Successful School Leadership in Socioeconomically Challenging Contexts: School Principals Creating and Sustaining Successful School Improvement

Elizabeth Murakami Ramalho, Encarnacion Garza and Betty Merchant

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine principals (headteachers) who had managed to sustain a high level of student achievement in two inner-city elementary public schools serving low-income, predominantly Hispanic children between six and ten years of age in one district in South Texas. These schools were part of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) and were selected because the majority of the students they serve are Hispanic and of low socioeconomic status. We learned that principals and teachers were facing internal and external pressure to succeed, and they were driven by their passion to provide students with multiple opportunities to experience success. Significant to this study is the interplay of the principals’ leadership in relation to the expectations for high-stakes testing, increasing ethnic diversity, and the realities of the students’ socioeconomic conditions common in many schools around the globe.

Introduction
Concerns about the effectiveness of American public schools with respect to successfully educating a diverse population of students have generated numerous reforms over the years and have shaped international perceptions about the American educational system. Most recently, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 brought to public light disparities in the delivery of curriculum and gaps in student learning across public schools in America (Nichols, Glass & Berliner 2006; Sunderman, Kim & Orfield 2005). This controversial government-based reform required that all students attain high standards of proficiency in reading and mathematics by the year 2014 (107th Congress 2002). This mandate lacked adequate federal, state and local funding, and disregarded the challenges associated with the significant difference in students’ cultural and socioeconomic conditions.

Recent data on student achievement, in fact, confirm that persistent academic disparities in student performance in the USA are concentrated in schools serving low-income families (Delpit 1995; Fry 2006, 2007; Ladson-Billings & Tate 2006). Moreover, in schools where students struggled to perform academically, there tend to be higher concentrations of Hispanic and
Black students (Pew Foundation 2008). Nevertheless, by 2006, the US Department of Education had gathered descriptive case-study data identifying successful examples of student improvement in every state. Through these cases, the Department of Education demonstrated the ways in which district and building level leadership efforts had a positive effect on student academic success, regardless of students’ race, ethnicity or income level (US Department of Education 2005).

The purpose of this study was to examine principals (i.e., headteachers) who had managed to sustain a high level of student achievement in two inner-city elementary public schools serving low-income, predominantly Hispanic children between six and ten years of age in one district in South Texas. Texas mirrors several of the characteristics and demographics of the USA in terms of cultural and socioeconomic conditions, and serves as a reference for other schools serving increasingly diverse populations. In these schools we learned that both principals were experiencing high levels of stress, along with teachers, students and parents, as they strove to meet the standards associated with NCLB and the Texas state-level accountability systems. Central to our inquiry was the question: 'At what cost (if any) were these principals leading schools that succeeded in meeting state and federal student performance standards?'

These schools were studied as part of a larger set of cases in the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) (Day 2005; Leithwood 2005; Leithwood & Riehl 2005; Leithwood & Day 2007). The ISSPP is an ongoing, multiple-perspective, international research project investigating successful principals and their schools. Using the same protocols, more than 60 schools in 12 countries have been studied over the course of 8 years for the purpose of observing effective leadership in successful schools within diverse cultural, social and economic settings. Our team is a relatively recent addition to this project and, as such, is only in its preliminary stages of comparing the findings of our case studies to those of other participating countries.

**Review of the Literature**

In the era of accountability, the principal’s success is measured by the students’ performance. Led by Leithwood & Day (2007), the ISSPP scholars have been conducting intensive research to study successful principals in contemporary schools. Since 2001 the ISSPP group of researchers has expanded the knowledge base related to successful principals through a large body of data collected in collaboration with researchers from 12 countries around the world: Australia, Canada, China, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, and the USA (Day & Leithwood 2007). The schools selected by ISSPP researchers included those with:

- exceptional school programmes and principal reputation;
- high student achievement and emphasis on academic instruction;
- exceptional student engagement and student social development;
- leaders showing democratic values; and
- collaborative decision-making approaches.

Most compelling in the studies of the ISSPP are the examples of instructional leadership in socioeconomically challenged areas. In their study of socioeconomically challenged schools in New York, Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki & Giles observed the importance of successful principals exerting a positive attitude while 'maintaining a strong sense of purpose and
direction' (2005: 616). The principals in their study stressed the importance of establishing safe and nurturing environments while at the same time setting high expectations for student performance with respect to state and national accountability requirements.

In his study of public schools in underserved areas in England, Day (2005) concluded that successful principals operate with a set of core of values and practices that sustain trusting cultures and community systems which, in turn, lead to student improvement. Day argues that ‘successful principals are those whose educational agendas go far beyond meeting the demands of external systems of accountability’ (2005: 533). These studies reflected the intricacies of the work of leaders and their focus on academic instruction.

Principal leadership, initially characterised as a managerial function, is now recognised for its purposeful and positive influence on student achievement. In their 2005 study, Heck & Hallinger recognise leadership as a cluster of ‘change-related functions such as setting a vision and goals for the school and motivating stakeholders to move towards their achievement’ (2005: 240). They also explain that ‘this distinction became more pronounced during the past two decades as part of school accountability’ (2005: 240). Similarly, Gurr, Drysdale, and Mulford (2005) indicate that when building social capital within a school, it was important that principals created an ethos of schools as ‘community-centered organisations’ (2005: 545).

Creating community-centred organisations is critical. While some societies value collective forms of expression, others, such as the USA, emphasise favouring individualism and competition. Collectivism, however, is important when observing underserved areas, especially in understanding the students’ context and background. The collectivism factor helps us understand the work of principals as leaders ‘working through and with other people’ (Leithwood & Riehl 2003). In their study, Leithwood & Riehl define effective principals as those who articulate a ‘function more than a role’ (2003: 3); influence ‘student learning by helping to promote vision and goals; ensure that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well’ (2003: 4); and involve parents and other stakeholders in the culture of the organisation. The findings shared from the studies in the multiple countries participating in the ISSPP validate these characteristics of successful principals sustaining successful elementary schools. A systematic analysis of the case-study data within and across countries is providing additional important insight into the key qualities, skills and behaviours of successful principals in different contexts.

**Hispanic Demographics in the USA: The Texas Study**

The Hispanic population is the second largest ethnic group in the USA, representing 15 per cent of the population. The numbers of Hispanics have more than doubled since 1980, when they represented only 7 per cent of the population. It is projected that Hispanics will represent 30 per cent of the national population by the year 2050 (Pew Foundation 2008). Consequently, the number of Hispanic students in K-12 education in the USA has grown at proportionate rates. In 2006, Hispanic students represented 20 per cent of public school enrolment (Plantry, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, Kewal Ramani & Kemp 2008). In 2006, 27 per cent of Hispanic families with children under the age of 18 lived below the poverty level, as compared to 10 per cent of White families, 33 per cent of Black families, and 12 per cent of Asian/Pacific Islander families (Snyder, Dillow & Hoffman 2008).

Hispanics have the lowest educational attainment rates and college completion rates of any other major racial/ethnic group in the USA (excluding Native Americans) (Astin and
While the school dropout rate for Hispanics has decreased from 32 per cent in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2006, it is still higher than that of other groups: 11 per cent for Blacks, 6 per cent for Whites, and 4 per cent for Asians/Pacific Islanders (Plantery et al. 2008). Despite their growth in the population, Hispanic high-school graduation rates have remained relatively flat since the late 1970s (Smith & Wolf-Wendel 2005). In 2007, only 13 per cent of Hispanics age 25 and over had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, 32 per cent of Whites and 19 per cent of Blacks age 25 and over had a bachelor's degree or higher (Snyder et al. 2008). Hispanics also have the highest percentage of students (70 per cent) who speak a language other than English at home, when compared to any other racial/ethnic group (Institute of Education Sciences 2005).

Hispanic educational attainment in Texas is similar to the national statistics. In the 2002–03 school year, a third of all students in Texas did not complete high school; Texas ranks 35th in the nation in graduation rates. Less than 60 per cent of Hispanic students in Texas graduate from high school with their 9th-grade cohorts (Swanson 2006). Of the Hispanic students who graduate from high school in Texas, only 62 per cent indicate that they are college bound, as compared to 75 per cent for White and Blacks students and 90 per cent for Asian students (Tienda, Cortez & Niu 2003).

Context of this Study
The context of this study is of particular importance to this inquiry. By design, our intent was to study principals serving in a geographic area with a high concentration of Hispanics and in schools where the majority of the students were Hispanic. The research site for this study, Mira Vista Independent School District (MVISD), a pseudonym, is located in a city of 1.5 million inhabitants in south Texas. The local demographics for Hispanics are significantly more acute than the national statistics. Hispanics represent about 60 per cent of the city’s population (US Department of Education 2005). MVISD is an urban school district with 110 schools and an enrolment of 54,726. Hispanic students make up 90 per cent of the district’s enrolment, of which 67 per cent are classified as at-risk, 93 per cent are economically disadvantaged, and 13 per cent receive special education services (TEA 2009a).

Methodology
Our research utilised an exploratory case-study design (Yin 2008). We selected schools in South Texas and focused on successful principals serving large Hispanic communities. Several Texas-based researchers observed that successful principals are, in fact, ‘closing the achievement gap for Hispanic students in traditionally poor performing schools’ (González 2001: 30). Successful principals concentrated their ‘efforts toward community-building and faculty and staff empowerment’ (Valverde & Scribner 2001: 26). These researchers concluded that the principals demonstrated strong leadership with high expectations for student achievement through a restructured curriculum design, employment of qualified and trained personnel, and an emphasis on sustaining a positive organisational culture.

Participants and Site Selection
Two principals, eleven teachers, five administrative staff, twelve parents and eleven students provided the data for the two schools. We identified principals who, in the previous four years, had led their school to a rating of Academically Acceptable or above according to the
Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). Their schools had a campus student composition of 75 per cent or higher of economically disadvantaged students. In addition, the principals in this study were recognised as successful leaders by their professional peers (at the local, regional or national networks and professional associations; see Table 1).

Table 1: Principals and participants’ interview sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School principals</th>
<th>Briskell Elementary</th>
<th>Stephens Elementary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience in this school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School staff</td>
<td>Briskell Elementary</td>
<td>Stephens Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative staff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total interviews</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We selected schools using a purposive sampling based on the Texas’ AEIS. These reports are public documents showing annual information on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas. The origins of the AEIS go back to 1984, when the Texas Legislature for the first time sought to emphasise student achievement as the basis for accountability (TEA 2009a). Through AEIS reports, the state of Texas provides information from over 1,200 school districts, more than 8,300 schools, 320,000 educators, and over 4.7 million students (TEA 2009b). The AEIS report helped us to identify schools that demonstrated a continuous or incremental successful student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS: see Appendix A) from 2003 to 2007. The TAKS is a state exam that evaluates students in reading, writing, English, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies in different grade levels as indicated in Table 2.

Based on the testing results, the AEIS report shows the performance of each school using the following accountability standards:

- Exemplary: For every subject, at least 90 per cent of the tested students pass the test.
- Recognised: For every subject, at least 75 per cent of the tested students pass the test.
- Academically Acceptable: Reading/ELA, at least 70 per cent of the tested students pass the test; Writing, at least 70 per cent of the tested students pass the test; Social Studies, at least 70 per cent of the tested students pass the test; Mathematics, at least 55 per cent of the tested students pass the test; Science, at least 50 per cent of the tested students pass the test.

In addition, AEIS reports disaggregate the data showing the performance of students according to ethnicity, economically disadvantaged students (who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch), and students at risk (those presenting a risk of dropping out of school; see Appendix B). Both schools used for this study served a high number of economically
Table 2: TAKS tests by grades and subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Tests (offered in English and some in Spanish)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Level</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TEA 2009a

disadvantaged students, at-risk students, and Hispanic students. Moreover, these two elementary schools demonstrated consistent improvement over time, and a high comparable student achievement when compared to other schools presenting similar demographics.

Procedures

A fact-finding questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and group interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, administrative staff, parents and students in each campus. Fact-finding questionnaires were used to collect statistical and other factual information about the case study schools, and biographical data on the principals. The principals were interviewed in three separate one-on-one semi-structured interviews lasting an average of 45 minutes each. The interviews included biographical questions, enquiries regarding their perceptions of the school and their leadership, and probing questions about their challenges and successes (Day 2007a). Teachers, parents and students were interviewed in their respective groups. The protocol included questions about their perceptions of the school, the principal’s leadership and possible areas for school improvement (Day 2007a). The focus groups took place at each school, and lasted an average of 60 minutes each. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed for analysis. Pseudonyms were used for the district, schools and participants.

Analysis and Findings

The two schools were treated as a ‘family’ of cases (Miles & Huberman 1994) for analysis. For triangulation, Texas AEIS reports, and district and school documents such as press articles, interviews, other historical documents and researcher observation notes were included in the analysis. The district description and case narratives reflect the richness of information and complexity of each site. Three prominent themes emerged from the analysis of the data:

a. focus on student achievement;
b. building efficacy among faculty and staff; and
c. collaborative and trusting relationships.
Each of the themes was evident in both cases and we organised our report of the finding using the themes for analysis.

**Case Descriptions**

**The Mira Vista District**

Fostering the success of Hispanics and particularly low-income students has been a critical concern of the MVISD. Under the accountability provisions in the NCLB Act of 2001, and the state-mandated accountability standards, all public schools in Texas are expected to demonstrate adequate yearly academic progress. Within the MVISD, the two schools we selected for our study were Stephens Elementary and Briskell Elementary.

**Table 3: Mira Vista independent school district student composition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003 (%)</th>
<th>2004 (%)</th>
<th>2005 (%)</th>
<th>2006 (%)</th>
<th>2007 (%)</th>
<th>2008 (%)</th>
<th>2009 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>89.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on TEA 2009b

**Stephens Elementary: A Will of Steel**

When students and parents walk through the main entrance at Stephens Elementary, they can hear the song that is played every morning to greet students and their families. The song was composed by a sports teacher, and its lyrics refer to students as the stars to the school, with a bright future ahead. Parents sing along as they bring students in the classrooms.

Stephens Elementary sits in an old and pleasant neighbourhood in the southeast side of the city, and its mission reads: 'We, the Stephens Community, envision the opportunity to provide students the skills necessary to meet their educational needs for lifelong learning.' The promotion of community relationships can be seen in the principal’s office, where a poster announces the upcoming Dad and Daughter Dance, for which godfathers, grandfathers, uncles and dads sign up to dance with students at the annual autumn festival. The 35 staff members and the principal serve an average of 400 children from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Besides the regular curriculum, the school offers before- and after-school extended day programmes, gifted and talented programmes, and special education programmes. Colourful instructional posters and creative student work decorate the sunlit hallways.

Stephens Elementary made the news in the local paper three years prior to our visit, when there were allegations that Stephens cheated in the state standardised tests. Stephen’s 3rd-grade students scored at the top 5 per cent of the state, which was much higher than other consistently high-scoring schools in the surrounding districts and state. According to the principal and the teachers, neighbouring schools could not believe that a predominantly Hispanic and poor school could outperform the more affluent, predominantly White schools; therefore they must have ‘cheated’. The principal, Laura Martinez mentioned that the district
Table 4: Stephens Elementary student groups, state accountability ratings, and academic improvement indicators

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (2007)</td>
<td>93.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficiency</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students (2007)</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student mobility rates (2007)</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability ratings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04: Academically Acceptable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/05: Academically Acceptable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/06: Academically Acceptable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/07: Recognized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08: Recognized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09: Exemplary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School improvement indicators*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004: 64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005: 61%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006: 62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007: 81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008: 82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009: 81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus improvement: + 25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on TEA 2009b.

leadership immediately established an Integrity Committee to investigate the allegations of ‘cheating’ that were brought against the school. After careful review of records, performance indicators and testing procedures, the committee reported that the accusations were unfounded. ‘We were just doing a good job with our kids,’ attested Ms Martinez, ‘but the allegations hurt our reputation and our trust in the system’.

Focus on Student Achievement

A review of the table indicates that Stephens Elementary serves the kind of students that have historically performed poorly on state assessments and have typically experienced failure in school. At Stephens Elementary, over 90 per cent of the students are Hispanic and economically disadvantaged, almost 20 per cent have limited proficiency in English, and over 50 per cent are considered at risk. The principal, Laura Martinez, is Hispanic with a background similar to her students. She has been an educator for more than 20 years. She was a teacher and assistant principal at Stephens Elementary before she was appointed principal. Ms Martinez is highly respected by her teachers, parents and colleagues. Most importantly, she knows her students well and her students know her well. Her energy and passion about her work is contagious, and according to the teachers she models exemplary behaviour and has high expectations of her teachers and students.

Ms Martinez is a strong bilingual leader. Parents and faculty perceive her as the principal that ‘takes care of business’ (TCB); she was even awarded a sculpted lightning bolt with the initials
TCB. Stephens was rated Recognised in the 2007 state accountability system, commended for high performance in writing, mathematics and science, and awarded the 2007 National Elementary School Site of the Year. Emphasis on academics was high, with curricular interventions and analysis of student progress interwoven in the day-to-day planning and weekly staff meetings. When asked, ‘How do you improve student performance?’ She answered:

We review the curriculum and work on professional development, but it is also about being attentive to each student and building a community that takes care of business. For example, I learned that one of the students registering was transferred from a school that retained him for the third time in 2nd grade. He was ten years old. I said, ‘Baby that cannot happen.’ I told myself, I am not going to call the central office for permission. I want what is right for this child - he needs to be with kids his own age, and if I have to give him support, I’ll give him all the tutors he need, and I’ll keep him after school. I’ll put him science lab, in the reading lab, and he’ll get all the assistance. I don’t know how far I can take him, but I’m not going to leave him behind. That’s the bottom line. His mother started crying but she knew she came to the right place. So I turned to the student and said, ‘You know what? When you become rich, you have to come back and give me some of that money.’

Interventions related to individual student chances for success were not taken lightly by Ms Martinez, as we encountered multiple stakeholders attesting to the same attention and concern given to individual students. One of the parents interviewed, an active participant in the community, shared that one of his twin daughters had to be retained, one year before, when in 1st grade. ‘When you have twins, it is really difficult to hear this’, attested the parent. ‘But after Ms Martinez sat with me to make this decision, I also understood that they were different, and that she wanted both my children to be successful.’

Parents at Stephens perceived Ms Martinez as enthusiastic. ‘She gets us all excited’, stated a parent; ‘she saw me and my daughters before school started when we were at the grocery store. She turned to my daughters and asked: “Are you ready to go back to school, to learn new things, and read?” My daughters were all excited to go back to school.’ Another parent commented that Ms Martinez and the teachers never treated the students or their parents negatively. ‘I never hear things like no, you can’t do that.’ Ms Martinez makes sure that ‘we feel welcome and that we create a positive atmosphere in school and at home’, added another parent. The students interviewed agreed that Stephens was a happy school. ‘Ms Martinez loves us and takes care of us’, said a group of 2nd-grade students. ‘She says we are her children when we are in school’, said another student. Her mother added, ‘It’s not just words, you know. A lot of times people say things and they don’t really mean what they say. They are just words. But words with action speak volumes. And Ms Martinez puts action behind her words.’ Another parent added, ‘Students need more positive role models, people that encourage them and lift them up, and not label them, or ignore them.’

Ms Martinez’s leadership is evidenced by her commitment to the low socioeconomic context in which the students live:

This is a low socioeconomic area, but you know why I don’t like to say that? - Because our students are young children. So, what I am saying is, when they come in, their socioeconomic status is the last thing I want my teachers to think about. I want the
teachers to focus on what potential students are bringing with them. I like to present my students as students that have great potential and that it is the teachers' job to get them that success. I expect every teacher to provide success stories for these children. I want them to do something that is going to encourage them and support them. They need to know that you care about them.

Interviews with other teachers and parents indicated that Ms Martinez was a principal skilled in mentoring stakeholders in order to build the students' successful academic future. One of the parents noticed that

At another school it seemed that the children that were excelling would get the most attention, and the ones that were not excelling they were almost pushed to the side. Here at Stephens it is not like that. Yeah. The kids that are excelling get attention, but the ones that are not excelling, it get even more attention to try to lift them up, to try to bring a balance.

'School programmes are not the solution for our children. It is the person behind the programme and the relationships that count. If you don't have the right person behind the programme, I don't care what programme you have. It's just not going to have the same success!' affirmed another parent.

**Building Efficacy among Faculty and Staff**

Ms Martinez demonstrated two inter-related characteristics that contributed to the development of efficacy among faculty: mentoring others and promoting a campus culture. Ms Martinez's mentoring skills were in fact what the district identified when promoting her to the principalship. As a 2nd-grade teacher, Ms Martinez implemented a mentoring programme for students that resulted in increased engagement of students, a significant feature in areas with high dropout rates. Now, as a principal, her mentoring skills were evident; several teachers attested that they chose the campus due to her principalship.

The teachers expressed that mentoring was a key component in serving the students. One of the teachers affirmed that Ms Martinez has an open-door policy. 'We can walk in at any time to discuss professional or personal issues -- and she is always open to it. It makes it really comfortable to work here.' Ms Martinez's reputation in creating an effective mentoring programme attracted teachers to serve in this campus. Many of the teachers interviewed reminded us that the students at Stephens experienced rough lives, many of them who were first-time generation in schools, or living with grandparents. Nonetheless, the majority of the teachers felt prepared to exercise their knowledge and prepare students to 'learn how to learn', as one of the teachers stated. 'I know my job is to begin the academic year with my students and I can make the decision about what they need, and Ms Martinez empowers me to do it.'

The students' life experiences are not taken lightly in the efforts to engage them in school. One of the teachers added:

One of my students missed three and a half a weeks of school before the math state test. Her cousin was shot. That does affect the student, but it affects me as a teacher, too. The student's resiliency was pretty incredible, and I could not help but think, 'I can't believe you are here after experiencing what no child should be going through'. Students like
Teachers had high expectations of their students; they believed that all students could achieve high levels of academic success. There was no evidence of the deficit-thinking paradigm that is so pervasive in schools that serve minority students (Garza, Reyes and Trueba 2004). According to one of the teachers, 'Ms Martinez does not accept any excuses; she works hard to prepare them to never consider students' socioeconomic status as an excuse for not performing. Teachers are required to focus on the fact that all our students are capable of learning.' 'Poverty does not diminish intelligence', affirmed Ms Martinez. Knowledge of the Hispanic culture was equally important, but was not perceived as a special feature at Stephens. Particular effort was made to acknowledge and respect the culture and lifestyles of the students through culturally relevant teaching embedded in the everyday instructional programme. In addition, according to the principal, nurturing a positive culture was important not only to prepare teachers to serve the students, but to strengthen and maintain a positive school climate that had eroded due to the allegations of 'cheating' related to the state standardised tests. Some of the teachers felt discouraged, and afraid to 'work hard with the kids, and it took us a collective will to continue' attested Ms Martinez.

One of the approaches Ms Martinez used to promote a positive climate among teachers was her effective and creative use of teacher observations and walk-throughs. Ms Martinez explained:

I perform walk-throughs and often take notes, but instead of filling out my observations form for the district, I ask the teachers to fill them out. They are much harder on themselves than I would be. We then jointly discuss approaches to improve teaching and learning and produce a final version for documentation.

Teachers at Stephens perceived this evaluation as working well for them. One of the teachers mentioned how their input on their performance, and the principal taking the time to discuss improvements with them and others, helped them develop strategies such as pairing up with other teachers to create stronger grade-level teams and improved their techniques in understanding families and preparing students.

Collaborative and Trusting Relationships

A strong sense of trust was evident among various groups of stakeholders in the school. Nonetheless, trust and community-building efforts were as challenging as instructional efforts. Parent volunteers talked about the importance of a 'happy school, where the kids started the day singing about being the stars of the school, and teachers demonstrated a passion for what they do'. In a school with almost 40 per cent of the students cared for by grandparents, a strong community relationship was a challenge for the principal and faculty. In order to enhance relationship with parents and grandparents, especially Spanish-speaking families, Ms Martinez planned the distribution of holiday food baskets, or encouraged staff to help families read and interpret the school information that was in English.

A way to promote trust among faculty, parents and students was by opening the school for a number of events. Even though events such as the Dad and Daughter Dance and the Fall Festival could be perceived by those unfamiliar with the school as distractions to academic
learning, such activities guaranteed enhanced contact among the parents, school staff and their teachers. Individual attention to family and community is of utmost importance in the school’s efforts to enhance attendance. It was a practice for teachers to contact parents to inform them ‘how well their children were doing’, attested some parents. As we were leaving the building, Ms Martinez added, ‘You have to love your profession with a passion. We bring ourselves to work every day, so there has to be a passion for what we do.’

**Briskell Elementary: A Tradition of Excellence**

The neighbourhood surrounding Briskell Elementary is quiet and peaceful amidst older, but nicely built homes. Sitting at the top of a hill, Briskell has been in existence since 1956. The school buildings are spread around a gymnasium and sports field. When entering the main building, one quickly learns about the tradition of excellence Briskell has developed over the years. Posters with performance graphs inform teachers, students and families about the academic performance of their students and set up high expectations for the current year. Students can be heard over the intercom announcing the day’s lunch menu, and in the background, uplifting songs with lyrics saying ‘I feel good’ are played. The announcement is closed with a cheer: ‘Who is number one? We are!’

The principal, Ms McCormick, has been an educator for more than 20 years and is well liked and respected by her staff, students and parents. She can be described as a ‘no-nonsense’ leader who goes about her business in a very serious manner. Ms McCormick is driven and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hispanic (2007)</th>
<th>85.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged students (2007)</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English proficiency (2007)</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk students (2007)</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student mobility rates (2007)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Accountability ratings**

- 2003/04: Recognized
- 2005/06: Recognized
- 2005/06: Recognized
- 2006/07: Exemplary
- 2007/08: Exemplary
- 2008/09: Exemplary

**School improvement indicators***

- 2004: 80%
- 2005: 82%
- 2006: 86%
- 2007: 87%
- 2008: 92%
- 2009: 88%

**Campus improvement + 20%**

Source: Based on TEA 2009b.
focused; teachers know what she expects and they accept her direct leadership style. Her appointment at Briskell was her first principalship and at the time of the study she has been at this school for seven years. Ms McCormick explained that ‘it was really hard in the first three years’ because she did not have an assistant principal: ‘It was very difficult to take care of all areas of discipline, instruction, management and professional development.’ In order to qualify for an assistant principal position in this school district, a campus must have an enrolment of 551 students. In the fourth year of her principalship, Briskell surpassed the necessary enrolment and she hired an assistant principal.

Briskell’s mission statement focuses on excellence in achievement: ‘High expectations for all students to achieve their fullest potential.’ Their mission also includes teachers as change agents collaborating with strategies to ensure that students are empowered to succeed. Briskell’s mission statement includes five tenets:

- Every child can learn and achieve at high levels.
- We are responsible for the education and safety of every student.
- We are responsible for the efficient and effective operation of the school system.
- Everyone should be treated with respect.
- People support what they help create.

**Focus on Student Achievement**

Briskell Elementary is the only school in the district that achieved *Exemplary* status in 2007 (TEA 2009a). During the seven years of Ms McCormick’s principalship Briskell students have demonstrated a high level of academic achievement, and Ms McCormick is proud of the students’ and faculty’s accomplishments. Ms McCormick recognises the faculty and her other administrators for the success Briskell has experienced:

> We have a responsibility, those of us who have been here from my seven years back ... we have a responsibility to teach the new teachers our core values of doing things – what has made our school successful. I remind new teachers that their responsibility is to be student-centred and have high expectations for students.

Ms McCormick also reminds the veteran teachers to assume the responsibility for preparing the new teachers and expecting excellence.

Briskell has consistently been included in the Texas Business and Education Coalition Just for the Kids Honor Roll, and has been the recipient of numerous educator excellence grants. In 2007, Briskell achieved gold performance in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics and science. As indicated in Table 4, over 85 per cent of the students at Briskell are Hispanic, over 80 per cent are economically disadvantaged, more than half of the students are considered at-risk, and the majority are first-generation students. Also, many of the students’ families are in rental apartments, subsidised housing or even living in motels.

These conditions contribute to the high mobility rates most schools in the district have experienced. The demographics of the student population at Briskell, in fact, are very similar to the other elementary schools in the district. Nevertheless, unlike some of the other schools, at Briskell students in the classrooms seem ready to learn. The informative posters around the school walls are not only for the students, but also for the families and communities
visiting the school. The charts display the areas in which students are excelling, or not, according to state standards, including the improvements of the students in bilingual programmes. The charts indicated that increased efforts during the 2007 academic year would be concentrated in improving science scores.

Mrs Alvarado, the curriculum instruction coordinator (CIC), warmly welcomed us on our visits. She was a teacher for 20 years in different schools in the district. After being retired for a few years, she returned to Briskell as a CIC. Ms Alvarado and a majority of the teachers spoke Spanish. Ms McCormick considered Mrs Alvarado as her right arm, and the key person behind the teachers’ successful academic outcomes. As a member of the community for many years, she is a key player in the academic improvement of the school. She asserted, ‘I know how to get our students where they need to be academically. One of our efforts at Briskell is to align the teachers’ expertise, grade-level teams, and curricular content.’ Even though the formula seems rather simple, it is very difficult when most of these issues are dependent on highly dynamic variables. ‘Working with people is hard, but we are achieving our goals’, explained Ms. McCormick. She continued, ‘Recruiting and retaining experienced teachers that can improve student scores is always a challenge in an inner-city district, especially with a student population like ours.’ A characteristic that seemed to strengthen the operations at Briskell was the close professional relationship between Mrs Alvarado and Ms McCormick. While Mrs Alvarado would identify whether students were getting the support from teachers and staff in all areas of the curriculum, Ms McCormick was concurrently seeking how to prepare the teachers for these tasks.

**Building Efficacy among Faculty and Staff**

Efficacy at Briskell seems to be developed through teacher-to-teacher mentorship. Besides the CIC, each grade level has an academic coordinating teacher. Over 50 per cent of the teachers at Briskell have been there for over ten years. Experienced teachers intensely mentor new teachers into a school culture that delivers the best quality education and maintains Briskell’s tradition of excellence. Although Ms McCormick has seen a significant rate of turnover of teachers over her seven-year tenure, the tradition of excellence is continuously passed on. One of the teachers, who has been there for over seven years, attested: ‘We all work as one to make sure we deliver the best education, and we really see this commitment as the culture of this school.’

One of the parents sensed and shared that his son’s teacher was under stress in order to guarantee that children demonstrated academic achievement. ‘My son’s teachers say, “please don’t let your son miss class because we need his grade.” I understand the reason why the teacher is saying that they need my son’s grade is to guarantee the tax dollars. But I ask – can funding over-ride the actual importance of the child getting his education?’ Another parent recognised the teachers’ stress, but argued that Ms McCormick was pushing involvement from everyone to get their tax dollars’ worth. ‘We want to see our children going to an exemplary school – we have to convey to each and every one of the students through the parents, the teachers and the principal that the goal is to make them better students and that they are going to a good school.’ He added, ‘I don’t think this school would be successful without Ms McCormick. She does an excellent job running the school. She always knows what’s going on – always.’

Even though the pressure is high, many teachers apply to work at Briskell. Ms McCormick perceives that the opportunity to choose teachers that understand the school’s commitment helps in maintaining the high academic performance. Hiring is conducted in teams, with the
corresponding grade level interviewing the candidate before the hiring decision is made. The interview is detailed, according to Ms McCormick, and includes classroom and curriculum expectations and extended days in order to meet campus expectations.

In addition to hiring, much is invested in professional development. 'It is important to consider that teachers require much training to develop their skills to analyse data', explained Ms McCormick. Teachers confirmed to Ms McCormick's skills in transmitting the district goals to the faculty and staff. 'She is able to come back from district meetings and very clearly set the mission and goals for Briskell.' In order to communicate new steps in curricular planning, teachers at Briskell have weekly cabinet meetings, as Ms McCormick calls them. Teachers develop individual reflection and action sheets for students in need of improvement.

Parents at Briskell attested to the teachers' collaborative aspect. One of the parents perceived that 'Every teacher pitches in. It's not like, "This is not my department."' The teachers are very much involved with the students, and not once have I seen a student turned away for anything.' A couple we interviewed said they were students at the same school and they perceived that the school communicated well with parents, helping bring together families from the community. The father commented:

I still interact with all the people I went to elementary school with because we still live in the same neighbourhood. But when you have children who come from broken families, they are identified really quickly by Ms McCormick. She immediately identifies families like us from the community to support them. These students are somewhat isolated in the beginning but they become integrated into the whole programme of the school because of the support with the families.

The students' success is demonstrative of the teachers' efficacy and cohesiveness of families, but the continuous success seems to come with a cost, Ms McCormick admitted. 'It's very stressful. It's a pressure-cooker all year long. Sometimes we say we are not sure if it is a blessing that we hit Exemplary status because once you hit it, it's very hard to stay there. And every year, it's a new group of kids and a new group of challenges.' Ms McCormick feels the pressure as well, as teachers sometimes seem to encounter a dead-end in customising the curriculum for students that are not reaching the 90 per cent mark. The pressure on teachers to maintain 'exemplary' status can be a possible reason for the high teacher turnover.

**Collaborative and Trusting Relationships**

Briskell administrators and staff worked hard to build trust among faculty, parents and students. The community at Briskell is changing, according to teachers. The community comprises more single-parent families, with an increased number of single dads responsible for raising their children. Characteristic of the area is a number of families who do not speak English. Providing incentives for student attendance is a year-round effort. Ms McCormick explained that 'parents do not often consider school a priority, especially in prekindergarten and elementary. Attendance is also compromised by socioeconomic problems when parents are constantly moving.'

Students interviewed perceived Ms McCormick as an authoritative but accessible presence. 'Ms McCormick is serious sometimes, but can be funny, too', said a 5th-grade student. When asked about how Ms McCormick related to the students, they talked about classroom rewards: 'when everyone in the classroom is not absent during an entire month, Ms McCormick gives
our teacher an award, and has lunch with us.' A number of incentives are in place to engage parents with the school, such as inviting parents to have lunch with students, attendance recognition parties in the classroom, and support to families for their personal needs. 'We organise community bimonthly meetings in English and Spanish, often around topics of interest, like financial advice, and evening sessions with dads, we call pizza and pap', indicated Ms McCormick. Teachers perceived the benefits of building trust among parents and helped create more opportunities for interaction. Nonetheless, Ms McCormick remembers that parents were resistant to coming to school at first, and there seemed to be a lack of trust with the school staff: 'I had very strong-willed parents. I had a very tough time with them. I had to slowly introduce new ideas and things.' Listening was the most important characteristic needed to develop trust among parents, according to Ms Alvarado.

Learning from the Principals at Stephens and Briskell
We learned that the principals in this study displayed extraordinary commitment to their schools and students by focusing on student achievement, building efficacy among faculty and staff, and by building collaborative and trusting relationships. The principals, Ms Martinez and Ms McCormick, were meeting state and governmental accountability requirements and expectations in terms of student achievement. We learned that their successful performance included a commitment to provide any means necessary to lead to high academic success. In their schools, half of the student population was considered at-risk of dropping out of school, and a quarter of the student population was highly mobile, moving in or out of school during the academic year. Nevertheless the students' scores continuously improved year after year. The principals attributed their effective leadership to their strong vision, values and expectations in relation to both teachers and students.

We also learned that principals and teachers were facing strong internal and external pressure to succeed, and they were driven by their passion to provide students with multiple opportunities to achieve success. Ms Martinez at Stephens Elementary exemplified how opportunities were customised when she decided to promote a student who was retained: 'I have to give him support, I'll give him all the tutors he needs, and I'll keep him after school. I'll put him in the science lab, in the reading lab, and he'll get all the assistance. I don't know how far I can take him; but I'm not going to leave him behind. That's bottom line.'

As a result, students excelled academically, and were prepared to master the state-mandated exams. The principals knew that it was their moral obligation to make sure that the students performed above expectations on these assessments, especially if they wanted to teach all children more than the 'basics'.

Ms Martinez and Ms McCormick were focusing on the local internal and external context. They were convinced that their students needed to know more than what was measured in the state assessments if they were going to be prepared to meet the expectations of the real world. Indeed, in their study of Canadian schools ISSPP researchers, Belchetz & Leithwood concluded that successful principalship should be 'responsive to context, but not context dependent' (2007: 174). The external context in the two schools was defined by the low socioeconomic situation of the families they served. Both principals and their teachers were aware of some persistent low academic expectations for students from some parents and teachers, and they constantly challenged them to overcome this deficit-thinking mindset. Principals in England (Leithwood & Day 2007) and in another US ISSPP site (Jacobson et al.
2007) who were serving children in low-income areas demonstrated commitment to preparing students beyond the required basic academic knowledge and this played a critical role in the success of their students, especially when compared to principals working in higher-income contexts (Leithwood & Day 2007).

The two principals in our study demonstrated different leadership styles in a similar context, but they had the same goals and expectations for their students, teachers and parents. Ms Martinez was a hands-on leader involved personally with her students, teachers, parents and all of her staff. She was Hispanic and communicated with her parents in Spanish and English. Ms McCormick, at Briskell, was a systematic highly structured and traditional leader: she facilitated the process and trusted her administrative team to make it work. Both principals were consumed by assessment data and used it effectively for planning instruction and training. However, they were starkly different in the way they structured instruction. Ms Martinez allowed more autonomy for her teachers; she did not worry about the 'how' but she was clear about the 'what'. Ms McCormick was more structured and prescriptive. Teachers were expected to be addressing the same objectives, using the same materials, at the same time, with a strict and inflexible adherence to the scope and sequence.

In both cases, Ms Martinez's and Ms McCormick's particular leadership approaches worked. Both schools were successful, but the way they accomplished their goals was different in terms of the principals' leadership styles. The stress of the state and federal accountability systems was a recognisable source of high anxiety. Ms McCormick, in the Briskell School case, commented: 'It's very stressful. It's a pressure-cooker all year long.' Ms McCormick referred to the difficulty of being an Exemplary school and maintaining the scores, especially because every year 'it's a new group of kids and a new group of challenges'. We learned that, even under the most severe stressful conditions that resulted from high stakes testing and the accountability system, principals and teachers in the two schools were not willing to let students fail. As we observed and interacted with the principals and their staff, it was not difficult to detect the pressure they felt from their supervisors to maintain Recognised and Exemplary ratings. We also observed the principals' self-imposed commitment to stay at the top of these ratings.

The effects of high-stakes testing on principals were similar in schools studied by other ISSPP researchers in England (Day 2007a), Canada (Belchetz & Leithwood 2007) and Australia (Gurr & Drysdale 2007; Mulford 2007). The stress seemed to stem primarily from political and managerial demands of the governmental educational reform. Numerous ISSPP cases (Höög, Johansson, & Olofsson 2007; Møller, Eggen, Fuglestad, Langfeldt, Presthus, Skrøvset, Stjernstrem, & Vedøv 2007; Moos, Krejslér, Kofod & Jensen 2007) also discussed the position of leaders as 'caught in the crossfire between conflicting demands for accountability from different stakeholders' (Day & Leithwood 2007: 177).

The principals built a positive climate while setting high expectations in relation to the discipline, wellbeing and safety of students. The principals in both schools were savvy in developing efficacy among faculty and staff, as the teachers demonstrated a strong focus on the students' academic progress. Ms Martinez, for example, did not want the teachers to perceive or define families, neighborhoods or students as culturally deprived or disadvantaged. The principals emphasised cohesion and professional support among teachers, and enhanced communication between state and district goals, along with well-defined roles of teachers, students and their families. Supporting the findings in this study are the findings of the ISSPP studies in Canada (Belchetz & Leithwood 2007) and Norway (Møller
et al. 2007) that also recognised the importance of the alignment of teachers with the school’s vision and goals as conducive to success. To establish such clear expectations, these principals closely observed and cultivated a school climate that simultaneously demanded high standards for teachers, students and their families, and provided all stakeholders with a safe, comfortable and enjoyable place for teaching and learning.

We conclude that the principals in this study were successful not only because their students performed exceptionally well on the state exam, but because they also manifested a genuine sense of care. Ms Martinez’s emphasis on the Dad and Daughter Dance, or Ms McCormick’s evenings with Pizza and Pap were strategically arranged to develop trust and form meaningful relationships among parents and other stakeholders in the school’s community. Parents felt invited, students were engaged, and the teachers felt supported and appreciated. ISSPP studies in Australia and Canada similarly highlighted the importance of school values as related to building coalitions with the community (Belchetz & Leithwood 2007; Gurr & Drysdale 2007; Mulford 2007).

In order to develop collaborative and trusting relationships among faculty, parents and students, the principals at Stephens and Briskell were cognisant of the fact that students often had both parents working outside of the home. The principals were therefore invested in supporting the families through school services in order to improve the academic lives of the children. To this end, several school-community activities were in place, such as: distributing holiday food baskets, helping Spanish-speaking parents to read the school correspondence, organising day and evening meetings with parents and grandparents in English and Spanish to discuss student academic needs, conducting weekend fun activities, and providing opportunities for parents to have lunch with students during the school day, and participate in class. These activities were perceived as critical in improving the behaviour and attendance of students. Instruction time and after-school activities together sometimes added up to more than ten hours a day to provide a safe environment for all students.

In summary, the principals in these schools bring us back to the importance of developing high academic expectations. They were invested in working in low-socioeconomic areas, and were sensitive to cultural factors influencing the success of students, particularly students of colour. In relation to the stress of principals and teachers towards high-stakes testing, we could not help but notice that academic optimism was maintained at a cost. Recreating academic success year after year seemed to quickly corrode the academic optimism of administrators and faculty.

National and International Implications

Leadership is a complex field of study, in which success is frequently attributed to an individual (Kirkpatrick & Locke 1991; Bennis 2007, 2009). Leadership is even more complex when expanded into national and international practices (Day 2007b). We are reminded, however, that a school principal can only be successful when the school, as a place designed to prepare students socially and academically, supports positive and healthy relationships. As researchers beginning to observe and analyse effective leadership in successful schools around the globe within diverse cultural, social and economic settings, we recognised that these schools are increasingly challenged with in their effort to finding the best way to serve an increasing number of students from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions. Student achievement is increasingly linked to the practices of school administrators. However, there are factors that are out of the school principal’s control such as poverty and
disengagement. In the USA, the principal’s success is tightly coupled with student achievement, and meeting the state and federal expectations are the cause of much stress. In our study we perceived that the principals were creative in organising their programmes and activities so that students’ needs are met both socially and academically. More studies are needed in the examination of principals that overcome stress when expectations for high-stakes testing are needed especially if they are jeopardising the organisational health and the relationships in schools.

Learning from principals’ styles and commitments in different countries helps us in understanding how these principals are creating sustained environments for learning. Leadership is not something to be defined using a simplistic formula (Bennis 2009). A common definition of leadership or a list of successful tenets may not fit every country, especially considering that each country presents a different context, different cultural definitions and different expectations. Nevertheless, it is our hope that our separate studies inform the many ways in which school principals are positively influencing and addressing the success of students, especially in their tender, formative years.

References


Appendix A

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) is a comprehensive testing programme 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 concepts and skills expected at each tested grade level. The grades and subjects shown on the AEIS reports are:

1. Grade 3 – reading (first administration only) and mathematics
2. Grade 4 – reading, mathematics and writing
3. Grade 5 – reading (first administration only), mathematics (first administration only), and science
4. Grade 6 – reading and mathematics
5. Grade 7 – reading, mathematics and writing
6. Grade 8 – reading (first administration only), mathematics (first administration only), science and social studies
7. Grade 9 – reading and mathematics
8. Grade 10 – English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies
9. Grade 11 – English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. These assessments are known as the exit-level tests; students are required to pass them in order to qualify for graduation from high school.
Appendix B
An at-risk student under 21 years of age is identified at-risk of dropping out of school when he or she:

1. is in prekindergarten, kindergarten or grade 1, 2 or 3 and did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year;
2. is in grade 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 or 12 and did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding or current school year, or is not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester;
3. was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years;
4. did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student under TEC Subchapter B, Chapter 39, and who has not in the previous or current school year subsequently performed on that instrument or another appropriate instrument at a level equal to at least 110 per cent of the level of satisfactory performance on that instrument;
5. is pregnant or is a parent;
6. has been placed in an alternative education programme in accordance with TEC §37.006 during the preceding or current school year;
7. has been expelled in accordance with TEC §37.007 during the preceding or current school year;
8. is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution or other conditional release;
9. was previously reported through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS, 2008–09) to have dropped out of school;
10. is a student of limited English proficiency, as defined by TEC §29.052;
11. is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or has, during the current school year, been referred to the department by a school official, officer of the juvenile court or law enforcement official;
12. is homeless, as defined NCLB, Title X, Part C, Section 725(2), the term ‘homeless children and youths’, and its subsequent amendments; or
13. resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility in the district, including a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house or foster group home.

Author Details
Elizabeth Murakami Ramalho
University of Texas at San Antonio
1 UTSA Circle
San Antonio, TX 78249–0654
USA
Email: elizabeth.murakami@utsa.edu