**The Education Trust**

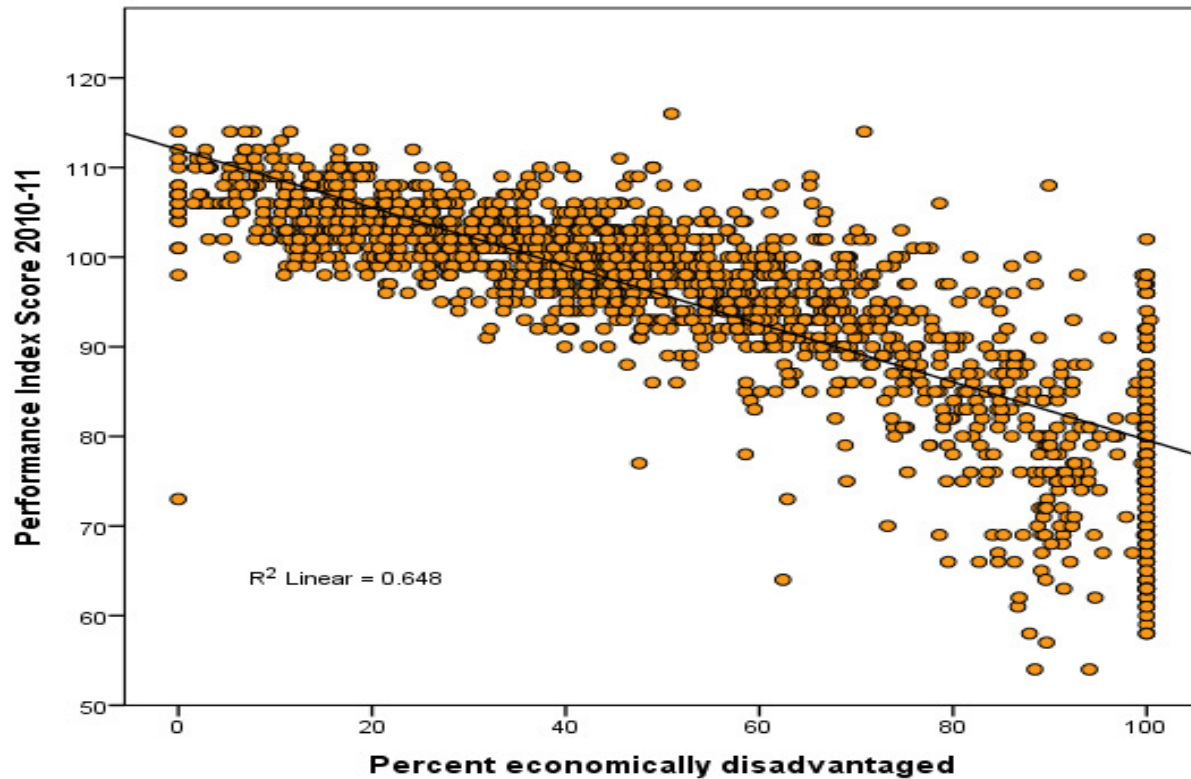# Getting it Done: Leading Academic Success in Unexpected Schools

### Karin Chenoweth

Title I National Conference
February 5, 2015

education

The correlation between poverty and achievement sometimes seems so strong as to be inescapable.

This scatterplot shows the elementary schools in a state arrayed by percentage of students who receive free and reduced-price lunch on the x-axis and achievement on the y-axis. It's a pretty typical pattern.

What are some of the reasons people give to explain this strong relationship between poverty and achievement?

A lot of people locate the problem
within the students...

lack of engagement
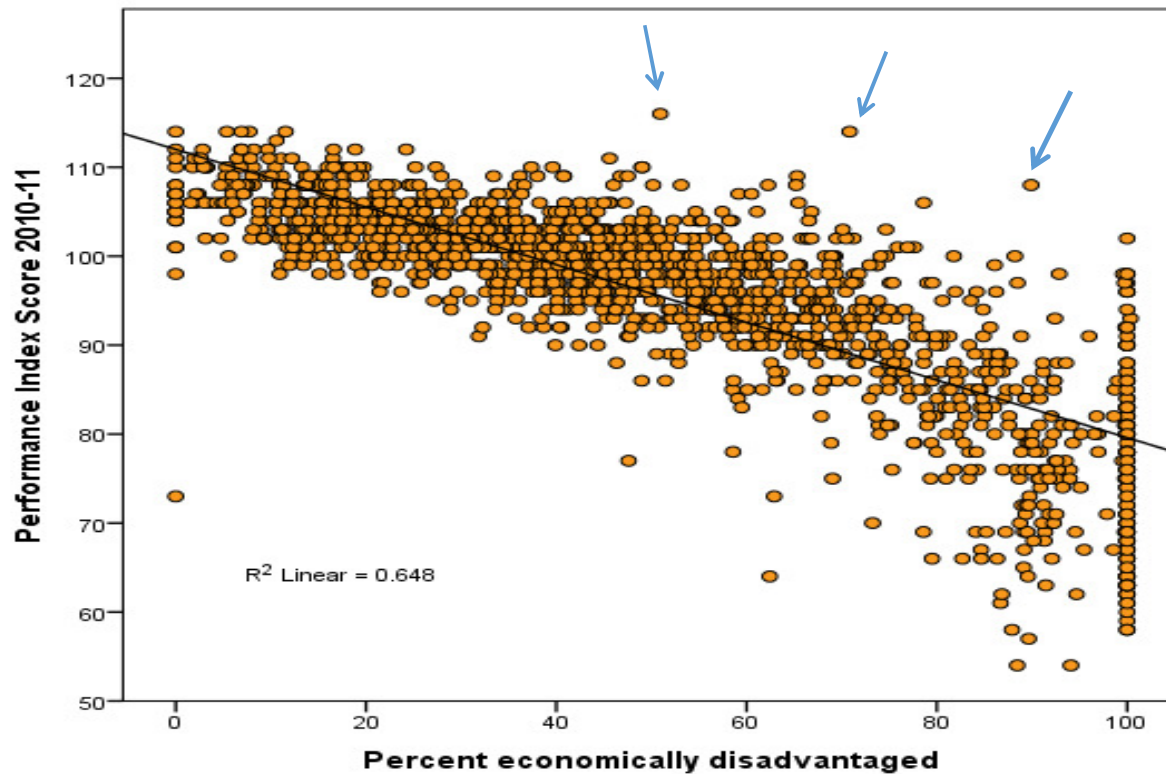lack of effort
lack of readiness

…or focus outside the
school house walls:

lack of parental engagement
single-parent families
drug use
poor pre-natal care
neighborhood crime

These are real issues.

But that line of thinking leads us to believe schools can't do much until everything in society is fixed.

But look at this graph again
—and notice something different—
it shows a few schools clearly performing above
their peers.

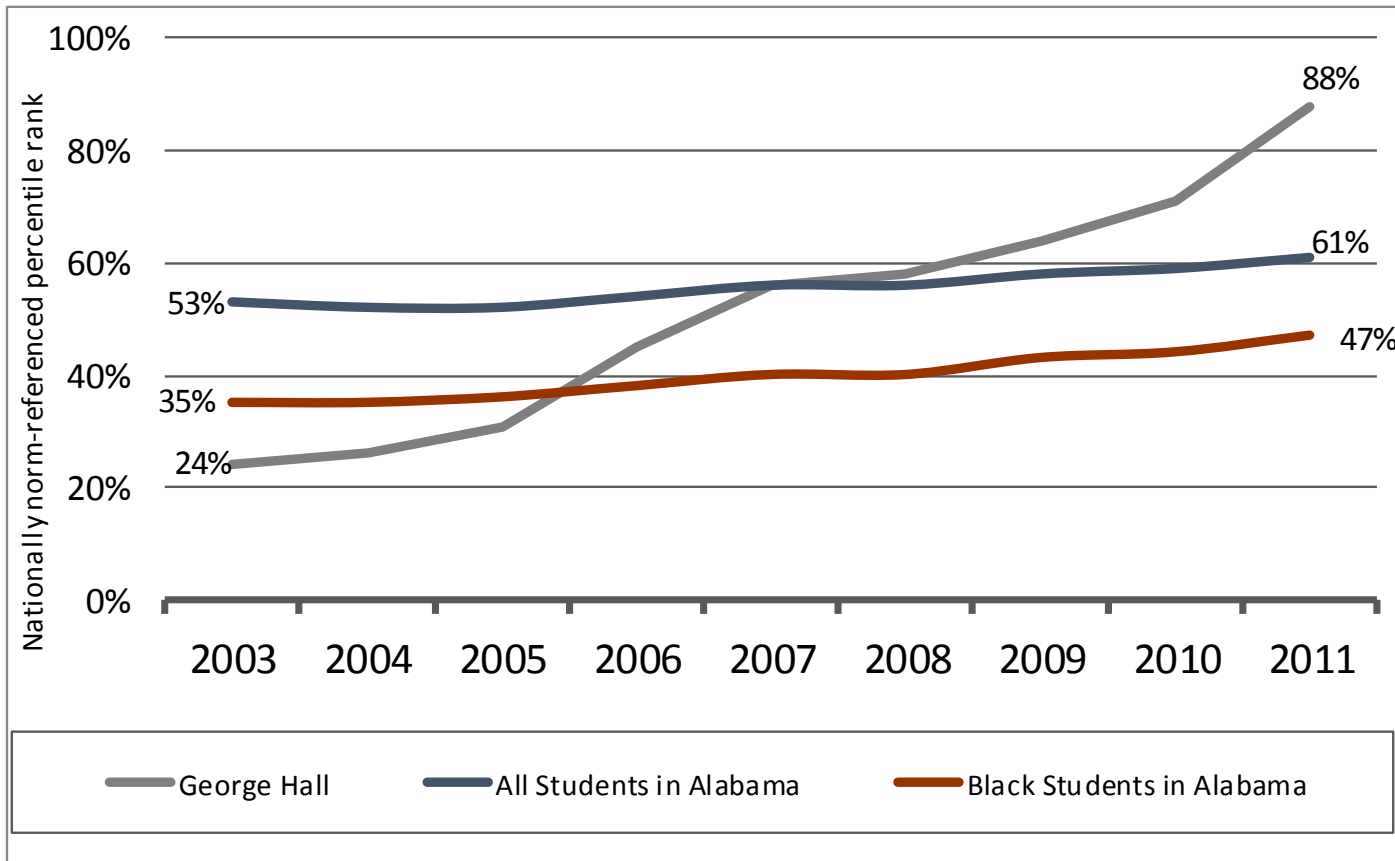# Is there something we can learn from those schools?

# George Hall Elementary School
## Mobile, Alabama
### 444 students in grades preK-5
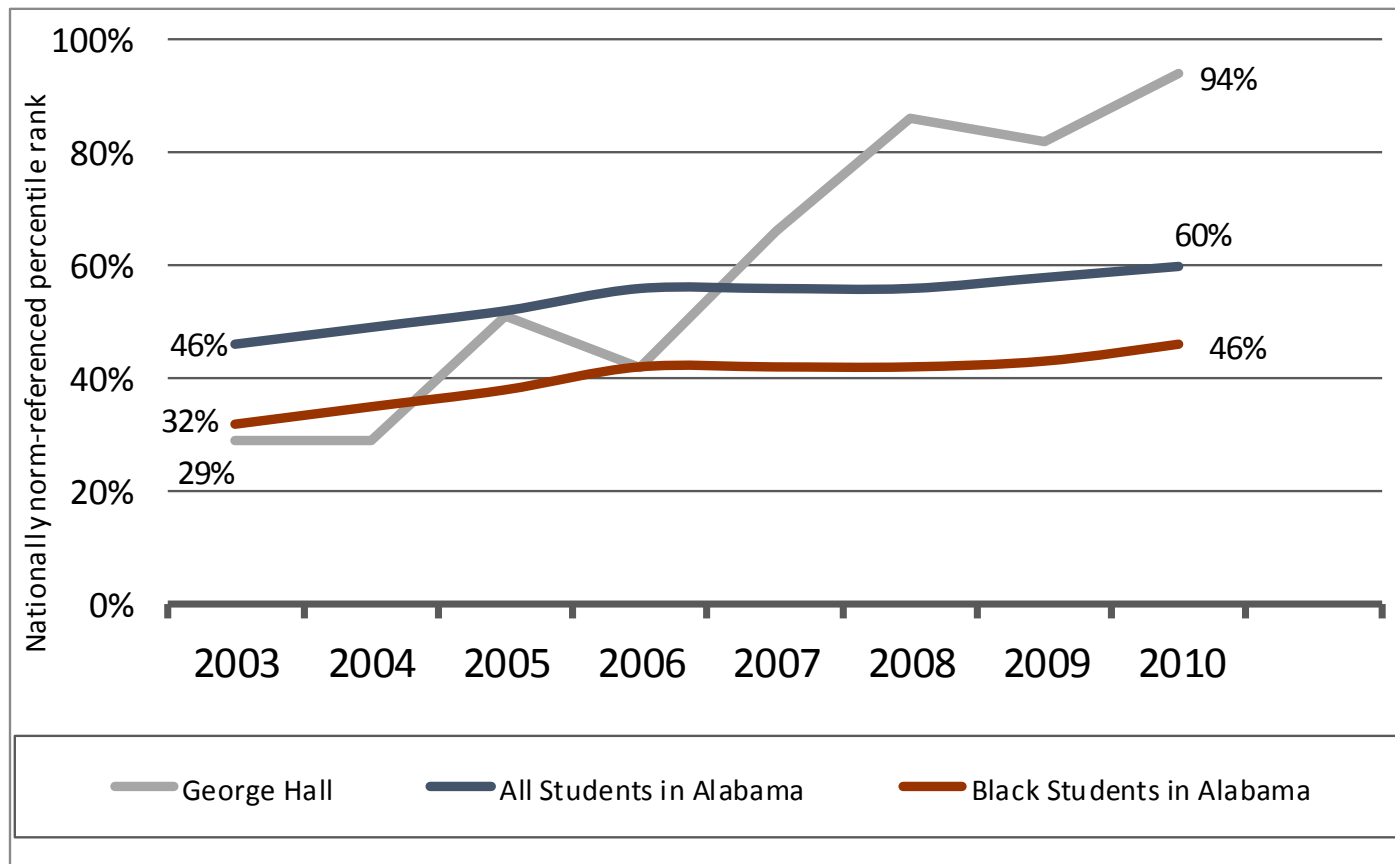
- 99 % African American
- 99% Low-Income

# Grade 5 Reading—SAT 10 results



Source: Alabama Department of Education

# Grade 5 Math—SAT 10 results



Alabama Department of Education

Ed Trust has spent the better part of a decade trying to identify and learn from schools like George Hall Elementary to find out what makes those schools—
we call them **It's Being Done schools**—
so special?

What became increasingly clear during that time was that It's Being Done schools had expert leadership.

# Some Facts About School Leadership

# Leadership is necessary to improve schools.

Conclusion from a 6-year study in 9 states, 45 districts and 180 schools:

"To date, we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership."

Source: Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson (2010). Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning.

# There is substantial variation in the effectiveness of principals.

Highly effective principals can help raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools, while ineffective principals don't.

Source: Branch, Rivkin and Hanushek, (2012). Estimating the Effect of Leaders on Public Sector Productivity: The Case of School Principals. CALDER Working Paper No. 66

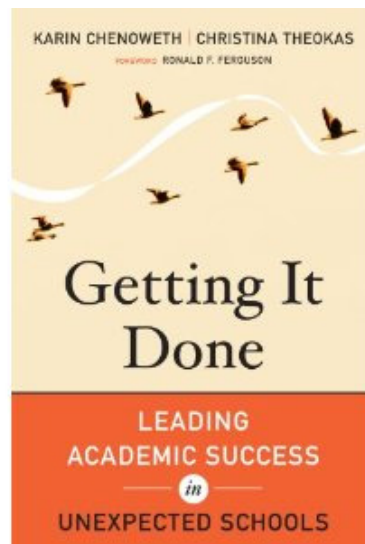# The effect of leaders is second only to teachers.

The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a 1/4 of total school effects.

Source: Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom. (2004). How leadership influences student learning. The Wallace Foundation.

# Leadership retains teachers.

Although a wide range of working conditions matter to teachers, principal leadership is most important.

Source:  Almy and Tooley (2012). Building and Sustaining Talent: Creating Conditions in High-Poverty Schools That Support Effective Teaching and Learning. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

*Getting It Done* was the first attempt to systematically marshal Ed Trust's unique resource of "It's Being Done" schools to better understand effective leadership.

The results both align with previous research findings and points the field in new directions with insights from proven leaders.

# What Did We Find?

I will share five findings, but overall, we found a consistent pattern that they very deliberately matched their strategies and actions to their beliefs, and that played out in a number of ways.

**Beliefs**

**Strategies** → **Actions**

**What Did We Find?**

## #1

These are typical school leaders with varied educational backgrounds and experiences.
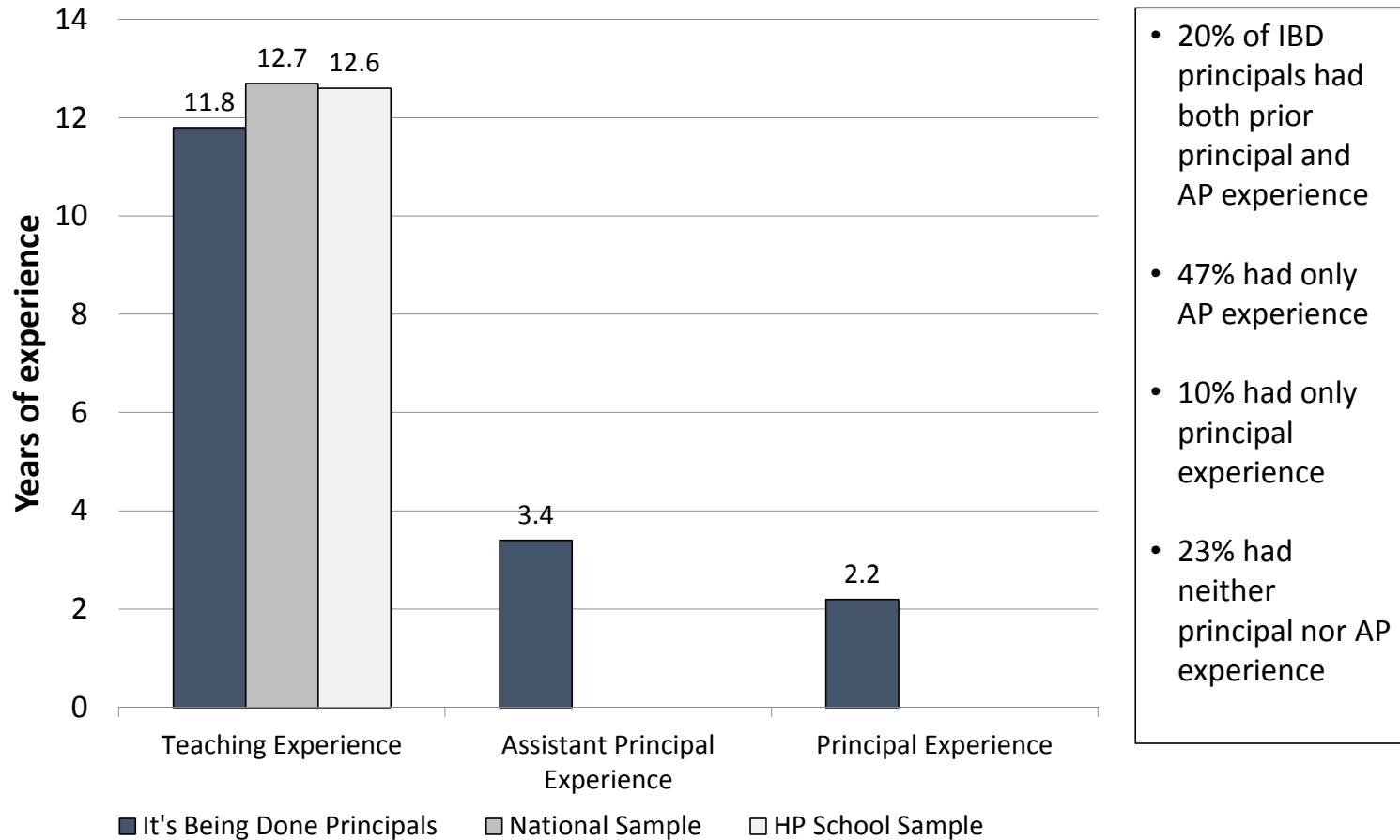
But they do share
some attributes—
and a common belief and vision.

# They have deep experience in classrooms



- 20% of IBD principals had both prior principal and AP experience

- 47% had only AP experience

- 10% had only principal experience

- 23% had neither principal nor AP experience

Chart axis label: Years of experience

Data:
- Teaching Experience: It's Being Done Principals 11.8, National Sample 12.7, HP School Sample 12.6
- Assistant Principal Experience: It's Being Done Principals 3.4
- Principal Experience: It's Being Done Principals 2.2

Legend: ■ It's Being Done Principals  ▨ National Sample  ☐ HP School Sample

Source:   Schools and Staffing Survey 2007–2008, Ed Trust Principal Survey, Pt 1

# They pursue additional learning



Source: Schools and Staffing Survey 2007-08, , Ed Trust Principal Survey, Pt 1

# Haberman Dimensions of Effective Urban School Leadership

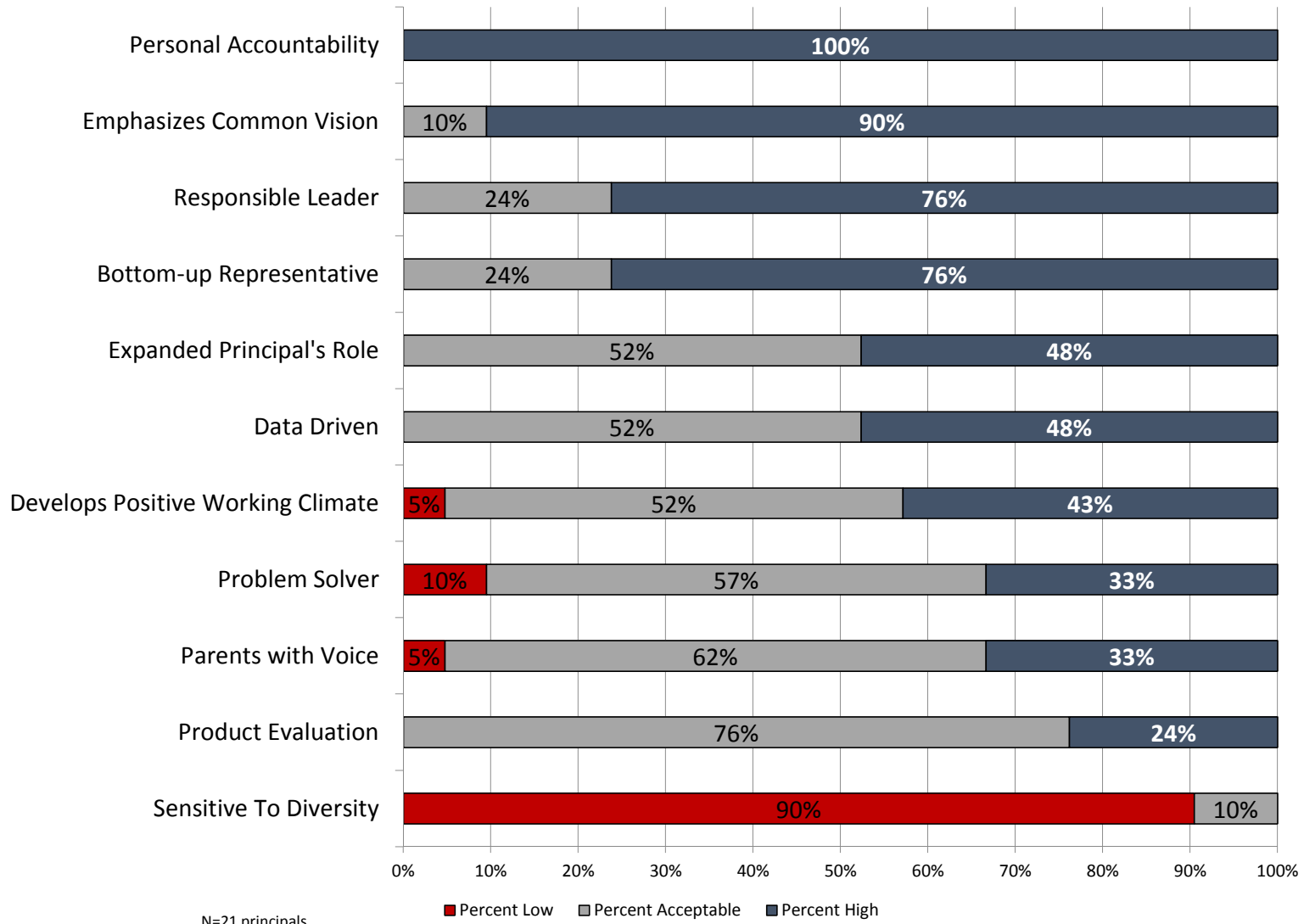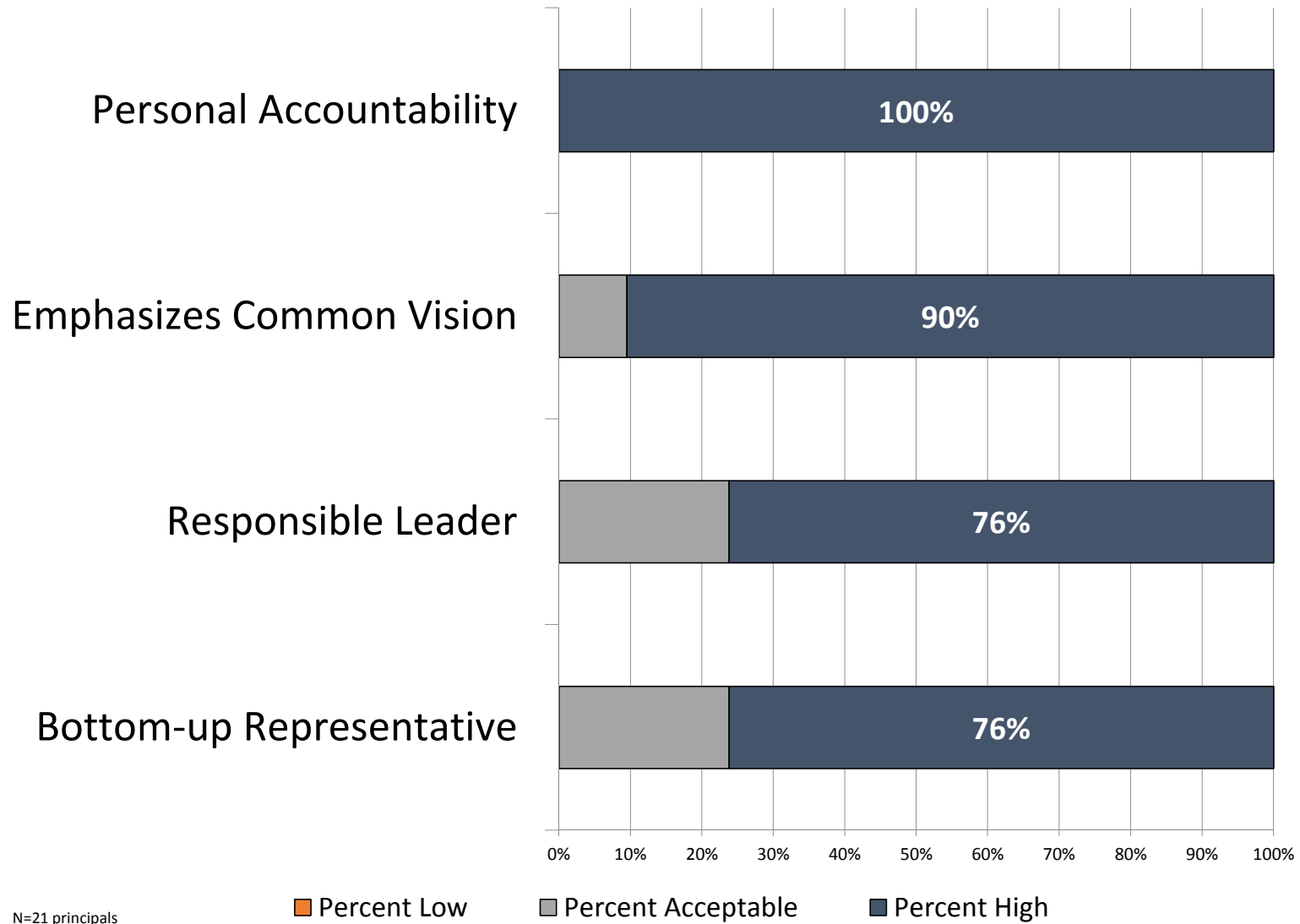| Dimension | Percent Low | Percent Acceptable | Percent High |
|---|---|---|---|
| Personal Accountability | | | 100% |
| Emphasizes Common Vision | | 10% | 90% |
| Responsible Leader | | 24% | 76% |
| Bottom-up Representative | | 24% | 76% |
| Expanded Principal's Role | | 52% | 48% |
| Data Driven | | 52% | 48% |
| Develops Positive Working Climate | 5% | 52% | 43% |
| Problem Solver | 10% | 57% | 33% |
| Parents with Voice | 5% | 62% | 33% |
| Product Evaluation | | 76% | 24% |
| Sensitive To Diversity | 90% | 10% | |

Legend: ■ Percent Low  ■ Percent Acceptable  ■ Percent High

N=21 principals

# Haberman Dimensions of Effective Urban School Leadership

| Dimension | Percent High |
|---|---|
| Personal Accountability | 100% |
| Emphasizes Common Vision | 90% |
| Responsible Leader | 76% |
| Bottom-up Representative | 76% |

0%  10%  20%  30%  40%  50%  60%  70%  80%  90%  100%

■ Percent Low   ■ Percent Acceptable   ■ Percent High

N=21 principals

I said they all shared a common belief and a common vision.

# What is their common belief?

They believe that **all** students can learn to high levels…

"Through my teaching experiences, I learned that my students were capable of learning just about anything I was capable of teaching."
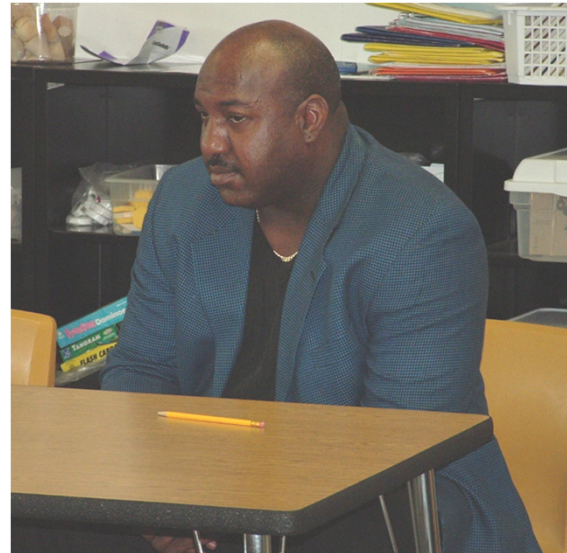
-Molly Bensinger-Lacy, former principal
Graham Road Elementary School
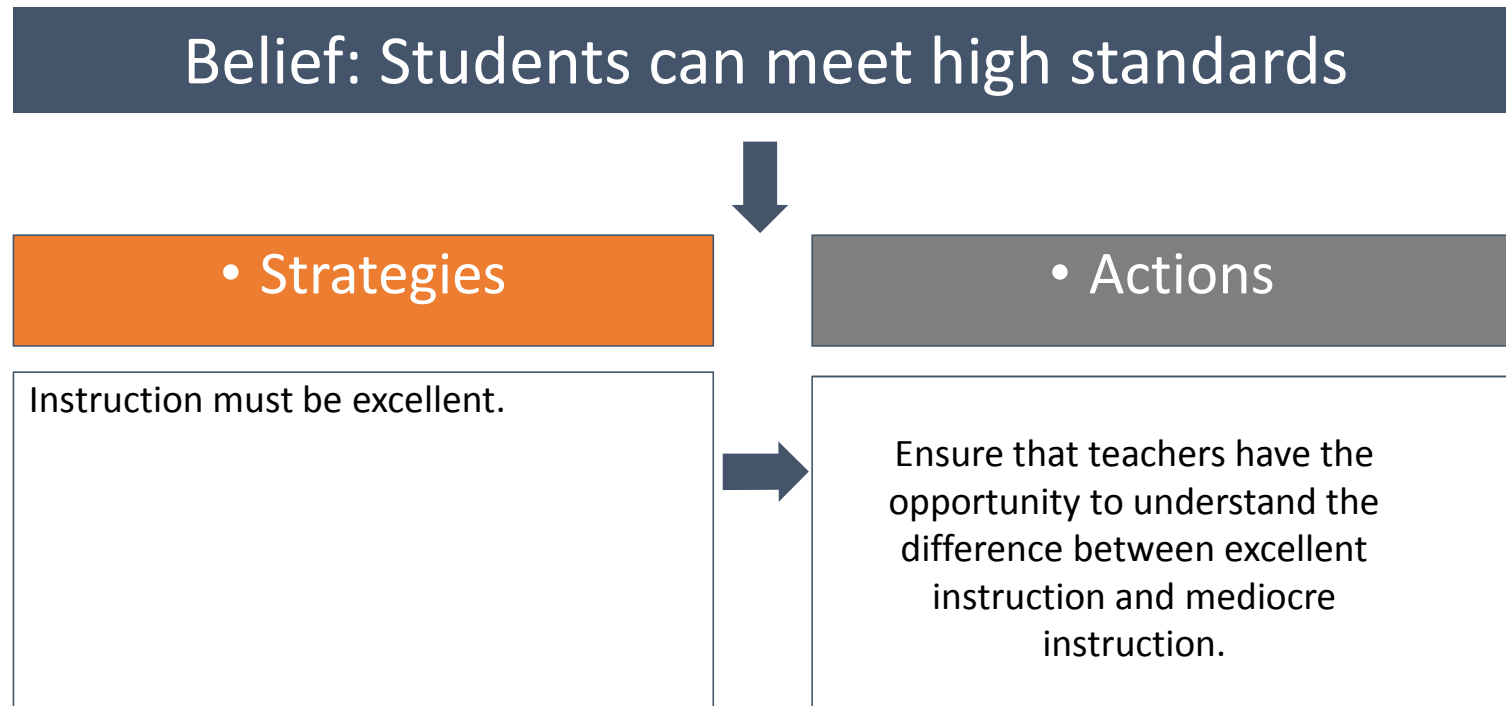
# What is their common vision?

…that it is up to schools to figure out how to *teach* all kids to high levels.

"It is so important to dispel the myth that these children can't learn to high standards. There's a belief system out there that they're not as smart as white kids. We're on a mission to conquer every myth and every test."

--Von Sheppard, former principal, Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School

One of the implications of this belief is that they are willing and able to honestly discriminate between excellence and mediocrity.

**Belief: Students can meet high standards**

- **Strategies**
- **Actions**

| Strategies | Actions |
|---|---|
| Instruction must be excellent. | Ensure that teachers have the opportunity to understand the difference between excellent instruction and mediocre instruction. |

Case Example:
Distinguishing
Between Excellence
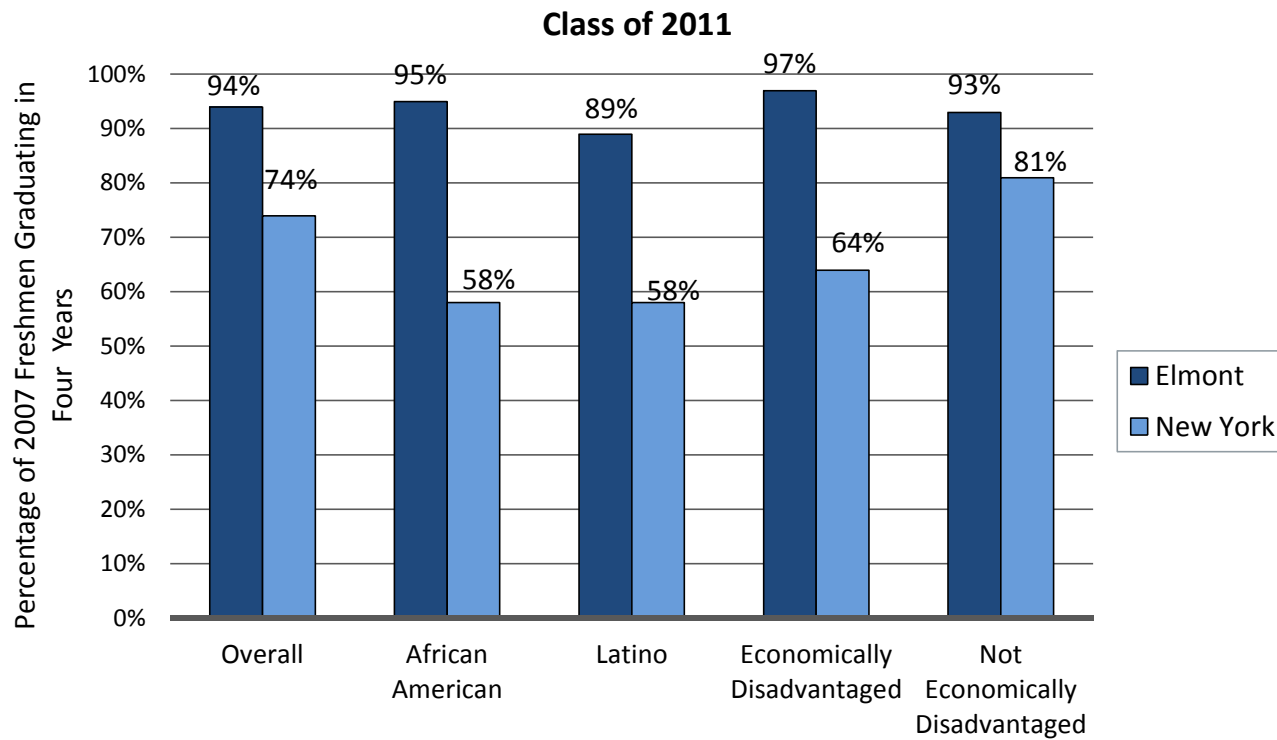and Mediocrity



# Elmont Memorial High School

# Elmont Memorial High School
## Elmont, New York

- 1,928 students in grades 7-12
  - 78% African American
  - 13% Latino
- 27% Low-Income

# High Graduation Rates at Elmont Memorial High School

**Class of 2011**



Percentage of 2007 Freshmen Graduating in Four Years

| Category | Elmont | New York |
|---|---|---|
| Overall | 94% | 74% |
| African American | 95% | 58% |
| Latino | 89% | 58% |
| Economically Disadvantaged | 97% | 64% |
| Not Economically Disadvantaged | 93% | 81% |

Legend: ■ Elmont ■ New York

Note: Includes students graduating by June 2011.

Source: New York State Department of Education

"…at one point in the lesson you took a sub-standard response that was not elaborated on….You admitted that, in the interest of time, you took the response and moved forward with the lesson. As we discussed, setting standards and having students meet those standards includes the proper responses.."

Discussion:

Are students in your school or district taught to high standards?

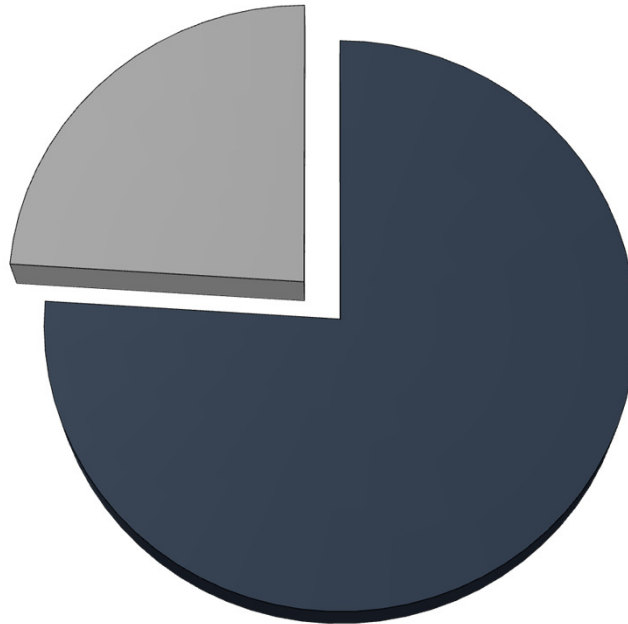What evidence do you regularly gather to substantiate your opinion?

**What Did We Find?**

**#2**

They put instruction at the center of their  managerial responsibilities.

# We asked them:
## How do you define your role as principal?

The remaining **24%** of principals described their role as setting a vision that includes equity or excellence

**76%** of principals described their role using one of the following terms:
- Instructional leader
- Principal teacher
- Teacher of teachers
- Lead Learner
- Educational facilitator

| **Belief: How educators spend their time reflects their priorities.** | |
|---|---|
| **Strategies** | **Actions** |
| • School leaders establish a school-wide urgency around the use of time. | • Set school and classroom routines to ensure time is spent on learning not "getting ready" to learn or discipline.<br><br>• Create master schedule to maximize both instructional time and time for teachers to collaborate |
| • School leaders share decision making. | Empower individuals to make decisions relevant to their role<br><br>• Create teams to pool expertise and get the work done. |
| • School leaders plan and schedule their own time | • Participate in meetings, trainings and be present in school. |

Case Example: Time Use

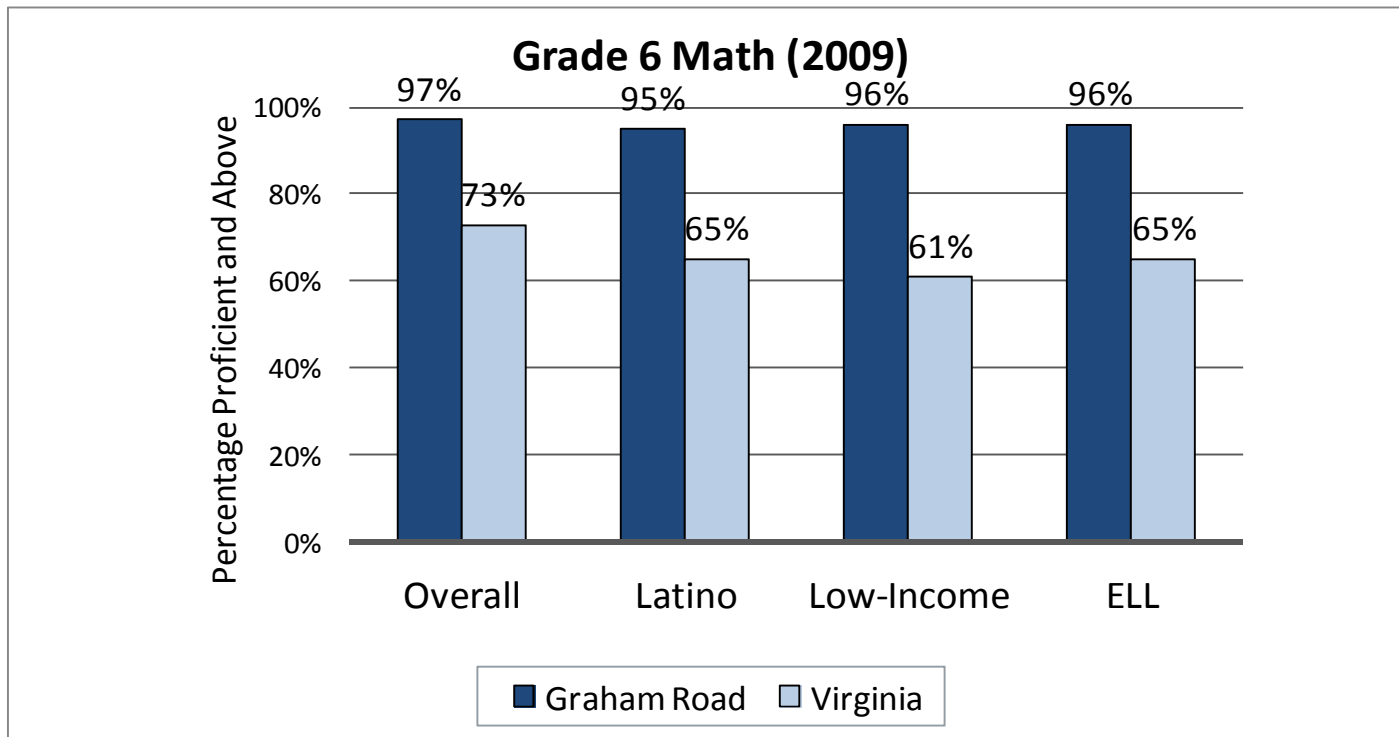Graham Road Elementary School

# Graham Road Elementary School
## Falls Church, Virginia

- 356 students in grades K-6
  - 13% Black
  - 16% Asian
  - 64% Latino
- 81% Low-Income
- 51% ELL

# Graham Road Elementary School
# Meeting or Exceeding Standards

**Grade 6 Math (2009)**

Percentage Proficient and Above

| Category | Graham Road | Virginia |
|----------|-------------|----------|
| Overall | 97% | 73% |
| Latino | 95% | 65% |
| Low-Income | 96% | 61% |
| ELL | 96% | 65% |

■ Graham Road   □ Virginia

Once a week, teachers from each grade level met at the beginning of the contractual day (15 minutes before school started) and continued for the first 45 minutes of the school day. Back in their classrooms, teacher aides began the day—supervising breakfast, collecting homework, and starting the students on their day's work.

At the meeting, often one teacher presented findings from significant research that illuminated a problem of practice they had identified and, sometimes, teachers would immediately be able to put that research into action.

# Discussion:

- In the next three minutes, list as many ways as possible that you have seen student learning time being wasted in your school or district.

- With a partner, pick one or two of these time wasters and brainstorm remedies.

- Bonus question: list as many ways as possible that you have seen **teacher time** being wasted.

**#3**

They focus on building the capacity
of all the adults in the building.

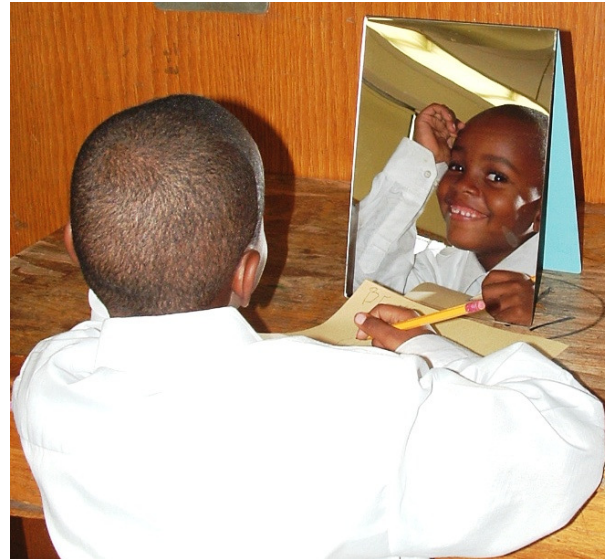| Belief: Teachers have great power to change children's lives. | |
|---|---|
| **Strategies** | **Actions** |
| • Hire carefully to shape the instructional culture of the school. | • Their hiring protocols often test candidate's willingness to commit to the school and continue improving. |
| • Assign carefully. | • Strong teachers are assigned to students furthest behind.<br>• Weak teachers are supported by coaches, mentors, etc. |
| • They encourage practices that yield the best results. | • They provide individualized feedback and guidance. |

Case Example: Building Teacher Efficacy and Capacity

# M. Hall Stanton Elementary School

# M. Hall Stanton Elementary
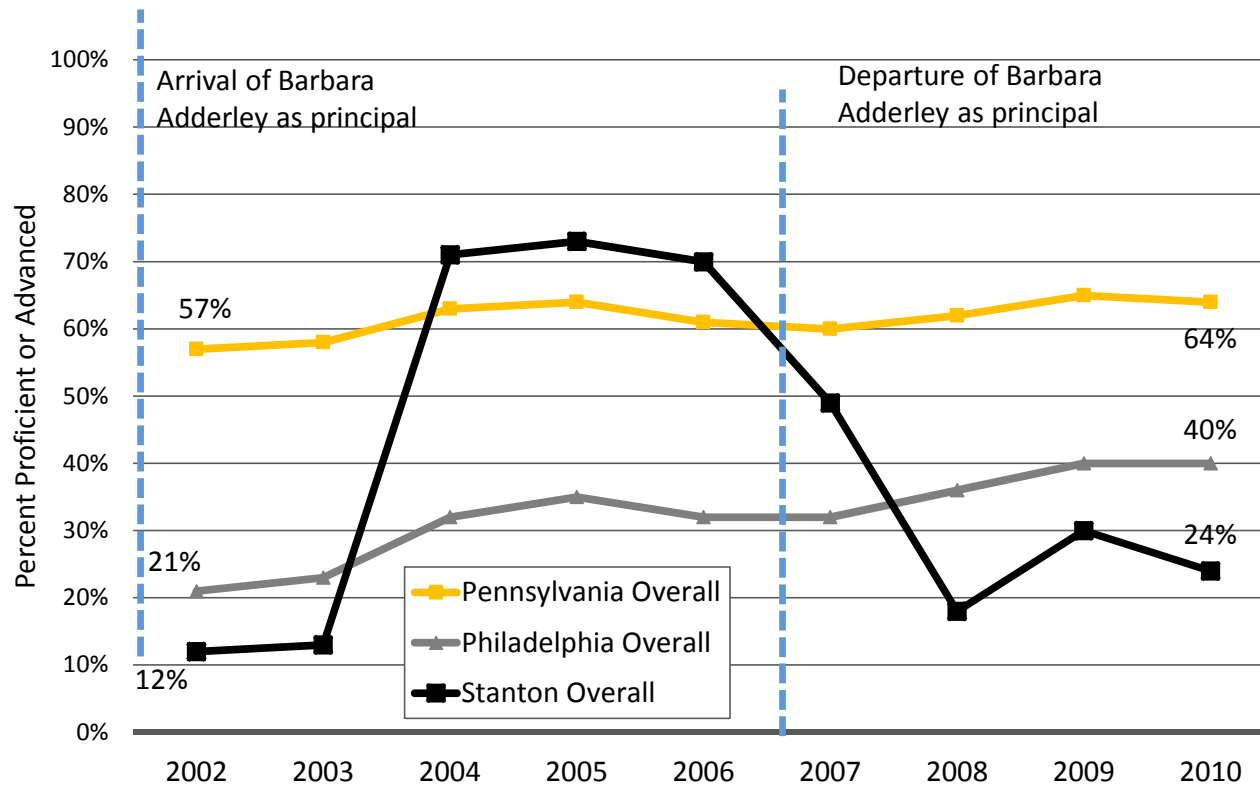## Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- 487 students, K-6

  - African American: 99%

  - Low Income:  99%

# M. Hall Stanton Elementary School
## Grade 5 Reading
## Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)

Arrival of Barbara Adderley as principal

Departure of Barbara Adderley as principal

Percent Proficient or Advanced

57%

21%

12%

64%

40%

24%

- Pennsylvania Overall
- Philadelphia Overall
- Stanton Overall

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

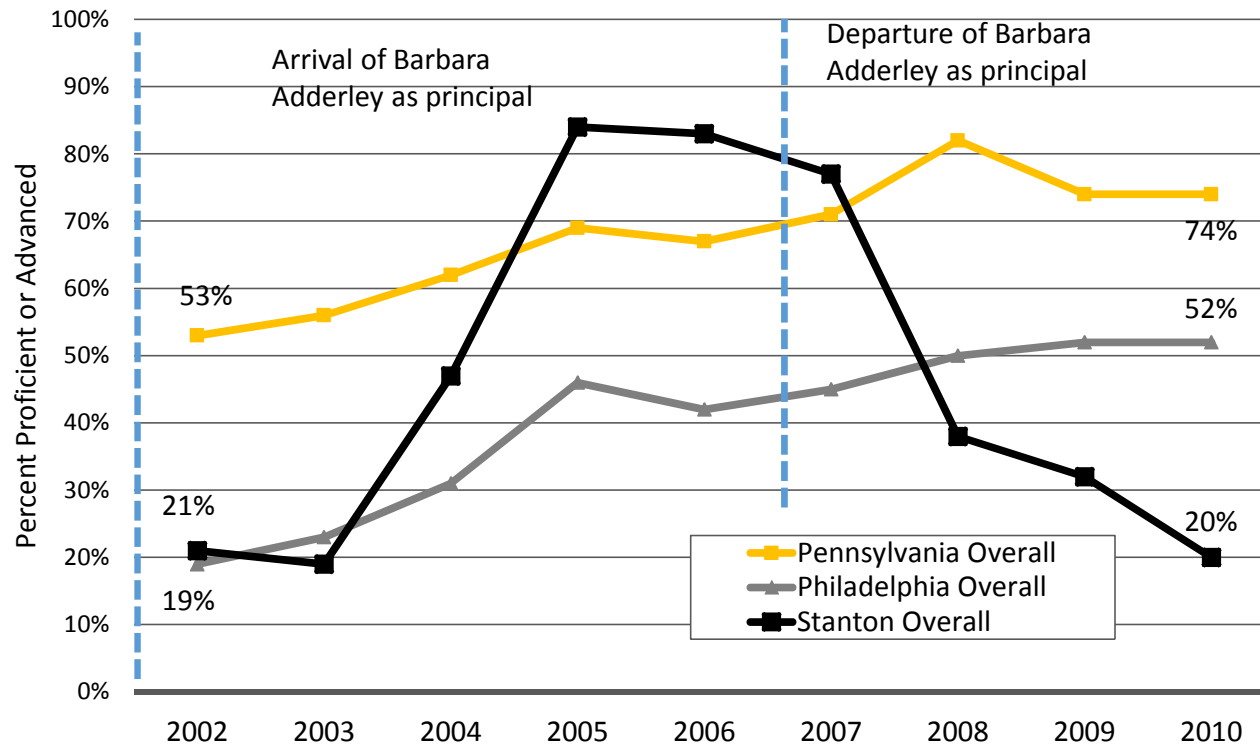2002  2003  2004  2005  2006  2007  2008  2009  2010

Source:
Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2002-2009

# M. Hall Stanton Elementary School
## Grade 5 Math
## Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)



Arrival of Barbara Adderley as principal

Departure of Barbara Adderley as principal

Percent Proficient or Advanced

53%

21%

19%

74%

52%

20%

Legend:
- Pennsylvania Overall
- Philadelphia Overall
- Stanton Overall

2002  2003  2004  2005  2006  2007  2008  2009  2010

**Professional development at Stanton**

•Each grade level met 1x per week with principal and coaches during planning period.

•Each academy met 7:30 -9:30 a.m. every two months in a different teacher's room for breakfast, book study, and sharing of best practices (coverage of classes and stipends were provided).

•Whole school met 1x a week for professional development (early dismissal of students).

•New teachers met every Tuesday 7:30-9 a.m. with principal and coaches to discuss pedagogy and math and literacy content (stipends provided).

•Additional staff development provided Saturday morning (stipends provided).

As they became more proficient, teacher leaders joined in making professional development decisions and in providing the professional development.

Professional development was less often school-wide and more often tailored to the needs, as determined by the data, of individual teachers or grade-levels.

Fairly quickly, the two instructional coaches became part of a team that helped Adderley determine professional development needs and they often taught specifics of math and reading instruction as well as bringing back district-level training that they received.

Initially Barbara Adderley made decisions about professional development needs of the staff based on data. Most professional development was whole-school, taught by Adderley (e.g., how to implement guided reading, how to use math games as part of the math curriculum, etc.)

**Data used to determine PD:**
Walk-through observations of classrooms
Reading data
Math data
State assessment data
Attendance and discipline data
Student work

"We can't hire and fire our way out of this."
--Barbara Adderley, former principal, M. Hall Stanton Elementary

Diane Scricca, former principal, Elmont Memorial High School

June Eressy, former principal, University Park Campus School and former principal, Chandler Elementary School, Worcester, Mass.

Discussion:

How does your district or school support teachers as they work to improve and grow as professionals?

How do you know that what you are doing is helping them?

**What Did We Find?**

**#4**

They deliberately create a
collaborative culture.

| Belief: Respect is essential for both teachers and students to thrive. | |
| --- | --- |
| **Strategies** | **Actions** |
| • "High support, high demand" approach. | • They create norms and expectations for professional conversations. |
| | • They establish norms for how adults interact with students. |
| | • Teachers adapt methods and interventions until students meet high performance standards. |

Case Example: Deliberately
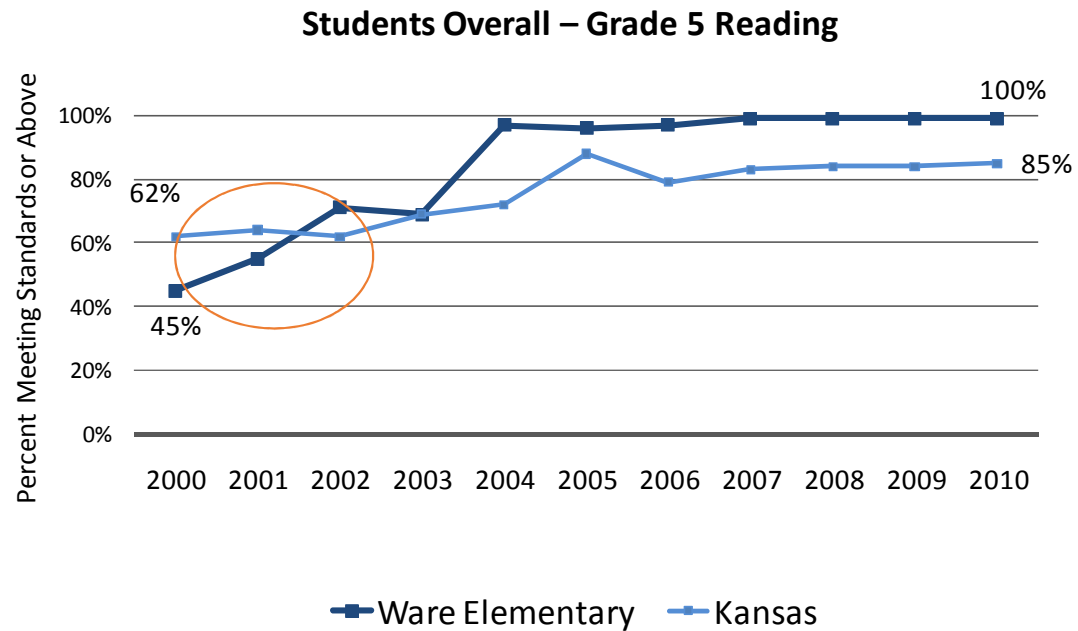Building a Respectful Culture



# Ware Elementary School

# Ware Elementary School
## Fort Riley, Kansas

- 693 students in grades K-5
  - 17% African American
  - 21% Latino
  - 55% White
- 76% Low-Income
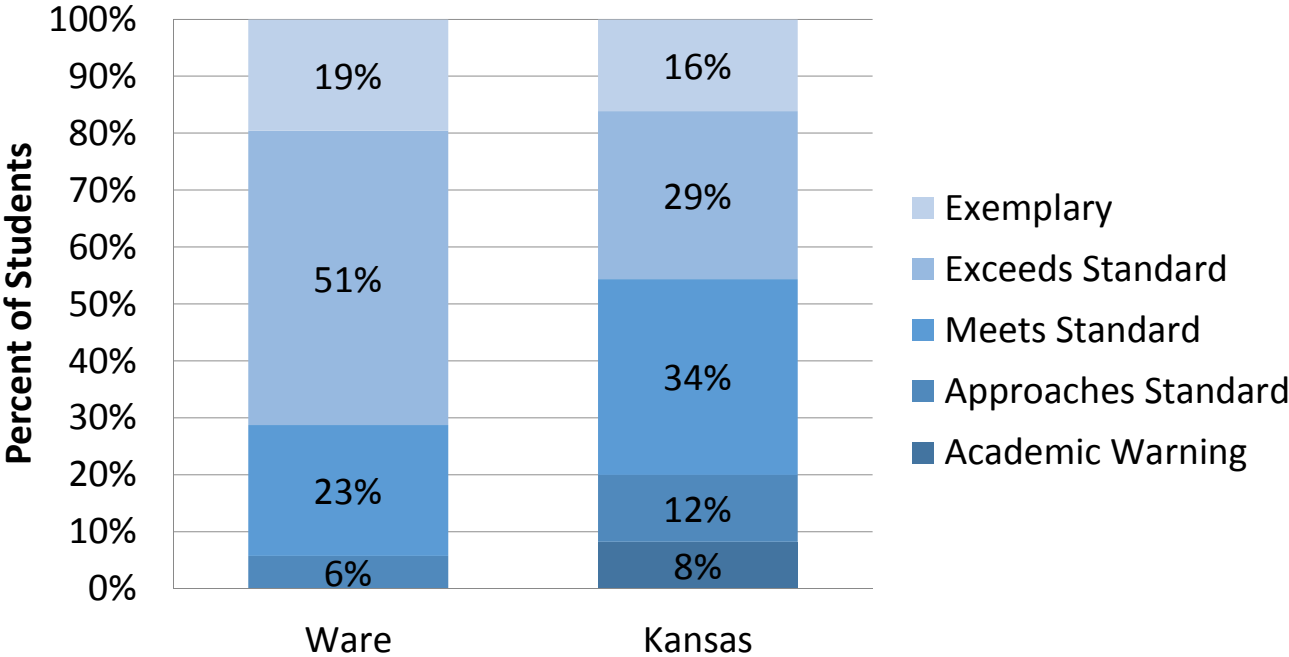
# High Achievement Over Time
# at Ware Elementary

**Students Overall – Grade 5 Reading**



Source: Kansas State Department of Education

# Outperforming the State
# at Ware Elementary

**Low-Income Students – Grade 4 (2010)**



Legend:
- Exemplary
- Exceeds Standard
- Meets Standard
- Approaches Standard
- Academic Warning

Ware:
- Exemplary: 19%
- Exceeds Standard: 51%
- Meets Standard: 23%
- Approaches Standard: 6%

Kansas:
- Exemplary: 16%
- Exceeds Standard: 29%
- Meets Standard: 34%
- Approaches Standard: 12%
- Academic Warning: 8%

# Exceeding State Averages
# at Ware Elementary

**Grade 3 Math (2010)**



Source: Kansas State Department of Education

# Discussion:

## Scenario:

You observe a teacher and see that although she is not overtly disrespectful to students, she does not expect much more than simple recall during lessons.

**The principal should...**

**#5**

They monitor and evaluate
what factors lead to success and
what can be learned from failure.

| Belief: Evidence trumps opinions. | |
|---|---|
| **Strategies** | **Actions** |
| • Without losing sight of big goals, they build efficacy through interim goals | • They set concrete, measurable goals based on data and examine outcomes. |
| • They make data public and help teachers understand how to use it. | • They examine work products to assess the rigor of instruction. |
| | • They have data meetings, create data walls, do data walks, conduct student academic reviews |
| • They are "relentlessly respectful and respectfully relentless" | • They follow up. |
| | • They ask questions. |

Terri Tomlinson, principal

George Hall Elementary School

# University Park Campus School

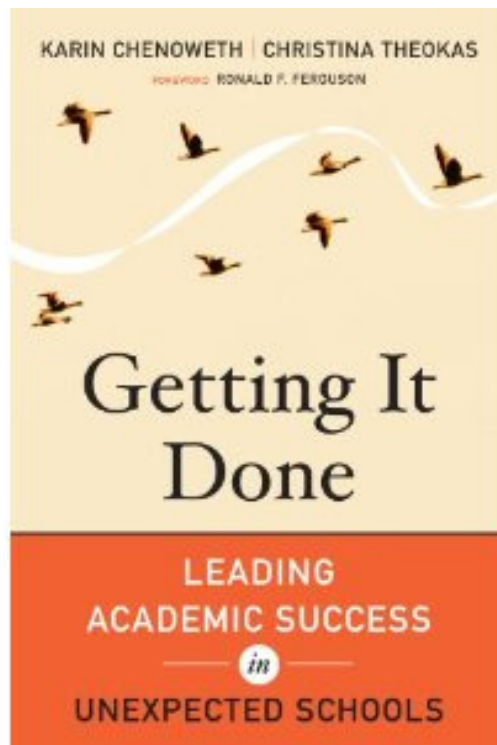Ricci Hall, former principal, University Park Campus School

# In Conclusion...

It's Being Done principals
are not superheroes but experts.

The expertise they have developed can be learned by other administrators who are:

- willing to honestly discriminate between excellence and mediocrity,

- have the courage to do things differently to improve, and

- the discipline to reflect on what factors lead to success and what can be learned from failure.

To read more about the beliefs and practices of Title I principals who are getting the work done

And to read more about their schools: