Participant Observation</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third and fourth grade teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school social studies teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title 1 computer coordinator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The high school social studies teacher was a White middle-aged female, completing her second year in the Louisiana Assessment and Assistance Program (LaTAAP). She had completed her teacher education training through alternative certification and had taught two years at Beta. She had initially served as a
paraprofessional at a neighboring school. The researcher observed her world history class and reviewed her lesson plans.

The middle school teacher was a Black female who had been teaching for 30-plus years. The participant taught the middle school (6-7) courses with the exception of science and social studies. Science and social studies were departmentalized.

The principal of Beta High School was a Black female with 28 years experience as a teacher. This was her second year as principal at Beta High School. She had finished the term of the previous principal who was a Black male with more than 30 years experience. Many of the data for this school were obtained based upon responses from or pertaining to the previous principal.

The Title I computer coordinator was a Black female with six years experience. She was also a parent of a student at the school and was interested in completing her degree through the alternate certification pathway and becoming a teacher. She had completed all coursework for an education degree with the exception of the student teaching component.

Student # 1 was a 15-year-old Black female. She was a member of the basketball team, participated on the student council, and was an honor student. Student # 1 had a brother who was also enrolled at Beta. She resided with her mother, a single parent.

Student # 2 was a 16- year-old Black male. He played basketball but was not involved in other activities. He resided with his mother, a single parent, and his grandmother.

Student # 3 was a 16- year-old Black female. She was not involved in basketball, but she had a GPA greater than 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. She resided with her mother and father.
Parent # 1 was married, had one child enrolled in the school, and worked full time. She and her husband participated in parental involvement activities and supported their daughter in her academic efforts.

Chi High School. Data sources at Chi High School included interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and participant observation. Table 12 describes participant and data source information.

Table 12
Participants and Data Sources for Chi High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Participant Observation</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second grade teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth grade teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school algebra teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school science teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student #3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent #2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The principal had held the position for 10 years. He had entered the education profession as an alternate career pathway. Prior to becoming a principal, he had been employed by a local mill. When the mill shut down, he returned to college and became a teacher. He had been a lifelong resident of the Chi community.

The assistant principal at Chi High School was a Black female with 30 years experience. She also served as the Title One Lab coordinator and as the School Improvement Coordinator. The researcher observed the computer lab, scrutinized software on the machines, and observed the participant during lunch and afternoon duty.

The second grade teacher was a Black female with six years experience at Chi High School. She did not reside in the community, but she commuted each day to the school. The researcher also reviewed this participant’s lesson plan book, viewed student work samples, and observed a reading lesson in her class.

The fourth grade teacher at Chi High School was a Black female with more than 30 years experience. The researcher reviewed this teacher’s lesson plan book in addition to the participant interview.

The middle school algebra teacher was a White female teacher with 17 years experience. This teacher was not interviewed individually, but the researcher observed one of her classes.

The high school science teacher was a White female with 10 years experience. The interviewee began her professional career in the medical field. She left the medical field and completed teacher education through the alternate licensure pathway. The researcher interviewed the participant, observed the participant and her physical science class, and reviewed her lesson plan book.
Student # 1 was a 16 year-old Black female in the 11th grade at Chi High School. The participant was involved in basketball, STAR (Students Teaching and Reaching), and was an honor student. The student lived with her mother and three brothers in subsidized housing. The participant stated that her hobbies were talking to her friends, listening to music, and talking on the telephone.

Student # 2 was a 15 year-old Black male in the 9th grade at Chi High School. The participant was a star basketball player. The student lived with his sister and her small children in subsidized housing. The participant stated that his hobby was basketball. This student was not forthcoming, but the researcher obtained more data from observing his behavior in the two high school classes observed.

Student # 3 was a 15 year-old White female in the 10th grade at Chi High School. She was a cheerleader and an honor student. It was her goal to be the valedictorian of her class. The student lived with her mother, who taught at the school, and her father, who worked for a petroleum company. She was an only child. The family resided in a single family dwelling outside of town. The participant was involved in National Honor Society, FBLA, FCA, and was actively involved in her church. This student was very forthcoming.

Parent # 1 was the sister of Student # 2. She was a Black female in her late twenties with two small children of her own in addition to her brother. She resided in subsidized housing.

Parent # 2 was a married White female. She had three children all enrolled at Chi High School. She lived in a rural area outside of the village and her children were bused
in. She was a teacher and her husband was an engineer for an oil company. He traveled frequently and the children attended Chi High School where she was employed.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are an important part of the research process. Ethical considerations of this study include confidentiality, privacy, and trustworthiness.

**Confidentiality and Privacy**

Glesne (2005), Patton (1990), and Merriam (1998) asserted that it is crucial to the validity and reliability of the study to ensure confidentiality for all participants. All participants reviewed and signed Institutional Confidentiality statements and returned to them to the researcher (see Appendix E). Pseudonyms were assigned both to schools and participants in the study to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Identities of all participants and schools were obscured, and all tapes, transcripts, documents, and other instruments were converted to electronic documents and kept in a secure place.

**Trustworthiness**

*Triangulation.* Triangulating responses from focus group interviews, participant observations, and case document analysis helps to ensure trustworthiness of the study. The researcher recorded observations daily in a researcher journal. Participants in the student focus groups were selected based on the return of permission slips. Participants were diverse in terms of age and grade level and most were females. Each school selected focus group participants for students in a different way. Participants gave permission for all sessions, focus groups and interviews to be audio recorded. Observations were written in a journal with researcher interpretations and notes. Reading of transcriptions, coded data, and data analysis displays by an external reviewer ensured validity of the subject.
**Peer debriefing.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) define peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p.308). Several scholarly professionals provided feedback in the process of peer debriefing for this study. This process included discussion of the study with the researcher, providing feedback on articulation of findings, as well as listening to and scrutinizing data collection and analysis methods.

**Member checking.** Member checking is a process through which respondents review interview transcripts for accuracy and provide suggestions for interpretation of statements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher accomplished member checking by returning to the sites and discussing transcripts with participants. Suggested changes in interpretation or in statements indicated in transcripts were accomplished on-site during the visit.

**Data Organization and Analysis**

Warren (2001) asserted that qualitative research allows participants the opportunity to provide narrative describing how they make sense of day-to-day activities at the site. Copious amounts of data were produced by interview, focus group, document analysis, and participant observation, and all data were distinct because these were the thoughts and experiences of individual people. Thus, it was necessary that the researcher develop a systematic method of securing, organizing, comparing, and analyzing, data (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Mack et al. stated that organizing data in a consistent and rigorous way is essential to the security and to the validity of the study results.

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Data Organization

Audio recordings. Interviews and focus groups were tape-recorded using a digital recorder with a USB port. This method allowed audiotapes to be converted to MP3 files. The MP3 files were imported into a transcription software program, Express Scribe, which allowed files to be (a) transcribed into word processor files and (b) saved as electronic MP3 files (see Appendix K). MP3 files were transcribed and saved as Word documents. Files were named for each interview or focus group and dated. The researcher assigned transcriptions and files names by school and participant and entered this data into a log. Logs include a brief description of the context and setting of the file and the date of transcription. Transcription and MP3 files for this study were copied to a compact disc.

Field observation notes. Handwritten field notes were taken in several forms: (a) casual and structured observations, (b) verbatim quotations, (c) participant paraphrases, (d) interview and focus group reflections, (e) the researcher’s questions, and (f) conclusions and observations. Notes were written longhand on a field note interview summary form (see Appendix L).

Reference system. The researcher transferred the information from transcripts, field notes, and participant journal entries to a data reference system developed by the researcher for analysis of data. The researcher extended codes to include field observation notes (FON), document analysis notes (DA), and researcher journal entry notes (RJ). Reference numbers were used to identify data sources for verbatim quotes from participant interviews, researcher observations, and field notes. Table 13 illustrates participant reference system coding for each school.
Table 13
Participant and Reference Coding System for all Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Data Code</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Data Code</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Data Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent District 1</td>
<td>SAB</td>
<td>Superintendent District 1</td>
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<td>T1-B</td>
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Data Analysis

Seidel (1998) described a simplified process for analyzing qualitative data. His method of qualitative data analysis was based upon the three principles of noticing things, collecting things, and thinking about things. Seidel indicated that the qualitative data analysis process is not linear but is

1. Iterative and progressive because it is a cycle that keeps repeating. These three steps in the process create an unending spiral.

2. Recursive in that one part may lead the researcher back to another part, and

3. Holographic in that each step in the process entails the whole process.

Seidel (1998) further stated that qualitative data analysis provides ways of discerning and interpreting meaningful patterns or themes during research. Meaningfulness is determined by the researcher’s goals and objectives for a particular study. Data can be analyzed and synthesized from multiple perspectives depending on the research question.

Moreover, qualitative data analysis cannot be broken down into discrete elements of time. As stated by Seidel (1998), the qualitative data analysis process is ongoing, holistic, and iterative. Miles and Huberman (1994) described the major phases of data analysis as (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing and verification.

Data reduction. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 10) “Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions.” Data need to be condensed for the sake of manageability and so that they can be made intelligible in terms of the issues.
being addressed. Data reduction forces the researcher to make choices about which parts of the data should be emphasized. The researcher decides which data should be singled out for description according to principles of selectivity.

The researcher read and re-read interview and focus group transcripts, field notes, and researcher observation notes and identified data that would provide the thickest, richest narrative for the study. Data selected for inclusion were indicated on the transcript by underlining. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Glesne (2005) suggested that while reading, the researchers should make careful note of topics that occur repeatedly.

Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg and Coleman (2000) stated that the act of categorizing allows the researcher to take bits of data and group them according to their similarities rather than their uniquenesses. The researcher is then able to look at the frequency with which certain topics and words occur and identify recurring patterns and themes.

As patterns continued to emerge, the researcher began to put the new topics and frequently used words and ideas into main theme clusters until continuous reading ceased to generate new topics or themes. Initially, there were many topics generated, but the more the researcher reviewed the data, the fewer the number of new topics were created. As this point neared, the researcher conceptualized a simple visual display that would easily illustrate what the emerging themes and patterns were.

Data display. Data display is the second element or level in Miles and Huberman (1994) model of qualitative display. Data display goes one step beyond data reduction to provide an organized way of assembling information to draw conclusions. Data displays allow the analyst to triangulate data across sources and may be designed utilizing either words or diagrammatic form. During the display stage, additional higher order categories
or themes may emerge from the data that extend past those discovered during the initial processes of data reduction.

The researcher wrote these themes down and assigned each theme a coding color. The coding colors allowed for relating specific participant statements, events, and activities to the themes that had emerged. Initially, topics were identified in the transcripts and words and ideas occurring multiple times assigned a specific coding color. These ideas were clustered into groups, and the major groups were identified as major themes. Quotations from interview transcripts were aligned to major patterns and themes; written into the data as verification or confirmation of specific concepts, ideas, and themes; and coded appropriately. Each research site was assigned a color code allowing the researcher to look at the sub-groups of data in each of the sub-piles and begin to determine the patterns and themes that emerged. Refinement of these patterns and themes continued until no further categories were generated.

**Conclusion drawing and verification.** The third element of data analysis consists of conclusion drawing and verification. Conclusion drawing involves reviewing the data and assessing the meaning of the data in terms of the questions asked. Verification of the data entails reviewing the data, comparing the data to other sources of data to cross check and find emergent themes, revisiting the data, and finally verifying the emerging themes. The meanings emerging from the data must be tested for their confirmability and validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Summary**

Chapter 3 described the methodology of the study. Mixed methods design included the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently. Qualitative data included interviewing participants; analyzing documents; and observing activities,
conditions, events, policies and procedures in each school. This process enabled the researcher to develop insight into perceptions of stakeholders at each school. Quantitative data included the use of statistical data such as the number and proportion of courses taught by highly qualified teachers. Triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data provided thick, rich descriptions of each school. Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the findings based on quantitative and qualitative data collected.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

The six sections of this chapter address answers to the research questions and provide data indicative of how activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures relative to the implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) contribute to the growth of SPS in three rural schools. Moreover, the researcher explores how school culture contributes to growth of SPS. Section one includes a description of general data collected as a result of researcher observations in the schools. This section is comprised of descriptions of school facilities; interactions among students, parents, faculty, and administration; and activities and procedures that occur on a daily basis at each of the three schools. School demographics, both faculty and student, are discussed in a description of the case in Chapter 3.

Section two is comprised of a triangulation of data across sources to answer the first research question: What perceptions did stakeholders have of the implementation of NCLB (2001) in the three schools? This section includes a discussion of participant perceptions relative to how NCLB (2001) was implemented at each site and descriptions of what participants at each school believed that NCLB (2001) actually encompassed.

In section three, the researcher provides data related to research question two: How did implementation of research-based strategies occur in each of the three schools?
This section includes a review of data indicative of how schools used scientific, research-based instructional strategies for reading along with a comparison of strategies used in each of the three schools.

In section four, the researcher addresses research question three: in what way was parental involvement accomplished at each site? Triangulation of data occurred across all sources describing formal communications among parents and school personnel, informal communications among parents and school personnel, and activities and events established to encourage parental involvement. The researcher also included an explanation of how teachers perceived parental involvement and an explanation of participant perceptions of the effect of parental involvement upon student and school success.

In section five, the researcher examined research question four: What is the proportion of highly qualified faculty in the three schools? This information was gathered from the Department of Education website and is included as a part of document analysis. In addition to data collected from the Louisiana Department of Education, this section discusses methods and strategies used by schools to select and facilitate professional development.

Section six includes a discussion of each school’s culture and how the school culture influenced student achievement at the three sites. The components of school culture include class size, school size, interactions among stakeholders, teacher expectations, and student efficacy. Data triangulated from all sources was used to describe the school culture that existed in each school.
Site Observations

Site observations at each school included descriptions of the facilities, interactions among members of the school organization, and activities and events that occur on a daily basis at each of the three schools. School observations were accomplished both covertly and overtly. Teachers and students were aware that the researcher was observing classes and instruction and interviewing students and teachers. However, teachers and students were not aware that transitions between classes, conversations among students, and discussion of activities and events were being observed. Site observations of each school are described in this section.

Alpha High School

Facilities. Alpha High School was housed in a facility built in the 1940's. It was at one time the high school in the community and a second facility housed the elementary school. With a decline in enrollment, School District # 1 combined the two schools, and Alpha became a combination school. The previous elementary school was located about one mile away and had become a private school.

Interview data indicated that renovation was needed at Alpha High School. Examination of the facilities confirmed the need for renovation in that the classroom furniture on the elementary side of the school consisted of older wooden desks while furniture on the high school side of the building consisted of modern metal desks, probably to accommodate the size of students. Examination of the teacher's lounge revealed a worn sofa, a stove, a refrigerator, several shelves, a copy machine, and several empty cubicles used for containing supplies and resource materials. Teacher mailboxes
were also located in this area. During the time of the researcher’s observation, no teachers entered this area, but student workers came to make copies for the following day.

Facilities were neat. Student restrooms were neat; however, there were instances of graffiti on the walls. Doors to lavatory stalls were painted plywood but were lockable. Wastebaskets were clean and empty. Classrooms were cluttered with resources for teaching, that is, textbooks, papers, and so forth.

The gymnasium was located at the end of the entrance hall. It was also used during the lunch period for activities such as basketball and socialization as well as for school events and presentations. The area was clean with large dressing rooms. The dressing room entrance areas were dark. The dressing areas were locked during the lunch period, and students were not allowed in the area. Several trophies were located in a trophy case in the hall.

The library was located at the front of the building and across from the principal’s office. A cursory examination of the library revealed two computer stations, a large media cart, and several racks of outdated reference materials and books. The library also contained a collection of accelerated reader materials, but selection across the collection was limited, and most of the books were appropriate for elementary students. Teacher interviews later indicated that only elementary students participated in the accelerated reader program.

The cafeteria was located at the end of the building opposite the gymnasium. It was clean and neat, and both faculty and students ate lunch there. Elementary school students were taken to the lunchroom early, and middle and high school students followed
them. Elementary and high school students were separated and were never housed together.

*Student interactions and behaviors.* Elementary students were sent to a playground adjacent to the elementary wing while middle and high school students were allowed to congregate at the front of the building directly outside the cafeteria entrance. There was no formal area for seating following lunch nor did there seem to be a structured recess break or formal activity period. The lunch period for both groups of students lasted approximately 35 minutes. Researcher observation during the lunch period revealed few teachers on duty, but student behavior was exemplary. Students were conversing, but there was no loud, rude, or boisterous behavior. The principal ate lunch with the faculty and students during the lunch period and was clearly visible.

Observations during transitions between classes and at the end of the lunch period indicated that the faculty and administrators had established expectations for student behavior during these times. Elementary students did not make transitions from class to class. All elementary classes were self-contained with the exception of the 30 minute period that each grade spent in the computer laboratory.

High school classes were held in the south wing of the main building while middle school classes were held in the north wing. Middle and high school students were scheduled for physical education classes together, but, for the most part, the grades were separated.

A spectrum of teacher expectations and student behaviors during instructional periods existed at this school. In 90% of the classes that the researcher observed, students were quiet, respectful, and engaged. In two classrooms observed by the researcher,
students were boisterous and unengaged, and off-task behaviors occurred. The researcher returned for a follow-up visit in these classes, and found that these behaviors were the norm for these classes.

_Curricular activities._ The state had designed a curriculum that prepared all students to be successful on the LEAP assessment. At Alpha High School, courses were limited to the basic core subjects such as mathematics; English; basic sciences such as physical science, biology, earth science, environmental science, and chemistry; and social sciences. Compressed video or online instruction from the Louisiana Virtual School program provided an opportunity for students eligible for the Louisiana Tuition Opportunities Program Scholarship (TOPS) to earn Carnegie units for courses required for the scholarship, including Spanish, calculus, and fine arts. Faculty members were assigned 2-3 courses to teach which meant corresponding lesson preparations for each course each day. Those faculty members in high school content areas, i.e., science, mathematics, English, taught content on more than one grade level.

_Extracurricular activities._ Extracurricular activity at the school was limited to athletics and limited participation in academic competitions at a local university. The athletic program included girls’ and boys’ basketball, girls’ softball, boys’ baseball, and girls’ cheerleading. Neither football nor track was offered. The basketball team was successful during the season as evidenced by several trophies on display. Although the school sponsored few non-academic extracurricular activities, small numbers of students participated in academic rallies and science and social studies fairs at Louisiana Tech University. These teams rarely went on to state competition, and preparation for local
competitions was usually a hurried affair and did not include consistent long-term preparation (RJA, p.1).

School and class size. Alpha High School had an enrollment of 260 students. Class sizes ranged from 14-21 students. Classes for content areas in grades 9-12 ranged from 8-14. Classes for core courses in the middle school averaged about 15; elementary classes ranged from 14-17. Such small class sizes allowed teachers an opportunity for more one on one instruction. The graduating class in 2006 numbered 14, and the eighth grade class numbered 24. Enrollment was increased by students who transferred from South Louisiana schools because of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and retention of students who did not pass the LEAP (RJA, p. 2).

Document analysis. Documents analyzed at the school included the School Improvement Plan (SIP), parent/teacher/student contracts, the mission statement, and a representative sample of lesson plans. Other documents included student work samples, memos to parents, and faculty meeting agendas.

School improvement plan. School Improvement Plans (SIP)s were written for all schools available for assistance through Title I. SIPs were developed based on needs assessments that each school conducted at the beginning of the school year. The SIP indicated activities and strategies that schools implemented to increase school and student success. SIPS were written at the end of the school year and included input from the principal, faculty members, students, parents, and community members. The plan included the following goals based on research-based strategies:

1. Improvement of student achievement in reading school-wide; and
2. Improvement of student achievement in mathematics school-wide.
Objectives of the plan included an increase in IOWA test scores for students in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 in both mathematics and reading. Activities in the plan focused on achieving these objectives and included components of parental involvement. Research-based strategies included writing across the curriculum and “activity based learning for math instruction” (SIP).

*Lesson plans.* There was no prescribed lesson plan format for the school. In examining the lesson plans, the researcher found that lesson plans reviewed included alignment across state Grade Level Expectations (GLEs), assessments, and activities. Other teachers utilized the Comprehensive Curriculum designed by the state (RJA, p. 6).

*Mission statement.* Members of the faculty, parents, students, and community members developed the mission statement for the school. The mission statement read, “We, the _______ family, will insure and promote academic achievement for all students.” This statement was created by requesting submissions from the faculty and submitting these suggestions to the mission statement committee. The committee recommended a statement, and it was submitted to the faculty for vote. The faculty revised the statement and adopted it in its finalized form in spring 2001.

*Beta High School*

*Facilities.* Beta High School was the most recently renovated site. Its enrollment was the smallest of the three schools with 180 students. The principal confirmed document analysis findings indicating a continuous decline in both high school and elementary school enrollment. This decline resulted in combining classes and leaving many areas empty. However, the building itself was bright and clean and had been painted prior to the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year.
During the period of data collection, the researcher noted that all classroom doors were decorated for the holiday season, and positive motivation posters were placed on the walls. Trophy cases filled with basketball trophies were located in the front hall of the school. Pictures of principals of the school were hung in the hall of the school. Unlike Alpha High School, during a short period, Beta High School had one White principal. His service occurred during an interim when a principal had been sent to another school.

Most classrooms were neatly furnished, and teachers had placed curtains at the windows. Teacher resources were placed in bookshelves and were used to create learning activities and strategies that benefited students. In addition to the main school building, Beta High School included several portable buildings that were used for classes at one time, but were being used as storage space at the time of the study.

The gymnasium was located in the center of the building. The doors to the gymnasium were flanked on the left side by two trophy cases containing basketball trophies. As at Alpha, the gymnasium served as a gathering place for activities other than physical education. Students gathered there during the lunch period to socialize and to play basketball. One physical education teacher taught all secondary students. The principal indicated that assemblies and school programs were held in the gymnasium as well as athletics and physical education classes.

The library was located at the front of the building across from the school office. The library contained four computer stations and a large media cart. The library contained a large collection of books and reading materials, but library visits were limited because the librarian was also the high school English teacher. She assigned formal book
reports and required frequent student reading assignments. Additionally, the teacher expected students to participate in oral reading as a group activity.

One school-wide activity was the use of Accelerated Reader in the elementary computer laboratory. Students read indicated Accelerated Reader (AR) books, were tested in the computer laboratory, and scores were reported to the teachers. AR is a commercial reading program that encourages frequent reading by students. The program includes rewards for different levels of reading.

The cafeteria was located in the center of the building and served all students and faculty. Elementary students, middle and high school students ate at different times. Elementary, middle and high school students were always separated and never spent recess or other breaks together.

**Student interaction and behaviors.** During the lunch period, elementary students returned to their classroom during inclement weather but, during good weather, students were sent to a playground adjacent to the elementary school wing; middle and high school students were allowed to go to the gym during lunch break. Students were in the gym because, during the data collection period, inclement weather forced students to remain inside. Students indicated that during good weather they were allowed to go behind the school where track and baseball fields were located. There was no formal area for seating following lunch, and there seemed to be no structured recess break or formal activity period. The lunch period for both groups of students lasted approximately 35 minutes. Researcher observation during the lunch period revealed that elementary teachers stayed with their students, took them to the restroom, and spent the remainder of lunchtime with them in the break area.
High school and middle school students gathered in the gym during the lunch period. Four middle and high school teachers were on duty during the lunch period, but no instances of disruption or inappropriate behavior were observed. Students were holding conversations but there was no loud, rude, or boisterous behavior. The principal sat in the gym with students, and the teachers on duty were visible and alert.

The principal at the site did not eat lunch with the faculty and students but ate alone following the lunch period. She remarked that the cafeteria manager took good care of her and knew her preferences. Lunchroom personnel seemed comfortable with her presence there, and the cafeteria manager greeted her in a solicitous manner.

Observations during transitions between classes and at the end of the lunch period indicated that the faculty and administration had established expectations for student behavior during these times. Elementary students did not transition from class to class with the exception that elementary classes were scheduled to spend 30 minutes in the computer laboratory for test preparation or reading activities.

Middle and high school classrooms were located in the south wing of the main building, while elementary classes were held in the north wing of the main building. Middle school and high school students were scheduled for some physical education classes together, but, for the most part, the grades were separated.

Teacher expectations, instructional styles, and student behaviors differed across classes at this site. With the exception of the science classroom, students in all classes observed were quiet, respectful, and engaged. Students were aware of what was expected of them, and teachers were engaged in instruction. The science teacher had just begun to teach the second day of the researcher’s observations. The researcher did not conduct a
formal observation of the science classroom, but informal observation during transition from observations revealed that the teacher spent the first part of his class introducing rules and procedures. Student behavior during the first days of data collection indicated that the teacher found it difficult to establish behavior management during the class. Observation in an American History class revealed no discipline problems, but several students were asleep during the class. The researcher returned for a follow-up visit in these classrooms and found that student behavior in the science classroom had improved while behavior in the American history classroom remained the same.

Curricular activities. The state had designed a curriculum that prepared all students to be successful on the LEAP assessment, and the school followed the state mandated curriculum. Secondary classes at Beta were limited to courses necessary to meet requirements for the high school diploma. Online instruction from the Louisiana Virtual School program provided an opportunity for students eligible for Louisiana TOPS to earn Carnegie units for additional courses required for the scholarship including Spanish and calculus. An art instructor from a nearby university provided art instruction for students to meet the fine arts requirement for TOPS.

Beta High School was different from the other two schools. The principal indicated that during this time the district, school district number 1, had gone through a strict restructuring due to financial constraints (PB, p. 1). The superintendent interview supported this statement (SAB, p. 2). Alpha and Beta High School were located in the same district and operated under the same constraints. The restructure of the district resulted in changes in grade configuration. At Beta High School, the elementary school wing was organized into three multi-grade classes: grades 1-2, grades 3-4, and grades
Teachers in these three classes were highly qualified and all three had been teaching more than ten years. Two were nearing retirement.

High school faculty assignments included more than one content course which required lesson preparations for each course each day. Those faculty members in high school content areas, i.e. science, mathematics, and English, taught those subjects across grades 9-12. Because grade enrollments were small, one teacher taught all middle school reading and language arts courses while high school teachers taught science and mathematics classes. The high school science teacher had been replaced three times during the data collection period.

In addition to academic activities and athletic activities, Beta High School had at one time included a fine arts program comprised of art instruction and music. The music program ended as a part of budgetary cuts at the district level. Prior to the termination of the program, students in the program participated in music competitions and rallies at Louisiana Tech University and won Excellent and Superior ribbons (PB, p. 2). The art program continued as a partnership effort between the University of Louisiana at Monroe and Beta High School.

Extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities at Beta High School included athletic and non-athletic activities. The athletic program included girls’ and boys’ basketball teams, girls’ softball, boys’ baseball, and cheerleading. Trophies in the trophy case were representative of successful basketball seasons (PB, p. 1).

Other extracurricular activities included self-esteem and academic activities. The principal and staff facilitated three programs designed to build character and self-esteem among students. These programs included a mentoring program for students at risk for
academic failure, the Princess program for female students grades 5-12, and the Trojan Warriors program for male students, grades 5-12. Teachers agreed to mentor one or more students who were at-risk for academic failure in the mentoring program. This included providing a "listening ear," assisting with homework, and teaching students problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. The Princess program was designed to provide guidance for young women while its counterpart, the Trojan Warriors, was designed to build self esteem in young men at the school (PB, p. 2). All of these programs included activities designed to strengthen student social skills and to provide opportunities for exposure to cultural events.

Although the school sponsored few non-athletic extracurricular activities, students participated in academic rallies and science and social studies fairs at Louisiana Tech University. These teams rarely went on to state competitions, and preparation for local competitions was a hurried affair and did not include consistent long term preparation (RJB, p. 1). During one observation period, students worked on a science fair project. All students were given a science fair board and spent several class periods in the business class conducting research for their projects. Students conducted research a week prior to competition at Louisiana Tech University (RJB, p. 3).

*School and class size.* Beta had an enrollment of 180. Class size ranged from 14-21 students. Classes for content areas in grades 9-12 were small ranging from 8-15; core classes in the middle school averaged 12. Elementary classes ranged from 18-24. The high school graduating class of 2006 numbered 11, and the eighth grade class had 14 students. Enrollment during the period covered in this study was in consistent decline.
Document analysis. Documents analyzed at the site included the SIP, parent/teacher/student contract, the mission statement, and a representative sample of lesson plans. Other documents analyzed included faculty meeting agendas, sign-in sheets for parent activities, and descriptions of the positive behavior system.

School improvement plan. The SIP was written at the end of the school year and included input from the principal, faculty members, students, parents, and community members. The plan included the following goals based on research-based strategies:

1. Improvement in student math achievement school-wide; and,
2. Improvement in reading achievement school wide.

Objectives of the plan included an increase in IOWA test scores for students in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 in both mathematics and English. Activities in the plan focused on achieving these objectives and included components of parental involvement. Research based strategies included extended day programs and computer assisted instruction for test preparation (SIP).

Lesson plans. Teachers were allowed to write lesson plans using any format that they chose. In examining the lesson plans, the researcher found that all written lesson plans included alignment across state GLEs, assessment, and activities. Other teachers utilized the comprehensive curriculum designed by the state (RJB, p. 12).

Mission statement. A committee comprised of faculty, parents, students, and community members developed the mission statement for the school. The mission statement read, “To strive to ensure and promote the academic achievement of all students.” This statement was created by requesting submissions from the faculty and submitting these suggestions to the mission statement committee. Each member of the
mission statement committee, including students, parents, and community members, voted on submissions. The faculty revised the recommended statement and adopted it in its finalized form in spring 2004.

**Chi High School**

Chi High School was the only school located in school district number 2. It was, however, located within 50 miles of Alpha and Beta. Chi High School was historically the only school in the village. Two other schools were located in smaller rural areas within twenty miles of the school, but student and faculty in both of these schools was predominantly White. Intense rivalry existed among the three schools. Enrollment at Chi was the largest enrollment of the three sites. The principal confirmed document analysis findings indicating a continuous decline in student enrollment in elementary and secondary grades. This decline in enrollment resulted in discussion of consolidating the three small rural schools in the district (SC, p. 2).

**Facilities.** Chi High School was located in a residential area. The grounds of the physical plant were well-kept, but the interior of the building needed renovation and cleaning. During the period of data collection, the researcher noted little decoration in the halls and few positive motivation posters on the walls. Trophy cases filled with academic and athletic trophies were located in the school entrance. Pictures of principals of the school were hung in the hall of the school. Principals of Chi had always been White, and student demographics at the school were more evenly distributed than at Alpha and Beta. Chi had been recognized as a School of Exemplary Academic Growth once during the period under study.
Classrooms included positive motivation posters, bulletin boards, and signs. Most classrooms were neatly furnished, and teachers had placed curtains in the windows. Teacher resources were placed in bookshelves and were used to create learning activities and strategies that benefited students. As with Alpha and Beta, elementary and high school classrooms were located in separate wings of the school. In addition to the main building, cafeteria, and secondary buildings, Chi included a greenhouse for its agricultural program and a football field.

A large bulletin board used to track progress of students participating in the Accelerated Reader® program dominated the elementary wing. The board tracked student and school progress of students in the Accelerated Reader® program. Rewards and incentives were given to students and classes in this program. The program was included as a research-based instructional strategy for reading.

The gymnasium was located at the end of the building and was not visible from the front. It was large, neat, and clean. The dressing rooms were well-kept, and students were not allowed to use the gym as a gathering place. Unlike Alpha and Beta where students gathered in the gym during inclement weather, Chi had a designated covered area where students congregated following the lunch period. The gymnasium was used, however, as a multipurpose area for assemblies and school presentations.

The library was located at the front of the building and across from the office. Detailed observation of the library revealed that the library housed 12 computer stations, a large media cart, several shelves of reference materials and books, and a wide assortment of Accelerated Reader® books. The school had an extended library program with a certified librarian who provided instruction in research and the use of media. The
librarian was certified in educational technology and served as the media center coordinator for the school. She attended several technology professional development activities each year.

The cafeteria was located in a separate building and served both elementary, middle and high school students, and faculty. The cafeteria was clean and neat with open, curtainless windows. Elementary and middle and high school students ate at different times. Elementary students were separated from middle and high school students and students in these grades never spent recess or other breaks together.

*Student interaction and behaviors.* During the lunch period, elementary students used a fenced playground adjacent to the cafeteria while middle and high school students were allowed to congregate in a seating area outside the cafeteria. The lunch period included structured recess breaks following lunch. The lunch period for each group of students lasted approximately 35 minutes. Researcher observation during the high school and middle school lunch period revealed several teachers on duty. Middle and high school student conversation during the lunch period was generally appropriate, but some profanity and inappropriate language was used.

The principal did not eat lunch with faculty and students. Instead, he ate with his wife, the librarian. The principal was rarely at the school during the data collection period and was not visible when he was present. On several occasions he was attending meetings relative to NCLB (2001) or assessment issues. On these occasions, the assistant principal was left in charge.

Observations during transitions between classes and at the end of the lunch period indicated that the faculty and administrators perhaps had established expectations for
student behavior during these time but students did not meet those expectations. Inappropriate language and behavior by middle and high school students was observed. Elementary students did not transition from class to class. All elementary classes were self-contained with the exception of the 30-minute period that each class spent in the computer laboratory.

Some high school classes including science, math, and English were held in the north wing of the main building with middle school classes. This location allowed teachers in these areas to remain stationary and not move from room to room. Students transitioned from class to class across all grades. Observation of a science class found that the teacher conducted lecture in a small crowded classroom adjacent to a small laboratory. Other high school classes including agriculture, shop, business applications, and the computer laboratory were held in classrooms below the cafeteria. One large neat science laboratory was also located in this area; however, it appeared not to be in use at the time. A greenhouse had been erected for the agriculture class behind the cafeteria. Students had planted a small garden outside the green house. Plants were used to landscape the outside of the facility and were also sold during holiday seasons to support the agricultural education program. Principal, faculty, students, and community felt that this program was successful as indicated by the following statement.

It's a really good program and all the kids--he [the teacher] makes the students, like they plant out in front of the cafeteria. If you noticed out in front of the cafeteria--they do all of that and they go up to the city hall and plant plants and they all go up to the senior citizen's home and plant. Yes, they also do the plants
in the gym and the agriculture program teaches the kids to carry on a meeting.

(PC, p. 8)

As stated by the principal in this statement and others, students at Chi are bused in from rural areas. One source of economic wealth in the community is its farm and cattle industry. Students in this school are interested in and involved in the 4-H programs. The agricultural education program supports student interest in this area.

A spectrum of teacher expectations and student behaviors during instructional periods existed in this school. In most of the classes that the researcher observed, students were quiet, respectful, and engaged. There were, however, classes in which students were loud, boisterous, and off-task. In an observation of a physical science class, the teacher had students reading aloud and discussing acids and bases and the attributes of each. She also integrated a teacher demonstration and a student demonstration. Student behavior was so disruptive that she asked three young men to leave and spoke with them in the hall (RJC, p. 3). A second visit to observe this teacher in a biology class revealed similar behaviors with a different group of students.

The researcher reviewed student work samples from the Students Teaching and Reaching (S.T.A.R.) class. This class allowed students to obtain college credit for a teacher education introductory course at Louisiana colleges and universities. Students in this class were engaged in student-centered instruction and were focused on the activities they were participating in. The teacher was passionate about her content and held student attention with little off-task behavior.

Curricular activities. The state had designed a curriculum that prepared all students to be successful on the LEAP assessment, and the school followed the state
mandated curriculum. Unlike Alpha and Beta High Schools, Chi High School included classes other than those necessary to meet requirements for the high school diploma. These classes were French I and II, physics, agriculture, mechanics, and carpentry. The school was able to include these classes by sharing itinerant teachers with two other schools and, in the case of physics, by rotating class offerings. This practice was supported by the principal’s statement:

In school, we are not able to offer, like, calculus. We offer physics every three or four years, and we were going to offer it this year, but you know, we are still going to have to wait and see if we will have the student enrollment to do that. We offer advanced math, but that is probably the only program that we offer for students who are college prep courses for our students. I don't offer any fine arts and that is one of the requirements for TOPS, but we replace it with something else. I don't have any type of music, no drama, no choir, and no art programs at all. (PC, p. 12)

Curriculum at Chi High School was designed to meet the needs of the students enrolled in the school. This included allowing opportunities to obtain the TOPS scholarship to its students.

Online instruction from the Louisiana Virtual School program provided another opportunity for students eligible for the Louisiana TOPS to earn Carnegie units for courses required for the scholarship, but students felt that the online courses were too much work; therefore, enrollment for these courses was poor.

We were going to offer fine arts, but we didn't have any students to take it. After the first week, the students thought it was too much work. But we do have a
teacher trained to do it if we had to. In fact, my wife was going to do it in the library. She went to the meeting in Natchitoches, I guess that's where they have the meetings every year, but so far, we just have to play it by ear. If we have to have a course, we will try our best to offer it. (PC, p. 12)

Efforts were made to ensure that students had opportunities to take any course they were interested in. Additionally, professional development for faculty was available should faculty wish to introduce new material.

Chi High School was more of a traditional school than Alpha and Beta High School. The school differed from the other two schools in that while the faculty and administrators of this school were concerned with success on the LEAP tests, the faculty was aware of the community that it served. For example, the principal indicated that few of their students would be attending college, but large numbers would be attending vocational schools or community colleges.

We have taken our high school students over to BPCC and last year we took them over to the Career Center in Caddo Parish. This is an excellent program, and I would love to see that program here in _______ parish. It is designed for students who are not going to college. They have culinary arts. It is an excellent program, and they have it going good over there. (PC, p. 4)

The assistant principal confirmed these statements by saying,

Most of them go to some type of formal training. Vo-Tech is winning out right now over college. We have even had some start college and realize that they can get the same training at Vo-Tech that they left college and came home and went to Vo-Tech. College has gotten so expensive even with grants and loans that it is
still too expensive for some children, so that they choose Vo-Tech and drive to _________ and make as much money as they would with a four year degree.

(APC, p. 2)

Unlike Alpha and Beta high schools, Chi high school includes both college preparatory courses and vocational programs. Both the principal and the assistant principal indicated that, at the time of the study, students were more likely to attend vocational school than college. The expense of a traditional four-five year program was cited as the main reason that students did not choose four year institutions.

*Extracurricular activities.* Extracurricular activities were very different from those at Alpha and Beta. The school included both athletic and non-athletic activities. The athletic program included girls’ and boys’ basketball, girls’ softball team, boys’ baseball, football, girls’ and boys’ track, and cheerleading squad. Unlike Alpha and Beta high schools, the athletic program at Chi High School included a football team. Several trophies in the display case at the entrance to the gym were indicative of the success of the athletic program.

Non-athletic programs included National Honor Society, Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Future Teachers of America (FTA), Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), and Future Farmers of America (FFA). Other programs included at the school were Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.). Students participating in local and state competitions with these organizations were successful as indicated by trophies won by students for participation in rallies and competitions. For example, the FFA was involved in an ongoing service learning project that had received state level awards.
Students competed in academic rallies at Louisiana Tech University and frequently participated in state competitions, as well (PC, p. 3).

School and class size. Enrollment for the school was 340. Class size ranged from 14-21 students. Enrollment in classes for content areas in grades 9-12 ranged from 14-24 students; middle school classes ranged from 17-22 students; and elementary classes ranged from 18-24 students. The 2006 graduating class was 21, and the eighth grade enrollment was 27 students. Enrollment during the period covered by this study was in consistent decline.

Document analysis. Documents analyzed at the site included the School Improvement Plan, parent/teacher/student contract, the mission statement, and a representative sample of lesson plans. Other documents analyzed by the researcher included memos to parents, parental involvement activity announcements, student work samples, samples of electronic faculty meetings, and the school report card.

School improvement plan. The SIP was written at the end of the 2000-01 school year by a committee of faculty, parents, students, and community members. Suggestions were made across several committee meetings. Goals and objectives were written based on the school analysis model survey which was completed by parents, students, faculty, and administration. Revisions were made by the school improvement committee and submitted to school faculty for approval. The plan included the following goals:

1. Improvement of student reading scores school-wide; and,

2. Improvement of student academic achievement in mathematics school-wide.
Objectives of the plan included an increase in IOWA test scores for students in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 for both mathematics and language. Activities in the plan focused on achieving these objectives and included components of parental involvement. Research-based strategies included extended reading, direct instruction, positive behavior support, and computer assisted instruction (School Improvement Plan).

Lesson plans. Teachers were allowed to write lesson plans using formats of their choice. In examining the lesson plans, the researcher found that all written lesson plans included alignment across state GLEs, assessment, and activities. Some teachers utilized the Comprehensive Curriculum designed by the state (RJC, p. 12).

Mission statement. The mission statement for the site was designed by members of the faculty, parents, students, and community members. The mission statement read “The mission of ____________ is to promote student learning in a caring atmosphere that encourages students to try, to succeed and to achieve.” This statement was created by requesting submissions from the faculty and submitting these suggestions to the mission statement committee. The faculty revised the statement and adopted it in its finalized form spring 2004.

Stakeholder Perceptions of No Child Left Behind (2001)

NCLB (2001) was a driving force in American education, but data from this study indicated that there were still misconceptions about its purpose. This section addresses research question number one: what perceptions did stakeholders have of the implementation of NCLB (2001) in the three schools?

Participants interviewed felt that implementation of NCLB (2001) had a positive effect on student achievement at their schools. Faculty members were aware of the
demands made on them by the mandates of NCLB (2001) and made every effort to meet the demands of the law. For instance, the second grade teacher at Chi High School said,

The testing could be a good thing to see what children are learning, but I feel that all children are not going to know what they are asking. If students don’t know what kinds of questions are being asked, they won’t know what kinds of answers to give. (T1-C, p. 2)

Another teacher, the social studies teacher at Beta High School, did not believe that the test addressed circumstances or situations with which students were familiar.

You can be the best teacher in the world trying to teach the kids what they need to know in that area, but some of the things that the tests are asking; I don’t think that these kids are prepared for that. (T1-B, p. 4)

The fourth grade teacher at Chi High School supported these statements.

One example was a question on the test that asked students to name the picture, and the picture was a picture of a dome, and these kids didn’t know what a dome was. Another picture was a cup, but the kids called it a mug. (T1-C, p. 3)

Both the second grade and the fourth grade teachers supported the principle of NCLB (2001), but both felt that there were some issues that needed to be addressed to make it successful for all learners. These faculty members also felt that undue pressure was brought to bear on teachers to ensure student success.

Other faculty members felt that there was not enough time or resources put into creating educational activities that meet the requirements of the law. Some faculty at Beta and Chi schools felt that the activities and objectives indicated by standards, benchmarks, and, the more recent, Grade Level Expectations (GLEs), were not stated in terms familiar
to the populations that they served. Other faculty felt that the activities of the Comprehensive Curriculum, the GLEs and the LEAP exam were biased against students of both minority and low SES.

The fourth grade teacher at Chi High School asked, “How do you motivate students who don’t want to learn?” (T4-C, p. 2) The physical science teacher at Chi High School inserted, “We spend a lot of time stressing the test, but it does not leave much time to encourage learning” (T3-C, p. 3). Faculty also felt that the implementation of NCLB (2001) did not allow teachers the autonomy necessary to prepare students for life-long learning. The statements above indicate that teachers felt that all that was being done in classrooms was teaching to pass the test. Statements above are indicative of the belief that this type of teaching is unfair to students.

One area of concern by faculty members interviewed was the lack of resources allocated for instruction of the Comprehensive Curriculum. The Comprehensive Curriculum was designed by the state as a guide to activities that could be directly aligned to the standards, benchmarks, and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) and authentic assessment of student learning. Most of the teachers interviewed used the Comprehensive Curriculum to design lessons but found that they did not have the resources to implement all of the lessons, or the concepts taught by specific activities in the Comprehensive Curriculum were beyond the comprehension of the students. One teacher, the biology teacher at Alpha High School, stated

I try to use the Comprehensive Curriculum, but these students cannot do these activities. For example, one of the activities asked students to describe the double...
helix of the DNA chain. My students could not do that. I didn’t even try that activity. (T2-A, p.3)

Another teacher at Alpha High School said, “Our students are not like the students at [name deleted] high school where there is a broad tax base and lots of money. Even if we had the money, I don’t think our kids could keep up” (TFGA, p. 5).

In light of these beliefs, these two teachers were most likely to create activities that students were able to apply and relate to prior knowledge. This was an example of constructivist theory. In spite of his beliefs that these students had limited prior knowledge of some science concepts, this teacher continued to give students rigorous course work. Instruction in his class included real-life applications of concepts in science. The researcher noted that the teacher also discussed the importance of an education and told students there were no unnecessary lessons and that all learning can be linked back to life.

Superintendents of both school districts indicated that there had always been a move toward accountability and that principals, faculty, and students in their learning communities worked toward achieving the norm on norm-referenced tests. The superintendent of School District # 1 indicated that in the past, schools were measured by success on the norm-referenced, California Achievement Test. “At that time we were operating under the California Achievement Test. We placed a lot of emphasis on reaching the national norm, that is, the fiftieth percentile. So there has always been some concern with accountability” (SAB, p. 1).

Student achievement had always played a large part in the education of children. As standards-based education evolved, the method for measuring student achievement
changed from one in which students were measured against a normed group using norm-referenced exams to one in which student achievement was assessed based on what individual students should know and be able to do using criterion-reference based exams. The superintendent of School District #2 indicated that student achievement plays a large part in the functionality of schools. “My schools work hard at making sure that students are able to pass the tests. We make sure that all teaching centers [on] the standards and benchmarks” (SC, p. 1).

Principals at the three schools indicated commitment to developing instruction that enabled students to be successful on the high-stakes test. All three principals claimed to make great efforts to ensure that teachers and students had both resources and information necessary to ensure acceptable scores on the LEAP 21 assessment. This comment made by the principal at Chi High School is representative of the strategies used by principals to ensure that faculty members are aware of and are able to implement changes made to provisions of NCLB (2001).

We keep them [faculty] aware that we have to do several things to keep our SPS score up. One way we have tried to offset the scores by low performing students is to get those students who are scoring basic to move up to mastery or proficient levels. (PC, p. 11)

Parental perceptions of NCLB (2001) ranged from moderate understanding of parts of NCLB (2001) such as high stakes testing and teacher quality to minimal understanding based on the title of the law. The researcher found that many parents had misconceptions about the law or thought that the law would do things that it would not.
Some parents believed that the law meant that students could not be retained or that they would not fail grades.

A parent at Chi High School indicated “My son is not a particularly good student. He has failed several courses in the past, but with emphasis on NCLB (2001), he shouldn’t fail this year” (Pt1-C, p.2). Similarly, a parent interviewed at Beta was under the misconception that NCLB (2001) was designed to make sure that all students would be promoted from grade to grade. “I don’t like the idea that my son has to take the test, but it makes his teachers try harder to teach him what he needs to know” (Pt1-B, p. 1).

Student perceptions of NCLB (2001) were limited to terms of how NCLB (2001) would benefit them. Student participants knew little about components of the law other than high stakes-testing. Student interview responses focused on the testing component of NCLB (2001).

One student indicated that the school faculty and administration attempted to prepare students for success on the LEAP. A statement illustrating this student’s perceptions of the implementation of NCLB (2001) was “Our teachers keep telling us that we need to learn to write for the Graduate Exit Exam. We have been writing for everything since eighth grade” (St1-C, p. 2).

This student also described efforts made by the school as a part of the extended day program (school improvement plan) to increase student achievement on the LEAP. “We have intervention in the afternoon, and I do my homework during intervention. Intervention is designed for kids who can’t take the test. Teachers try to help them get ready. They work on computers and stuff” (St1-C, p. 2).
Interviews with students at Alpha High School revealed that of the eighth grade students interviewed, only three of them passed the LEAP the first time. The rest of them had passed during the retest in the summer. All students interviewed expressed negative feelings concerning the importance of the high stakes test to their future. A student at Alpha (St2-A, p. 4) indicated that most of the students had passed the LEAP with basic or approaching basic scores. The principal was concerned because as students failed the exam and were retained, the eighth grade class became larger and out of balance. “The more students [who] take the LEAP and don’t score basic, the more students are in the eighth grade, and the more teachers are needed for that grade, and it puts a strain on the teachers that I have” (PA, p. 3).

Administrators, faculty, staff, parents, and students were all aware of the amount of time that went into preparing for the LEAP exam. Faculty meetings at all three sites focused on the dissemination of state mandated activities designed to ensure that students were successful on the LEAP. Faculty meeting agendas, memos from principals, and handouts from the school district offices documented this. The superintendent of district number 2 (SC, p. 5) described a principal’s meeting in terms of “passing down mandates from the Department of Education to principals. The principals then take the information back to the schools so that teachers could institute these practices in their classes” (SC, p. 5).

Schools included activities designed to involve parents in the learning process for their student, but each of the schools experienced minimal success with these activities. Teacher interview statements and activity sign-in sheets indicated low parent turnout at
all sites. For instance, when asked if parents participated in parental involvement activities, the assistant principal at Chi responded,

No, parents do not attend parental involvement activities. I won't say never, because, they sometimes come up to help with parties. Ms. _________ had a really good parent, but she was not the norm. When I started teaching 23 years ago, we had parents who would come in and grade papers or sit with students to let them read, but because of confidentiality issues, we had to stop it. Parents would see other information and leave the school and tell it. It's not like it used to be--these young parents lack integrity. We need more parents to become involved in the school, but it is always the same ones. Last year, we had a math night up here and eight parents showed up, but it was eight parents whose students were on the [honor] roll. So, parents [who] need to come do not come (AP-C, p. 3).

Most of the teachers at the three sites used the Comprehensive Curriculum to create instruction for students. Teachers at the sites perceived varying degrees of usefulness for the program. For instance, the middle/high school science teacher at Alpha felt that overall comprehensive curriculum was useful and enabled teachers to create instruction more easily. He said, “As a new teacher, I used the Comprehensive Curriculum. It targets the GLEs specifically. In general, I use it because it is easier to use, and it is already aligned” (T2-A, p. 3).

A more experienced teacher, the eighth grade teacher at Alpha (T3-A, p. 2), and the middle grades teacher at Beta (T3-B, p.1) both indicated that although the Comprehensive Curriculum provided activities that were aligned to the GLEs, it was easier for them to create their own activities and assessments and align to the GLEs.
The middle grades teacher at Beta High School said,

I have been teaching 27 years, and I know what the standards and benchmarks are. I also know my students and the activities that are listed in the Comprehensive Curriculum do not work for them [my students], or we don't have the resources to do the activities. I tried using it [the Comprehensive Curriculum] when the school board introduced it, but it is just easier for me to do it [the activities] myself. (T3-B, p. 2)

Observation of this class confirmed that this teacher created her own lesson plans, and aligned instruction, objectives and assessment to the GLEs. Objectives were clearly stated prior to instruction and assessment included knowledge level and higher order thinking skills tasks as well as extended response questions (FNO, p. 11).

The eighth grade English teacher at Alpha also did not implement the Comprehensive Curriculum as written. She frequently substituted materials with which students were familiar (T3-A, p. 3).

*Implementation of Scientific Research-Based Strategies*

This section will address research question number 2: how did implementation of scientific research-based instructional strategies occur at each site? One of the components of NCLB (2001) is that schools utilize instructional strategies tested using a control group and proven successful with all learners. However, research by DeYoung (2001), Benard (2000) and others demonstrated that not all research-based strategies work for all students.
School Improvement Plans

Each school implemented strategies that had previously been included as part of the overall SIPs in the districts and which had been mandated for each individual school. Many of the activities included in the SIPs were mandated in the districts for implementation in all schools in the districts. Each SIP identified at least one scientific research-based strategy for reading and at least one strategy for mathematics.

SIPs for all three schools indicated that test scores for the previous year were used to determine the goals and objectives for the coming school year. Assessment-based data was used to determine strengths and weaknesses at each school, and scientific research-based instructional strategies were selected to accelerate or remediate all learners in the schools. The NCLB (2001) legislation required that students at each school must meet the cutoff score or, in the state of Louisiana, reach a performance level of basic on the LEAP exam in both reading and mathematics. All three schools in this study selected goals and objectives that emphasized student achievement in both mathematics and reading.

Strengths and weaknesses for each school were identified in several different ways. For instance, at Alpha strengths and weaknesses were identified by the District Assistance Team using the School Analysis Model (SAM). Strengths at Alpha included (a) staff development efforts that focused on student achievement activities, (b) a positive, safe learning environment, and (c) good instructional programs that focused on meeting students' needs (Alpha High SIP, p. 36-38).

Weaknesses at Alpha High School included (a) lack of variety in instructional strategies, (b) poor student writing skills, and (c) low level of academic value and parental involvement. Strengths at Alpha included faculty collaboration and principal
leadership (Alpha High SIP, p. 39-41). Goals and objectives were developed based on the strengths and weaknesses identified in the SAM. Goals and objectives for Alpha High School included the following:

Goal 1: To improve student achievement in English/Language Arts school-wide.

Objective 1: To increase Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores in grades 3, 5, and 7 and to increase student scores on LEAP 21 up one achievement level.

Research-based strategies utilized to increase English scores included writing across the curriculum. Faculty members were expected to include writing activities in all subjects.

Goal 2: To improve math achievement school-wide.

Objective 1: To increase test scores for students on both the ITBS and the LEAP 21 exams.

Research-based strategies utilized by Alpha High School included math instruction focusing on activity-based project learning. Teachers used *Everyday Mathematics®,* a discovery oriented, activity-based mathematics program used in Grades K-8 and facilitated in collaboration with a nearby post secondary institution.

Weaknesses at Beta High School included (a) lack of variety in instructional strategies, (b) poor student writing skills, and (c) low level of parental involvement. Strengths included faculty/principal relationships. Goals and objectives were developed based on student test scores. Scores at Beta High School included high percentages of students achieving below *approaching basic or unsatisfactory* on the state criterion referenced exams.
Goals and objectives for Beta include the following:

Goal 1: To improve math achievement school-wide.

Objective 1: To increase Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores in grades 3, 5, and 7 and to increase student scores for 17% of fourth grade students to basic or above on LEAP 21 Mathematics.

Research-based strategies utilized to increase mathematics scores included extended day program. The Title I SIP offered tutoring through both afternoon and Saturday programs. A secondary strategy included informational workshops for parents about LEAP 21 and ITBS test results.

Goal 2: To improve English/Language Arts achievement school-wide.

Objective 1: To increase test scores for students on both the ITBS and the LEAP 21 exams.

At Chi High School, strengths and weaknesses were identified by the utilization of the data comprehensive needs assessment. The data comprehensive needs assessment was similar to the SAM assessment. Strengths at Chi High School included (a) a good discipline policy and (b) a supportive principal (Chi High SIP, p. 27).

Weaknesses at Chi High School include (a) low performance in reading, (b) poor student writing skills, (c) low performance in writing, (d) low student expectations, and (e) lack of parental involvement (Chi High SIP, p. 27-28). Goals and objectives were developed based on the strengths and weaknesses.

Goals and objectives for Chi High School included the following:

Goal 1: To improve student achievement in reading school-wide.
Objective 1: To increase Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores in grades 3, 5, and 7 and to increase student scores on LEAP 21 up one achievement level.

The research-based strategies used to increase student achievement in Reading and English/Language Arts were extensive reading which integrated *Accelerated Reader* and *Project Read*. The librarian administered the S.T.A.R. diagnostic test for reading and determined the baseline score for all students. These tests were administered periodically, and their scores compared to determine growth in student reading achievement.

Goal 2: To improve math achievement school-wide.

Objective 1: To increase test scores for students on both the ITBS and the LEAP 21 exams.

Research-based strategies utilized by Chi High School included *Focus on Meaning for Mathematics* so that students were able to answer open-ended mathematics questions along with cooperative learning and hands on experiences in mathematics. The *Addison-Wesley Inventory of Math Skills* was used to measure student progress in mathematics.

All schools incorporated several programs. Faculty members indicated that many of the programs were selected by the district and all schools in the district had to implement them. A review of SIPs confirmed that many of the research-based instructional strategies in the schools were strategies being implemented district-wide regardless of success at the school. Although research indicated that uniform programs do not work well for all schools, none of the schools in this study implemented innovative strategies unique to their specific circumstances. Even in the schools with
predominantly Black populations there were no strategies implemented that had proven particularly successful for Black learners.

*Behavior Management Programs*

Each school SIP indicated problems in varying degrees with behavior management. Each school developed some form of behavior management program to create a productive learning experience for all children. All of the behavior management programs were similar but not exactly alike. The central office in district 1 directed all schools in that district to implement some form of positive behavior system while district two provided no directions for the implementation of any specific system. Schools implementing these programs could customize them to fit their particular schools.

Alpha and Beta High Schools, located in School District #1, were directed to use the positive behavior system but were permitted to implement it in their own way. The system was designed to promote positive behaviors for all students by awarding appropriate behaviors. Beta High School implemented the system using the school store while Alpha gave rewards at the end of the school year. The system was designed to promote positive behaviors for all students. The program was highly successful at Beta High School as indicated by this statement made by the principal.

The Trojan Buck store is not supported by our Title I budget as money is limited.

The faculty and I support the store. Because the store was so successful for students, I began to stock it with small gifts for the teachers, as well. (PB, p. 2)

The principal at Alpha High School indicated that students were rewarded for appropriate behaviors at the end of the school, but he also indicated few office referrals for major student infractions or inappropriate student behaviors. "We have very few discipline
problems. Most of the problems that we have proceed from tardiness, dress code violations, and back talk to teachers. We do not tolerate that” (PA, p. 3).

The SIP for Chi High School indicated that one weakness of Chi High School was behavior management in the school. The assistant principal served as the liaison for discipline and revealed that there was a discipline plan for the school. The comprehensive needs assessment indicated that the discipline plan was a strength for the school. The assistant principal indicated that the school utilized the Lee Canter Assertive Discipline plan. Teachers were using different forms of the assertive discipline plan, but the assistant principal stated that inconsistency in implementation of the plan caused it to be less successful. For instance, the assistant principal stated,

The greatest problem at the school is discipline. We have five steps in the discipline plan. We institute in-school suspension called Teaching Exceptional Social Skills, or TESS; Saturday detention; or corporal punishment. The most drastic measures are suspension and expulsion. We have few students who are suspended and even less are expelled. (AC, p. 1)

Beta and Alpha high schools indicated less of a discipline problem than that found at Chi High School. Although Beta High School utilized the positive behavior system (PBS), the principal indicated “PBS usually works with students, but we still have students who will be suspended” (PB, p. 3).

In an interview, one Beta High School student, said, “I get in trouble a lot, and sometimes I get in-school suspension” When asked what he was in trouble for, he said that he usually got in trouble for talking, playing in class, or having an attitude with the teachers. (St2-B, p. 3)
This statement supports data that would indicate that small rural schools are more likely to develop effective behavior management plans that include parent input. Parents played a part in behavior management at all three schools. Students, faculty and administrators indicated that parents usually came to the school when contacted about behavior problems. The fifth grade teacher at Alpha High School indicated that parents came to school when their students were in trouble. The behavior management plan at each of the three schools included parent/student/teacher contracts which described consequences for inappropriate behaviors and which parents, students, faculty and administrators signed. Contracts were then returned to the school and filed in the counselor’s office. (Student handbook analyses).

Instructional Strategies

All three schools integrated a wide range of instructional strategies in addition to research-based instructional strategies identified in the SIP. Strategies identified first are those that were identified in the SIP as scientific research-based instructional strategies.

Directed instruction. One program common to all three schools was Directed Instruction (DI). Each school had DI at the beginning of the day, and each elementary class taught reading during this period. The secondary schools did not incorporate DI. Faculty members felt DI to be successful in elementary grades. Most fourth graders were able to make basic or approaching basic on the LEAP exam. Moreover, most students were able to meet the cutoff score successfully for the mathematics portion of the LEAP as well (FNO, Document analysis, p. 5). The third/fourth grade teacher at Beta High School stated, “Because of our unique circumstances, DI allows me to teach all of my students in both the third and fourth grade the same concepts” (T1-B, p. 3).
Not all participants, however, felt that DI was successful. The fourth grade teacher at Chi High School stated,

DI is knowledge level learning and students simply memorize information. I incorporate it into my instruction at the time that we do the Problem of the Day, Oral Language of the Day, and the Word of the Day. Students do learn the material, but they do not necessarily learn to use the knowledge at higher levels of learning. Students learn the material necessary for success on the LEAP exam, but they forget what they have learned as soon as the exam is over. (T4-C, p. 3)

*Accelerated reader.* The Accelerated Reader® program was used in all three schools as a means of increasing reading comprehension skills for elementary students. All students between grades Pk-5 were allowed to spend designated time in a computer laboratory with a computer laboratory teacher (FN Beta High School, November 9; Alpha High School, April 26; Chi High School, May 7) where students participated in interactive learning activities. Students in grades K-5 spent 30 minutes a day in the computer laboratories where software was used to enhance learning and test preparation.

The libraries in all three schools contained color coded Accelerated Reader® books, but Alpha High School and Beta High School had fewer books than Chi High School. The Title I coordinator at Chi (AP-C, p.7) revealed that the books for the Accelerated Reader® system at their school were purchased with Title I funds, but the librarian ordered and maintained the books for the library.

*Computer-assisted instruction.* All three schools integrated computer assisted instruction (CAI) at some level. CAI was indicated as a component of each school’s SIP, and most of the elementary students at all three schools were successful in using the
programs for either remediation or acceleration. CAI was also used at all three schools as a means of test preparation for the LEAP exam (RJE, p. 10). In some schools students were able to bypass filtering software and install programs other than educational software on the machines.

All three schools used Louisiana Practice Assessment/Strengthen Skills (PASS) program, an online test practice program supported by the Louisiana Department of Education, for preparation for the LEAP. Students spent the time in the computer laboratory reinforcing learning in either mathematics or language arts. The fourth grade teachers at Alpha and Chi high schools described test items on the program that were aligned with the format of test items on the LEAP. All schools in the study incorporated software as a means of reinforcement and preparation for the LEAP exam. The fourth grade teacher at Alpha High School stated,

I was concerned about the LEAP exam when I began teaching the fourth grade, but the practice tests that are included on the software installed on the computers in the computer laboratory make it easy to prepare students for the test. (T1A, p.2)

The fourth grade teacher at Chi High School said,

Students are not used to writing short answers so the programs installed on the computers in the laboratory make it easy to ensure that students recognize the format used on the test. I just don’t like the way that students learn the material just for taking the test. (T3-C, p.2)

Instructional software selected by the state is aligned to state standards and benchmarks. This alignment allows schools to determine individual student strengths and
weaknesses and create differentiated activities to address those weaknesses. Students were allowed to work at their own pace on the computer-assisted learning activities.

All schools used a wide variety of software to support student preparation for the LEAP exam and provide computer laboratory time for student learners in the elementary grades. Test preparation software was available for secondary learners, but its use was optional (RJE, p. 11). Software and hardware in the computer laboratory at Chi High School was exceptional. The Title I coordinator explained,

I review software and select pieces that I think will be most effective for our students. Most software provides opportunities for students to advance in skills.

Once I have selected the software, I present it to the faculty and we vote on it. It is then purchased with Title I Monies. (APC, p.6)

The principal of Chi High School said, “We purchase most of the software in the computer laboratory using Title I monies. However, I have purchased some software with my $20 per pupil general fund money” (PC, p. 3).

The computer laboratory coordinator at Alpha High School described her function as liaison for technology professional development. “I coordinate visits to the computer laboratory for our elementary students. High School students rarely come to the computer laboratory” (FGTA, p. 4).

In addition to software, observations were made relative to hardware. Many of the computers were outdated or had been refurbished. At Beta High School, several of the computers were running older versions of the Windows Operating systems. At Alpha High School there were several computers in each classroom, but students in the two
focus groups and individual interviews said that most of the computers did not work. One eleventh grade black female said,

The only computers available for our use are those in the Business Applications classroom. If teachers ask us to write reports, we have to do them at home if we have computers or go somewhere to find them. Sometimes the Business Applications teacher will let us use the computers in her classroom to do assignments. (St2-A, p. 4)

The technology coordinator stated that the previous year, the school had received new computers, and the old ones were stored. The principal decided to have the stored computers refurbished and placed in classrooms. This action led to the placement of multiple computer stations in all classrooms at Alpha High School.

Curriculum. Curriculum in all three schools was test driven and was mandated by the state. Low SPS in each school provided the opportunity for the schools to have additional assistance in meeting the needs of all students. For instance, all schools had training in the use of the Comprehensive Curriculum. Based on interviews with faculty and analysis of lesson plans, the researcher concluded that all instruction was aligned to the Comprehensive Curriculum. The fourth grade teacher at Alpha High School stated,

When the Comprehensive Curriculum first came out, I used it just as it was written. As a new teacher, getting licensure by alternate certification, I had never taught before. I did not know how to write lesson plans, and it was easier to use the Comprehensive Curriculum. (T1-A, p.5)

The science teacher at Alpha High School was working on alternate certification during the data collection period. He said,
Well, see now in Louisiana, as you well know, we have to follow the Comprehensive Curriculum. In addition, as a new teacher, I use the comprehensive curriculum. It targets the GLEs specifically, and I try some peer tutoring as I can. But in general, I use the Comprehensive Curriculum because it is simple to use (T2-A, p.1).

This interviewee also indicated that selected activities sometimes were too advanced for students, and he had to find activities that would allow him to establish prior knowledge about something with which students were familiar. Principals at the schools revealed that most of the teachers were consistent in teaching the Comprehensive Curriculum.

The principal at Chi High School stated, “Most of them [teachers] are trying to abide by the Comprehensive Curriculum where we have to do the activities and we have to do the GLEs and it helps them when they list their GLEs, and their activities” (PC, p. 5).

There were teachers, however, who did not find the Comprehensive Curriculum simple to use. For instance, the second grade teacher at Chi High School indicated,

They gave us the Comprehensive Curriculum at the beginning of school and said this is what you have to do. I have to know what I am doing ahead of time, and we just got a new math series, so I had a few days to learn this curriculum and then we had that new math series, so I am learning with the students. (T1-C, p. 1)

The eighth grade English teacher at Alpha High School said, “The Comprehensive Curriculum does not really work for my students. It is easier for me to create lesson plans and align them to the GLEs” (T4-A, p. 2).
Analysis of lesson plans indicated that all teachers made an effort to align lesson plans with the GLEs and to make sure instructional objectives, assessments, and activities were aligned with the LEAP. This was one example of test-driven instruction. Another example of test-driven instruction was the use of the Comprehensive Curriculum. While lesson plans indicated that instruction was aligned with benchmarks and standards, observations of instruction demonstrated that faculty might not follow written plans.

Faculty indicated during a faculty focus group “some activities, such as field trips, are included in instruction but are not aligned to the actual objectives. Field trips, movies, and other activities are frequently used as motivation and incentive for appropriate behaviors” (FGTA, p. 2).

Teaching styles. Observations of instruction demonstrated several different personalities and teaching styles. At Alpha High School, teaching styles were very diverse. The fourth grade teacher conducted a lesson that employed several constructivist instructional strategies. Students were engaged in reading a book titled, The Fourth Grade Nothing. Students were allowed to read the story aloud. Once the story had been read aloud, she incorporated different activities that required students to use higher order thinking skills to respond. Students were engaged from the time the class began until it ended. In the interview following the observation, the teacher provided further insight into her teaching methods.

I chose this book, because this is the fourth grade, the students in the story were getting out of school as well, and it would allow the students to relate the story to themselves. I found the book at www.half.com and purchased one for each of my students. (T1-A, p. 4)
An observation of a tenth grade social studies class at Alpha High School revealed students doing nothing and the teacher simply sitting until class was over. No objectives were written or identified, and students were off-task during the period and spent the hour talking loudly. The teacher later explained, “They [students] quit working after the LEAP exam. I can’t wait until school is out” (RJE, p. 4).

Across the hall in the senior English class, the chemistry class, and the business applications class, students were busily engaged in learning activities. The senior English class was taking a test, the chemistry class was reviewing for the final exam, and the business application students were engaged in doing research on career choices and the colleges they were interested in attending. The teacher then had them compute their GPAs and determine requirements for entry into their selected institutions.

The eighth grade English teacher indicated during her classroom observation that, “Students learn better when they are allowed to choose the kinds of activities that they are allowed to do. So when we do specific assignments, I give them a choice of activities for each concept” (T3-A, p. 3). The participant also said during the interview, “Students are not like they were when I first began to teach. I am going to finish this year up and retire again. There is too much paperwork and too much pressure” (T3-A, p. 3).

At Chi High School and Alpha High Schools, there were a number of diverse personalities and teaching styles. Classroom observations and individual interviews indicated that teachers who were more authoritarian seemed to have fewer discipline and classroom management problems. Student test scores in these classes were higher on the average in the elementary grades. For instance, the second grade teacher at Chi High School revealed,
My expectations are exceptionally high. They will learn at high levels of performance in my classroom. If they don’t learn anything in any other grade, they will have learned it in the second grade because I think that all children can learn, and because I have a small class. (T1-C, p. 6)

Classroom observations revealed that teachers who demanded that all students perform at high levels were more successful. Observations in the eighth grade English language arts class showed students on-task and focused on activities. The eighth grade teacher stated,

When students come to my class on grade level, I expect them to move ahead one grade level. That’s an expectation that I have and will continue to have. All students don’t function well under these expectations, but it is my job to make sure that all my students are successful. (T3-A, p. 4)

Teachers in these two classrooms had high expectations and demanded appropriate behaviors for students. Consequences and rewards for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors were posted on the walls. During the time that the researcher was in each school, consistency in implementing the rules and consequences was noted. The eighth grade teacher at Alpha High School used the assertive discipline method instead of the positive discipline method. The fourth grade teacher at Alpha High School used the positive discipline method and students had tickets. However, in both classes student behaviors were exemplary.

In contrast to the authoritarian style of discipline, the more democratic high school classes at Chi High School were less productive. The high school science teacher was a constructivist teacher but was unable to maintain student attention. During the
observation, students were off-task to the point that she wound up sending them to the hall (T3-C, p. 7).

In an interview with this teacher, the researcher found that students who were not self-motivated were likely to be unsuccessful in her class. The science teacher explained, “After the LEAP exam, it is very difficult to hold their attention, and students frequently cause problems” (T3-C, p. 4). The teacher incorporated a wide assortment of activities including integrated instruction, hands-on activities, and cooperative learning activities, but the students were often inattentive or off-task.

Lesson plans written by the science teacher provided evidence of alignment across standards and benchmarks, assessments, and activities. Activities were designed to enable students to develop their own instruction and included higher order thinking skills. This included discussion focused on concepts and ideas that students were already familiar with. This establishment of prior knowledge gave students something to build their new knowledge on (RJE, p. 9).

The researcher observed an eighth grade mathematics class that appeared to be chaotic and out of control. In reality, the math teacher provided background information and allowed students to create their own responses to queries. Following discussion and guided practice, students were allowed to engage in reinforcement activities designed to reiterate instruction of specific sequential mathematics concepts. This observation demonstrated how teachers integrated higher order thinking skill activities into their instruction (FNO, p. 9).

Diverse instructional strategies were utilized at Beta High School as well. An observation of the social studies teacher, a White female who had completed alternate
certification, revealed no use of variety in instructional strategies. Five students were asleep during the class, and no student was actively engaged. In the interview following the class, the participant stated, “In my content area, it is very difficult to create instruction other than lecture, and it is right after lunch and the students are sleepy” (T2-B, p. 6).

There were four computers located in this classroom behind two pallets of books and resource materials that the participant was previewing because of her responsibility as a member of the district textbook selection committee. The classroom was filled with boxes and books and students had to find places to sit.

While the lesson utilized only lecture as a means of instruction, the concepts of monarchy, anarchy, and democracy were discussed and the concept was related to current events in Iraq. The teacher also discussed the premise of supply and demand as a reason for the current events of the day. Her lesson included applying the concepts being taught to the international political and diplomatic scene, but students did not participate or provide feedback.

In the student focus group at this school, a tenth grade male student confirmed, “That is what we do everyday. We never use the computers, and we don’t do anything but listen. I always go to sleep” (FGSB, p. 3). A tenth grade female student added, “Sometimes in civics it is better because we get to vote” (FGSB, p. 3).

Beta High School had three science teachers during the year this study was conducted. The principal stated, “Our science teacher left on the first day of school to take a better job. His substitute stayed a little more than two months. We are hoping to
get a replacement today” (PB, p. 2). The principal revealed that several changes occurred due to budget constraints as illustrated by the following:

As stated in yesterday’s journal entry, the high school faculty is very young. The science teacher began teaching on today, and this is his second semester in the classroom. He is not familiar with procedures at the school or with the school culture. In order to meet the mandates of TOPS, the school is involved in the Louisiana Virtual Schools program to insure that students are able to access instruction in foreign language and fine arts. Additionally, the school shares a counselor and an art teacher with two other schools. Prior to the incorporation of LVS in the school, the school had established a partnership with Southern University in Shreveport, and the university sent teachers to the school to provide instruction in foreign languages and fine arts. This partnership ended because of the loss of faculty at the University. (RJB, p. 5)

In spite of difficulties with the change in faculty, students were engaged in creating activities for the regional science fair. The faculty replacement for science had just graduated in December from a nearby postsecondary institution. He was not familiar with the procedure for the science fair or for creating effective lesson plans. The business applications teacher and the middle grades teacher had agreed to mentor him during the science fair process. Students went to the business applications teacher to develop hypotheses and conduct research for the project.

Beta High School was unique in that it was the only school in the district to have multi-age classes. Small enrollment resulted in the loss of faculty members. To keep the school open, it was necessary for elementary school teachers to double up on the grades
that they taught. Observation of the third and fourth grade class revealed the teacher
teaching both third and fourth graders the same content in a math class. She
incorporated a variety of activities that addressed a diverse range of learning styles, and
students worked in cooperative groups. The third and fourth grade teacher had taught at
this school for 28 years and had attended school there. She was a licensed teacher who
completed a traditional teaching program. She said, “We have lost several really good
teachers, but the teachers on the elementary wing are the best that there are” (T2-B, p. 3).

_Differentiated instruction._ Alpha and Chi High School both demonstrated
instances in which teachers developed instruction that would meet the needs of all
students. All three schools included students with exceptional needs in classes, and
teacher expectations were that these students would also be successful.

Following is an example of differentiated instruction at Chi High School:

Differentiated instruction was taking place in the computer laboratory
because students were working on different activities, and students were able to
move forward in their studies individually. One child was not on-task, and the
teacher moved the child to the front computer near her. This child was quickly
brought on-task and completed the activity. This class was in the computer
laboratory for 30 minutes. Each class spends 30 minutes a day in the computer
laboratory with the instructor. (RJB, p. 5)

The fourth grade teacher at Alpha High school also included differentiated
instruction in her classroom. Observation of a differentiated assignment was recorded by
the researcher. In addition to students of diverse races, this class included two students
with exceptionalities. Both students were Black females and were receiving differentiated instruction (RJA- p. 2).

Observation of the third and fourth grade teacher at Beta High School indicated the integration of several different instructional strategies as well as differentiated instruction (RJE, p. 3). The teacher included cooperative learning, integration across content areas, and oral presentations (T1-B, p. 3).

**Technology**

All schools in the case incorporated technology at different levels. SIPs indicated the ratio of computers to classrooms in each school. Alpha High School had an average of six computers per classroom; Chi High School had an average of two computers per classroom, but had three separate computer laboratories; and Beta High School had an average of two computers per classroom. Faculty and administrators at Alpha High School indicated that there were computers in every classroom but students provided information that was different from the information received from teachers. Students asserted that although the computers were in the classes, they did not all work (St1-A, p. 3).

An eighth grade student said, “Sometimes Ms.____ gives us assignments so that we can go to Louisiana PASS, but on Fridays we use the computers to play games” (FGST, p. 4). When observing this teacher’s classroom, the researcher observed 12 computers in the classroom, but students were using only four. The teacher confirmed that not all of the computers worked, but that the district computer technician had been asked to come and look at them. During the time that data collection occurred, the computers were not repaired. At a follow-up visit in August, the computers had been
repaired, but were still using the Windows '98 operating system, which restricted the functionality of the machines.

The science teacher also integrated technology into the classroom, but only rarely, as there were only two computers there. During his interview, he remarked, “I try to bring natural things in or we go outside and observe nature. “Getting up and going outside helps them to relieve some extra energy” (T2-A, p. 5). There was also an overhead projector in the science classroom as in all of the classrooms. The researcher did not see anyone using the overhead projectors during any observations.

The only class observed integrating technology was the fifth grade class at Alpha High School. The Thursday before Mother’s Day the researcher observed students creating Mother’s Day cards. Students designed the cards by showing the teacher what they wanted printed on the card. The teacher then used Publisher to create the card and print it. The lesson plan review did not indicate alignment between the activity and any GLE or objective for that day.

Although the teacher did all of the computer work, there were three computers in the class, two for student projects and one for teacher use. The teacher being observed also had a laptop and Infocus projector that she had received upon completing an INtegrating TECHnology into Student Centered Learning (INTECH) professional development activity. The students used the setup to complete a mathematics activity, but its use appeared to be more busy work than instruction.

As discussed earlier, much of instruction in all three schools was test-driven. Instructional strategies for test preparation included the use of software for computer laboratories, the use of directed instruction in the morning, the use of quick write
activities for all content areas, and the use of assignments that included test items similar to those used for standardized tests. Extended day programs included test preparation and remediation for students who were having difficulties meeting the requirements of their schools. These programs included tutoring programs at both the elementary and secondary levels. Title I supported these programs, and each of the school sites used Title I funds to support the salary of a teacher for extended programs and a Title I computer laboratory.

The principal of Alpha High School indicated that there were two computer laboratories in his school: the business applications class and the elementary Title I computer laboratory. As with the other schools, elementary students spent at least 30 minutes per day in test preparation and reinforcement in the laboratory. During the data collection period, there were several computers inoperable in the elementary laboratory. Students participating in the student focus group indicated that there were few working computers, and the one media cart present in the school (small television and computer InFocus setup) was used for compressed video instruction in foreign languages and fine arts.

The principal of Beta High School, in discussing her school, indicated that the teacher in the Title I computer laboratory was paid with Title I funds (PB, p. 3). Moreover, the principals at Beta and Alpha high schools confirmed that computer laboratory teachers’ salaries came from Title I funds. In observing both the school computer laboratories, it was noted that computers were not obsolete; many of them were not new but refurbished. All three laboratories were equipped with Dell computers,
suggesting that they were purchased through the bid process, and Dell won the contract with the refurbished machines.

In previewing software on the machines, it was observed that computers in all of the three schools had A+ Learning software installed along with a shortcut to Louisiana PASS. "The computer laboratory at Chi High School has a wide and varied assortment of other forms of educational software that," said the computer laboratory coordinator, "is used to provide opportunities for challenging assignments for those students who achieve at the proficient level or who have been identified as gifted" (AP-C, p. 12). In the Chi laboratory there were no games installed on the machines, and a filter would not allow students to go to inappropriate websites. Students were monitored at all times, and student scores produced by learning activities were used to determine instruction for students.

At Beta High School the software on the computers in the elementary computer laboratory included several learning programs for students, but there were also several hunting games, clue games, and other non-learning games installed on the machines. Students spent 30 minutes on the computer engaged in test preparation programs and specific learning activities. The presence of non-academic software was related to the fact that the computers had been moved to the laboratory from another school. The high school laboratory at Beta High School was very small. The high school laboratory, which was used only as a virtual classroom, enabled students eligible for the Louisiana (TOPS) program to meet requirements for scholarships from the Department of Education by fulfilling the foreign language and fine arts courses requirements. During the data collection period, students were preparing for a science fair. In order to do researches
assigned by the teacher, students went to the business applications classroom where the teacher allowed them to use computers there.

*Parental Involvement in the Schools*

Research by Jeynes (2003), Fege and Smith (2002) stated that parental involvement and clear collaborative communication between schools and parents is a positive indicator for academic achievement of at risk populations. Benard (2004a, 2004b) low SES and minority status as characteristics of at risk students. This section discusses forms and degrees of parental involvement in the three schools.

All three schools indicated difficulties with parental involvement. For instance, the principal at Chi High School stated,

Parental involvement is a major problem here at school. But we do have programs. ________ comes in two or three times last year. I don't know if you know him, but he is over some troubled children’s homes in Shreveport. He's from Minden. He comes in once a year and speaks to our parents. We try to have a math night and a reading night for the parents. We don't have a lot of meetings--our PTO was going through a crisis this year so we didn’t have a lot of meetings. But we have the Christmas program and the end of the year programs. We don't have a lot of parent activities but the math night, the reading night, and the night that we have with ________ are probably our biggest parental activities to draw parents in. (PC, p. 10)
Additionally, the principal at Alpha stated,

We need more parents to become involved in the school, but it is always the same ones. Last year, we had a math night up here and eight parents showed up, but it was eight parents whose students were on the honor roll. (PA, p. 3)

*Formal communications.* In discussing formal communication methods with parents, all three schools indicated this as an area of weakness. Letters requesting conferences were usually mailed while other information for parents including programs, activities and events were sent home by students. However, observation of these practices showed that announcements and notes did not necessarily reach parents because students frequently threw them in the trash or on the ground; left them in the halls, on the desks or in other places; or did not take them out of book bags. In an interview at Alpha High School, one student readily admitted, “I don’t hardly ever take home notes” (St1-A, p. 4).

The principal at Alpha High School stated,

Students in the high school rarely take the notes home, but teachers in the elementary school provide incentives for taking the notes home and bringing them back. This causes them to have a better rate of delivery than the high school.

(PA, p. 5)

Staff at Beta High School stated, “Most of the students here have relatives that work here. If there is information that needs to be communicated to homes or parents, the relative who works here relays the information to parents” (T2-B, p. 5). During an interview, one student went to the cafeteria to get her permission slip signed by her mother. Another student called home, and his mother told him to get his aunt, a teacher in the elementary school, to sign it for her.
At Chi High School, the secretary provided a list of 911 addresses that they used for mailing out announcements, letters to parents, and event notices, but the school had much the same results as Alpha and Beta high schools. The secretary provided the researcher with the list of 911 mailing addresses to send out permission forms for interview and focus group participants. More than 75% of the letters were returned undeliverable. When the researcher discussed the return of the letters with the assistant principal, she said, “This is what usually happens. We don't usually use the mailing method to contact parents. We see parents at games and other places, or the principal drives to their houses” (AP-C, p. 12). Personnel at all three schools indicated that they rarely see parents unless there are problems with the students at the schools.

*Informal communications.* Even though parents may not come to school, there were still instances when teachers and parents were able to talk. Because of the tightness of the community, most parents knew the teachers who taught their children, and had attended the school, been taught by the teachers at the school, or had gone to school with the teachers at the school. They saw the teachers at church, at Wal-Mart, at basketball games, at track meets or at the gas station. Although teachers could not tell parents exact assignments and test scores, they could tell them if there were academic problems with students and make suggestions for assistance, if needed. They also could discuss any discipline problems with students. This contact provided opportunities for teachers and administrators to make appointments to meet with faculty who needed to speak with parents (T2-A, p. 2; T1-B, p. 2; PB, p. 2; St1-C, p. 2; Ptl-C, p.2).

Principals at Alpha and Chi high schools indicated that they made phone calls if parents were needed at the school. The district where Chi High School was located
employed a resource officer who visited all schools in the district. The resource officer was familiar with everyone in the district and often went to students’ homes to contact parents there. If there were other difficulties involved in meeting with parents, the resource officer would provide transportation for parents to come to the school.

*Activities and events.* Parent activities and events were very different for all three schools. Interviews at Alpha and Chi high schools indicated that parent activities were determined by the Regional Service Center for their district. Alpha High School had a wide variety of parent activities including Family Science Night, Family Math Night, and the Spring Fling. Chi High School conducted these activities as well. Both schools indicated that few parents attended the activities. Sign-in sheets for the Family Math Night at Chi High School indicated that seven parents out of a student body of 340 attended the activity. A sign-in sheet for the Family Science Night indicated that, outside of faculty involved in the activity, only one parent attended.

Beta High School had also attempted to implement family night activities but had poor parent participation. Beta High school instituted other programs that would familiarize parents with testing methods, procedures, and strategies for motivating students (PB, p. 6; T1-B, p. 6; Pt1-B, p. 3). A second activity conducted at Beta included an invited motivational speaker who addressed parents and students about planned success. In terms of attendance, neither activity was successful.

One of the most common parent-teacher organizations is the PTA or PTO, usually an organization developed to support the success and growth of schools. It is an active reminder of the collaborative efforts of parents and teachers who work together to
improve academic success at a school. Principals at the three schools provided different impressions of parent-teacher organizations in the schools.

Alpha High School had no parent-teacher organization. The principal said that parents did not attend well, and it was difficult for them to get parents to sponsor the group or work with the group. Moreover, faculty did not want to spend time at school for these activities (PA, p. 3).

The principal at Chi said that they had a PTO at one time, but there were some discrepancies with the bookkeeping and other policies, and at the time of this study, the PTO had disbanded (PC, p. 10). Beta had also disbanded its parent-teacher organization. The principal cited parental disharmony as a reason that they no longer had a parent-teacher organization (PB, p.4). Parents interviewed at the school indicated “personality clashes between the parents and the principal” as reason for lack of parent interest in the school. A parent of a tenth grade student, stated, “When the previous principal was here, we had all kinds of activities for students, and the parents planned most of them. Ms. _____ wants everyone to know she is the boss, and no one wants to work with her” (Pt1-B, p. 4).

An interview with one of the older faculty members confirmed that there was a different atmosphere and culture in the school since the change in administration. Statements included in the SIP as weaknesses supported this. One statement written by a faculty member suggested that, “The principal fails to implement rules, regulations, and policies that she herself has written.” Another statement made was that there was a “lack of discipline in the school” (FON, Document analysis, School improvement plan).
Individual teachers also incorporated plans for encouraging parental involvement in their classes. The second grade teacher at Chi High School employed a method called Fun Fridays,

At the end of the year, I send a letter home and ask for parent volunteers and they come on Friday—I call it Fantastic Fun Friday—and they can share an activity, they can read a story, or they can share something about their career. This year has seen the most involvement that I have experienced, and I couldn’t fit them all into April so we stretched it out to May. The first parent read a book of poems, and then she helped them make a bookmark. The second guest was the chief of police, and he came and talked about being a policeman. Then another parent did a project that talked about bananas and ice cream, and they made banana splits. (T1-C, p. 6)

Opportunities like this allowed parents to share information and become a part of the learning process. These activities were used as story starters and creative learning activities.

*Perceptions of parent role in student instruction.* Participant groups perceived the roles of parents in the learning process for students differently. For instance, Pt1 at Chi High School was frequently available should the school contact her. The student from this family indicated that his guardian, his sister, attended all activities held at the school. This involvement, however, was not the norm.

Parents did not participate in parental involvement activities for several reasons including lack of time and lack of understanding. Many parents had more than one job and some of them had not finished school.
The fifth grade teacher at Alpha High School said,

Parents don’t usually come to school for meetings, not even for parent-teacher conferences. The parents that you really need to see don’t come to the meetings. Parents do not care, or parents do not feel that school is that important. (T4-A, p. 3)

Many of the interviews with teachers about parental involvement indicated this was an area of weakness for the schools. The third and fourth grade teacher at Beta High School summed up why parents were not involved in these three schools. Some were working at “the mill” or “the chicken plant,” and many of them were just not able to attend. The participant said that many parents not only worked one job but sat with the elderly or other second jobs. They did not have time to come to the school. “They were too busy living life” (T1-B, p.3).

The second grade teacher at Chi High School indicated that parents were territorial and many times did not collaborate or cooperate well with parental involvement efforts. She indicated that teachers encouraged parental involvement, but many times efforts were unsuccessful. For instance,

At the beginning of the year, I speak to all my parents and let them know what my expectations are. I also tell them that if they have questions, please call me at home. I feel that communication between parents will be a better factor if the kids know that their parents are involved. We don’t have a whole lot of parental involvement. (T1-C, p. 6)

The teacher indicated that she had trouble with parents when she first began teaching at Chi High School.
Because I am Black, when I first came I had a lot of problems because the previous second grade teacher was White (sic), so I stayed in the office a lot because of something that I said or did or was supposed to have done. I really didn’t care for these parents up here, because I live in ______. It took me a long time to get parents involved in something, because they had this attitude that they didn’t like me. I had a hard time getting parents involved because they did not like me because I was an outsider, but now it is getting better. (T1-C, p. 2)

The third and fourth grade teacher and the middle grade teacher at Beta High School confirmed these statements. The third and fourth grade teacher had always been at Beta High School first as a student and then as a teacher. She said,

Our community is very small. We have no problems talking to parents, and every student has someone [who] either works in the school or knows someone who works in the school. So when we need to contact students we are able to do so by telling someone to tell someone. (T1-B, p. 4)

The middle grade teacher said that she had several problems contacting parents. “I do not live in this community, and I really feel like an outsider. I come to the school, and I do my job, and I go home at 3 p.m. I live in ______, so I don’t see parents at the school. Parents do know what my expectations are, and I send home a letter at the beginning of the school year” (T3-B, p. 3).

Teacher Quality

This section speaks to teacher quality in the three schools. It includes information collected from the Louisiana Department of Education database. It also includes professional development information for each school and a description of how teachers
enter the teaching profession. Darling-Hammond (1999) and Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) addressed the effect of teachers who enter the profession through alternate certification. Other research indicates that teachers who are less qualified are more likely to teach in schools with high populations of low SES and minority students.

**Faculty Quality**

In all three of the schools, more than 80% of the teachers had at least 17 years of experience, or had been in their respective teaching positions five years or longer. All three schools indicated highly qualified faculty teaching most core courses. See Table 6.

**Alternate Licensure**

Some members of faculty at all three schools had been enrolled in or were enrolled in an alternative licensure program. At Chi High school one teacher was seeking licensure in special education. He was in the process of completing the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program (Latah). At the end of the study, 100% (22) of faculty were certified.

A teacher at Alpha High School had recently completed alternate certification in special education but was teaching fourth grade at the time of the study. Teachers who had obtained licensure through the alternative pathway admitted dependence on using the Comprehensive Curriculum or textbooks and textbook resources for instructional strategies (T1-A, p. 1). For instance,

I just got certified last year. I taught special ed for five years. I wasn’t certified; I had a degree in finance. So, you know, I worked here while I finished school, and when I got certified they had to move me to my area and that was elementary. So I moved to the second grade and hopefully I will stay here.
The high school science teacher also obtained licensure through the alternative certification pathway. The participant revealed,

I started out as a minister, but I went back to school to earn a degree as a teacher. Because I come out of a communication background, I spend a lot of time preparing students so that they can stand up before a group and communicate their thoughts and ideas. I live in _____, so I earned my degree at Louisiana Tech University through alternative certification. (T2-A, p. 1)

District and School Relationships

Superintendents in both districts identified procedures for principals’ meetings. Each met frequently with principals at the central office to disseminate information relative to instruction in the district. Both superintendents stated that their districts were experiencing severe financial difficulties. One superintendent revealed,

I was superintendent before, and I retired and went back to being a principal. I always felt that I was a better principal than superintendent. The school board called me and asked me to come back to help them get back on a sound financial track. This time I have been in the office for three years. (SAB, p. 2)

The superintendent of the district in which Chi High School is located indicated that as a superintendent he delegated many of his duties. His district was the one in this study that had an assistant superintendent. He said, “I have a good staff and they are very good at what they do. My responsibility is to ensure that we stay fiscally sound” (SC, p. 1).
Professional Development.

NCLB (2001) guides selection of professional development, but selection of professional development is made at the district level, and directives are sent to the individual schools through the principals. For instance, when asked about the kinds of policies that the central office would send down, the superintendent of School District #1 stated,

Basically, we are talking about what policies come down from the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. An example would be the Comprehensive Curriculum. How do you handle this kind of policy when your resources are limited? When it first came out, the State Board of Education felt that all schools should teach it the same way, but that won't work. I think that the State Department finally backed off and said “we didn't intend that it be that way.” But I believe that that was the intent and that the State Department felt that we should all do it that way. (SAB, p. 6)

The superintendent of district #1 also indicated that responsibility for effective instruction was largely delegated to principals. He stated that he always felt that he was most effective as a principal and he understood the difficulties that principals experience in leading schools. Additionally, he stated

I think that I have a greater influence on a school as a principal than as a superintendent. And that grieves me some as a superintendent because I can't exert my influence the way that I want to. So, I give credit to the building level principals when improvement is made. My experience has been that it is because of the leadership of the principal. That doesn't mean that the central office doesn't
offer support or help, but improvement at schools takes place because of the kind of leadership at the school.

This superintendent also indicated that the central office provided individual schools with lists of available professional development opportunities. Principals allowed faculties to select activities based upon the needs of the individual school. This supported what principals at the schools had indicated.

Teachers indicated that professional development was a function of the central office as well. According to one teacher (T1-B, p. 5), "We have so many days for professional development each year. The central office sends a list of the professional development activities, and we select the ones that we are interested in, and the principal turns them in to the [Central Office]."

The assistant principal at Chi High School indicated that the central office made decisions relative to professional development, but the professional development was not always what the school needed, "We have been having professional development for technology, but our needs assessment indicated that we needed professional development for classroom management" (AP-C, p. 8).

The principal of Chi High School stated that the central office sends down several opportunities for professional development, and faculty are allowed to choose ones that they might be interested in.

You know, a lot of times the central office will send down information that we have to do. But, if it is something that has to do with this school usually, we have committees that get together and talk about issues, and make up whatever the rules need to be, or whatever changes need to be made. But I usually get help,
you know, on big issues; you know, I am not a dictator. I try to get more people involved. (PC, p. 4)

Research by Darling-Hammond and others indicate that one of the most important factors in student achievement is the presence of a highly qualified teacher in classrooms. Although these three schools are rural schools with great potential for faculty turnover, it is evident that courses are taught by highly qualified, high quality faculty.

School Culture

Renchler (1992) defined school culture as the attitudes and beliefs of the members of the learning communities in each of the sites. These attributes consist of several components including school and classroom routines, faculty and administration interactions, activities important to the school, teacher expectations, and student self-efficacy.

School and Classroom Routines

School and classroom routines are shaped by a school’s culture. School and classroom routines were unique to each school in this study. At Alpha High School, the principal waited at the entrance to the school as each bus unloaded. Buses unloaded in two different areas and elementary students were met by teachers and entered the elementary wing. Two teachers performed bus duty for both elementary and high school wings. Students were moderately quiet and well-behaved as they left the bus and entered the building.

Several things were clearly visible as the researcher observed students making the transition from bus to classroom. Students had more than ample time—four minutes—to travel from classroom to classroom between classes. The principal indicated that this
time should be used for restroom breaks, retrieving books, sharpening pencils, and preparing for class to begin. Students revealed that they used this time for other things such as visiting with friends and talking.

Students were not allowed to have cell phones or electronic devices on campus, but some of them did. If the principal or faculty members became aware of the possession of contraband on campus, they would confiscate the item, and keep it in the office. The principal indicated a drawer containing several cell phones, MP3 players, and earphones.

Students at Alpha High School were all dressed in the school uniform colors of navy blue, black or white shirts and khaki pants. Teachers were allowed to wear casual street clothes while the principal was dressed in the school uniform. Students could earn points and be allowed to wear blue jeans as a reward for good behavior.

Transition from classroom to lunchroom at Alpha was accomplished in the same orderly manner as leaving the bus and entering the building. Students entered the cafeteria from separate ends as they departed the buses, and teachers made sure that elementary students ate breakfast. Teachers were permitted to eat lunch with the students, and some teachers took advantage of the opportunity. The principal at Alpha also ate lunch with the students and talked to his faculty and staff. Tables in the cafeteria were designed to accommodate students of all sizes. As students finished breakfast or lunch, they returned the attached seats to their initial position.

Students at Beta High School left the bus at the front door of the school. Teachers were on duty, but most observed from the door. The principal did not observe students as they arrived or left. The coach, who also served as the principal’s administrative assistant, met buses and observed students as they disembarked. Buses unloaded at the front door
opposite and down the hall from the cafeteria. Elementary students ate breakfast and left the cafeteria to enter the small playground at the rear of the building. High school students ate breakfast and left the cafeteria to go to the gym. Classes began at 7:50 a.m. Students were in place in homerooms where the roll was called and first period began.

Bus arrivals were not noted for Chi High School as the buses arrived prior to 7:30 A.M. The assistant principal indicated that the bus loading and unloading process was similar to that of other schools. Afternoon bus departure was announced from the office and students loaded buses according to the order in which buses were called.

**Faculty and Principal Relationships**

Faculty at the three schools indicated ambiguous views of their school principals. At all three schools, there were few faculty meetings, but principals made sure that information was shared from the district relative to state mandates and requirements at the district and state levels. At all three schools, interviews and focus groups gave the credit for academic growth and success to the leadership of the principal. The middle grades teacher at Beta High School said that the previous principal, who implemented the practices that caused the school to be successful, was willing to make the same kinds of sacrifices that he asked of both faculty and students.

Alpha High School faculty, parents, students, and support staff indicated in their interviews and focus groups that the principal was the foundation upon which their success was built. He had been principal at Alpha High School for 12 years and had seen the school through attainment of all four of the school of exemplary academic growth designations. He said, however, "It has nothing to do with me. It is about my faculty. We are all professionals, and I allow them to do what they do best" (PA, p. 5). A teacher...
confirmed this sentiment, saying, “He does not treat us like he is the boss cracking the whip. He tells us what the central office says we have to do, and then allows us the freedom to do it” (T2-A, p. 5). Another teacher added, “He has always been at this school. He is the best principal that we have had” (T3-A, p. 3).

Few teachers said negative things about the principal. However, one faculty member disagreed with positive statements made by others about him. She felt that the principal was not aggressive enough, and his lack of aggression caused some teachers not to do their jobs. “He does not enforce the rules that we made, and you may see and hear children doing anything” (T5-A, p. 4).

A parent (Pt1-A, p. 2) said that the principal was “largely about basketball,” and “the basketball players get away with anything.” This parent said, “I am not concerned with basketball. I want my child to be able to pass the test. The test scores at this school are the worst in the state.”

During observations, the Alpha principal was always clearly visible and available to parents, faculty, and students. He ate both breakfast and lunch in the cafeteria with faculty and students and used this time to speak with faculty and staff about the functioning of the school. Faculty at Alpha High School indicated in most individual interviews that he allowed faculty to provide much feedback at the school, and he carefully considered their feedback.

Beta High School faculty, parents, and support staff all had conflicting views about the principal during the study. The researcher interviewed her and found her to be well organized and to have great plans and high expectations for her institution. Document analysis supported the perception of organization and preparedness as well as
the statement by the principal, "My goal as the principal is to ensure that High School become a place of excellence for faculty and students." However, faculty, students, and parents did not all agree either with what was observed during the time that the researcher was on site or with what was revealed by the interview with the principal.

The third and fourth grade teacher at Beta High School said,

I have always been at Beta High School. I attended school here as a student, and I have been here under all seven principals. The last principal that I worked under retired last year, and the new principal took over. She is very different from the other principal. She seems to be good at her job, but she does want everyone to know that she is boss. The faculty either really likes her, or they really hate her.

(T1-B, p. 4)

Faculty interviews revealed that the previous principal was well respected and loved by the faculty. The third and fourth grade teacher said, "There was nothing that he could ask me to do that I would not do. He was here all hours of the night, and his goal was to ensure that our students were successful." In an interview, the Title I coordinator said,

The new principal was not like the old one, but she implemented some programs that were very successful and motivated students to be better behaved. The district mandated that each school develop a positive behavior system and allowed the school the flexibility to create a system that would be a good fit to each individual school. (T2-B, p. 1)

During the time of the study, the principal of Beta had come up with a plan for creating the Trojan Bucks. Teachers would give students the Bucks for appropriate
conduct. They could then use these Bucks to purchase things in the Trojan Store. The principal indicated that the program was so successful with the students that she decided to extend the program to include teachers (PB, p.3).

At Chi High School, most of the faculty indicated that they liked and respected the principal, but that he was “extremely laid back” (T3-C, p. 4). The principal conducted most of his faculty meetings by e-mail. He said that all of his faculty members were familiar with e-mail and had access to e-mail. One of the faculty members had helped him to set up groups and forward memos and information from the district office. Much of the site management was accomplished with feedback from the faculty.

I didn't know how to do it myself, but a lady who was up here in the intern program showed me how to put it on computer, so I could put all my teachers in one little group and send it to all of them at one time, and if it is science or math or whatever, I just pick out the two in the group and send it to them. (PC, p. 4)

Other faculty members felt that he was inconsistent and did not have high expectations for his student body or faculty (T4-C, p. 5).

A second grade teacher when interviewed suggested that the principal did not enforce the rules that were made and frequently delegated responsibility for discipline of both sides of the school to the assistant principal (T1-C, p. 7). One teacher simply said that the principal was very “laid-back.” When observing at the site, the researcher saw very little of the principal (FON, p. 8).

The principal had returned to Chi High School through the alternative certification route. In his interview, he said that he had been working at a plant in the area, and when the plant shut down, he went back to school and earned a teaching degree.
He then earned certification as a principal, and when the job came open at Chi High School, he took it. He was an alumna of Chi and lived in town. He did not want to do anything else.

The principal of Beta High School had been principal for the shortest length of time. Principals of both Chi and Alpha high schools had more than 10 years experience. All three principals spent much of their time at the schools. When asked about faculty and teacher relationships, all three indicated confidence in their faculty and their qualifications. For instance, the principal at Chi High School said,

I just oversee all the activities of the teachers. Go into all the classrooms; try to go in everyday; make sure everybody is working. But I have a faculty that I really don't have to worry about. I know that they are going to be working. (PC, p. 1)

The principal at Alpha High School stated,

I don't have to watch my teachers. I relate the expectations and information that I obtain from the principals' meetings, and my teachers do what is expected of them. My teachers are some of the best teachers in the state. (PA, p. 4)

The eighth grade teacher at Alpha High School confirmed what the principal said by stating, “The principal does not return lesson plans. He does not give his teachers feedback because they are professionals and they know what their responsibilities are” (T2-A, p. 2).

The principal at Beta High School discussed the loss of faculty at her school by stating,

Even though we have lost some teachers, I feel that my teachers on the elementary side are the best teachers at the school. On the high school side, my
faculty is fairly young, but I believe that they can grow and become the best. We also have a couple of teachers who can serve as mentors on that end. (PB, p. 2)

Teacher Expectations

Observations at all three schools indicated varying degrees of teacher expectations. It is difficult to determine what expectations are across all faculties because of the limited number of participants interviewed. The teachers interviewed indicated high expectations. Observations of instruction, analysis of lesson plans, and informal discussions with faculty and students revealed different levels of expectations.

Most of the teachers observed stated high expectations for students but also stated that they know that students don’t learn at the same level. The fourth grade teacher at Alpha High said that she expects all students to at least perform at the “C” achievement level as “C” is average (T4-A, P. 5) In observing this teacher, the researcher discovered that students were allowed the freedom to determine rules for the classroom and to give feedback for decisions made in the classroom (RJC, p. 2).

The second grade teacher at Chi High School stated that she had exceptionally high expectations for her students. Support for this statement was provided in the following:

My expectations are exceptionally high. They will learn at high levels of performance in my classroom. If they don’t learn anything in any other grade, they will have learned it in the second grade because I think that all children can learn and because I have a small class. (T1-C, p. 3)

The middle grade teacher at Beta High School demonstrated her expectations as well. Observation of her classroom during instruction indicated that the teacher informed
students of the objectives that were being taught that day. Instruction included activities that would allow all students to participate. Rules for behavior were posted throughout the classroom, and students were made aware of what was expected during her class. This process for relating daily objectives differed from that of teachers at Alpha High School.

The eighth grade English at Alpha High School stated, “I don’t write objectives on the board, I simply tell them that we are going to continue working on what we were working on yesterday and we keep working” (T3-A, p. 2).

One of the main elements of effective teaching for at risk populations is the necessity for high teacher self-efficacy and high teacher expectations for students. At-risk populations include students of either high minority or high poverty status or both. Schools that exhibit high expectations for all learners are likely to experience success in student achievement.

**Extracurricular Activities**

School culture determines what types of extracurricular activities are important at schools. Trophy cases in the entryway to Alpha and Beta high schools indicated that basketball is important at both schools. Neither of these schools had a National Honor Society, but Beta High School had created organizations that would develop student confidence and self-esteem. All three schools also participated in the DARE program for the school district.

The principal at Beta High School developed a mentoring program for students at the school who did not have support at home. Student mentors provided advice and emotional and academic support for students. The principal said,
We have a program designed to provide student support for academics and emotional support. Mentors may eat lunch with mentees and they serve as an outlet for emotional, academic, and intellectual stress. Most mentors also provide support for students after the school day ends. (PB, p. 4)

Extracurricular activities at Chi High School differed from those at both Alpha and Beta high schools. The principal described the school relationship of the school as one in which students were prepared to become productive members of society. For instance,

We have taken our high school students over to Bossier Parish Community College, and last year we took them over to the Career Center in Caddo Parish. This is an excellent program, and I would love to see that program here in this district. It is designed for students who are not going to college. They have culinary arts and other vocational programs. It is an excellent program and they have it going good over there. (PC, p. 4)

The principal also said, “We know that many of our students will not go to college, but we want them to be prepared for life” (PC, p. 4).

Some students are involved in a successful agricultural program at the school. Students attended, competed, and placed highly in the Future Farmers of America convention. There is a well equipped greenhouse between the cafeteria and the football field. Students in the agriculture program are responsible for yard work at the school as well as at several of the government businesses in town (FNO, p. 5).

Extracurricular activities at Alpha High School include boys’ and girls’ basketball teams, boys’ track, girls’ softball, and boys’ baseball. Alpha is fairly successful with
these teams. The principal did not include National Honor Society as one of the activities in which students would participate. However, the business applications teacher took students to the Future Business Leaders of America convention in Baton Rouge, and the science teacher indicated minimal participation in the regional science fair held each year at nearby Louisiana Tech University.

School Atmosphere and Climate

Research by Howley, Bickel, and Strange (2003) indicated community as one of the greatest strengths of rural schools. DeYoung (1994) described conditions under which students from minority and low SES backgrounds were most likely to be successful. These conditions, present in the three schools in the study, were important in developing instruction for minority and low SES students. Relationships between students and faculty were respectful and caring. Teachers were available to speak with students at any time. Professional relationships were collegial and collaborative.

These conditions were conducive to an environment that was community and family oriented. The researcher observed, “In addition to the nineteen students in the class, the teacher has also allowed her pre kindergarten daughter to spend the day with her. The daughter is engaged in coloring and drawing while the classroom was going on” (RJC, p. 2).

Alpha and Beta high schools demonstrated a strong sense of family as the researcher saw faculty members collaborating during team meetings, sharing duty assignments, and seated together while monitoring students during recess. Faculty members at all three schools revealed that the schools were like a community. For instance, the paraprofessional at Alpha High School said, “We don’t
see Black and White here. We are like family. We try to work together” (PaA, p. 1).
The fourth grade teacher at Chi High School also indicated that there was a sense of family among the faculty. “We don’t always agree, but we are able to talk out our disagreements and get along” (T5-C, p. 2).

The second grade teacher at Chi High School also spoke to the sense of community among members of the learning community (T1-C, p. 4) as did the third and fourth grade teacher at Beta High School (T1-B, p. 3), Parent number 1 at Beta High School (Pt1-B, p. 2) and Parent number 1 at Chi High School (Pt1-C, p.1). The description of informal communications among school and parents addressed the sense of community and family among parents, students, and teachers.

Faculty in all three schools were frequently alumnae of the schools who completed teacher preparation programs and then returned to their alma maters to work. With the exception of the principal at Beta High School who, as cited earlier, is completing her second year in the position of principal at the school, principals graduated from these schools, taught somewhere else, and then returned to these schools as administrators. The previous principal at Beta was also an alumna of Beta High School and returned to the community to teach and later become principal there (RJE, p.12).

The principal of Chi High School said that most of his faculty members were alumnae of Chi who returned there to teach. There were two exceptions to that rule: one was a first grade teacher who came there after graduating during the middle of the year as a mid-year substitute, and the principal hired her to teach. The special education teacher came from a nearby parish while working on alternate certification in special education and stayed at the school after completing a teaching internship. Most faculty members
lived in town, participated in social and church activities, and were a part of the community.

The same was true of the faculty at Alpha High School. Although some faculty members were not residents of the Alpha community, they lived within 15-30 minutes of the school. Four faculty members at Alpha were once paraprofessionals or substitute teachers at Alpha who returned to university and obtained licensure through alternative certification. A paraprofessional, remarked, “We encourage the younger ones [paraprofessionals] to go back to school and obtain their teaching license. Paraprofessionals are required to do what teachers do today anyway; they might as well become teachers” (PtA, p.1). Three members of the faculty and staff were working toward getting licensure through alternative certification.

The secondary social studies teacher at Beta High School indicated “I was a paraprofessional at a school near here, but I discovered that I enjoyed teaching. I had to return to school because of paraprofessional requirements, so I continued to get alternative certification for social sciences” (T2-B, p. 3).

Statements in this section evidence philosophies and attitudes unique to rural areas. Rural education research maintains that these attitudes create a positive environment for collaboration among stakeholders in rural schools.

Decision Making

All three sites indicated that major instructional decisions were made at the district central office. The superintendent of school district # 2 stated,

Although I have an assistant superintendent here, and several supervisors, I expect principals to make decisions for their schools based on what the circumstances are
at the school. My responsibility is mainly administrative. I make sure that the schools have the resources and funding that they need to teach, and I trust my principals to make the best decisions possible for their schools.

(SC, p. 1)

The superintendent of school district #1 supported this statement with,

I have no assistant superintendents. In a small system, that is not necessarily wrong. At this time, we have two supervisors for elementary, middle, and high school, a Title I director, and a special education supervisor. (SAB, p. 3) I think that I have a greater influence on a school as a principal than as a superintendent. And that grieves me some as a superintendent because I can't exert my influence the way that I want to. So, I give credit to the building level principals when improvement has been made. My experience has been that it is because of the leadership of the principal. That doesn't mean that the central office doesn't offer support or help, but when you see improvement at a school, it is because of the leader at that school in my opinion. (SAB, p. 1)

Statements from teachers supported this idea as well. For example, the third and fourth grade teacher at Beta High School stated, “Mr. _____ was the kind of principal you could easily follow. If he asked us to do something, he would be right out there with us working on it. There was nothing that he could ask me to do that I would not do” (T1-B, p. 3).

The eighth grade teacher at Alpha High School also credited the principal as instructional leader for their school success. She stated,
The principal allows everyone to have input into what is going on in the school. That’s the only way that you can get anything to work. If you sit in the office, you make all the decisions, and you don’t allow the people who are doing the work to have any input, then you won’t get anything done because they won’t work (T3-A, p. 3).

Rural school research indicates that school culture in rural schools can be described as analogous to the relationship that exists within families. Statements and evidence provided by interviewees, documents, and SIP activities are demonstrative of the existence of such relationships among parents, schools, and students.

Summary

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research study. Findings include data collected across all sources. Data were triangulated and interpreted across all categories. Triangulated data were analyzed using the constant comparison method. Statements and data were analyzed and placed into categories. The categories were then reduced and placed into clusters of patterns that were representative of specific themes. The patterns and emerging themes are later discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to explore three rural Louisiana PK-12 schools with high percentages of minority, low SES populations, and to discern how activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures related to the implementation of NCLB (2001) in each school might be associated with its consistent growth in SPS across the period 2001-2005. The study investigated such factors as SES, parental involvement, quality of teachers, types of instructional strategies, stakeholder perceptions of NCLB (2001), and the influence of school culture on school achievement.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings of the study and implications for educational practice in rural schools, and provides recommendations for future research. In discussing the findings, the researcher first addressed the patterns and themes that emerged in the analysis of the data in Chapter 4. Moreover, in answering the research questions, the researcher comparatively related findings presented in the research literature in Chapter 2 with the findings of this study. Overall, the case study findings revealed conditions, activities, and strategies that appeared to have contributed to student’s academic success, at least in terms of increasing SPS scores. However, the study also revealed conditions that may be deemed contraindicative of student academic success. The implications of these findings are also discussed in this chapter.
Patterns and Themes

Analysis of data in Chapter four indicated several patterns and themes that occurred across the three schools. Patterns and themes were identified by utilizing data reduction as a method of determining how frequent certain words appeared in interview and focus group transcripts, researcher journal notes, and field observation notes.

Patterns

Patterns were established using the reduction of data. Several patterns appeared across the data. These patterns included

1. All three schools had historically served the areas in which they were located. This history included long tenures of service in their communities. In addition, these schools served as places where entertainment occurred and communication among parents, faculty, and students was accomplished.

2. All three schools indicated an assurance that their schools functioned as families. In addition to the word, "family," the terms teams, teamwork, and other terms indicative of working toward a unified goal or unified vision appeared throughout the data.

3. Document analysis at all three schools indicated that members of each organization agreed, particularly as evidenced by school mission statements, that the purpose of their schools was to ensure that all students had an opportunity for success.

4. Document analysis at the three schools and statements in interviews across participants indicated that discipline and student behavior management
was an issue to some degree. However, all three schools included some form of behavior management plan.

5. The three schools were committed to the implementation of a curriculum that would facilitate students’ success on the LEAP exam. Student work samples, lesson plans, and other evidence of the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum suggested that schools practiced alignment of GLEs, assessments, and instructional activities so that students would be successful on the LEAP.

6. A large percentage of faculty members at the three schools had attained a master’s degree or higher. Members of all faculties were licensed, but it was not uncommon for faculty to have obtained a degree through alternative certification. Several faculty members at each school were alumnæ of the school.

7. Faculty members at each school were likely to be members of the local community and be familiar with parents, students, other faculty, and administration.

8. All three schools implemented some form of computer-assisted instruction for either remediation or test preparation. Each school had a computer laboratory where elementary students spent a minimum of 30 minutes per day in the Title I computer laboratory.

9. Each school had eliminated extra-curricular programs such as music, drama, or art to ensure that it could meet the basic requirements for a
diploma at the school or so that students were able to meet the requirements for TOPS.

10. Each school’s faculty and staff expressed some degree of confidence in the principal’s leadership in the school; however, there was a greater degree of confidence in the two male principals than in the female principal.

11. Faculty meetings in the three schools were minimal. No school had faculty meetings weekly; however, when meetings were held, none of the schools met for over one hour at a time.

12. Each of the three schools indicated difficulties with classroom and behavior management; however, homogeneous classrooms, that is, classrooms with teachers and students the same race, experienced fewer behavior problems.

13. Researcher observation in all three schools revealed instructional strategies proven successful with mainstream populations. Teachers had difficulty creating instruction utilizing learning styles of minority students.

Themes

Major patterns that evolved were clustered into themes. The themes that emerged were important because they provided insight into how implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) influenced each school’s SPS. Themes were embedded across all activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures. Emerging themes included

1. Testing and test preparation;

2. Relationships within school and community;
3. Computer-assisted instruction; and
4. Decision making.

These themes appear and are amplified in the following section that addresses the research questions.

Research Questions and Discussion

The primary research question in this study was, "What activities, conditions, events, policies, and practices related to the implementation of provisions of NCLB (2001) in three rural schools contributed to the growth of SPS in the three schools?" This question served as the overarching focus for the study. In this study, NCLB (2001) was identified as the most recent effort at ensuring that the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, ESEA, IASA, and Title I, benefits American children of all groups, including minority and low SES students. All were results of changes in the role of the federal government that would eventually support equitable learning opportunities for American students (Mitchell, 2000).

The secondary research questions are presented below along with a brief answer, based on the data analysis, to each.

What perceptions did stakeholders have of the implementation of NCLB (2001) in the three schools? Perceptions of members of the school organization varied and seemed to be determined by the role that the participant played within the school. Student and parent perceptions appeared to focus largely upon the accountability provision of NCLB (2001). Parents and students were more likely to operate under misconceptions and misinformation than were faculty and administrators. Data suggested that some faculty did not like the amount of paperwork necessary to implement the law while others...
appeared to feel that the law showed potential for ensuring student success. Faculty and administrators seemed to understand the law and be willing to put forth effort to ensure school success in accountability. Data suggested that each of the schools as a whole worked with a unified vision at making the school successful.

Research by Barton (2006), Fege and Smith (2002), and Blake and Schwartz (2002) asserted that, while NCLB (2001) had several shortcomings, it was beneficial to minority, low SES students in that it required the use of higher order thinking skills and comprehension activities. These activities were likely to increase student achievement for the targeted groups. The three schools studied integrated the use of higher order thinking skills, and comprehension activities as a component of the Comprehensive Curriculum. Teachers and administrators in the three schools perceived that they were implementing the provisions of NCLB (2001) to the best of their ability.

Students shared some of the same misconceptions of NCLB (2001) that parents experienced. Students felt that the law was too stringent and required more work than was equitable. Many students who had already taken the test stated that it tested them on items with which they were not familiar and some indicated frustration at not knowing the answers and not being able to arrive at the correct answers.

In addition to students, some teachers believed that the tests required minority low SES students to be familiar with terms and concepts unfamiliar to students. Some teachers, however, put forth efforts to create instruction that would enable students to scaffold instruction on prior knowledge. Young, Wright and Laster (2005) asserted that teachers teach the way they learn, and many mainstream teachers teach differently from the ways that African American students learn. They suggested that teachers who will
teach African American students become familiar with different learning styles and strategies.

How did implementation of research-based strategies occur in each of the three schools? Implementation of research-based instructional strategies appeared to occur in several ways across the three schools. Data suggested that the three schools selected programs, activities, and strategies that were proven successful by best practices. None of the three schools appeared to have utilized strategies that were innovative or unique to the population. Activities, software, and educational programs were selected based on evaluations by other schools or by other practitioners utilizing the programs in question.

Emphasis in the three schools seemed to focus on test preparation and test taking. Curriculum activities, technology, and assessments were directly related to content and skills tested on the LEAP exam. For example, document analysis suggested that the three schools incorporated Accelerated Reading®; extended day programs; some form of behavior management program; and Louisiana PASS, an online LEAP practice exam. Each of the three schools also integrated some form of computer-assisted instruction with the intent of increasing test scores.

In what way was parental involvement accomplished in the three schools? Data suggested that all three schools attempted to meet the mandates of NCLB (2001) relative to the Title I parental involvement component of NCLB (2001) by incorporating three forms of parental involvement. It appeared that these three forms of parental involvement included volunteerism, parent-teacher communications, and events and activities designed to support parental participation in student learning. The findings presented in Chapter 4 suggested that parental volunteerism was limited at each of the
three schools. Nevertheless, one teacher at one of the schools had developed a unique
program that encouraged parent volunteering in the classroom. Parental involvement was
also evident, to a limited degree, in that parents were included as members of school
improvement committees and provided feedback in decision making in each of the
schools.

Research by Fege and Smith (2002), Fields-Smith (2005) and others indicated that
parental involvement is one of the most effective strategies for increasing the success of
minority students. Drummond and Stipek (2004) indicated that parents are an important
influence in helping children achieve high academic standards. When schools collaborate
with parents and parents participate in activities and decision making for students,
children achieve at higher levels and schools improve.

A study conducted by Shoaf, Shoaf, and Leck (2006) used focus group data to
describe how parents perceive Title I and other poverty-based programs. The researchers
identified one difficulty of developing activities and events in schools located in areas
where funding is limited as being the difficulty of overcoming perceived power
differences between program participants and researchers or teachers. By adopting Title
I, Congress endorsed the idea that additional financial resources could make the
difference between success and failure in the education for poor and disadvantaged
children.

Cotton and Wikelund (1989) described parental involvement in several forms.
Parental involvement may include encouraging telephone and written home-to-school
communications, attending school functions, allowing parents to serve as classroom
volunteers, sponsoring parent-teacher conferences, supporting home educational
enrichment, and providing opportunities for parent involvement in decision-making and school governance.

This case study confirmed the kind of difficulties that school administrators and teachers may experience in establishing parental involvement in rural schools such as these three. However, according to Drummond and Stipek (2004) and Cotton and Wikelund (1989), there are several ways that parents may participate in the learning process of their students. Each of the schools in the study had an established parental involvement program. The programs ranged from formal written and telephone communications to informal communications and discussions at social sites. Schools provided opportunities for parents to volunteer and attempted to include events that would strengthen support systems for their students. All three schools attempted to integrate content area activities which in turn would enable parents to play a more active part in the learning process of students by contributing to the completion of student homework and projects. Howley, Strange, and Bickel (2000), Huang (1999) and Jeynes (2003) indicated that one of the advantages of rural communities and rural schools is the close-knit nature of the community. Schools in this study were especially representative of this attribute. Success of formal programs was minimal, but informal communications and activities were extremely successful as faculty were members of the community and were familiar with parents outside the school setting.

Rural schools in this study were composed of individuals who had matriculated through the school, gone on to higher education and become trained to teach, and had returned to their alma mater to teach. Consequently, teachers at these three schools were very familiar with, and part of, the culture and values of the community. Additionally,
faculty members, administrators, and resource officers were aware of how parents or guardians could be contacted if they were not accessible by formal methods.

In other important ways, particularly in terms of formal parental involvement, data suggested that these schools were not successful, and faculty and administration at the schools may have missed important opportunities for helping their students. For example, research by Fege and Smith (2002), Fields-Smith (2005), and others indicated that parental involvement is one of the most effective strategies for increasing the success of minority students. A longitudinal study conducted by Meidel and Reynolds (1999) indicated that students whose parents were actively involved in the student’s school were likely to perform better academically. Furthermore, Fields-Smith (2005) indicated a positive relationship between parental involvement and student success. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Fields-Smith conducted a study of a cross section of Black students to determine the kinds of changes that have occurred in Black families fifty years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. She indicated in the study that Black parents are concerned about and value the education of their children but that Black parents may lack the ability or the resources to participate in parental involvement activities. Additionally, these parents felt that parental involvement had to go beyond parent-teacher conferences at the school. This observation was particularly true of the schools where the study took place. Parental involvement in the three schools in the study included (a) volunteerism, (b) parent-school communications, and (c) activities and events designed to enhance and support parent participation in the learning process. It appeared that activities and events were designed to support parent participation in learning activities such as homework and projects. Examination of evidence in all three
of these areas of involvement indicated limited participation by parents and guardians in each of the schools.

Thurston and Navarette (2003) surveyed a group of low SES parents across four states and found that low SES parents wanted to become involved in their students’ education but were frequently uncomfortable around teachers. Poor parents were less likely to be involved in school-based activities and to meet with teachers because of this awkwardness. The findings related to parental involvement in schools in these types of communities are aligned with the findings in this researcher’s case study, which indicated that few of the activities and events offered by schools was strongly attended by parents. This also suggests that low SES parents in these schools might have been intimidated by teachers or might not have had time or resources to attend these activities and events.

In summary, the data suggest that formal parent-school communications was limited; however, informal parent-school communication was beneficial. Rural school research supports the theory that relationships between schools and rural communities are extremely close and tight-knit. These relationships appeared to make it simple for parents and school members to communicate concerning student needs and behaviors in informal settings that might have been more comfortable for parents. These relationships suggest the potential for informing parents of other activities using informal communications.

What was the number and percentage of highly qualified faculty in the three schools? Data obtained from the Department of Education database suggested that few faculty at the three schools were not highly qualified. Data indicated that in each of the three schools in the study 40% or more of faculty had obtained a masters’ degree or
higher. Additionally, data suggested that a highly qualified faculty member was teaching more than 80% of classes taught at each of the three schools.

Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, and Madaus (1995) identified a relationship between the quality of instruction that minority students received in classrooms and student achievement. Lomax et al. asserted that if teachers included higher order thinking skills activities and authentic assessments, minority students would be better prepared to respond to standardized tests at higher levels. Findings in the three schools of this case study support the findings of Lomax et al. Data in the three schools suggested that in most instances, teachers in the three schools utilized activities either included in the Comprehensive Curriculum or created activities similar to those included in the Comprehensive Curriculum. Analysis of lesson plans and interviews with principals and teachers indicated that lesson plans had to be aligned to the GLEs established by the state, and that classroom activities had to include higher order thinking skill activities.

Malhoit (2005) and Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) indicated that one of the most overt weaknesses of rural schools is the lack of professional development opportunities for all teachers and especially support for beginning teachers. Malhoit suggested that school programs that included professional development opportunities and support for teachers were most likely to see improved instruction and improved student outcomes. Findings in this case study suggested that local schools and school districts offered professional development designed to provide opportunities to extend or develop teaching strategies that benefit all students. It also appeared that, although some professional development opportunities were mandated by the district, teachers had the option of choosing other professional development opportunities. In addition to
professional development opportunities, support opportunities were included for
beginning teachers. Administrators of schools assigned mentors for beginning teachers as
a component of the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program (LaTAAP) in
addition to other professional development opportunities for faculty-at-large.

The three schools in the study all appeared to have developed familial
relationships within the school as well as in the community. Each of the three schools
implemented the team teaching approach in which teachers in specific grades or specific
content areas met at structured times to discuss instruction and professional development
opportunities and to provide support for other teachers by suggesting activities or
resources. These activities were representative of the team spirit throughout the schools.

What school culture existed in each of the three schools? Renchler (1992) defined
school culture as activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures representative of
each school. Similar characteristics were used to describe culture of each of the three
schools. These characteristics included school size, class size, school and community
relationships, teacher expectations, and student self-efficacy.

Data in each school suggested that the three schools were similar in school size,
class size, and possibly community size. Populations of Alpha, Beta, and Chi high school
were 260, 340, and 189, respectively. All three schools were identified as small schools
according to the Louisiana High School Athletic Association (LHSAA). All three schools
were located in rural areas as evidenced by the definition for rural area as an area with a
population less than 2500.

Demographics and economic information obtained from school improvement
plans appeared to indicate that SES, major businesses, and geographic location of the
three schools were similar. While some characteristics of the three schools were similar, other characteristics were different. Demographics at Alpha and Beta high schools were similar in that student population in both schools was more than 95% minority. Student population at Alpha was 97% Black and 3% other. Of the three schools in the study, this was the only school with a population that included Hispanic students and Native American students. Beta had a Black population of 100%. Chi was the only high school in the study that was evenly divided among Black and White students. Chi had a White population of approximately 53% and a Black population of 47%. The community where students were located was also more racially balanced.

Class size in each of the three schools ranged from 14-21. The average class size in the state was 24. It would appear that small class size would enable teachers to spend more one on one time with individual students. Observations of elementary classrooms seemed to support this perception. Class size in high school classes appeared to have no effect on instructional methods in high school content classes.

One of the major themes of this study was school and community relationships. Data suggested that all of the three schools experienced a close-knit relationship between schools, parents, and communities. Stakeholders in all three groups appeared to perceive the relationship between faculty, administrators, parents, and students to be one of family.

Data indicated that faculty members appeared to feel loyalty to the community and returned to their alma mater to teach. Data also suggested that the relationship of faculty and administrators to the community provided potential for the development of effective informal communications between parents and schools. It also appeared that stakeholders had the same vision for success in the school. Research demonstrates that
schools are more effective and students are more successful when parents and schools are on the same page.

Analysis of interviews with teachers and faculty indicated that faculty and administrators had different expectations of students at different schools. Interviews with faculty and administrators at Alpha and Beta high schools suggested that faculty and administrators believed that all students could learn. Some faculty appeared to make every effort to integrate multiple learning styles to ensure that all students had an opportunity for equitable learning. Data suggested that other faculty related learning to prior knowledge. It seemed that all teachers expected students to perform at the median level of performance. Other data suggested that, while teachers stated that they expected average performance, there was little integration of activities that encouraged performance of challenging learning tasks that included the use of higher order thinking skills. Examination of student work suggested that few assignments required the use of creative and critical thinking skills.

Interviews with the assistant principal and the principal at Chi High School suggested that at Chi High School, administrators were resigned to the knowledge that not everyone would go to college. Both administrators asserted that they worked hard to ensure that students would become productive members of society. Thus, it seemed that expectations of faculty and administrators at Chi were minimal for their students. Interviews with teachers, however, indicated that not all teachers believed that students could achieve at an average level. Thus, the data suggested that teacher expectations varied throughout the school.
Darling-Hammond (2000) and DeYoung (1989) and others indicate that high teacher expectations directly influences minority student achievement. High teacher expectations directly affect the kinds of questions that teachers ask and the degree to which higher-order-thinking skill questions are integrated into instruction.

Self-efficacy is associated with a student's judgments of personal capabilities to initiate and successfully perform specified tasks, expend greater effort, and persevere in the face of adversity. As with teacher expectations, data suggested different levels of student self-efficacy in each of the three schools. Interviews with some students suggest high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, but self-efficacy appeared to be related to athletics, gaming, and social skills and not necessarily to academic abilities. Other student interviews indicated that students judged themselves to be adequate in several other areas.

How did school culture contribute to the consistent growth of SPS in the three schools? Although school culture is not the only factor that contributes to school success or failure, it plays a significant role in determining the kind of school environment to which students are exposed. Findings of a study conducted by Byrk and Schneider (2002) suggested that prominent qualities of successful schools included (a) engagement of parents and community resources, (b) collaboration among teachers and community, (c) internalization of responsibility for change, and (d) planning that brings coherence to educational programs. Data in this case study indicated that members of the school organization exhibited most of the qualities identified by Byrk and Schneider. Interviews and focus groups data suggested that members of the school organization were engaged in the process of providing productive learning for all students.
Fyans and Maeher (1990) suggested that there are three dimensions to school culture similar to the qualities identified by Byrk and Schneider. Fyans and Maeher determined these three dimensions to be (a) academic challenges and achievements, (b) perceptions of shared school goals, and (c) interactions within school and community. Findings of this study indicated that students are more likely to achieve in schools with positive cultures.

Findings indicated that school culture in the two schools that were more homogeneous in terms of faculty and students was very different from that of the more racially balanced school. Alpha and Beta high schools experienced fewer difficulties with behavior, classroom management, and student motivation. Students were more likely to be respectful and attentive than in the racially balanced school. In these two schools, both faculty and students were the same racially. This similarity appeared to allow the two groups to be more in tune to the different nuances of cultural expectations, traditions, and beliefs.

While Chi High School was more racially balanced in terms of students, its faculty was predominantly White. Research by Fields-Smith (2005), Fege and Smith (2003), Hale (2004), and Darling-Hammond (2000) indicated that there is a definite disconnect between the cultural values of minority students and non-minority faculty. Non-minority faculty are less likely to understand why minority students behave in some manners than others and may also experience difficulty understanding the traditions, beliefs, and values that have been implanted into students before they come to school.

Thacker and McInerney (1992) explored the effects of school culture on student achievement. The study focused on the language of school mission statements,
professional development, and building level decision making. Findings indicated a significant test change in test scores in schools with positive culture.

Data from the three schools in this study support the findings of Byrk and Schneider (2002), Fyans and Maeher (1990), and Thacker and McInerney (1992). Members of the school organization were members of the community and, in some cases, interacted socially. Faculty members were also alumnae of the three schools explored; thus, they were familiar with the traditions, values, beliefs, and attitudes common to each respective school district.

Other data obtained from school mission statements, faculty meeting agendas, and parent-school memos indicated that all members of the school organizations evidenced a unified vision among all stakeholders ensuring that students had an equitable opportunity for success. Document analysis indicated that parents, students, and faculty were provided opportunities to provide input into decisions made within the organization. Members of the organization were encouraged to provide feedback for decisions that were made for the school, but leadership as suggested by Glascock (2003) was provided by the principal.

**Conclusions Based on Findings**

Data revealed several patterns of interactions and behaviors in the study, but the four insights that were revealed that might have influenced student success in these three schools were (a) testing and test preparation methods, (b) formal parental involvement and informal parental involvement, (c) highly qualified teachers and home-grown teachers, and (d) culturally responsive teaching practices.
Testing and Test Preparation

Each of the three schools developed instruction aligned to and supportive of the LEAP assessment as evidenced by lesson plans, student work samples, and researcher observation of teaching. The researcher believes that instruction of this sort based on short-term learning influenced the kinds of scores that students made on the criterion and norm referenced exams. Over 70% of each school’s SPS was comprised of these exams. The focus on test preparation helped to ensure the success of large numbers of students on exams. Document analysis also revealed that students who failed the assessment in the fall could take it again in the summer. The researcher asserts that the retake reinforced information that had been taught previously. This opportunity allowed students to complete the assessment successfully.

Formal Parental Involvement vs. Informal Parental Involvement

Each of the three schools benefited from the relationships that were established within the community. Formal communications were not strong in any school as evidenced by the lack of participation in parental involvement activities. However, because teachers and administrators were members of the community and had ties with parents other than through the school, informal communications were successful. Informal communication in each school served to offset the lack of formal communication among parents and schools. Research by Jeynes (2003), Thurston and Navarette (2003), indicated that parental involvement was an important piece in the learning process of all children. Thus, while the lack of formal parental involvement had not negatively affected these schools to date, this trend was not assured for the future. In the long term, the researcher felt that activities designed to strengthen parental
involvement must be developed and implemented to meet the needs of high-poverty, high-minority populations. This need shall be addressed as an implication for professional practice.

*Highly Qualified and Home-Grown Teachers*

Darling-Hammond (1999), Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003), Dunn (2001), and Hale (2004) asserted that one of the most critical pieces to success in educating minority, specifically Black, students was an effective teaching staff. Research stated that rural schools experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff, and classes in high minority and high poverty schools were more likely than classes in their non-rural counterparts to be taught by poorly prepared, unlicensed practitioners, or teachers teaching out of their fields. These three schools did not experience that difficulty. Highly qualified faculty taught the majority of core courses in all three schools. The researcher asserted that this phenomenon existed because high percentages of faculty in each of the three schools were alumnae of the three schools, who had returned to college, had become licensed and returned to teach in the community where they lived. Continuance of this practice will help ensure teachers for the future in these villages.

*Culturally Responsive Teaching Practice*

Research by Young, Wright, and Laster (2006) stated White teachers frequently lack the skill necessary to teach Black students. Young, et al. stated that minority students frequently learn differently than majority students, and instruction is designed for the mainstream student population. Instructional activities must align with the way that
students learn. Darling-Hammond (2000) asserted that teacher preparation institutions often fail to prepare new teachers in the instruction of minority students.

Alpha and Beta high schools were both homogeneous schools in that the majority of the school population was composed of minority faculty and students. As stated earlier, the two schools with predominant Black faculty with a predominantly Black student population, experienced fewer behavior management difficulties than the more racially balanced Chi High School. Hughes (1995) indicated that this phenomenon often occurred in circumstances where all stakeholders were familiar with the culture of the community and where values, traditions, and beliefs were the same.

The faculty of Chi High School was composed of White teachers while greater than 48% of the students in the school were Black. In the more racially balanced school, students were more likely to engage in inappropriate behaviors or to be disrespectful to the teacher. It seemed that minority students valued education less and were less motivated to achieve in the diverse setting of Chi. Additionally; instruction appeared to be limited to instruction that historically aligned with the learning styles of non-minority students in the heterogeneous schools.

Implications for Professional Practice

Although controversy surrounded the effectiveness of NCLB (2001), it was clearly advantageous from a fiscal and educational standpoint that the law be implemented in rural schools. The four provisions of NCLB (2001) discussed within this study were (a) accountability, (b) parental involvement, (c) research-based instructional strategies, and (d) teacher quality. Findings of this study may have implications for
several areas of professional practice and for the successful implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) in rural schools. They were

1. Implications for testing and test preparation;
2. Implications for parental involvement;
3. Implications for implementation of research-based instructional strategies
4. Implications for teacher quality.

Implications for Testing and Test Preparation

The practice of standardized testing has become an accepted part of the standards-based movement for education reform. The first tests were norm-based assessments that ensured that fifty percent of students who took the test would be unsuccessful. A study conducted by Horn (2003) indicated that subgroups consisting of minority and low SES students were more likely to experience difficulties performing at an achievement level of approaching basic or basic than were their non-minority counterparts. Findings of this study appeared to compensate for this difficulty by incorporating activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures designed to focus on test taking and test preparation strategies. The implications of these activities appear to be positive in that incorporation of activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures designed to focus on test-taking and test preparation strategies could possibly influence school performance scores in the three schools; however, the findings suggest other implications that are not positive.

Aside from students appearing to be prepared and confident of successfully completing the assessment, findings revealed instances where students demonstrated inappropriate behaviors after administration of the LEAP. Faculty in these classes suggested this behavior was a normal occurrence at the end of LEAP week, the statewide
testing period. Students appeared not to care about instruction, failed to follow rules, and were difficult to keep on task. It would appear critical that faculty and administration in the three schools be aware that by focusing on activities, conditions, events, and strategies designed to ensure student success on the LEAP, motivation for learning after the LEAP was compromised. The concern was that students experienced test burnout and lack of motivation, and became undisciplined and unfocused following the test. Instruction ceased, and teachers experienced difficulty with classroom management. A suggestion would be to prepare faculty to teach consistently from the beginning of the year to the end. Some teachers in the three schools continued to teach even though the end of the school year neared. These teachers experienced fewer behavior management problems, fewer student absences, and fewer general classroom management difficulties.

A second implication of testing and test preparation is the inherent danger of limiting learning to that expected on the LEAP. As teachers begin to develop instruction that is aligned with the GLEs and, in some cases, utilize the Comprehensive Curriculum exclusively, students are not introduced to the premise of life-long learning. Research indicates that test preparation learning is temporary at best, and is limited to information necessary for student success on the high-stakes test. The concern is that students cease to desire to learn and only learn for the extrinsic reward of passing the test. The suggestion of teaching consistently is appropriate here, with the codicil of incorporating higher order, creative, and critical thinking activities near the end of the year. Research demonstrated that minority low SES students greatly benefited by activities that required them to use these skills. Additionally, more challenging activities might entail closer attention to detail, more intense thought, and more insightful responses to assessments.
Implications for Parental Involvement

Findings suggested formal parental involvement as a weakness in all of the three schools. This lack was obvious in school improvement plans; interviews with administrators, faculty, parents, and students in the schools; and in researcher observations. Jeynes (2003), Fege and Smith (2003) state, however that parental involvement positively affects student achievement, and schools where teachers and parents collaborate are more successful than schools where there is little or no parental involvement. Based on the findings, it appears that these schools are not experiencing severe difficulties with parental involvement as these schools continue to show growth in spite of minimal parental involvement. The concern, however, is that SPS scores for the schools are below that recognized as acceptable, and growth in SPS, while consistent, is not significant and, as such, is likely to be affected detrimentally if parental involvement remains minimal.

These facts hold several implications for parents, faculty members, and administrators. Teachers and administrators in rural schools must find a way to create a productive learning environment. First, teachers and faculty members in rural schools with high percentages of minority and low SES populations must be cognizant of the necessity of understanding their populations. Findings in the study indicated that many of the students were bused to the schools, which indicated that the schools might be located several miles from the homes of students. This distance creates a logistic difficulty in that low SES parents are likely not to have transportation to schools.

Secondly, conditions that affect all minority and low SES families are particularly difficult for families in rural areas. Families in rural areas are more likely to be headed by single parents. This condition introduces several issues that must be considered in
developing an effective parental involvement plan for rural schools. Many parents are unable to participate in parental involvement activities because of work schedules. As in the case of one parent in the study, many single parents are working more than one minimum wage job and are unable to schedule times to meet with parents.

Research by Howley, Strange, and Bickel (2000) indicated that minority and low SES families are likely to have small preschool children. This condition frequently necessitates some form of childcare if parents are to participate in parental involvement activities. Schools must consider this condition when developing parental involvement plans for their schools.

Fourthly, Thurston and Navarette (2003) suggested that low SES parents were more likely to be intimidated by teachers and the school environment than were their non-minority and higher SES counterparts. This factor should also be considered when developing a parental involvement plan.

Faculty and administrators not only play a role in the community as members of the school, they are also members of the community. They socialize with parents, attend the same churches with parents, and occasionally meet and greet in local stores with parents. Faculty members and administrators may also have children who attend the schools and who participate in the same kinds of activities with other students in the school. Cognizant of the difficulties involved in creating a successful parent involvement plan, rural schools must take advantage of the informal communication opportunities offered them. The close-knit nature of the community surrounding the school allows the establishment of relationships with parents that will increase their desire to participate in
school functions as well as their ability to assist in the learning processes of their students.

Fyans and Maehr (1990) and Thacker and McInerney (1992) suggested that meaningful participation in parental involvement activities could possibly produce significant change in student achievement. Rural schools with large populations of high poverty, high minority students must recognize that the traditional forms in which parental involvement existed might not be practical for today’s society. It may be necessary for faculty and administrators of rural schools to come up with new and innovative ways to invite parents into the learning process. These ways might include day care services for parents with preschool children, transportation for parents who have no transportation to the schools, and other ways that demonstrate to parents that the schools both need and want them as part of the learning process. Fege and Smith (2002) stated that minority and low SES parents are frequently intimidated by the school environment and may be uncomfortable in attending activities at school. Schools may collaborate with community organizations to hold parental involvement activities in churches, community centers, and other places more proximal to the location of parents.

**Implications for Implementation of Research-Based Instructional Strategies**

Practitioners must understand that NCLB (2001) requires the use of scientific, research-based instructional strategies to ensure that students are able to read on grade level as a major piece in the Reading First initiative. Reading is crucial to the learning of other content areas, and implementation of instructional strategies that ensure students a good foundation in reading is necessary for student achievement. Toward this end,
most schools, including rural schools, tend to integrate instructional strategies that enhance student preparation for reading. All three of the schools in the study incorporated Accelerated Reader® as a major component of the Reading First initiative. This program encourages extended reading for students and is valuable in all schools, but the concern is the selection of the program without considering its benefit for minority and low SES populations in these three schools.

Secondly, administrators and faculty in rural schools must be familiar with other forms of research-based instructional strategies that make learning effective for minority and low SES students. Students learn in different ways just as teachers teach in different ways. It is critical that practitioners in rural schools have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to create culturally responsive learning opportunities for all children. Teacher preparation institutions must improve training in teaching a nation of diverse people in diverse learning settings. Schools must utilize or develop effective instruments to determine student-learning styles, and professional development opportunities must be made accessible to new teachers to improve skills and dispositions necessary to teach to diverse learning styles. Additionally, culturally responsive teachers must be made aware of cultural differences between their students and themselves. This new knowledge will enable teachers to know how and what to use to establish the necessary prior knowledge on which to build new learning.

To determine what kinds of instructional strategies will be most effective for their populations, practitioners must have the skills necessary to make decisions established on standards-based assessments. Administrators and faculty must be able to read and interpret data collected in empirical research related to potential instructional strategies.
Practitioners rarely conduct their own research, but by comparing the populations studied in the research and the population for which the instructional strategy is being considered, they can select strategies that might be most effective for their classes. The practitioner should be informed enough to ask for some form of assessment to determine if a program or strategy has been tested under predetermined conditions with a test group. This kind of research allows the practitioner the opportunity to determine whether the strategy will be effective for the population being served.

Implications for Teacher Quality

Teacher quality in schools is addressed by NCLB (2001) by the highly qualified provision. Rural schools are more likely than their urban counterparts to employ teachers who may be teaching out of their field. In addition, minority and low SES students in rural schools are more likely to be taught by teachers who are teaching out of their field or are not highly qualified. Darling-Hammond (2000), Malhoit (2005), and others indicated that one of the major problems in rural schools is the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers. Conditions that directly affect recruitment of highly qualified teachers include teacher salary, isolation, professional development, and support of new teachers.

A major difficulty in the recruitment of highly qualified teachers is the salaries offered by rural school districts. Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) suggest that there is no national teacher shortage, but that there are teacher shortages in specific geographic areas and in content areas such as math, science, and special education. As with Beta High School, findings of this study revealed that rural schools experience difficulty hiring
teachers for these content areas. To address shortages in these areas, the administration in
districts affected by these difficulties must develop innovative ways to address them.

A new method of addressing the teacher shortage in rural areas is to create a
teaching force tied to the school. This goal was accomplished in the three schools in this
study by two methods. The first was alternative certification of individuals already
employed by the school district. This method proved successful for these three schools.
The second method was traditional teacher training after which individuals who lived in
the community and, thus, were tied to the community in some way returned there to
teach. Findings of the study indicated that recruitment of faculty members who had ties to
the community or who had completed alternative certification was largely the case in the
schools in the study. Faculty members either lived in the community or lived within a 30-
minute drive of the school.

asserted in their studies that, while parent SES is the most significant variable affecting
student achievement, teacher content knowledge and teacher quality are two significant
factors in student achievement. There are both positive and negative implications of the
findings relative to professional development and support for new teachers in this study.

First, findings in the study suggest that professional development is largely related
to testing and test preparation. Faculty indicated that principals provided knowledge of
professional development opportunities, and teachers were allowed to select opportunities
that would extend teacher quality and skills in the classroom. Findings also indicated that
faculty members rarely took advantage of these opportunities, but the district included
several hours of professional development across the school year. It would appear that
inclusion of mandated professional development would be effective for each of the three
schools, but other findings indicated that district mandated professional development
might not meet the needs of the individual schools. A suggestion from the findings of the
study would be to determine professional development based on comprehensive needs
assessments for the school. Professional development should be unique to the needs of
the school so that the student population of the school is served. Additionally, it would
appear that professional development for culturally responsive teaching would enable
new teachers to be better able to meet the needs of a diverse population of students.

Support for new teachers is accomplished through the assignment of mentors for
new teachers. This is a function of the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment
Program (LaTAAP). By providing support for new teachers, schools are more likely to
retain teachers recruited for employment. Additionally, mentoring helps to extend the
sense of family and teamwork across faculties. Schools that integrate mentoring for new
teachers and professional development for all teachers are more likely to witness
consistent growth in SPS and student success.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study investigated how activities, conditions, events, policies, and
procedures related to the implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) influenced
consistent growth in SPS in three rural schools. Moreover, the study examined the culture
of each of the three rural schools in the study. Implications from the findings of the study
indicate the necessity for further research in rural schools. Extant research has been
generated relative to success of minority and low SES students, but little research has
been generated about this population in rural schools. Research in the following areas can
extend the knowledge base for rural schools:

1. Recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers in rural schools;
2. Roles of principals as educational leaders in rural schools; and
3. Student burnout at the end of standardized exams.

Recruitment and Retention of Highly Qualified Teachers in Rural Schools

Research by Williams (2003a, 2003b) and Williams and King (2002) stated that rural areas experience unique difficulties in producing equitable education opportunities for learners. One of the most critical areas of rural education research is the effect of teacher quality in rural schools. Findings in this study indicated differences in teacher preparation in rural schools. Research suggests that minority and low SES students are likely to be taught by faculty teaching outside their field or less well prepared faculty. The highly qualified teacher provision of NCLB (2001) assured that a highly qualified teacher would be present in every classroom in the nation beginning in the year 2005. The definition for highly qualified is broad and general. The definition provides criteria by which states might identify highly qualified educators. These criteria include completion of either an alternative teacher preparation program or a traditional teacher preparation program and the successful completion of the state licensure exam. Further, teachers who hold licensure in other areas may also become highly qualified by completing 36 hours of advanced coursework in the content area for which they are seeking highly qualified status or by completing the licensure exam for that content area. Further research would extend the knowledge base regarding how teacher preparation paths affect student achievement in rural schools.
Role of Principal as Educational Leader in Rural Schools

Copious amounts of research have been generated relative to the effect of principal leadership in urban schools, roles that minority principals play in urban schools, and the role of the principal in instituting organizational change for education reform. Findings of this study indicated that visionary principals who established rapport with the faculty such that they were able to take ownership in the principal's vision for the school instigated positive changes in these three rural schools. Trust in the leadership of the principal grew out of that rapport. Study of this concept can illustrate how educational leadership of principals affects student achievement in rural schools.

Student Burnout at the End of Standardized Exams

Findings of this study revealed that students frequently lost focus on learning after LEAP examinations week. Teachers reported that students were not motivated to learn, and, once the test had ended, it was difficult to maintain appropriate behavior and classroom management. Further research is suggested to determine what kinds of activities will enhance student achievement. Other research could possibly address research question number one and examine the student perceptions of the importance of the high stakes test. Research could also address kinds of instructional activities that would prevent student burnout.

Summary

This study investigated how activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures implemented in rural schools influenced consistent growth in SPS. Additionally, activities, conditions, events, policies, and procedures were examined to
determine what kind of culture existed in three rural schools. Lastly, the school culture was investigated to determine how the confluence of school culture and implementation of the provisions of NCLB (2001) influenced consistent growth in SPS.

The researcher also discovered the different ways that NCLB (2001) might be implemented across a particular population of schools. It was very clear that although these three schools shared some characteristics, each was unique in some way. The researcher also discovered that even though all the schools were operating under the directives of NCLB (2001), they might not work toward meeting those directives in the same way. The researcher also became aware of the differences in perception of what NCLB (2001) was and was not and did or did not do. The researcher also began to see NCLB (2001) as a means of ensuring equitable education opportunities for all learners.

The researcher discovered the importance of effective school leadership. By critically examining leadership styles, interactions with other members of the learning community, and personal attitudes, values and beliefs about learning, the researcher became more aware of the importance of principal leadership to facilitate positive educational reform.

Lastly, the researcher became aware of the importance of parental involvement in the school setting. Additionally, the researcher learned the value of informal communication as a means of inviting parents into the learning processes of their students. The researcher also became more cognizant of the misperceptions relative to parental involvement in rural schools.

This study contributed to the broader body of knowledge by examining the relationship between rural schools with high minority low SES populations and
implementation of NCLB (2001) as a means of providing equitable education opportunities. Additionally, this study noted how positive school culture directly affects student learning.

The researcher found that the greatest advantages of rural school education are the family and community ties that extend past the school into the home and the community. These ties enable schools to be aware of situations that might directly affect student learning and to create a sense of belonging for each learner. The results of this study should prove valuable to teachers in rural schools, parents of students in rural schools, university personnel in teacher preparation programs, and students who attend rural schools.
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION

STUDY/PROJECT INFORMATION FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE

Describe your study/project in detail for the Human Subjects Committee. Please include the following information.

TITLE
Beating the Odds: A Case Study of Three Rural North Louisiana Schools with High Percentages of Minority and Low Socioeconomic Populations

PROJECT DIRECTOR(S) Jacqueline L. Mason

EMAIL masonj@nsula.edu
ilm0012@bellsouth.net

PHONE 318-259-7082 (home)
318-357-5091 (office)

DEPARTMENT(S) School of Graduate Studies: Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

PURPOSE OF STUDY/PROJECT
The purpose of this study is to explore factors, characteristics, and conditions that could possibly influence the success of three rural schools located in North Louisiana with predominantly minority, lower socioeconomic populations.

SITES
The sites for this study are three rural schools in North Louisiana with high populations of minority, lower socioeconomic students.
PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the study will include selected administration, faculty, parents, and students.

PROCEDURE

The researcher will contact superintendents of the districts in which the sites are located and obtain permission to enter the schools. The researcher will conduct focus groups with instructional staff and parents; individual interviews with superintendents and school administration (principal, assistant principal, and counselor) and faculty members; selected parents, and selected students. Student interviews will be conducted as written prompts by the researcher with follow-up interviews using structured questions and open ended responses. (Questions attached.) Individual interview participants will be selected using stratified random sampling.

All interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed with transcriptions being read by participants to ensure interpretive validity and trustworthiness. All collected information will be kept on file in a secure place and only viewed by the researchers.

INSTRUMENTS AND MEASURES TO INSURE PROTECTION OF CONFIDENTIALITY, ANONYMITY

To maintain anonymity and confidentiality in this study, both sites and participants will be assigned pseudonyms. All tapes, documents, surveys, and other instruments will be sealed for a period of five years. Additionally, the researcher, as instrument will protect the identities of research participants by not divulging names, places, or other demographic information of participants.

The principal will request that teachers volunteer to participate in the focus group interviews. Permission to tape record sessions will be kept, and all interview sessions will be recorded for later coding. Multiple methods of data collection ensure validity of the data collected. The researcher will ensure reliability by multiple readers of the coded data and the conclusions of the study.

RISKS/ ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS
No risk is involved in participant involvement. Participation in the study is voluntary.

BENEFITS/ COMPENSATION
There are no direct benefits attached for participation in the study and no monetary compensation will be offered.
SAFEGUARDS OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Participation in this study is voluntary. If at any point the study reveals threat of emotional, psychological or physical concerns, the participant may discontinue participation in the study.

Note: Use the Human Subjects Consent form to briefly summarize information about the study/project to participants and obtain their permission to participate.

HUMAN SUBJECTS CONSENT FORM

The following is a brief summary of the project in which you are asked to participate. Please read this information before signing the statement below.

TITLE OF PROJECT: Beating the Odds: A Case Study of Three Rural North Louisiana Schools with High Percentages of Minority and Low Socioeconomic Populations

PURPOSE OF STUDY/PROJECT: The purpose of this study is to explore factors, characteristics, and conditions that could possibly influence the success of three rural schools located in North Louisiana with predominantly minority, lower socioeconomic populations.

PROCEDURE: The researcher will contact superintendents of the districts in which the sites are located and obtain permission to enter the schools. The researcher will conduct focus groups with instructional staff and parents; individual interviews with superintendents and school administration (principal, assistant principal, and counselor) and faculty members; selected parents, and selected students. Student interviews will be conducted as written prompts by the researcher with follow-up interviews using structured questions and open ended responses. (Questions attached.) Individual interview participants will be selected using stratified random sampling.

All interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed with transcriptions being read by participants to ensure interpretive validity and trustworthiness. All collected information will be kept on file in a secure place and only viewed by the researchers.

INSTRUMENTS: To maintain anonymity and confidentiality in this study, both sites and participants will be assigned pseudonyms. All tapes, documents, surveys, and other instruments will be sealed for a period of five years. Additionally, the researcher, as instrument will protect the identities of research participants by not divulging names, places, or other demographic information of participants.
The principal will request that teachers volunteer to participate in the focus group interviews. Permission to tape record sessions will be kept, and all interview sessions will be recorded for later coding. Multiple methods of data collection ensure validity of the data collected. The researcher will ensure reliability by multiple readers of the coded data and the conclusions of the study.

**RISKS/ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS:** No risk is involved in participant involvement. Participation in the study is voluntary.

**BENEFITS/COMPENSATION:** None

I, _________________________________, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the following description of the study, “Beating the Odds: A Case Study of Three Rural North Louisiana Schools with High Percentages of Minority and Low Socioeconomic Populations”, and its purposes and methods. I understand that my participation in this research is strictly voluntary and my participation or refusal to participate in this study will not affect my relationship with Louisiana Tech University or my grades in any way. Further, I understand that I may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely available to me upon request. I understand that the results of my survey will be anonymous and confidential, accessible only to the principal investigators, myself, or legally appointed representatives. I have not been requested to waive nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

Signature of Participant or Guardian

Date

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** The principal experimenters listed below may be reached to answer questions about the research, subjects' rights, or related matters.

Dr. Pauline Leonard, Major Professor (318-257-3753)
Jacqueline L. Mason, LEC Doctoral Candidate (318-357-5091)

Members of the Human Use Committee of Louisiana Tech University may also be contacted if a problem cannot be discussed with the experimenters:

Dr. Les Guice (318-257-3056)
Dr. Mary Livingston (318-257-2292)
APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD
APPROVAL LETTER
MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Pauline Leonard and Jacqueline L. Mason
FROM: Barbara Talbot, University Research
SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW

In order to facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been done for your proposed study entitled:

"Beating the Odds: A Case Study of Three Rural North Louisiana Schools With High Percentages of Minority and Low Socioeconomic Populations"

# HUC-261

The proposed study's revised procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Informed consent is a critical part of the research process. The subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary. It is important that consent materials be presented in a language understandable to every participant. If you have participants in your study whose first language is not English, be sure that informed consent materials are adequately explained or translated. Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined. Projects should be renewed annually. This approval was finalized on April 28, 2006 and this project will need to receive a continuation review by the IRB if the project, including
data analysis, continues beyond April 28, 2007. Any discrepancies in procedure or changes that have been made including approved changes should be noted in the review application. Projects involving NIH funds require annual education training to be documented. For more information regarding this, contact the Office of University Research.

You are requested to maintain written records of your procedures, data collected, and subjects involved. These records will need to be available upon request during the conduct of the study and retained by the university for three years after the conclusion of the study. If changes occur in recruiting of subjects, informed consent process or in your research protocol, or if unanticipated problems should arise it is the Researchers responsibility to notify the Office of Research or IRB in writing. The project should be discontinued until modifications can be reviewed and approved.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Mary Livingston at 257-4315.
DEPARTMENT HEAD APPROVAL FORM

TO: Project Directors

FROM: Barbara Talbot, Office of University Research
btalbot@latech.edu
318-257-5075 phone
318-257-5079 fax
http://research.latech.edu/

SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW

DATE: April 7, 2006

Please submit this page signed by your Department Head or Dean when submitting a proposal to the Human Use Committee for expedited approval. Their signature is stating that they are aware of this proposal and/or survey that is being conducted.

(print or type below)

Department
Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership

Department Head Name

Dr. David Gullatt

David Gullatt ___________________________ April 10/06
Signature Date

(Actual original signature required)
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

This study is designed to determine what factors, characteristics, and/or conditions are present in the three schools selected that may be associated with their consistent growth in school performance scores across the period, 2001-2005. I will collect information today that will aid practitioners in understanding how your school works. I will break this interview into three parts beginning with interactions between and among faculty members and administration; interactions between and among other faculty members; and interactions between faculty members and students. Secondly, I will request information about instructional strategies that you use in your classroom, activities that are incorporated into your classroom, and the extent to which students are engaged in learning in the classroom. Lastly, I will collect information about how parents are involved in your school and the activities in which parents participate. First of all, I am sure that you all know one another. Please allow me to introduce myself to you and allow you to introduce yourself to me.

Introductory Set

a) What grade do you teach?

b) How long have you been teaching?

c) What is your favorite content area?
Set One Stakeholder Interactions

a) Describe a typical faculty meeting.

b) Elaborate on the effectiveness of typical faculty meetings (opening school meetings, regular monthly meetings, closing meetings).

c) Describe the kinds of feedback you give in school policymaking.

d) Tell of a time, if any, that you have participated in selection of professional development.

e) Describe school policy for lesson planning.

Set Two Instructional Strategies

a) Describe a lesson that allowed you to be the best teacher possible.

b) What kinds of instructional strategies do you include in your teaching practice on a daily basis?

c) What types of activities are most engaging to students?

d) What kinds of behavior management and classroom management strategies do you use?

Set Three Parental Involvement

a) Describe your school parental involvement plan.

b) List three times that you have seen parents in your school?

c) What kinds of parental involvement are included in your school?

d) Explain how parents are contacted in your school.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
FOR PARENTS
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
FOR PARENTS

I will collect information today that will help my understanding of why your school shows consistent growth in School Performance Scores despite factors that researchers have indicated are detrimental to student and school success. I will break this interview into three parts beginning with your interaction in your student’s academic studies and the kinds of learning activities that students pursue at home (i.e., kinds of reading material selected by parents, educational games that students play and television programs that you watch with your student). Secondly, I will ask questions that describe how you interact with the professional staff of your student’s school. Lastly, I would like you to describe the kinds of activities in which you participate at your student’s school.

First of all, I am sure that you all know one another. Please allow me to introduce myself to you and allow you to introduce yourself to me.

Introductory Set

a) How many children do you have in this school?

b) What grade is your child at this school? If you have more than one child enrolled, please give grade of enrollment for each child.

c) How long has your child attended this school? If you have more than one child attending this school, please tell how long each child has attended this school.
Set One Parental Involvement with Student Learning Activities

a) Select the number of books that your student has read this year.
   1. 1-5
   2. 6-10
   3. 11-15
   4. 16-20
   5. more than 20

b) How would you describe interactions with your child between the hours of 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.?

c) Summarize the last television show, movie, or video that you watched with your student.

d) How does your child access educational technology?

e) How often does your child have access to educational technology, (i.e., computers, Ipods, or DVD player?)

Set Two Interaction with Professional Staff at your Student's School

a) List three times that you have been asked to come to school.

b) Explain how parents are contacted in your school.

c) On what occasions do you come to visit your student’s teacher?

Set Three Kinds of Parental Activities At Your School

a) How would you describe the last three parental involvement activities sponsored by your school?

b) How would you describe school efforts to ensure your participation in parental involvement activities?
APPENDIX E

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
FOR PRINCIPALS
APPENDIX E

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
FOR PRINCIPALS

I will collect information today that will help me to understand why your school demonstrates consistent growth in SPS, despite factors that researchers have indicated are detrimental to student and school success. I will break this interview into three parts beginning with interactions between and among faculty members and administration; interactions between and among other faculty members; and interactions between faculty members and students. Secondly, I will request information about instructional strategies that your teachers use in the classroom, availability of resources for activities in the classroom, the types of professional development available for faculty and style of school management. Lastly, I will collect information about how parents are involved in your school and the activities in which parents participate.

Introductory Set

a) How long have you been principal at this school?

b) What kinds of duties do you fulfill as principal?

c) What kinds of duties do you delegate to assistant principals or counselors?

Set One Stakeholder Interactions

a) Describe a typical faculty meeting.
b) Elaborate on the effectiveness of typical faculty meetings throughout the school year (opening of school, regular monthly meetings, closing of school).

c) opportunities for faculty involvement and feedback in local school policymaking.

d) Describe district/school policy for lesson planning.

Set Two Instruction

a) What kinds of instructional strategies do your teachers employ on a daily basis?

b) What types of professional development are available for your teachers?

c) How would you describe the professional development selection process for teachers in your school?

d) What determines the kind of professional development offered to teachers in your school?

e) What kinds of behavior management and classroom management strategies do your teachers use?

Set Three Parental Involvement

a) How would you describe your school parental involvement plan?

b) How would you describe the last meeting that you had with a parent?

c) What kinds of parental involvement are included in your school?

d) Explain how parents are contacted in your school.
APPENDIX F

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR
DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS
APPENDIX F

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR
DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

I will collect information today that will help me to understand why School ________ demonstrates consistent growth in SPS despite factors that researchers have indicated are detrimental to student and school success. I will break this interview into two parts beginning with interactions and communications between schools and the central office and the process for implementing mandates from State Department of Education. Secondly, I will request information about district wide initiatives, availability of resources for activities in the classroom, the types of professional development available for faculty and style of school management.

First of all, please tell me a little about yourself.

Introductory Set

a) How long have you been superintendent in this district?

b) What kinds of duties do you fulfill as superintendent?

c) How many assistant superintendents, supervisors, and/or directors make up your staff?

Set One Policy Making

a) How would you describe a typical administrator’s meeting at the central office?

b) Would you elaborate on the effectiveness of the district administrator’s meetings?

c) Which of the following describes the decision making policy in your district:
1. Centralized management (decisions and policies are made at the central office and passed down to the schools)

2. Site-based management (decisions and policies are made at the school with the input of all stakeholders based on input and suggestions from all stakeholders)

3. Combination of both

d) Identify opportunities for faculty involvement and feedback in local school policymaking.

Set Two Instructional Strategies

a) What kinds of district wide initiatives are in place in your district?

b) What types of professional development are available for your teachers?

c) How would you describe the professional development selection process in your district?

d) What determines the kind of professional development offered in your district?
APPENDIX G

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS
APPENDIX G

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

I will collect information today that will help my understanding of why your school shows consistent growth in School Performance Scores despite factors that researchers have indicated are detrimental to student and school success. I will break this interview into three parts beginning with the kinds of learning activities that you pursue at home (i.e., kinds of reading material selected by parents, educational games and television programs that you watch at home), and finally, instructional activities in which you participate and interactions with faculty at school.

First of all, I am sure that you all know one another. Please allow me to introduce myself to you and allow you to introduce yourself to me.

Introductory Set

a) What grade are you?
b) How many brothers and sisters are enrolled in this school?
c) How long have you attended this school?

Set One Student Learning Activities at Home

a) Select the number of books that you have read this year.

6. 1-5
7. 6-10
8. 11-15
9. 16-20
5. More than 20
b) Summarize the last television show, movie, or video that you watched within the last 3 months.
c) How do you access educational technology?
d) How often do you have access to educational technology, (i.e., computers, Ipods, or DVD player?)

*Set Two Instructional Activity Preference*

a) What kinds of instructional activities does your teacher usually use?
b) Describe what activities help you learn best?
c) Describe what does not help you learn.

*Set Three Interaction with Faculty and Administrators*

a) List three times that your parents have been asked to come to school.
b) Explain how parents are contacted in your school.
c) On what occasions do your parents come to visit your teacher?
APPENDIX H

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION
TO ENTER SCHOOL (SUPERINTENDENT)
APPENDIX H

LETTER REQUESTING
PERMISSION TO ENTER
SCHOOL (SUPERINTENDENT)

April 17, 2006

Jacqueline L. Mason
1150 Sweet Home Road
P.O. Box 463
Hodge, LA 71247

(Name)
Superintendent, (___________ Parish Schools)
Address
City, State, Postal Code

Dear __________________________:

As a doctoral candidate at Louisiana Tech in Curriculum and Instruction, I am conducting research to understand how characteristics, conditions, and factors in rural schools with high percentages of low SES minority schools contribute to consistent growth in School Performance Scores in schools. I am also an instructor in the College of Education at Northwestern State University of Louisiana and a large number of our schools will benefit from the findings of this study.

I am preparing to conduct a qualitative study for my dissertation in three rural North Louisiana schools with high percentages of minority low SES students. These three schools, one of which includes __________________________ (name of school), have shown consistent average growth in SPS over the period 2001-2005. To conduct this study, it is necessary to obtain written permission from you as superintendent of the district. I am seeking permission to enter __________________________ High School during the period April 20 – June 1, 2006.

Enclosed please find the consent form and a description of the research being conducted. Participation in the study is voluntary and each participant must complete the consent form if they agree to participate in the study. The form requests permission to interview individuals, conduct focus groups, analyze school documents, and observe school activities and events. Ethical considerations are also outlined in the consent form. Every effort will be made to guarantee anonymity of all participants will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on my interpretation of the data. Additionally, the identity of the school will be concealed in that revealing information will be withheld and pseudonyms be assigned to all schools.
Should you have any questions, please contact me at 318-259-7082 (home) or 318-357-5091 (office) or my major advisor, Dr. Pauline Leonard at 318-257-3753 at Louisiana Tech University. Your letter of approval will make my research possible. I look forward to receiving such approval from you.

Sincerely,

J.L. Mason

Enclosure: Human Subjects Consent Form
APPENDIX I

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO ENTER SCHOOL (PRINCIPAL)
APPENDIX I

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO ENTER SCHOOL (PRINCIPAL)

April 17, 2006

Jacqueline L. Mason
1150 Sweet Home Road
P.O. Box 463
Hodge, LA 71247

__________________________
(Name)
Principal, (___________ Parish Schools)
Address
City, State, Postal Code

Dear _________________________

As a doctoral candidate at Louisiana Tech in Curriculum and Instruction, I am conducting research to understand how characteristics, conditions, and factors in rural schools with high percentages of low SES minority schools contribute to consistent growth in School Performance Scores in schools. I am also an instructor in the College of Education at Northwestern State University of Louisiana and a large number of our schools will benefit from the findings of this study.

I am preparing to conduct a qualitative study for my dissertation in three rural North Louisiana schools with high percentages of minority low SES students. These three schools, one of which includes __________________________ (name of school), have shown consistent average growth in SPS over the period 2001-2005. To conduct this study, it is necessary to obtain written consent from you as principal of the school. I have been given permission by the superintendent to enter __________________________ High School during the period April 20 – June 1, 2006.

Enclosed please find the consent form and a description of the research being conducted. Participation in the study is voluntary and each participant must complete the consent form if they agree to participate in the study. The form requests permission to interview individuals, conduct focus groups, analyze school documents, and observe school activities and events. Ethical considerations are also outlined in the consent form. Every effort will be made to guarantee anonymity of all participants will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on my interpretation of the data. Additionally, the identity of the school will be concealed in that revealing information will be withheld and pseudonyms be assigned to all schools.
Should you have any questions, please contact me at 318-259-7082 (home) or 318-357-5091 (office) or my major advisor, Dr. Pauline Leonard at 318-257-3753 at Louisiana Tech University. Your letter of approval will make my research possible. I look forward to receiving such approval from you.

Sincerely,

J.L. Mason

Enclosure: Human Subjects Consent Form
APPENDIX J

PERMISSION SLIP REQUESTING PARTICIPATION
OF PARENTS OR STUDENTS
APPENDIX J

PERMISSION SLIP REQUESTING PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS AND STUDENTS

May 29, 2006

Jacqueline L. Mason, B.S., M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate, Louisiana Tech University
P.O. Box 463
1150 Sweet Home Road
Hodge, LA 71247

To the parent(s) or guardians of _______________________

I am enrolled in a doctoral program at Louisiana Tech University where I am engaged in a study describing schools that are able to show consistent growth in SPS scores. These scores are determined by analyzing a school’s test scores, attendance, student retention, and other factors. Your child’s school, ______________________ is one of the schools selected for my study.

My research involves getting the perspectives and perceptions of all stakeholders at the school, that is, students, parents, faculty and staff, administration, and the central office. I need your views and input to present an accurate picture of your school. This is a story that needs to be told. Please meet me on June 8, 2006 at 6 p.m. in the library of the school for a short interview session. Refreshments will be served along with door prizes.

This letter includes a short overview of my study along with a permission form that will allow me to tape and include your story as a part of the story of ______________________ and a stamped, self addressed envelope. Please return the permission form in the envelope if you will be able to participate. The school and each participant in the study will be assigned a pseudonym to protect the identity of each participant. You will be given an opportunity to preview your statement for accuracy prior to the publication of the study. Data collected will not be seen by anyone other than the principal investigator, the major professor, and the peer reviewer of the study. It will be locked for five years following the study.

Please return the attached permission slip in the enclosed envelope. Thank you for your participation in this study.
Thank you,

Jacqueline L. Mason, B.S., M.Ed.,
Doctoral Candidate, Louisiana Tech University

I, _________________________________, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the description of the study, "Beating the Odds: A Case Study of Three Rural North Louisiana Schools with High Percentages of Minority and Low Socioeconomic Populations", and its purposes and methods. I understand that my participation in this research is strictly voluntary and my participation or refusal to participate in this study will not affect my relationship with Louisiana Tech University or my grades in any way. Further, I understand that I may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely available to me upon request. I understand that the results of my survey will be anonymous and confidential, accessible only to the principal investigators, myself, or legally appointed representatives. I have not been requested to waive nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

Signature of Participant or Guardian

Date
APPENDIX K

ELECTRONIC MP3 TRANSCRIPTION FILES
### APPENDIX K

**ELECTRONIC MP3 TRANSCRIPTION FILES**

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APPENDIX L

FIELD OBSERVATION RECORDING FORM
APPENDIX L

FIELD OBSERVATION RECORDING FORM

Field Observation Recording Form

Date of Observations
Study Site
Setting:
Persons in attendance
Time

Notes:

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REFERENCES


Benard, B. (2004a). *Resiliency, what we have learned.* San Francisco: WestEd.


Carter, G. R. (2003). *NCLB and the diverse needs of rural schools. Is it good for the kids?* Retrieved June 22, 2007, from http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.ef397d712ea0a4a0a89ad324d3108a0c/template.article?articleMgmtId=2a1ec72507e3e010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD


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