VOICES OF FOUR SMALL RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS THAT HAVE

SUCCESSFULLY REDUCED THE GAP IN ACADEMIC

ACHIEVEMENT OF ECONOMICALLY

DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

DISSERTATION

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This qualitative study explored the voices of four small, rural high schools in Texas that had successfully minimized the gap in academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students in the 2006-2007 school year. The purpose of this study was to identify the inherent qualities of each identified school through the voice

of the local school community. A pool of potential high schools to examine was initially created based upon several factors: a) being rated *Recognized* under the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System, b) classified as being rural by the guidelines of the National Center for Education Statistics, c) having a significant enrollment of socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED) students as reported by the Texas Education Agency, d) having an enrollment between 200-900 students, e) being a traditional four year high school, and f) having a significant reduction in the achievement gap between SED students and all other students. From this pool of high schools, a panel of experts composed of the dissertation committee members chose Foothill, Legg, Robinson, and Winkler high schools to be studied.

Each school's informal structured interviews were reviewed, a coding scheme was developed, and significant patterns both identified and described through the voices of interviewees. All four high school visits were then cross-analyzed for similarities.

All four high schools repeatedly attributed their academic success to both relationships and expectations. More specifically, all four schools expressed that

relationships with students, relationships with the

community, and expectations of the school were the primary

reasons for academic success.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Achievements gaps of socioeconomically students have always existed to some extent in schools. Schools have long examined the academic performance gap in striving to provide a quality education to all students. Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly (2004) said that the goal of eliminating achievement gaps was at the center of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The researcher stressed the importance of examining the inequitable achievement gaps at the local level within the context of the situation found at any given school.

Wasley (2002) addressed the significance of school and class size by coupling her experience and interpretation of research to delineate the importance that small school size had upon increased academic achievement. The increasing importance of school size can be attributed to the standards movement, an increasing consensus that all

students can learn, and a search for conditions that were supportive of increased academic achievement. Wasley (2002) stated, "renewed interest in…school size is broad-based and nationwide. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation…dedicated more than $250 million…The U.S. Department of Education has committed $125 million…"(p.8). Wasley (2002) further related her personal thoughts,

> My teaching and research experience have provided me with data that convince me that both small classes and small schools are crucial to a teacher's ability to succeed with students…despite parental involvement and teacher's good attentions; it is easy to get lost in large classes and in large schools…The time is ripe for educators to make the case for what research suggests and what our experience has been telling us for years: Students do best in places where they can't slip through the cracks, where they are known by their teachers, and where their improved learning becomes the collective mission of a number of trusted adults. (pp. 9-10)

Lee and Smith (1995) expressed concerns about the problems associated with research in terms of school size,

The inconsistency of research findings on the effects of high school size results from problems in the research: inconsistent definitions, weak methodology, and (primarily) the lack of a clear focus on what, precisely, might be affected by a change in school size and on the process through which those effects might work. (p. 7)

With the increased accountability at the state level and implementation of a federal accountability system, it has never been more beneficial than now for all students to be academically successful with the elimination of an academic achievement gap for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Some schools have managed to reduce and eliminate the academic achievement gap of socioeconomically disadvantaged students and warrant further review.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how four small, rural high schools successfully minimized the gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students. Each school's inherent qualities were identified

through the voice of the local school community, including students, teachers, parents, and community members.

Research Questions

The research questions are inherently confined to the context of each school studied within the research:

1. Through the voice of the local school community, what qualities enabled Foothill High School to successfully minimize the gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students?

2. Through the voice of the local school community, what qualities enabled Legg High School to successfully minimize the gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students?

3. Through the voice of the local school community, what qualities enabled Robinson High School to successfully minimize the gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students?

4. Through the voice of the local school community, what qualities enabled Winkler High School to successfully minimize the gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students?

Theoretical Framework

A qualitative research methodology was chosen with the intent of understanding in a context as conveyed by Merriam (2009), "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences..." (p.5). From a constructivist epistemological perspective as discussed in Merriam (2009), this study constructed the reality and nature of the studied phenomenon through interviewee thoughts and understandings within the context of each case study.

Specifically, this research was grounded in a case study type of methodology because in the words of Merriam (2009), "the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon" (p.50). Merriam (2009) defined a case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). Each school was a bounded system and case study displaying the phenomenon of having successfully minimized the gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students. Thus, each of the four high schools identified was a case study.

The emergent themes of the influence of relationships and expectations on student achievement provided the basis of a theoretical framework for consideration within the case studies of this research. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1966) Pygmalion Theory provided a foundational theoretical construct in establishing a relationship between teacher expectations and student academic performance. Furthermore, in an elementary setting with data gathered through questionnaires and interviews, Brookover and Lezotte (1979) found that in schools with improving performance, the staff shared much higher expectations for student achievement. Recent high school studies have proposed blended models that relate the impact of relationships and expectations to student achievement.

Research Methodology

The case studies were developed through structured interviews, observations, and document review. The research methodology was composed of three components: 1) Phase I Sampling Protocols, 2) Phase II Site Visits, and 3) Phase III Data Review and Analysis.

Phase I of the research involved identifying the particular small, rural schools that fit the criteria for

inclusion in the study. As outlined in Patton (2002), purposeful sampling allowed for the examination of cases that were more apt to be rich with information about the phenomena contributing to the success of the school.

During Phase II, the four schools identified as case studies were then examined using qualitative methodology to explore their respective qualities that have successfully reduced the gap in academic achievement scores between all students and economically disadvantaged students enrolled in the school.

During Phase III, data from each school were first individually analyzed by utilizing inductive analysis to identify themes and patterns. A coding scheme of concepts and sub-concepts emerged from reoccurring themes identified in the interviews at each site. The concepts and sub concepts were then used to organize the interview data. Concepts included relationships, expectations, school structures, and student behavior. Sub-concepts further defined concept definition by attributing the concept with greater specificity such as expectations being the expectations of either the teachers or student.

Definition of Terms

1) Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (SES)- Students
   qualifying for free or reduced lunch program as outlined
   in the Federal Register (USDA, 2004).

2) Non- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (NSES)- Students not
   qualifying for free or reduced lunch program as outlined
   in the Federal Register (USDA, 2004).

3) Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) –

   "…A comprehensive testing program for public
   school students in grades 3-11. The TAKS is
   designed to measure to what extent a student has
   learned, understood, and is able to apply the
   important concepts and skills expected at each
   tested grade level. It was first administered in
   the spring of 2003" (Texas Education Agency,
   Pearson Educational Measurement, Harcourt
   Educational Measurement, & Beck EvaluationTesting
   Associates, 2006).

4) Achievement Gap- The performance differential in
   achievement levels between socioeconomically deprived
   students and non-socioeconomically deprived students as
   measured by TAKS scores.

5) Locale Codes- Coding scheme developed by the National
   Center for Education Statistics (2006) to classify
   campuses for research purposes. Unlike other
   classification systems, the locale coding scheme
   classifies a campus based upon its specific geographic
   address and provides a better description of the setting
   in which the campus exists.

6) Cref- Texas Education Agency (2006) data file containing
   campus reference information to be utilized in the study.

7) Cstud- Texas Education Agency (2006) data file containing
   student reference information to be utilized in the
   study.

8) Ctaks6- Texas Education Agency (2006) data file
   containing 9th and 10th grade TAKS reference information
   to be utilized in the study.

9) Ctaks7- Texas Education Agency (2006) data file
   containing 11th grade TAKS reference information to be
   utilized in the study.

10) Relationships- An interaction among the school
   community that was generational, collaborative,
   supportive, caring, and committed to each other and

individual student success as a cornerstone in the
success of the school.

11) Expectations- A sincere sense of pride, connection and
ownership leading to a responsibility and commitment for
the school to be academically successful.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations within this study should be noted.
First, transferability as defined by Merriam (2009), "a
description of the setting and participants of the study"
(p.227), is limited to the data presented in this study.
Readers must carefully evaluate their setting and situation
in comparison to that of the study before considering
transferability of the findings.

Second, the target population consisted of small,
Texas high schools containing grades 9-12 with the
exception of Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs,
charter schools, and private schools. The study focused on
four small, rural high schools and, thus, can only be
applied within that context.

Third, achievement in this study was measured by
multiple TAKS test administered in the 9th, 10th, and 11th
grades of high school. As such, all discussions about

achievement were limited to the realm of implications and understandings as seen through the lens of the TAKS tests.

Fourth, White (1982) noted inconsistent definitions of socioeconomic status as a problem in the research base reviewed in his study. For purposes of this study, socioeconomic status was defined as the percentage of students on a campus qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program as outlined in the Federal Register (USDA, 2004). For the 2005-2006 school years, the free and reduced lunch qualifications were set respectively at 130% and 185% of the federal income poverty guidelines. Qualification as a student for a free or reduced lunch requires that a parent submit an application to the school to validate income. As such, there can be no definite guarantee that every student in a school qualifying for a free or reduce lunch has submitted an application and is appropriately categorized. In spite of the aforementioned limitations, the study provided insight and information into the interaction and relationship of SES, school size, achievement, expectations, and what individual schools do to provide a quality education.

Summary

Although the topics of school size, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement have been examined under a quantitative lens, education is an endeavor that is very much about human relationships and, thus, qualitative approaches to the problem are critical. Quantitatively knowing that some schools provide a better education is not enough, we must be able to describe vividly the nature, environment, and characteristics occurring in those particular schools. Thus, for this study, qualitative techniques will be utilized. This study examined four small, rural high schools in Texas that had successfully minimized the gap in academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students in the 2006-2007 school year. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors present in each school that contributed to its success in closing the achievement gap. The researcher, listening to the voice of the local school community, identified three relevant factors: expectations held by the school for student achievement, relationships of students with the school and the teacher, and the school's relationship with the community.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

After reviewing a number of quantitative studies (Bickel, 1999; Bickel, Howley, Williams, & Glascock, 2000; Fetler, 1992; Fowler & Walberg, 1987, 1991; Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; Lee & Smith, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997; Wasley, 2002), a relationship between school size, socio-economic status (SES), and academic achievement was evident. Studies examined the impact of school size on academic achievement in multiple settings using multiple measures of academic achievement, and multiple definitions of school size. Multiple settings included different states, types of schools, and campus grade spans. Academic success was measured by multiple types of achievement instruments dependent upon the school being studied. School size was examined from district size, campus size, or grade level size within the studies. The impact of SES on academic achievement was verified in multiple sites. Furthermore, several noteworthy qualitative

studies (Beesley & Barley, 2006; Cotton, 2001; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006) offered some understanding of the dynamics among school size, SES, and academic achievement of successful schools.

In listening to the voices of the four small, rural, high schools that had successfully minimized the gap in academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students in the 2006-2007 school year, the themes of relationships and expectations were significant. Because of the apparent importance of these factors, a further review of the literature concerned with relationships and expectations was conducted.

School Size and Socioeconomic Status

White (1982) reviewed the impact of SES upon academic achievement in a comprehensive review of the literature. The study noted that the unit of analysis was extremely influential in terms of the robustness of the correlation between SES and academic achievement. More specifically, a much stronger correlation existed at the aggregated school level than at the student level of analysis. Furthermore, family income was identified as the best single predictor of academic achievement.

Within a large study, Caldas and Bankston (1997) examined the impact on individual academic achievement and socioeconomic status of the school population for 42,041 10th grade students in Louisiana. Academic achievement was measured by the successful completion of the Louisiana Graduation Exit Examination (LGEE). Socioeconomic status was contextualized at the school level by the percentage of students who participated in the free and reduced lunch program as outlined by the federal government. The researchers reported a negative impact on individual student success in schools with higher percentages of low SES students.

Toutkoushian and Curtis (2005) demonstrated the impact of SES on standardized test scores utilizing the data from all 75 New Hampshire public High Schools. Standardized test scores were drawn from the New Hampshire Educational Improvement and Assessment Program (NHEIAP) examination administered to the 10th graders. Socioeconomic status was determined in part by the percentage of enrolled students eligible to receive a free and reduced lunch. The researchers confirmed that SES had a robust relationship with the average academic performance of students (Toutkoushian & Curtis, 2005). The researchers,

Toutkoushian and Curtis (2005), also acknowledged that without further investigation, their research had limited policy implications. Toutkoushian and Curtis (2005) recommended that it might be beneficial to "identify schools that are clearly above average in terms of their performance relative to SES and conduct case studies to investigate what might contribute to schools' success"(p. 269).

Lee and Smith (1993, 1994, 1995, 1997) conducted a series of studies that focused on school restructuring involving large bureaucratic schools that evolved into the examination of school size and its relationship to achievement. The authors defined school restructuring as "less departmentalization, more heterogeneous grouping, more team teaching..." (Lee & Smith, 1993, p. 164). Each of these studies utilized a subset of the data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 that included Catholic, private, and public schools. The NELS study had a baseline year of 1988 and followed with subsequent data collection at two-year intervals.

In the first study, Lee and Smith (1993) examined the impact of school restructuring upon the outcomes of achievement and engagement, as well as the social equity of

these factors. Social equity was defined as the ability of a school to have an equal impact upon students from different social backgrounds. The study specifically examined the aforementioned factors within the context of a random set of 8,845 eighth grade students from within the NELS data set. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was the methodological approach utilized in the investigation. The study validated a positive association of school restructuring with achievement and engagement. Furthermore, the study indicated that the more restructured schools were smaller in size. Hence, Lee and Smith (1993) reported, "grade size is negatively related to average levels of academic achievement…schools with larger eighth grades have less engaged students and achievement is more differentiated by social class than is the case in schools with fewer students in the eighth grade"(p.179).

Lee and Smith (1995) also utilized the NELS data set for a second study. Tenth grade students were the focus of the study. The researchers included school size as a factor because they believed that small size facilitates provided a greater likelihood of a school having an organic form of an organization. Lee and Smith (1995) outlined her interest in school size with the following hypothesis,

Another hypothesis concerns school size. We suggest that students attending small high schools are favored by that experience, above and beyond the other organizational practices considered under the "restructuring" or "traditional" definitions. The positive effects of attending small schools on students, we hypothesize, occur on both cognitive and noncognitive outcome effects, we also suggest that attending smaller high schools engenders a more socially equitable distribution of learning and engagement across students of differing social backgrounds. (p.12)

The study supported the impact of this hypothesis by reporting the clearly negative impacts of increased school size on achievement, engagement, and social equity.

The third study (Lee & Smith, 1997) focused on three questions: 1)in terms of student learning, what is the ideal size of a high school?; 2) in terms of equitable student learning, what is the ideal size of a high school?; and 3) in the context of the socioeconomic background of the school, what is the ideal size of a high school? As with the previous studies, this work also utilized the NELS

data set and hierarchical linear modeling methodology. The study categorized the independent variable, school size, based upon preliminary sensitivity studies that revealed the variable to have high positive skew. The eight school size enrollment categories were: 1) over 2,000 students, 2) 1,801-2,000 students, 3) 1,501-1,800 students, 4) 1,201-1,500 students, 5) 901-1,200 students, 6) 601-900 students, 7) 301-600 students, and 8) fewer than 300 students. The results indicated that schools within the 600-900 student category demonstrated the greatest positive impact upon both math and reading achievement. However, the social equity results were bifurcated for reading and math. The 301-600 student category showed the greatest negative effect size for reading. Schools with fewer than 300 students showed the greatest negative effect size for math. Furthermore, the results indicated that the 600-900 students category showed the highest achievement whether the school was a low or high SES school. The results revealed that schools with fewer than 600 students can be too small and have negative impacts on achievement.

Howley and Bickel (1999) reported on a series of studies in the states of Georgia, Ohio, Montana, Arkansas, and Texas known as the Mathews Project. The studies

focused on the interaction among student's achievement, poverty, and school size. The average number of students per grade level determined the school size. The study set no other standard for classifying schools as small or large. Poverty was measured by either the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch or the percentage of students who live with families qualifying for the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program. State-mandated achievement tests were utilized to provide student performance data. In Texas, the study utilized the 1996-1997 results of the Texas Assessment of Academic Success. The study specified number of schools and districts examined but not the criteria for being chosen. The authors suggested that states should adopt policies in favor of small schools to reduce the achievement gap between the students of economically disadvantaged students and non-economically disadvantaged students.

Like the Lee study, the Bickel et al. (2000) research was concerned with both achievement and equity. In affluent settings, the studies showed a positive relationship between school size and student achievement. However, in less affluent settings, the studies showed a negative relationship between school size and student achievement.

Hence, larger schools better serve the academic needs of affluent communities. Friedkin and Necochea (1988) reported similar findings in California third, sixth, eighth, and 12th grades between SES, school size, and academic performance. The researchers described an "equity effect" in terms of defining the extent of poverty's impact on student achievement in smaller and larger schools. Achievement equity was markedly increased in smaller schools.

Johnson, Howley, and Howley (2002) described the results found in a study of excellence and equity impacts in the state of Arkansas. Unlike the previous studies that limited examination to the interaction of school and district size to academic achievement, Johnson, Howley, and Howley (2002) expanded their investigation to include the impact of the socioeconomic status of the community. Stanford Achievement tests were utilized as a measure of academic achievement. School enrollment to the number of grade levels ratio was used as the definition of school size within the study. Limitations of using socioeconomic status as a measure are addressed in the report. Size, socioeconomic status, and the interaction of size and

socioeconomic status were utilized to create regression equations to predict school performance.

Johnson, Howley, and Howley (2002) extended their investigation to a multi-level analysis and examined schools within Georgia school districts. The multi-level study revealed a pattern to equity results among four groups of schools. Achievement was least equitable in larger schools within larger districts and most equitable in smaller schools within smaller districts. The second most equitable configuration was larger districts with smaller schools. Smaller districts with larger schools were the third most equitable configuration.

Bickel (1999) extended the Matthew Project to include the state of Texas. The study indicated that achievement of economically disadvantaged students was significantly impacted by increasing school size. The study indicated that achievement decreased as school size and the enrollment percentage of economically disadvantaged students increased at Texas High Schools. Data were utilized from the 1996-1997 school year. The study examined school achievement as measured by the three subtests of the 10th grade Texas Assessment of Academic Success (TAAS). The TAAS subtests include reading,

writing, and, math. Socioeconomic status was defined as the percentage of student enrollment eligible to receive free and reduced lunches. School size was defined as the number of students enrolled in the 10th grade. The study utilized regression analysis and partial derivatives to examine the data. The study also accounted for the interaction of the percent of less advantaged students and grade level size by multiplying the two variables within the regression equation.

Although Bickel et al. (2000) addressed and considered the SES gap between different communities, at the local level, it is crucial to consider the qualitative factors that impact achievement of individual schools. A qualitative lens is practical and relevant to practicing school administrators and local school boards charged with improving the community because it is the realm in which they have control to make a change.

Relationships and Expectations

Henderson and Mapp (2002) report in their annual synthesis of research that student achievement is connected to the community and family involvement with the school. Beesley and Barley (2007) investigated 21 rural, high performing schools in the central United States for factors

that school personnel attributed to each school's success.
The schools selected for in-depth site visits all revealed
a perception that close relationships with the community
and high expectations were fundamental to student's
academic success. The authors stated, "…communities are
invested in the success of the schools" (Beesley & Barley,
2007, p. 4).

In an extensive review of the literature, Cotton
(2001) outlined the key elements to success of small
schools, including small learning communities. Success in
a small learning community is framed in terms of several
outcomes: achievement, equity, affiliation and belonging,
safety/order, truancy/dropouts, preparation for higher
education, extracurricular participation, parent
involvement/satisfaction, teacher attitude/satisfaction,
curriculum quality, and costs. Cotton (2001) reported,
"Experienced practitioners and knowledgeable researchers
have much to say about conditions and practices that can
enable small schools to achieve their potential…self-
determination, identity, personalization, support for
teaching, and functional accountability" (p.18). Self-
determination was defined as autonomy, distinctiveness,
self-selection of teachers and students, and flexible

scheduling. Identity was defined as having a vision/mission, thematic focus, focused on student learning, and detailed planning. Personalization was described as knowing students well, heterogeneity, looping, and parent and community involvement. Support for teaching was identified as leadership/decision making, integrated curriculum/teaching teams, and large repertoire of instructional strategies. Functional accountability was seen as multiple forms of assessment, accountability/credibility, supportive districts, boards, and legislatures, and networking with other small learning communities.

A series of four case studies of high need rural schools was conducted to determine the qualities that separated lower and higher performing schools (Beesley & Barley, 2006). Although each of the rural schools examined faced different barriers, each found a way to be successful beyond what would normally be expected. In addition, each of the schools attributed their success differently. The study reports poverty and school funding as key barriers to student learning. Community relationships, caring approaches, leadership, extracurricular involvement, and an attribution of credit to having good students were

identified as prevalent themes helping the schools overcome their barriers to being successful in raising standardized test scores.

The first case study focused on an elementary school that served 151 students (Beesley & Barley, 2006). The case study detailed a situation with 48% of the students being eligible for free and reduced lunch, a community with a low level of education, a high special education enrollment, and few role models for the students. Through the use of data, parental and community involvement, caring culture, inspiring leadership and high expectations, researchers concluded the school was able to beat the odds and be successful at raising standardized test scores.

The second case study (Beesley & Barley, 2006) focused on a junior-senior high school with an enrollment of 124. The school had 36% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch with 15% of the students being English language learners. The researchers indicated a relatively high poverty rate for the community and a declining school enrollment. However, it was reported that the school overcame its barriers to become academically successful by using student data, implementing new policies, and organizational structures, maintaining high expectations,

retaining dedicated teachers, administrative leadership, and community partnerships (Beesley & Barley, 2006).

The third case study (Beesley & Barley, 2006) focused on a junior-senior high school with an enrollment of 196. The school had 97 % white students and 16.8 % eligibility for free and reduced lunch. The researchers point out that knowing parents, holding high expectations for everyone, supporting teachers, community support, extracurricular activities, and having a "great kids" attitude provided a means to overcoming the odds (Beesley & Barley, 2006).

The fourth case study was a junior-senior high school with an enrollment of 148 students (Beesley & Barley, 2006). The student population had 93% white students and 37% eligibility for free and reduced lunch. Beesley and Barley (2006) reported that the high expectations for students, teacher retention, administrative leadership, community support and involvement, a culture of caring, and extracurricular involvement as thematic reasons for beating the odds and being successful.

Hoy (2006) gathered data from 96 high schools in a Midwestern state trying to determine the characteristics, in a school that support increased student achievement. Hoy (2006) coined the term "academic optimism" to explain

the findings and defined it as "academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust…tightly woven together…to reinforce each other as they positively constrain student performance" (p. 426). Academic emphasis was seen as the impetus for academic achievement. Collective efficacy was seen as the whole school's belief that they could be successful. Faculty trust was trust that was inclusive of the faculty members trusting both parents and students. Hoy (2006) noted these indicators as an attribute of the school as opposed to the individual teacher.

Summary

After reviewing a number of quantitative studies (Bickel, 1999; Bickel, et al., 2000; Fetler, 1992; Fowler & Walberg, 1987, 1991; Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; Lee & Smith, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997; Wasley, 2002), it was evident that there a relationship exists between school size, SES, and academic achievement. In the light of new standards and academic testing requirements in Texas, it was thought to be valuable to apply a qualitative lens to examine what was happening in schools that produce exemplary performance in spite of the odds against them.

Several key qualitative studies (Beesley & Barley, 2006; Cotton, 2001; Hoy, et al., 2006) offer some insight into the dynamics among school size, SES, and academic achievement of successful schools. It was also deemed vital to focus on successful small, high schools which represent a focal point of communities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

From a qualitative standpoint, this study explored the qualities of four small, rural high schools that have successfully minimized the gap in academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. Case studies were developed through informal structured interviews, observations, and document review.

Study Context

This study was conducted within the secondary public education system in the State of Texas. The focus was narrowed to small, rural high schools that had been identified at least "Recognized" by the Texas Education Agency. The Texas Education Agency (2006) outlined the requirements that a campus needed to earn the status of being labeled as "Recognized". "Recognized" was defined as a campus scoring at least a 70% passing rate on all TAKS tests administered. TAKS passing percentages were examined for all students as well as several student sub-

categories: African American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged. Passing percentages were specific to each subject area tested: Reading/ELA (60%), Social Studies (60%), Mathematics (40%), and Science (35%)(Texas Education Agency, et al., 2006).

A campus's rural status was determined by the locale codes established by the National Center for Education Statistics (2006).

Economically disadvantaged status was defined as the percentage of students on a campus qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program as outlined in the Federal Register (USDA, 2004). For the 2005-2006 school years, the free and reduced lunch qualifications were set respectively at 130% and 185% of the federal income poverty guidelines. A student having qualified for a free lunch did not have to pay for lunch. A student qualified for a reduced lunch paid a substantially discounted fee for lunch. This study examined schools that had an enrollment of economically disadvantaged students greater than 30%.

School size was measured by the number of students enrolled in the high school. As school size is relative in terms of what is considered small and large, this study

focused on high schools with an enrollment between 200 and 900 students. Researchers (Cotton, 2001; Howley & Harmon, 2000; Lawrence et al., 2002; Lee & Smith, 1997) have identified varying optimal ranges and specific sizes from as few as 200 students to as many as 900 students as being optimal enrollments for high schools.

Academic achievement was examined through the lens of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests. The TAKS test is given at the 9th, 10th, and 11th grade levels in Texas high schools. At the 9th grade level, two tests, reading, and mathematics were administered. At the 10th and 11th grade levels, four tests were administered: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science. The percentage of all students passing all tests and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students passing all tests were utilized in examining the academic success of the school. The TAKS test is currently being phased out and being replaced by the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR).

Through the combined efforts of the Texas Education Agency, Pearson Educational Measurement, Harcourt Educational Measurement, and Beck Evaluation and Testing

Associates, Inc. (2008), appropriate statistical measures were applied to the TAKS tests to gather data for the study. Test validity and reliability were thoroughly examined and statistical equating was utilized to ensure consistency between the different forms of the same tests.

The Texas Education Agency et al. (2008) reported that the TAKS reliability was based upon both the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR20) and the stratified coefficient alpha (Cronbach's alpha) internal consistency measures. The KR20 addressed the multiple choice items whereas the Cronbach's alpha was utilized to address the short-answer and extended response items. Reliability estimates were calculated for all TAKS content area tests utilized within this study. The TAKS tests had an acceptable range of KR 20 reliabilities from 0.81 to 0.93.

The Texas Education Agency et al. (2008) further reported that the validity of the standard referenced TAKS test was based upon the assessment's ability to measure a student's understanding of the Texas Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) upon which it was based. Furthermore, the Texas Education Agency et al. carefully approached test construction to ensure the validity of the TAKS test. A

collaborative and multidimensional process between Texas Education Agency staff, teachers, and test development specialists were followed to ensure the content validity on all TAKS assessments.

Furthermore, the Texas Education et al. (2008) indicated a need to equate the TAKS assessments due to the many different versions of each assessment administered. Each administration of the assessment needed to have a comparable difficulty to maintain the same passing standard. Equating occurred during test construction as well as after construction. During the construction of the assessment, the equating process was named pre-equating. After the test had been administered, both the field-tested items and the operational items on the test were also equated.

Phase 1 Sampling Protocols

The first phase of the research was identifying the particular small, rural schools that fit the criteria for inclusion in the study. Purposeful sampling allowed for the examination of cases that were more apt to be rich with information about the phenomena contributing to the success of the school.

From the Texas Education Agency (2008), four data files were downloaded to be utilized in the study: Cref, Cstud, Ctaks6, and Ctaks7. The data files were merged into one spreadsheet. Extraneous data fields and records were deleted. Several data fields were needed to fulfill the sampling protocol: Campus Name, Current 9-Digit School Number, Campus 2006 Flag-Charter School, Campus 2006 Ratings, Grade Span, Total Enrollment, Campus 2006 Student: ECO Percent, Campus 2006 TAKS-Accountability Test: Grades 3-11 Summed All Students All Tests Rate, Campus 2006 TAKS-Accountability Test: Grades 3-11 Summed Econ Disadv All Tests Rate. Several criteria were used to screen the data and discern the records applicable to the context of the study: schools with a grade span of 9-12, schools not classified as charter or alternative, schools designated as rural, schools with enrollments between 200-900, and schools having a Texas Education Agency accountability rating of at least "Recognized".

After discarding records not applicable to the context of the study, a gap score, defined as the difference between the passing rate of all students and the passing rate of the economically disadvantaged subset of students,

was determined for each school. The mean and standard deviation of the gap scores was calculated. The high schools with the smallest gap scores, 1 standard deviation below the mean, were selected as a pool of possible high schools to be examined further.

A panel of experts examined the pool of possible high schools to be examined further. From the remaining identified exemplar schools, four schools were selected to conduct case studies. The selected schools were contacted and agreed to participate in the research study.

Phase 2 Site Visits

The four schools to be identified as case studies were selected using a purposeful sampling technique and were then examined using qualitative methodology to explore their respective qualities that have successfully reduced the gap in academic achievement scores between all students and economically disadvantaged students enrolled in a school. With the small number of purposefully selected schools to study, this study cannot be generalized and likewise does not have external validity.

Methodological and data triangulation techniques were carried out in completing site visits. Patton (2002)

comments that, "triangulation strengthens a study"(p.247).
The site visits methodologically triangulated findings by
using observations, informal conversational interview
protocols, and document review. In the pursuit of building
a rich understanding of the school, data triangulation was
incorporated by interviewing the principal, formal campus
leaders, informal campus leaders, teachers, school board
presidents, and other key members of the community that
provided a deepened understanding of the school.

All interviews were digitally recorded, and
handwritten notes were taken as a means of initial
documentation. Each digital recording was transferred to
the computer, backed up, transcribed, and verified by
individual interviewees. In alignment with Merriam's(2009)
suggestions for increasing validity and reliability,
interviews transcriptions were reviewed by interviewees for
accuracy to enhance the internal validity and reliability
of the study. After verification, digital recordings were
deleted. Observations were documented by taking copious
handwritten notes. Document review was recorded by
obtaining copies of key documents such as the campus action
plan.

Phase 3 Data Review

After completing site visits, audiotapes were reviewed multiple times and then the transcribed interviews were also extensively reviewed. While reviewing transcripts, open coding comments were highlighted and notations were made on transcripts to identify potential answers and relevant information to the research questions. Notations and comments were clustered and collapsed into categorical concepts: Relationships, Expectations, School Structures, and Student Behavior.

Utilizing the QSR XSight 2 qualitative data computer program, identified concepts and interviewee transcripts, the frequency of each concept occurring during interviewees was determined. After further review, it was evident that the "Relationship" and "Expectation" categories could be described with a greater specificity by providing subcategories as provided in Table 1 and the data were reevaluated to take into account the subcategories.

"Relationship" was defined in Merriam-Webster (2012) as a noun that describes, "…a state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings." The dictionary (2012) further defined "relation" as, "…the state

of being mutually or reciprocally interested." Repeatedly, interviewee statements expressed a reference to an interaction among the school community that was generational, collaborative, supportive, caring, and committed to each other and individual student success as a cornerstone in the success of the school.

"Expectation" was defined as a noun in Merriam Webster (2012), "that act or state of expecting." The dictionary (2012) further delineated that the verb "expect" to mean, "to consider reasonable, due, or necessary." The construct emerged from interviewee statements expressing a sincere sense of pride, connection and ownership leading to a responsibility and commitment for the school to be successful. The interviewees specifically used the word "Expectations" as being an important contributing factor for all students to be successful in all endeavors.

Table 1. Concepts and Subconcepts

Concept	Sub Concept	Description
Expectations	School	Expectation of the school for students to be successful. The school expressed a sincere sense of pride, connection and ownership leading to a responsibility and commitment for the school to be successful.
Relationships	Students	Relationship between the school and the students contributing to student success. An interaction between the school and students that was supportive, caring, committed and foundational to student success.
Relationships	Community	Relationship between the school and the community contributing to student success. An interaction between the school and community that was supportive, caring, committed and foundational to student success.
Expectations	Community	Expectation of the community for students to be successful. Community expressed a sincere sense of pride, connection and ownership leading to a responsibility and commitment for the school to be successful.

After each case had been reviewed, findings were shared again with each site to validate agreement and significance of findings. Patton (2002) stressed, "Where all three---analyst, those studied, and reviewers---agree, one has consensual validation of the substantive significance of the findings…"(p.467).

Reporting of data included each site visit being reported individually. These recordings and descriptions were the basis for determining and analyzing the findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The findings of this study detail the inherent qualities of each identified school through the voice of the local school community. The Foothill High School interviewees attributed most of the success of the school to expectations of the school, relationships with the students, relationships within the community, and expectations of the community. The Legg High School interviewees attributed most of the success of Legg High School to relationships of teachers, expectations of the school, and relationships within the community. The Robinson High School interviewees attributed most of the success of the school to relationships within the school, expectations within the school, and relationships within the community. The Winkler High School interviewees attributed most of the success of the school to expectations of the school, relationships with students, relationships within the community, and relationships with the community.

Foothill High School

Foothill High School was rated as a recognized campus for the 2006-2007 school year under the Texas Education Agency's (2008) school accountability plan. According to the Texas Education Agency, Foothill High School reported an enrollment of 248 students, of which 79.0% were White, 4.8% were Hispanic, and 15.3% were African American during the 2006-2007 school year.

Foothill High School served the community of Foothill and encompasses 93.19 square miles within its attendance boundaries(Texas Education Agency, 2008). The US Census Bureau (2008) data indicated that the Foothill community exhibited some characteristics as shown in Table 2 that deviated from the nation as a whole.

Table 2. Foothill High School Demographic Data

Characteristic	Foothill	United States
Population	1209	
White	86.7%	75.1%
African American	10.9%	12.3%
Hispanic	2.8%	12.5%
High School Graduates	70.7%	80.4%
Bachelor's Degree	11.6%	24.4%
Families Below the Poverty Level	12.8%	9.2%
Median Household Income	$28,125	$41,994
Median Home Value	$66,700	$119,600

From the 2002-2003 school year to the 2006-2007 school year, the Texas Education Agency (2008) indicated that Foothill High School increased the percent of students passing all TAKS tests by 147%. During that same time period, there was only a 49% increase of students passing all TAKS tests in the state of Texas. Furthermore, during

the same time period, Foothill SES classified students had

a 353% increase in passing all TAKS tests. At the state

level, however, SES classified students only showed a 76%

increase in passing all tests. Foothill also had an also

had a 67% increase in SES classified student enrollment

during the same time period.

Table 3. Foothill High School Summary TAKS Data

| School Year | Percentage Passed | | |
	All Students	SES	Difference
2002-2003	32	17	15
2003-2004	52	37	15
2004-2005	65	64	1
2005-2006	72	75	-3
2006-2007	79	77	2

Coded interview data as shown in Table 3 from the

qualitative data computer program, QSR XSight 2, depicted

the frequency that Concepts and Sub-Concepts under

consideration during Foothill High School interviews.

Interviewees attributed most of the success of the school to expectations of the school, relationships with the students, relationships within the community, and expectations of the community.

Table 4. Foothill High School Coding Summary

Concept	Sub Concept	Number	Percentage
Expectations	School	17	22
Relationships	Students	13	17
Relationships	Community	10	13
Expectations	Community	10	13
Structures	-	7	9
Expectations	Parents	6	8
Relationships	School	4	5
Expectations	Students	3	4
Behavior	-	3	4
Relationships	Parents	2	3

Expectations of the School.

Foothill High School interviewees conveyed the significance of expectations held by the school as a critical factor in the success of the school as they told their stories. Expectations of the school were articulated both in general terms that success was inherently expected because teachers and administrators were products of the community as well as the school having high expectations for all students. The Foothill High School interviewee vocies best expressed the significance given to the concept of expectations of the school.

Strong beliefs were held that administrators and teachers held high expectations because they were community members or graduates of Foothill High School. Mason, an administrator, commented that,

Elementary principal graduated from Foothill. High school principal graduated from Foothill. Middle school principal did not graduate from Foothill but he did work in the community in a different capacity other than school for a quite a number of years, so he had some ties here also. Many of my other administrative, not just administrative, I'm talking

about teachers, especially elementary and middle school, are from the community. Not as many of them from high school, though a few of them are. Of course, most of our other employees are going to be from in our community area. I feel like being a small school with a large number of people that are from the community, they want our school to be successful and look well. They don't want to be the ones to let down the community by them not doing their job or not stepping up to things.

Haylie, a teacher, further elaborated that, "we all work together as a team. I do think part of it is there are a lot of hometown folks here so they have something invested."

Multiple stories were told about Foothill High School having high expectations for all kids. Robert, a teacher, expressed his high expectations for all kids,

I tell my low socio-economic kids that we're all at the same level. It doesn't matter who you are. The expectation is that they reach the same level, and I've always had really good luck with that. Low socio-economic or not. I don't care who it is. I

don't accept anything less than that. You will not use the excuse that you are poor. I was raised by my grandfather, my grandmother and my mother and my dad left when I was 11 months old. We were poor. That was not an excuse. I've got a college degree and a master's degree. So I refuse to let them use that as an excuse. It's real hard challenging them because they know that sophomore test doesn't count for anything. See, it doesn't count for anything and yet our sophomores raise their level.

I'm a firm believer in a classroom you do everything you can to set a kid up to be successful: You push them, you praise them. Whatever it takes for each kid, you try to figure out what it is it takes, you know, that one button that you can push. Some of these kids respond to you when you kind of get on to them a little harder. Other kids, you got to praise them beyond belief, just pat them on the back. You can do this. You're not stupid. I don't care what your brother said. I don't care what your sister said. I don't care what your friends say. You're not stupid. And you just have to work very, very

diligently to get that. That's how I work in my classroom. The expectation here is to be highly successful. It's to be highly successful in everything.

Harvey, a teacher, expressed high expectations for all children while reflecting aloud,

They will come back later and say, "You know, I was doing this or I was wearing this and I was trying to be this, but you never let that affect how you saw me." And I think that's a very, very important part of it. And the way that I teach in regards to that is, whether a kid's poor or not they trust me, I know the poor kids in this town and I know the rich kids in this town. I don't care. I expect you to achieve. It's my expectation. Kids look at me and they say, "Why are you always making us do this?" Because I expect you to be able to do it. That's what I expect from you. So therefore, you should be able to do it. And I had one girl, probably my first or second year here. And, you know, you never realize. It's one of those teaching stories. You never realize how much of an effect you have on somebody. They weren't in my

theater class, and that's obviously my strong point. I teach speech and she was in my speech class. As I teach, I share kind of personal values and life lessons and things in any class that I teach. She'll be graduating, I believe this year, with her CPA in accounting, maybe even her master's, I'm not sure. She came back to me one time and she told me, "It's the way that you treated me by not saying…because she was a poor kid, you know, and by letting her know in the teaching that you don't have to be like your parents.

The expectations of the school were expressed repeatedly and in different ways as a central reason for the success of Foothill High School. Harvey, a teacher, expressed his opinion about the existence of expectations at Foothill High School,

I think the biggest thing to maybe what you're looking at and what you're doing and what's being said is I think the reason kids succeed in specific areas is that there is a personal, a local and then a, I guess, a professional expectation. And it all comes back to that one thing. I expect you to do good because I

don't want you to be. I don't want people to have dominion over you. And that's really one of the big things that I teach, is if you're ignorant, people control you. If you are educated, then you'll get to make choices for yourself.

Relationships with the Students.

Foothill High School interviewees attributed the success of the school in part to the relationships cultivated with the students. On multiple occasions, interviewees made connections between educators being local and knowing the kids and establishing relationships with students at Foothill High School. The connections are best illustrated through the stories shared by interviewees.

Jesus, a teacher, felt strongly about relationships being a contributing factor to the success at Foothill High School,

A lot of our teachers are people that have grown up here. We got a good bunch. They got people looking up to them. They get along good with the kids because they know their surroundings, their background, and I think that helps quite a bit.

Chelsey vocalized a complementary concept about the significance of student relationships,

> You know, I think, you know, I've been here for 15
> years, knowing the community and knowing the kids.
> I've got brothers and sisters and cousins and all of
> that now. And kids used to say to me in 9th grade,
> "You're not near as mean as I heard you were in middle
> school." And I say, "Well, don't pass it around. I
> don't want them to know. I want them to come over
> scared to death."

Repeatedly, interviewees spoke of the importance of relationships at Foothill High School. The phenomenon is better explained through the eyes of the interviewees at Foothill High School. Ansel, a community member, explained that

> …being a small school district, you kind of keep up
> with the teachers and stuff. Not all of them live
> around here, but most of them. A lot of them do. If
> you live in a small district you know how this is. If
> you go to the grocery store, you see the kids or you
> see the parents or you go to the same church as they
> do. You see them at the football games. You know how

on football games, most everybody comes to football

games. That's one thing I like. Some of the kids, by

the time they are a senior, you feel like they're

almost your kids. I have them two or three periods a

day for four years. After a while, you know them

pretty good by the time they get out of here.

Emma extends the importance of the concept of teaching

students multiple times and the impact upon relationships,

I love this place. You know all the students. I get

several of them over and over, so when they come to me

the second time, they already know my expectations.

They already know the rules. So it's not having to

teach all of that at the beginning. That's nice about

small schools.

Chelsey reinforced the importance of teachers having

the ability to teach each student multiple times throughout

high school,

And everybody has something you know, you can't be

anonymous from a kid's standpoint, because they can't

hide. It's hard to fall through the cracks here. And

there are kids who do, but that's pretty limited. So

I'd have them as freshmen and again as juniors and the

other teachers as sophomores and seniors, so you
really get to know them.

Mason, an administrator, depicted the relationship
with students through a genuine interest and caring about
the success of students at Foothill High School,

You've got to have an interest in them, and I go to
most everything that we have. I may not be able to
make some events because of other things I have to be
at or be involved with, but I do try to go to as many
of them as I can and I enjoy it. I'm not going just
to be seen so that somebody knows I'm there. I
genuinely enjoy so much of it, love the kids, and love
to see them be successful.

Relationships with the Community.

Foothill High School interviewees recognized the
importance of community relationships in fostering student
success. Harvey, a teacher, commented that, "the
communication is pretty open…the village takes care of the
children." Jesus, a teacher, elaborated upon the importance
of the community by saying,

Basically, I think we're a good close-knit community.
I think it's a big part. We've got some good

churches, some good people all the way around. We
have our differences, but at the end of the meeting we
walk up and shake hands with each other. I think
that's the way it is with the school. If somebody has
a problem. If one of the teachers gets in a little
bit of trouble, I think there is always somebody there
to pat them on the back and say, "What can we do to
help?" Just real close knit. We're a small community,
close-knit community, everybody knows each other.
Matter of fact, at our church my wife and I teach
junior high Sunday school class. You're always
looking to try to get more people involved, try to get
more students in the class or just people in general
in the school. I asked my son and several of the
other kids in there; are there any kids in your class
that don't go to church? And they sit there and they
think for little bit and they can't think of anybody.
Nearly everybody's involved in one way or another in
church. When you start getting people together in
groups and working together with each other, I think
that makes a big difference. Just makes everything
smoother. Everybody knows each other. Everybody

knows how everybody's going to work. It just is
making everything smoother. I think that's trickling
over to the school.

Interviewees also cited the importance of community
relationships in that many educators and students have
long-term connections to Foothill. Mason, an
administrator, expressed the importance of community,

A lot of folks from the community live here. I mean
have lived here. Their children may come back and
live here. Their grandchildren may come back and live
here. They may have been gone for a while. Sometimes
they come back for economic reasons. Sometimes they
come back for other reasons. But it's been good. I
know, as somebody from the community, when I returned,
I was involved in the elementary school. I would see
students who's last names I knew and they were either,
in this case they were grandchildren of people, maybe,
I had been in school with. So when there were
discipline issues or other issues, it was very handy
for me to know who to call and talk with. In many
cases, they knew me. In some cases where some parent
would come up or worry about a complaint or something

sometimes it was just matter of, "Oh, I'm from Foothill." Then their attitude with me changed. They didn't know who I was or where I was from. I was just somebody in here being the administrator. They took a different attitude with maybe the things I dealt with their children. But once they realized I had roots in the community, their dealings with me were completely different. They knew I wasn't just somebody who was going to step on their kids and go on.

Harvey, a teacher, further reinforced community relationships,

I grew up here, went kindergarten through graduation at Foothill High School. I left here. I went and got a degree and came back. I think that's a big part, one of the strengths of Foothill, that it's a local community. And while the kids would argue that, "I can't do anything without Mom knowing before I get home." I think that that's one of the big strengths.

Expectations of the Community.

Foothill interviewees also align the success of Foothill High School with the expectations of the community. Mason, an administrator, said

Foothill is a community, having grown up here and gone
to the public school here and gone off to college and
work and was gone a number of years. They have always
had pride in their school and their community and the
success of their students. Many of our graduates have
gone on to do excellent things. One of them had been
president of Baylor University at one time. They have
been…two of them have been president of the Texas
Bankers' Association. That was father and son.
Another graduate of Foothill was president of the
world's large mortgage company at one time. We've got
students now that have gone to the service academies
and have done well that are doctors, lawyers. Our new
editor does an excellent job of getting the positive
things in the paper also. Now he may put a negative
thing or two, but by far, the majority of the things
he has with the school, with the students, are very
positive. So it presents a positive image to our
community and to the people that read our paper and
see what's going on. We have people that care. They
want our students to be successful. I don't know
really what else to say other than they care. And

because so many people have remained in the community, you still have a lot of the people that know each other and that are positive. They want to know what their children are doing. They do want to be responsible for their children. Again, you're still going to have some that aren't, as with any place. But I think by far, we have a high percentage that are. I think we've got good people. We try to have good people at school, people that care. That's right. So I think that's a lot of it. The board has good expectations. They all I would say every one of our board members, every one of them has an interest in the school and the students at the school. Not all of them have children in school. That's all right, because either they or their family has been in school here and they care. It's our community.

Haylie, a teacher, attributed a part of the school's success directly to community expectations,

I think that's a big part of it and I think that the community expects a lot and so I think a lot of it comes from there. And we have a lot of the people that were born, raised, graduated from here, went off

to college, and came back. That makes a difference so they care about the kids that live next door to them as well as their friends' kids and kids' friends and –

Carter, a teacher, from an outside perspective said that "this community has always been -- and I knew this because I competed against them for years before I even came here… I could tell as an outsider looking in at that particular time how much support community had for their children. I was impressed by that.

Ansel, a community member, commented on the values of the Foothill community as it related to the expectation of education in the community,

Environment, because if you've got a strong, positive family that has positive values, work ethic, that sees the point of education, it doesn't matter where they're at. If they're in a government housing project or in a hundred thousand dollar house, they're going to try to enforce that in the kids that it's important to get an education. And I think you have a lot of the people in Foothill that have that value system, even the poor ones. They want to see their kids go to school. Even the ones that are not

necessarily that way a lot of times, if you've got one
or two up here at school and they don't feel that way,
and they're surrounded by eight or nine more, maybe
they'll take the positive role.

Summary.

Foothill High School, a TEA "recognized school",
reduced the gap in SES student performance from a 15
percentage point differential in the 2002-2003 school year
to a two percentage point differential in the 2006-2007
school year. The community of Foothill High School
attributed their academic success to expectations of the
school, relationships with students, and relationship with
the local community.

Legg High School

Legg High School was rated as a recognized campus for the 2006-2007 school year under the Texas Education Agency's (2008)school accountability plan. According to the Texas Education Agency, Legg High School had an enrollment of 213 students of which 75.1% were White, 19.2% were Hispanic, and 3.8% were African American during the 2006-2007 school year.

Legg High School serves both the communities of Jamestown and Martinville and encompasses 307.95 square miles within its attendance boundaries (Texas Education Agency, 2008). The two communities both share many characteristics while also having noticeable differences as evidenced through data obtained by the US Census Bureau (2008). Furthermore, the census data as shown in Table 4 also illustrate some key differences of the communities as compared to the United States in general.

Table 5. Legg High School Community Demographic Data

Characteristic	Jamestown	Martinville	Unites States
Population	861	226	
White	75.1%	81.8	75.1%
African American	7.7%	8.6	12.3%
Hispanic	23.6%	12.3	12.5%
High School Graduates	63%	69.5	80.4%
Bachelor's Degree	7.4%	12.0	24.4%
Families Below the Poverty Level	26.4%	27.9	9.2%
Median Household Income	$26,250	$18,333	$41,994
Median Home Value	$59,600	$44,300	$119,600

From the 2002-2003 school year to the 2006-2007 school
year, Legg High School increased the percent of students
passing all TAKS tests by 32%. During that same time
period, there was a 49% increase in students passing all
TAKS tests in the state of Texas. Furthermore, during the
same time period, Foothill SES classified students had a
167% increase in the number of students passing all TAKS

tests. At the state level, however, SES classified

students only showed a 76% increase in passing all tests.

Legg also had an also had a 21% increase in SES classified

student enrollment during the same time period.

Table 6. Legg High School Summary TAKS Data

	Percentage Passed		
School Year	All Students	SES	Difference
2002-2003	50	27	23
2003-2004	58	38	20
2004-2005	64	48	16
2005-2006	60	61	-1
2006-2007	66	72	-6

Coded interview data as shown in Table 6 from the

qualitative data computer program, QSR XSight 2, depict the

frequency that Sub-Concepts and Concepts occurred during

Legg High School interviews. Interviewees attributed most

of the success of Legg High School to relationships of

teachers, expectations of the school, and relationships within the community.

Table 7. Legg High School Coding Summary

Concept	Sub Concept	Number	Percentage
Relationships	Student	34	47
Expectations	School	12	17
Relationships	School	8	11
Relationships	Community	4	6
School Structures	-	4	6
Relationships	System	3	4
Behavior	Student	2	3
Expectations	Students	2	3
Expectations	System	1	1
Expectations	Parents	1	1
Relationships	Parent	1	1

Relationships with Students.

Legg High School interviewees attributed the school's success primarily to the relationships they has created with the students. Interviewees reported the development of nurturing relationships stemming from both the genuine

caring attitude of the educators as well as student involvement in activities.

Patricia, a counselor, clearly articulated the care and concern at Legg High School,

I think we have a staff, too, that genuinely is concerned and cares for the kids. And I think that's probably the key to what we're talking about in the success, and then the kids know you're concerned. And a lot of the times, some of these kids, nobody's ever been concerned before. I've got one student…she's a junior…she keeps coming in and coming in and coming in here, and I'm like, "Go to class." She said, "But I like to be in here with y'all." You've got to realize there's more than just the academic part to this. So I think with us tapping into that, that makes a big difference, because once we do that and then the student rises and gets to where we think he should be, then all that kind of goes away, and we can do less of that and more of the academics

I go to the home. I sit in the living room with the parents. I had a kid the other day, very high-risk. I've been with her since kindergarten. She's been here

off and on, been in juvenile facilities and she's going to graduate May 30th, and quit coming to school a couple of 3 days…I went to her house. I said, "Get dressed. You're coming to school." Her grandmother was there. I said, "Can I do this?" The special ed teacher and I went. She said, "Sure." So what I did on her, I knew she wasn't going to make it three more weeks. So I set up a plan with the teachers and the special ed teacher, and I said, "By next Monday, everything's got to be done." Because I knew and somebody said, "Three weeks?" I said, "She's not going to make it. I know her and I can tell she's not going to make it." So I went to her house and she said, "Oh, what are you doing here?" I said, "Get your clothes on. You're coming to school. You are not sick." And she was just wandering around for about 30 minutes -- I was glad the grandmother was there, though – about 30 minutes and the grandmother said, "I'm so glad you did this." I put her in my car and brought her to school. She hasn't -- she hasn't missed since.

John, an administrator, depicted the building of relationships with the students at Legg High School through simply taking an interest in the student's activities,

They want you to be there to see them and they want you the next day to say, "Did you see me, Mr. John, catch that touchdown pass? Did you see me, Ms. Patricia? Did you do this? Did you see me, Ms. Brown? Did you know that I won second place in prose and poetry?" And pat them on the back and say, "Yeah, I did." Or a lot of times, they'll say, "Are you coming to my game tonight? Are you coming to watch the play tonight? Are you coming to do this?" They want you there and no matter what the age, old or young, like I said, first through 12, they have feelings and they cry when they're sad and they laugh when they're happy and they have all the emotions in between. And I know I don't always come to school feeling the best and sometimes I have bad days and I go in my office and I shut my door, but kids can't do that. They have got to be out there at the best of their ability every day. And we have got to understand to know that sometimes they're not having the best day. And just

because they're not having the best day, they may not

perform the best work or the best discipline, they may

not be the best-behaved, but we can't look past the

sight of the fact that there's probably a reason

behind it and we've been in the same spot. So you've

got to keep that in consideration. Have a little bit

of patience and understanding and hopefully…

Hudson, a teacher, shared his thoughts about Legg High

School's success in terms of relationships and small school

size,

And they know that if we're up there getting a cup of

coffee in the workroom, all they have to do is come by

and say, "Hey, I need some help," and we'll come help

them. They know that. I mean, I have them call me at

home. I have college kids call me at home needing

help with something. But I think it's a closeness of

the small school, too. And here, everybody's somebody

and you can't get lost. You can't get lost. My daddy

was military so I went to big schools. He retired

when I was going into high school, so I graduate from

a small high school but I went to big schools all over

the world and you can get lost, and here, everybody's

somebody and I think that helps, too. And I think
that's why the small schools, percentage-wise, do
better. My kids … I mean, all three of my own kids
are successful. They all have college degrees and
they got to try everything, you know, whether it was
football or basketball or track or band or one-act
play or debate. In a big school, you can't do that.

Cortland, a teacher, related the extensive caring and
commitment of the student's most basic needs that were
being addressed at Legg High School,

We take care of our kids even after they graduate.
You cannot imagine how many work here in the custodial
staff, in the cafeteria; in the bus barn and we love
them so much that we don't let them go, ever. I
didn't see that in Johnsonville. And I was hometown
Johnsonville, hometown, third-generation educator in
that school, and I didn't feel what I feel here. I
can't explain it. We just had an incident just last
week. There were quite a few band kids that didn't
have the money to go on the band trip. They needed
$175 each and the band director let us know and we as
a staff took care of it. It happens all the time. It

happens all the time. Clothes, shoes, spending money,
trip money, it happens all the time because we -- they
don't necessarily know. These things are anonymous.
And that's back to that, if they know you care, then
they care. It's not mushy. I don't shake hands at the
door and I don't hug unless I'm given one and then I
take it. I go home every afternoon and I think about
them and I think about what they need and if their
needs are being met and I worry about them. So that
makes a difference, and they can tell that. They know
if you really care or not and that makes them care. I
really do think that for the most part, our campus--
that's why we're successful, because we're taking care
of their needs, making sure that their needs are met.
Part of that is to make sure that their self-esteem --
that they feel good about themselves. If they feel
good and they like our classrooms, they're going to be
successful.

John, an administrator, connected Legg High School's
student involvement to establishing relationships with
students and thus leading to academic success,

I would say 80 percent of our kids are involved in some sort of extracurricular activity, whether it's SCLA officers and competitions or FFA officers or competitions or projects, or animals in the shows or whether it's your athletics or your band or organizations to that nature. If you've got your kids involved and you've got them focused towards some of those things, it automatically makes some of those things better because then you've got the sponsors and the coaches and the UIL directors working with those kids on a close basis, and therefore, they're keeping them focused and they tend to do better in the classroom if they've got something that they're also interested in and it's two-fold. The fact that they are interested in it, number one, and number two, if they want to stay involved and interested in it and be eligible, they've got to pass and it helps take care of itself. So I think the second major thing for us is 80 percent of our kids are involved in something. We've got very few of our kids that are not.

Ruth, a teacher, reiterated the importance of having strong and caring relationships with the students to the success of Legg High School,

I just think it's a small, close knit -- the kids here have grown up -- we've had a lot of the kids that have moved in, but for a majority-wise, they have all started together and stayed together and they're like family. Everybody knows everybody here. Of course, they know their business. There is some gossiping that goes on. But it's just-- everyone pulls together and I think, too, we've got a lot of teachers that have been here for years or a lot of the teachers that are from this area. And we just have a group of parents that work. I mean, it's all the way down from high school down to elementary. We've got a lot of parents that stay involved with the athletics. We have got some great athletic departments. They really push the kids to strive and do their best. I went to a large 5A school. I've been here for 20 years and I had grandparents, aunt and uncle that lived here, so I visit on the weekends and spring break. So I knew a lot of the people before I moved up here. So it's

just the closeness, though. At that large 5A school -

- I told the kids today, "Y'all are really blessed to

be here with teachers that do care about you and that

do know who you are," because every day I meet them at

the door and greet them and tell them hi and I know

their names and I know their problems and I know, you

know, everything pretty much about them, but at that

big school, you've got teachers that don't know the

kids and don't even know their name. So here I think

that they feel they're something special

Expectation of School.

Legg High School interviewees related that

expectations of the school were an integral part of the

success of their school. Expectations were rooted in the

goal for all students to be successful and a sense of pride

in past accomplishments.

Patricia, a counselor, spoke to expectations in terms

of meeting the specific needs of every child,

Trying to…trying to coordinate all that. I think,

too, if there's a need of any student, it's met. We

work on individual needs of each student like

individualized scheduling. We don't do anything in a

group. We look at kids one-on-one. I think that's
just a real plus for a small school like this. You
know, there are advantages and disadvantages, but when
we're looking at academics, you know, and we really
are pushing now the technology and we're pushing for
kids to go to college, go to work, do something as a
productive citizen once they get out of high school.
I think it makes a big difference because if you can
get a kid to buy into, "An investment in what I'm
doing now can create a stronger future for me and
society", that makes a big difference. We start it
very early, little bitty on, and every time I meet a
student I'm like, What are you going to be doing in
five years, Johnny? What are you going to be
doing...And I think giving them their options, and
showing you're genuinely concerned. We have colleges
come in and we even take kids to the schools. Like
last week, I took three kids that, financially, it's
going to be hard for them to go to school. So I said,
We're going to go down there, spend the whole day at
Bryan/College Station, we're going to talk to
counselors, financial aid. We did the whole thing,

took them out to lunch. And we'll get a kid in here

that the other school districts say, there's nothing

you can do with them. Well again, we think out of the

box. We sit here --there are four or five or six of

us. We call the region center in. We do whatever it

takes to get them through school, and now those kids

are doing great. Yeah, but by doing that, you can

pull everybody in and say, this is where we are. This

is what this child needs.

John, an administrator, related that the school's

expectations in alignment with that of the community as a

result of consistency in administration over time has aided

the success of Legg High School,

Well, I think the number one is consistency and most

especially, consistency at the top level. Like I

said, the superintendent here before me was the

superintendent for 22 years. I'm finishing my tenth

year as superintendent and, of course, I was here as

elementary principal, junior high principal, high

school principal. Very familiar with the community,

very familiar with the people, what the beliefs of the

community are. And we are fortunate that we are a

small, rural community school and because of that, if you're here for any length of time, you come to know everybody in the community and you come to know what the community expects.

Cortland, a teacher, reemphasized a commitment at Legg High Schools to meet the needs of all children through the lens of having high expectations of students with learning disabilities,

They're really just basically staying in the room, and I know that when I taught juniors and seniors, I didn't send anyone out. They didn't need to. By keeping them in the room and by making them a part of the room, then you create an atmosphere where everybody understands that that person is just as important to the classroom and to the school as everyone else. And they're not separate. They're not different. They're an important part of the room. They're a part of the school and our kids are really good about that. I just think high expectations and consistency, being very consistent.

Denee, a teacher, expressed the impact of pride and past accomplishments contributed to expectations and the success of Legg High School,

> I'd say the main thing is I think we have a lot of, like me, ex-students that have come back or take pride and interest in our school. That's really how I feel about it because I want our school to look good, so I guess that's the drive in me. I want my kids to do good because I don't want our school to look bad. So I think it's just pride, having pride in your school and just good tradition.

Relationships in the School.

Bailey, a teacher, related a story that deeply portrayed her commitment to Legg High School rooted in the relationships within the school and as an underlying factor for the success of the school,

> We had two different accidents about five weeks apart and we lost…it was actually the day of the writing TAKS test in February. And we lost…the librarian's two sons were in a car accident and she was behind them, a tenth grader and an eleventh grader, and the eleventh grader was burned on 80 percent of his body,

and the tenth grader passed away. And about the time that we were beginning to heal as a school and as a community and pulling together and praying for the one that was in intensive care, the week of county show, which is a good five weeks later, we had another sophomore and junior together in a car accident. Just freak things, one of fog, the other was, we're not really sure. He was a high school kid pulling a trailer, coming back to a baseball game, but the little girl, the tenth grader was killed and then the eleventh grader was injured. He almost lost his arm, but it was pretty tough for all of us to have that many holes in our classrooms to not have, especially if you taught tenth and eleventh graders, to have a hole in each classroom. It was hard and that was the only reason that I left and when I turned in my resignation…, I said, Thank you. I'm not unhappy with my job. Thank you so much for the opportunities. The little girl had been on my debate team and I had carried her all over the place in my vehicle. I just couldn't do it.

After leaving Legg High School and teaching for a year at nearby Johnsonville High School, Bailey, a teacher, reported,

The principal sat down with me when I did tell him I was leaving and after the superintendent talked to me and said, "You know, you really need to stay." I said, "I can't. You know, it's not the school. It's not really you. It's not Johnsonville. It's about ownership. I have invested a lot in Legg and I want to go back." And I'm sure that if I had stayed in Johnsonville, I would have, you know… It's all about ownership. This is my school. I'm not going anywhere. I'm invested in it. And I believe that if you talked to the other teacher, that is the way they feel. That's why we've got some that are actually retired but you really can't tell that they're retired. They're not like your typical retire/rehire. They're not just here drawing a paycheck. They're here because they're invested and they don't want to go home. This is our school and everybody works together so well. I mean, I don't know. These other schools would just die if they had Miss Brown as a

counselor and could see what a real counselor does. She's wonderful. If you go in and say, "There is a problem," she says, "What do you want to do? Do you want to make a home visit? What do you want to do? Let's get it done." She's always up for the challenge.

Summary.

Legg High School, a TEA "recognized school", reduced the gap in SES student performance from a 23 percentage point differential in the 2002-2003 school year to scoring six percentage points better than all other students in the 2006-2007 school year. The Legg High School community attributed their academic success to relationships with students, expectations of the school, and relationship in the school.

Robinson High School

Robinson High School was rated as a recognized campus for the 2006-2007 school year under the Texas Education Agency's school accountability plan. According to the Texas Education Agency, Robinson High School had a 230 student enrollment of which 85.7% were White, 8.7% were Hispanic, and 4.3% were African American during the 2006-2007 school year.

Robinson High School serves both the communities of Baines and Tarmington and encompasses 260 square miles within its attendance boundaries. The two communities both share many characteristics while also having noticeable differences as evidenced through data obtained by the US Census Bureau (2008). Furthermore, the census data as shown in Table 7 also illustrate some key differences of the communities as compared to the United States collective data.

Texas Education Agency (2008) data as shown in Table 8 illustrated that from the 2002-2003 school year to the 2006-2007 school year, Robinson High School increased the percent of students passing all TAKS tests by 118%. During that same time period, there was only a 49% increase of students passing all TAKS tests in the state of Texas. Furthermore, during the same time period, Robinson SES classified students had a 276% increase in passing all TAKS tests. At the state level, however, SES classified students only showed a 76% increase in passing all tests. Robinson also had a 62% increase in SES classified student enrollment during the same time period.

Table 8. Robinson High School Community Demographic Data

Characteristic	Baines	Tarmington	Unites States
Population	1396	570	
White	93.9%	78.6%	75.1%
African American	3.0%	12.8%	12.3%
Hispanic	3.3%	13.2%	12.5%
High School Graduates	61.1%	57.9%	80.4%
Bachelor's Degree	6.9%	6.3%	24.4%
Families Below the Poverty Level	16.9%	36.4%	9.2%
Median Household Income	$22,969	$17,500	$41,994
Median Home Value	$29,600	$22,500	$119,600

Table 9. Robinson High School Summary TAKS Data

	Percentage Passed		
School Year	All Students	SES	Difference
2002-2003	34	21	13
2003-2004	54	43	11
2004-2005	69	62	7
2005-2006	66	63	3
2006-2007	74	79	-5

Coded interview data as shown in Table 9 from the qualitative data computer program, QSR XSight 2, depicted the frequency that Sub-Concepts and Concepts occurred during Robinson High School interviews. Interviewees attributed most of the success of the school to relationships within the school, expectations within the school, and relationships within the community.

Table 10. Robinson High School Coding Summary

Concept	Sub-Concept	Number	Percentage
Relationships	Student	15	24
Relationships	School	14	23
Expectations	School	12	19
Relationships	Community	7	11
Structures		4	6
Relationships	System	3	5
Behavior		2	3
Expectations	Students	2	3
Expectations	System	1	2
Expectations	Parents	1	2
Relationships	Parent	1	2

Relationships with the Students.

Relationships with students were identified as one of the primary underpinnings of the academic success of Robinson High School. Linda, a teacher, attributes the

success of Robinson High School to the relationships
between the school and students,

Well, this is the high school I graduated from…this is
the only place I've ever taught, and so to me, I don't
know that we're doing anything any more special than
what we've always done. We've always had caring
teachers. We've always had a small community where
you can pick up the phone and get in touch with
everyone and for the most part, you know who you're
talking to. We keep tabs on our kids. We know when
boyfriends and girlfriends are skipping school and we
contact parents. We know when students are here
earlier in the day and have a car on the parking lot
and aren't here now. We do checking on that, but not
just on that type of thing. We also pick up the phone
and call if we're concerned about grades or so-and-so
has not been doing what they usually do. I think it's
probably just a small community where you know people.
I've grown up with some of them. I think that's
probably one of the biggest things, teachers that
care, teachers that have gone into this profession
certainly not for the money. I think another thing

that's helped us is we tend to keep teachers. When I
came here, the same teachers had been here, a lot of
them since I was in high school.

Mary Beth, a teacher, further comments about going
above and beyond in building relationships with students
while helping them prepare for the future,

I've helped kids stay up and write scholarships,
taking them home, you know, the whole gamut of things
that you do for kids. I've encouraged kids to look at
the military, look into trade schools and I've found a
lot of enjoyment and fulfillment in helping the kids
prepare for the next step, because I truly believe
that it's not going to end at all with a high school
education, but if you want to be successful in life,
that you're going to have to pursue other means of
education, whether it be a trade school, whether it be
college, whether it be military.

John, an administrator, further attributed the success
of Robinson High School to developing caring relationships
with the students,

They don't hug you, but if you'll take the time to
talk to them, take an interest in what they're doing

and show that you care, those kids will lean over backwards for you. They will do anything that you want and I think that's one of the things that they accomplished down here is they have teachers that really care, that take the time to visit with those kids. I know that's one of the things I always tried to instill in my teachers. Take the time. You're working here, so take the time to take an interest in what these kids are doing. It does not matter what kind of kid it is. Take an interest in what they're doing. Show them a little love and it makes…well you just can't measure it…and one of the things that I think down here at Robinson, they have put together a good set of teachers that actually care. And by doing that, you know, it's just a great…it's a great thing, because it's not just happening in one department. It's happening in all…it's everywhere and you can do that, put together that, then you're going to have an outstanding school.

Mike, a teacher, reinforced the importance of relationships in the success of Robinson High School,

Your kids will never really learn -- and I'm
paraphrasing it badly -- until they know how much you
do care. I think this is a very caring faculty, and I
hope that in our move towards more institutional
approach to things, that we don't lose that. It's
there, I assure you. It's there. I don't know
whether this is their -- the spot where they are
accepted and it's a reprieve from what they live in at
home a lot or what and I'm I told you. I'm back here
– this is my second year here after a long time away,
but I'm appalled at the number of parents that aren't
parents. The young lady that you were in here with
today after class to tell me that her mother had
called again and was complaining about not having
that…she was stuck out in the country and the young
lady had to tell her mother that, "Mom, you know what
it takes. You're a 41-year-old woman. You've got to
stay off the drugs. You've got to get a job to so
that you can improve your life." And I believe with
all my heart that that's why God has her in class with
me with just a couple, because she needs a mother. We
have a lot of those. I didn't even know it. You

can't tell by looking. We have a young man who lives

with us whose dad died. The stepmother that he's

living with basically keeps them for the check that's

coming in, but thankfully, the young man now gets the

check, so he can buy groceries and things for the

house rather than drugs. And I would have never known

it, but he lives next door to another science teacher

that when we meet on this high school collaborative

this gentlemen asked me how he was doing in my class.

He has a 90 in chemistry and he's not that sharp a

student. And it's a situation. Call them. Let's

find out what's going on with them. But again, if you

had 200 kids that you were in contact with each day,

would you be able to do that? But still, I think for

the most part that there is concern for the student as

an individual. They don't have to be a science

student or a math student. You're an individual and

you've got strengths. Develop those. Go out there

and be a wonderful athlete. Go out there and do a

wonderful job for the band or sing for your church.

Find something that you can do that you enjoy doing

and do well and believe in yourself because you do

have strengths. Now we still got to pass the TAKS test. We still got to pass these classes and graduate. We do things for those that are retesting. I make them muffins before the test. They have muffins. The other teacher, we write notes. We put candy in little packages so they have that. This one happens to have an attention deficit -- or not attention -- he's just hyper, I guess I'll say. We have little squeeze balls for him, little things that you twist. He's one that we can read to. The minute I saw him getting fidgety, I said, "All right. Let's take a break." I got him a comfortable chair. We go above and beyond trying to help him do that.

Relationships with School.

Gene, an administrator, comments about the administrative team, "I always try to…now with the administration team, we've got a great administrative team that's working together. And I think his administrative team now has got it better than ever before. And he meets with us all about every two weeks at minimum and sits down and shoots it straight with us, and lets us -- if we got us something on our mind, he says, "Shoot at me."

The opportunity always that I like about being in ours is that if you want to challenge anything, he says, "Get well-prepared, give us the information, give us the data, pass it out." And I tell you what, if you take that challenge and want to do it, it's a great feeling, because occasionally, we've been able -- he looks at it. "I like what you got written down. Well, what we'll do, we'll approach the board about it." If it happens to be a board, if not, he'll say, "Go for it. Let's go see what we can do but enforce it. I'll stand behind y'all 100 percent." It's kind of neat to be able to have that.

Gene, an administrator, elaborates on the teaching staff by adding, "If you get your teaching staff to work collaboratively and have that same type of attitude, then it's a win, win, win for all the kids. And these are some of the things that we keep striving for and we're not there yet where we want to be.

Expectations of School.

John, an administrator, reinforces the importance of relationships but couples the importance of expectations as a recipe for academic success, "I mean, if you don't have teachers that take an interest in that child, they are not

going to perform. So you have to have a combination

working, and that's one of the things I see at Robinson is

a good combination of teachers, parents, student support,

being able to talk, high expectations, and all of that

combines to give you what everybody's looking for, a good

test score"

Richard, a teacher, comments that, "We have always had

high standards for the kids. Whatever it takes for them to

pass, especially TAKS. We want them to excel and do well.

Mary Beth, a teacher, laid out the high expectations

maintained at Robinson High School,

And I want them to grow up and do right and I expect

them to do right. And I believe we as a high school,

especially a small, rural high school, prepare our

kids as well as any school in the state of Texas. Now

we might not be better, but I'll say we're as good as

any high school in the state of Texas, and we expect

our kids and we expect our staff and our community

expects us as a school to strive every day when we

come to work to get these kids prepared to make them

into citizens that are going to be productive, because

that's what I'm looking into. I taught government for

several years. I want a good educated citizenry that
will make decisions for you and I here in less than 15
years. So those are a little perspective of both the
teacher and the administrator. I feel like our
district is progressing in the right way to attain our
goal. We want to be the first exemplary high school,
the first exemplary district K through 12 in Region 8.
We're going to get that. We're going to get that. It
may take us some time. It might take us a little
tweaking, but I have all the confidence that we're
going to do it. We're going to do it before anyone
else in this district. I just think we all have that
desire and this is the right place to do it to get
done. Because our goal -- we may be very proud of
being a recognized high school, but that's not the end
goal where I'm going to go and where I'm going to try
to lead us. I know we are always striving to do
better, whether it's from something minor like
rerouting the way we bring kids in every morning to
how we represent ourselves when we're away.

John, a retired administrator and teacher, and local
politician, adds

But here in Robinson, I have a stepson and a son

that's seniors that's fixing to graduate out here.

One of the things that I really like is the attention

to detail that Robinson school gives. They actually

challenge the kids to do their best. When I taught in

Robinson…see, I spent 20 years there…The teachers know

their subject matter. They do a good job of relaying

the subject matter to the kids and they expect a

higher performance from every kid that they have. And

by doing that, then the children are always -- you

know, if you cut them slack, they will do bad, but by

demanding and staying on them and a high expectation,

and then they're going to do well.

Mike, a teacher, relates the student's own expectation

as an outcome of the school system,

I think a lot of it is a compliment to the students

themselves. They are willing to put forth the effort,

and that's not every child, but again, I think part of

that is because they believe that they can do it.

I've been thinking about it quite a bit. I guess the

one thing is that our kids believe they can do it, and

I don't know exactly how we accomplished that. I

think it's a lot of encouragement, and I know as far

as I'm concerned, it's something that we do together.

It's not just them against the test. It's we can do

this if we prepare and do our best. The other thing

is getting them to believe that it's possible. If

they will work hard and concentrate and do it, then

they can. I wish I could pinpoint specific things.

Relationships with Community.

Mary Beth, a teacher, connects a strong relationship

with the community to the success of the Robinson High

School,

I think each one needs the others. I think it's a

cycle. I think you need the good kids and the parents

and the community involvement. I think you need the

whole circle of people. And especially like athletics

and Ag. They're really supportive. You know, a

couple of weeks ago, I had a plant sale. We have a

one-day plant sale every year from what we grow in the

greenhouse, and you'd just really be amazed by how

many folks come that day when they could go to Wal-

Mart and buy the same thing or they can go right up

the road here to Kelly's Nursery and buy the same

thing. But they come out and support the kids. They

know it's beneficial to them. So I think the

community involvement is really key. We've got

community members that will come up here at a moment's

notice and help us out if need be. We have community

involvement in every aspect. I think that's just a

blessing that we have that a lot of the schools don't.

And I think when you get that sense of pride, not only

in your community but in your school, in your staff

from Head Start all the way up to graduating senior,

you're building a recipe for eminent success and I

can't say enough good things about it.

John, an administrator, said, "You know, we try to

work with the school through the city. Anything that

we can do, you know. We're really supportive.

Mike, a teacher, addresses community support, "And I

will say this community, this area, because it's very rural

and it's spread over a large area, is very, very supportive

of their children in extra-curricular activities.

Mary Beth, a teacher, further comments about

relationships and its impact upon the success of Robinson

High School,

I think our -- the one reason why our school stands above any other that I've ever been in or around is because of that sense of community and pride between everybody that's involved in this district. It doe not mean if it's between the two towns, if it's between the transfer kids that come here, between the staff, the administration and everything, it's a whole partnership. And I believe if you're going to have a successful school, it's going to have to be a partnership…The parents are really supportive…You know, when you get the parents involved, the kids are going to follow suit. And with the parents involved in the school, and you know, really caring about what's going on, and then their child understands, "I better do a little better. By looking at that, the overall picture that you get is one of caring.

Summary.

Robinson High School, a TEA "recognized school", reduced the gap in SES student performance from a 13 percentage point differential in the 2002-2003 school year to scoring five percentage points better than all other students in the 2006-2007 school year. Robinson High

School espoused that their academic success was due to relationships with students, expectations of the school, and relationship with the community.

Winkler High School

Winkler High School was rated as a recognized campus for the 2006-2007 school year under the Texas Education Agency's school accountability plan. According to the Texas Education Agency, Winkler High School had a 278 student enrollment of which 83.5% were White, 4.7% were Hispanic, and 10.4% were African American during the 2006-20007 school year.

Winkler High School serves the community of Winkler and encompasses 76.98 square miles within its attendance boundaries. The community exhibits some characteristics as shown in Table 10 that deviated from the nation as a whole by the US Census Bureau (2008).

From the 2002-2003 school year to the 2006-2007 school year as shown in Table 11, the Texas Education Agency (2008) reports that Winkler High School increased the percent of students passing all TAKS tests by 91%. During that same time period, there was a 49% increase of students passing all TAKS tests in the state of Texas. Furthermore,

during the same time period, Winkler SES classified students had a 161% increase in terms of passing all TAKS tests. At the state level, however, SES classified students only showed a 76% increase in passing all tests. Winkler also had a 24% increase in the SES classified student enrollment during the same period.

Table 11. Winkler High School Community Demographic Data

Characteristic	Winkler	Unites States
Population	1740	
White	87.4%	75.1%
African American	8.3%	12.3%
Hispanic	2.6%	12.5%
High School Graduates	74.4%	80.4%
Bachelor's Degree	14.2%	24.4%
Families Below the Poverty Level	7.96%	9.2%
Median Household Income	$33,194	$41,994
Median Home Value	$57,200	$119,600

Table 12. Winkler High School Summary TAKS Data

| | Percentage Passed | | |
| | --- | | |
School Year	All Students	SES	Difference
2002-2003	44	31	13
2003-2004	67	65	2
2004-2005	80	75	5
2005-2006	83	76	7
2006-2007	84	81	3

Coded interview data as shown in Table 12 from the qualitative data computer program, QSR XSight 2, depicted the frequency that Sub-Concepts and Concepts occurred during Winkler High School interviews. Interviewees attributed most of the success of the school to expectations of the school, relationships with students, relationships within the community, and relationships with the community.

Table 13. Winkler High School Coding Summary

Concept	Sub Concept	Number	Percentage
Expectations	School	17	22
Relationships	Student	11	14
Relationships	Community	10	13
Relationships	System	6	8
Expectations	System	6	8
School Structures		6	8
Expectations	Students	5	6
Relationships	Parents	5	6
Behavior	Student	4	5
Expectations	Community	4	5
Relationships	Teacher	2	3
Expectations	Parents	1	1

Expectations of the School.

As indicated in Table 12, 22% of the interviewee comments were attributed to the expectations of the school. Anthony, an administrator, commented that,

We let the kids know it's not acceptable to fail.
It's not acceptable to do halfway. It's not
acceptable to just want to glide through. It is
acceptable to give it your best no matter what level
that is.

Shawn, a community member and retired teacher, alluded
to the school having a lengthy history of expectations by
saying,

And so I think what you see in our school district,
first of all, is you have a pretty stable base in the
faculty that stays for a long period of time and
understand that education is very important and gets
that through to those kids. And I think that didn't
start with my group. Like I said, I've been here
since 1974. But it goes back to groups that probably
started here in the 50's. If you look at the history
of Winkler, Winkler, when it was first settled, had a
college that was established here in town.

Holten, a teacher, addresses having high expectations
for all students,

They see every kid as an opportunity to succeed and
we've talked about that in our staff meetings. We've

talked about that in our first staff meeting of the year when we kind of set a goal and set a mission for the year that every kid can learn. We don't know what level they can learn, but we don't try to determine what level they can learn. We just expect them to learn. We take our special-ed kids -- we except our special ed kids to learn just like everybody else… They want those kids – and they are saying, We want them in regular ed classes. We don't want them in special-ed classes. We don't want them in resource classes… They teach them. And they don't expect and they don't allow them to say, I can't learn.

Christian, a board member, referenced expectations in terms of striving to always be better by saying,

Because I don't know if you looked at our performance over the last few years, but it's been really good, and, we won't settle, don't want to settle for anything less. So we're constantly raising the bar and adding new challenges to our kids and our teachers, and they constantly step up and continue to meet whatever we set out for them to reach.

Preston, an administrator, added to the history of success by expressing,

I think a lot of it in school is the old adage of success breeds success and even back before TAKS days, when we had the TAAS days, we were very successful even then, and not just with regular population but with special ed population as well... I know on the old TAAS, you can go down to the commons area and see the banners up on the halls from all of those. Since TAKS has started and kind of got past that initial year where nobody knew what in the world was going to happen, ever since then, it's been a real -- it didn't take long to get it up there.

Anthony, an administrator, reemphasizes a shared commitment by all towards high expectations,

But you give everything you've got to be that. Kind of like the Army, be all you can be. That's kind of always been the philosophy here of everybody. You do your best no matter what level it is. You just -- that's the expected norm. And I think that's pretty much in the community too, you know, in anything they do whether it be academics, sports or just behavior,

even. You know, you're not expected to be -- you're

expected to be a child and a teenager. We all know --

You know, I think that's the big difference here.

It's just high expectations from all areas. You know,

we have high expectations on both sides. You get it

from home. You get it from school. But I think, as a

whole, you know, because the parents have high

expectations of them, the teachers have high

expectations of them, the kids, they do try to live up

to that. I think they do.

Shawn, a community member and retired teacher, shared

a broad perspective about expectations by saying," …So the

core community leaders here that go all the way back to the

1800's were interested in education and understood the

importance of education, and I don't think that's ever left

here. For some reason, that tradition has been able to be

carried on, even up to today. And I think having that --

some of our faculty members are Winkler graduates. Some of

them, but not all, like I'm not, but I've been here since

1974."

Relationships with Students.

Lauren, a teacher, comments about the significance of relationships and their cultivation overtime by saying,

> We have the small one-on-one interaction, and then there is the continuity, when a family stays for a long time -- I've had the privilege -- there's one family, for example, that I've had -- they have seven children and I am on number five right now. I will be able to have number six. I believe he's coming next year. I will miss -- just miss number seven because I plan to retire in three years…When I write college application recommendations, I can really put personal anecdotes, memories of when I taught them in VBS when they were just little guys. I've watched them grow up. I had one the other day that he was a pickle as a freshman. Oh, my word. Half these gray hairs you see are Kevin. But I've watched him mature and grow into a fine young man and I was able to say that. He's still a mischievous one, but he's learned now with maturity, when humor is appropriate and when it's appropriate to settle down and it's a beautiful thing, to watch a child mature and to help shape that, to

help shape that maturity. I find myself now being

invited to weddings, getting baby announcements from

my former students and it's just wonderful.

Holten, a teacher, further reinforces the importance

of relationships from the time he first arrived in the

community by adding,

Well, I think number one, one of the things that I

think we have that I really feel good about is the way

that our teachers build relationships with kids. It

becomes more in my mind, more than teaching. I saw

that when I interviewed here, and I spent -- oh, I

don't know, a couple years ago when we came, just in

the interview process was a little over an hour. You

could feel the attachment that they have for their

kids. They're very protective of the kids here. They

believe in the kids. So it comes to more than just

sitting in the classroom and delivering the material.

So I think that's important. I think if I had to put

it at one thing – and I don't know whether this is

right or wrong. If I had to put it at one thing -- I

think there are two things. I think it's the

relationships that our teachers build with our kids.

I think that they have an investment in the kids and they don't just come in and teach for 48 minutes and let them go. And then I think that they don't -- even though they know, but they don't care who they are when they come in their door. They're going to learn. And they teach where they can learn. They don't care if they're resource. They don't care if they're low socio-economic. They don't care if they're white, black, or Hispanic…I really believe.

Preston, an administrator, expressed his opinion about relationships through the deep involvement of student's,

One of the things we used to talk about is even on a Friday night, between the football team, the cheerleaders, the band, the drill team, you look at the number of students we have involved on a Friday night during football season, and traditionally through the years, and it's been an extremely high percentage. And then when you factor some of these other areas like the robotics program…of course, that's been special for me…we get a lot of the students involved in that aren't necessarily athletes or aren't necessarily involved in other things. Now,

this year, we had a lot of band students, a lot of people that were involve in drama, but through the years, we've had a lot of the students that did that that weren't necessarily involved in any other thing. The more options, the more opportunities they have…and I'm real excited about next year, because we're offering…I may miss the number, but we're going to offer about a dozen classes next year that we have not had before.

Lauren, a teacher, stresses the importance of relationships as made possible through small class sizes,

You know, for the most part, class size is manageable, and that gives me a direction and to individualize projects and to just relate on a closer level with the kiddos. And I think that's another thing and it feeds right into or is helped by the class size, and that is the relationship aspect.

Relationships with Community.

Luke, the mayor, expresses his beliefs about the importance of relationships between the community and the school,

They take interest in the children that's going to
school there, and they follow them. They participate
in all the activities and we sort of keep abreast of
what's going on in the school. And my departments, in
particular my police department, they are very active
in the school. And the principal over there, he will
notify us if there is some kids out of whack. And one
of the other things is I visit my schools three times
a week. I'm over there at the elementary school, the
middle school, and the high school. Three times a
week I go into every classroom and I keep the kids
informed on the things that are going on in the city.
And consequently, we've got some kids that they
listen. And they know me, they know the city
officials here and they go and they work right along
with us. I go in every classroom and I talk to them.
Just like right now, for instance, we're building a
new children's park over there…. I tell the school,
the principal and the superintendent, things over
there, "Good. You have the kids from 8:00 in the
morning to 3:00 in the afternoon. I've got them from

3:00 in the afternoon until the next morning. So why

shouldn't we work together?

Lauren, a teacher, adds to the importance of

relationships with the community though several examples,

Everyone's needs are met, and that's another thing,

back to the accountability thing. And I'm not liberal

in my politics but there's that saying, "It takes a

village." And it really -- we know that -- for

example, you know, I've had this child in my Sunday

school class since he was a little kid, third or

fourth grade. And the other day, I saw him sitting in

the office with a pink slip in his hand. I don't have

him this year, but I know DJ. I love his granny who's

trying to raise him as a single grandmother because

the other family isn't in the picture. I took DJ out

into the hall and I said, "DJ, why are you in the

office with a pink slip?" "Oh, I didn't show up to D-

Hall." I said, "DJ, do you realize how much your

granny is going to be disappointed. She's doing a

phenomenal job, trying to be mom and dad to you.

Don't let her down. I've had you in Sunday school, so

I know you know right from wrong." And so we have --

they've seen me in other places and they know where

I'm coming from. And we're just all sort of

accountable to each other. They all care. And that's

what I tell them. I counter with that. Sometimes

they take it as tending to their business and I say,

"No. Nothing can be further from the truth. We just

love you and we want you to grow up to be adults that

don't have too many regrets." I go to church with

these kiddos. I go to church with their families.

I'm in Bible studies and small groups. We have a

community theater group that we started, my husband

and I. So we work together. We do community

volunteer work together. We are…it sounds corny to

say, but it's a big family kind of atmosphere.

Summary.

Winkler High School, a TEA "recognized school", reduced the
gap in SES student performance from a 13 percentage point
differential in the 2002-2003 school year to a three
percentage point differential in the 2006-2007 school year.
The voices of Winkler High School attributed their academic
success to expectations of the school, relationships with
students, and relationship with the community.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Education can be explained as a complicated humanistic endeavor with a plethora of variables working in concert to provide appropriate conditions for student academic success. Administrators, teachers, community members, students, parents, legislators, and researchers across the nation and around the world that are concerned about student academic success view the issue through their filter of what they perceive as important within the context of their situation and understanding of school improvement. The voice of local school communities about their academic success through site visits and interviews was crucial in understanding each school's success.

The findings of this study detail the inherent qualities of each identified school through the voice of the local school community. This qualitative study explored the

contexts of four small, rural high schools in Texas that had successfully minimized the gap in academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students in the 2006-2007 school year.

A set of specific criteria enabled the researcher to create a pool of potential high schools to include in this study. These specific factors included: a) being rated *Recognized* under the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System, b) being classified as rural by the guidelines of the National Center for Education Statistics, c) having a significant enrollment of socioeconomically disadvantaged students as reported by the Texas Education Agency, d) having an enrollment between 200-900 students, e) being a traditional four year high school, and f) having a significantly reduced achievement gap. From this pool of high schools, a panel of experts composed of the dissertation committee members chose Foothill, Legg, Robinson, and Winkler high schools to be studied.

All four high schools had similar enrollments, gaps in achievement between SES students and all other students, and a high percentage of SES students. Campus enrollment ranged from 213 to 278 students. The percentage of SES

student enrollment ranged from 35.0% to 47.2%. The gap in
academic performance ranged from the SES students lagging
in performance by as little as three percentage points to
outperforming all other students by six percentage points.

Interviews from each school were individually
reviewed; a coding scheme was developed; significant
patterns quantitatively identified and then described
through the voices of interviewees to answer each research
question. All the data from each of the four high school
visits were then cross analyzed.

Case Studies

Foothill High School interviewees articulated the
qualities that enabled them to successfully minimize the
gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged
students. They attributed most of the success of the
school to expectations of the school, relationships with
the students, relationships within the community, and
expectations of the community.

The voices from Legg High School clearly related the
qualities that enabled them to successfully minimize the
gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged
students. The Legg High School interviewees attributed

most of the success of Legg High School to relationships of
teachers, expectations of the school, and relationships
within the community.

The Robinson High School community voiced the
qualities that enabled them to successfully minimize the
gap in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged
students. The Robinson High School interviewees attributed
most of the success of the school to relationships within
the school, expectations within the school, and
relationships within the community.

In great detail within the findings, the voices from
Winkler High School articulated the qualities that enabled
them to successfully minimize the gap in academic
achievement for economically disadvantaged students. The
Winkler High School interviewees attributed most of the
success of the school to expectations of the school,
relationships with students, and relationships within the
community.

Summary

The interviews at all four high schools repeatedly
attributed their academic success to both relationships and
expectations. Interviewees expressed a plethora of rich

and vivid examples of the importance of both relationships and expectations in student academic success. These findings about small schools size, better relationships and improved student performance align with what has been published in previous studies (Beesley & Barley, 2006, 2007; Cotton, 2001; Henderson, et al., 2002; Hoy, et al., 2006).

In the end, all four small school communities resonated with a significant degree of commitment and passion to relationships and high expectations in an effort for their students to be academically successful. School size, relationships, and high expectations are significant factors in reducing the academic achievement gap. Further qualitative investigations need to be conducted to determine if the qualities expressed from the participants during this investigation are contributing factors in other high schools in Texas that have successfully reduced the gap in performance of SES students.

Several additional areas of research need to be considered for future research:

- Are gains in achievement by low SES students at these four high schools sustained over time and in the face of a change in the state accountability test?

- What factors do students identify as contributing to their success in passing the state test?

- Are the constructs "relationships" and "expectations" transferable to high schools of varying size and in other locations?

Small schools only provide the conditions and potential for better relationships, high expectations, and a reduced gap in academic performance for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Hence, being a small school does not mean that relationships will develop, high expectations will be held for all students and the gap in academic performance for socioeconomically disadvantaged students will be a minimized.

The constructs of relationships and high expectations are transferable and can exist in any school despite factors such as school size, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and location. When embraced and weaved into the belief system of any school system, high expectations and

relationships can significantly impact student performance of all students.

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Date: <u>Date Letter Sent</u>
Dear <u>Participants Name</u>:

I am currently conducting interviews as part of completing my dissertation research at Texas State University-San Marcos. The interview is designed to explore the underlying qualities that have helped your specific school provide an exemplar education to the students of your community. Your school's participation in the study will greatly benefit my research as well as hopefully providing you with meaningful reflection and insight about the great achievements of your school.

All interviews will be tape recorded and then transcribed for a more accurate understanding and documentation of the interview. The tapes and transcripts will be kept confidential. Your identity will remain anonymous and confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of both your name as well as your school's name.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign a letter of consent that will describe your participation. Participation is this interview is absolutely voluntary. At any time, you change your mind and choose not to participate. A copy of the consent form is attached. You can mail it back in the stamped and addressed envelope that is enclosed.
I appreciate your time and the consideration that you have already given. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call or email me.

Sincerely,

Hensley Cone
830-424-3098 home
830-203-1274 cell
830-582-1536 work

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Form
Texas State University – San Marcos
Hensley Cone

VOICES OF FOUR SMALL RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS THAT HAVE
SUCCESSFULLY REDUCED THE GAP IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

I have read the letter of introduction and fully understand
my participation in this study. I agree to participate in
the research interview.

The interview will be tape recorded and then transcribed
for a more accurate understanding and documentation of the
interview. The tapes and transcripts will be kept
confidential. I am aware that both my name and the name of
the school will both remain anonymous and confidential in
any write ups. At any time, you change your mind and choose
not to participate.

By signing below, I agree to participate in the research
interview as outlined in the letter of introduction and
letter of consent.

_____

Printed Name

_____

Signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

An informal structured interview process was utilized during all site visits. Each interviewee was informed as to why their respective campuses were selected for site visits. Interviewees were then asked why they thought their school was successful. Subsequent questions, as appropriate and needed according to the particular context of an interview, were utilized when needed to obtain a clearer or deeper understanding of the conversation.

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VITA

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This dissertation was typed by Freeman H Cone.