

Factors That Influence Teacher Expectations of  
Hispanic, African American and Low-Income Students

by

Tina Craig

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Teresa McCarty, Chair  
Gerald Miller  
Lynn Davey

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## ABSTRACT

There is a nationwide gap in which African American, Hispanic and low-income students perform significantly lower than their peers. Research suggests that teachers hold lower expectations for these students resulting in lower achievement. There are four main factors that influence teacher expectations: stereotypes, teacher self-efficacy, school culture, language and formal policies and programs aimed at increasing teacher expectations.

The purpose of this study was to inquire into the following questions: (1) What are the factors that influence teachers' academic expectations for low-income and minority students? (2) What are teacher's perceptions on the effectiveness of formal policies and programs that are aimed at increasing teacher expectations? More specifically, do teachers feel that top-down formal policies, such as teacher evaluations, uniform curriculum, and performance-based pay are effective in impacting their expectations, or do teachers believe that bottom-up policies, such as book studies and professional learning communities, make more of an impact on increasing their expectations? Ten teachers were interviewed in a school district that is consistent with the state and national achievement gap.

The findings revealed that teacher expectations are influenced by the four factors I found in the research as well as two other factors: a cultural disconnect among teachers and students and teachers' level of motivation. A combination of top-down and bottom-up formal policies and programs are

needed as teachers are individuals and all respond to various forms of formal policies and programs differently.

To my mom who is the quintessential  
"Giving Tree."  
To Owen, Kayla, and Bryce  
who inspire me every day to be a  
Mother they can be proud of.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

That is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny. —(Huxley, 1932)

Aldous Huxley's 1932 science fiction novel, *A Brave New World*, depicts a social hierarchy where people are engineered to be of a certain social caste and are subsequently drugged to remain happy with their status regardless of how lowly it is. This dystopic scenario may sound ridiculous; however, some of our social structures in the United States parallel the novel. Within schooling, for instance, students are socialized early to accept their grouping status through the expectations that educators have of them.

In this chapter I outline my proposed dissertation, embedding this in a discussion of the effects that teacher expectations have on student achievement, nationwide data that illustrates an achievement gap, and the role teacher expectations have in contributing to that gap. But first, I would like to share how I have personally experienced the effects of teacher expectations in three different roles in my life: as a student, as a teacher, and as a parent.

I am a White female who attended low-income urban schools as a student. In high school I had aspirations of going to college. I made an appointment with my guidance counselor to inquire about a college scholarship. My guidance counselor told me that I was not college bound and

that I should look into other career options. She did not take the time to glance at my transcripts that would have revealed a high grade point average. Yet her low academic expectations for me were possibly influenced by my family's low-income background. Luckily, my grandmother believed in my academic ability, and her high expectations of me negated the low expectations of my guidance counselor. I often wonder if my Caucasian race helped to counteract any negative effects of my teacher's low expectations due to my family's low socio-economic status.

Needless to say, I did attend college and have been a teacher for the past fifteen years. During my first eight years in education, I served as a special education teacher in a Title I school, where over 50% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch because the family income was below the poverty line. The majority of the students in that school were Hispanic. The culture of the school reflected low expectations of the students. There was a collective belief that students attending the school could not reach high standards; therefore, they were not exposed to high level skills nor were they held accountable for high academic success.

I was always a loving teacher who cared for my students; however, I never felt that my students had the ability to achieve high academic standards. I held low expectations for my students and demonstrated those expectations by giving good grades for mediocre effort and work. I gave so much assistance that I never asked my students to think and grow on their

own. This was a common practice at my school as I was considered to be a master teacher by my colleagues and administrator. However, something did not feel right, and after teaching for about six years, I started to make a shift in my beliefs. I attended a series of workshops that focused on using positive thoughts to change behavior. The main lesson I learned was the notion that if teachers believe that all their students can learn and hold high expectations, then their students will rise to those high expectations.

After those workshops I felt an immediate personal and professional paradigm change. At first, the only thing I changed was my belief about students' abilities. These beliefs increased my expectations of my students, leading to a change in my instructional practices, which resulted in an increase in my students' academic achievement. I never verbally communicated this transformation to my students; however, it was apparent in the way I treated them. I held my students accountable for high academic standards that resulted in a tremendous increase in my students' test scores. Today, I continue to teach with high expectations.

Another factor that caused a change in my beliefs was that my son began kindergarten. I held high expectations for my son and was upset when he was not learning the same high quality skills that kindergartners were learning in another school in our district. The schools in our district that had a school culture of high expectations for all students were located in upper-to middle-class neighborhoods with primarily White student populations. I am



a single parent raising three children alone on a teacher's salary. I could not afford to live in those schools' attendance area so I transferred to that school as a teacher so that my own children could attend. I have been teaching in this school for the past eight years and have learned that it is the high expectations teachers hold for their students that solicit high student achievement. I have often wondered why many teachers in low-income schools tend to hold lower expectations for student achievement than teachers in middle-to upper-class schools. These experiences have inspired me to pursue research in this area.

### **Research Problem**

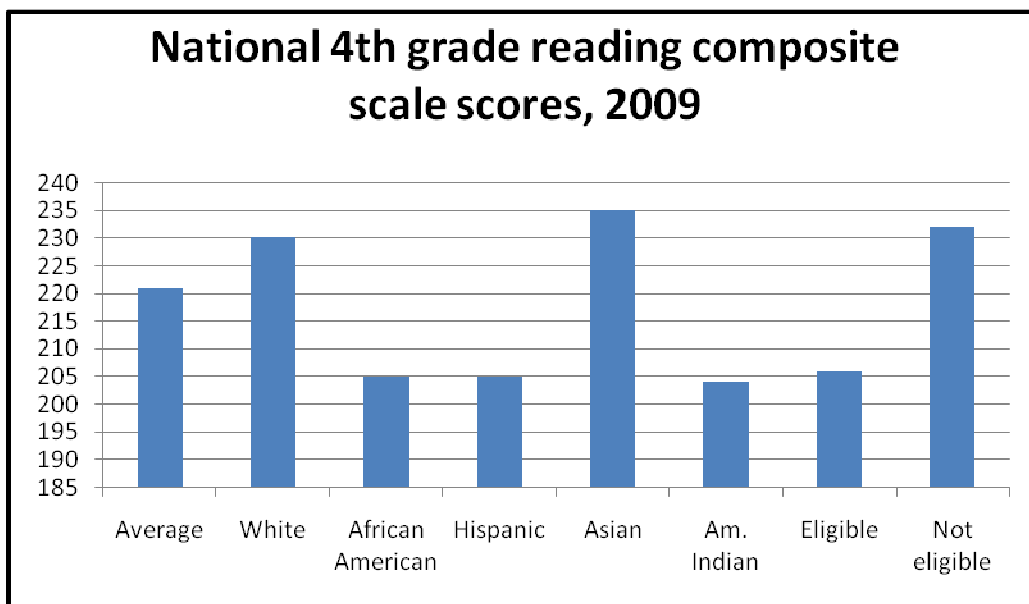
Several studies have shown a correlation between teacher expectations and student achievement (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). Some researchers suggest that teachers hold lower expectations of African American and Hispanic students than of White and some groups of Asian/Pacific Islander students (Anderson-Clark, Green, & Henley, 2008; Diamond et al., 2004; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Other researchers have found that teachers hold lower expectations for low-income students (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008; Benner & Mistry, 2007). In this section I present national and state data that reveal a nationwide achievement gap. By comparing the research that shows a correlation between teacher expectations and student achievement and the national and state achievement gaps, I am making the

assumption that “teacher expectations” significantly contributes to the achievement gap.

There is a national achievement gap in which students from low socio-economic status families perform much lower academically than students from middle- to upper-class families. This achievement gap contributes to the cyclical patterns that continue from generation to generation: children born into low-income families achieve lower academically in elementary and high school than do higher income students. Fewer low-income-students finish high school and attend college, leaving many to face unemployment, underemployment, and jobs that pay significantly less than those requiring a college degree (Mishel, Bernstein, & Schmitt, 2001). In contrast, children of middle- to upper-class families on average are more successful academically and attend college in higher rates, leading to careers that support their middle- to upper-class lifestyles (Berliner, 2006). This cycle continues to be reinforced by teacher expectations in the school setting.

In addition, subgroups of Hispanic and African American students nationally fail to achieve academic standards compared to other racial groups such as White and some groups of Asian/Pacific Islander students (Berliner, 2006), suggesting the possibility that teacher expectations for Hispanic and African American students are lower than for White and Asian/Pacific Islander students.

Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate the national achievement gap in reading for fourth and eighth grade students separated by race and SES. The data shown below are scaled scores published by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Students who come from households whose incomes are at or below the poverty line are eligible for free or reduced lunches while those above the poverty line are not eligible.



*Figure 1.* NAEP data: fourth grade national reading composite scores comparing students by SES and Race, 2009

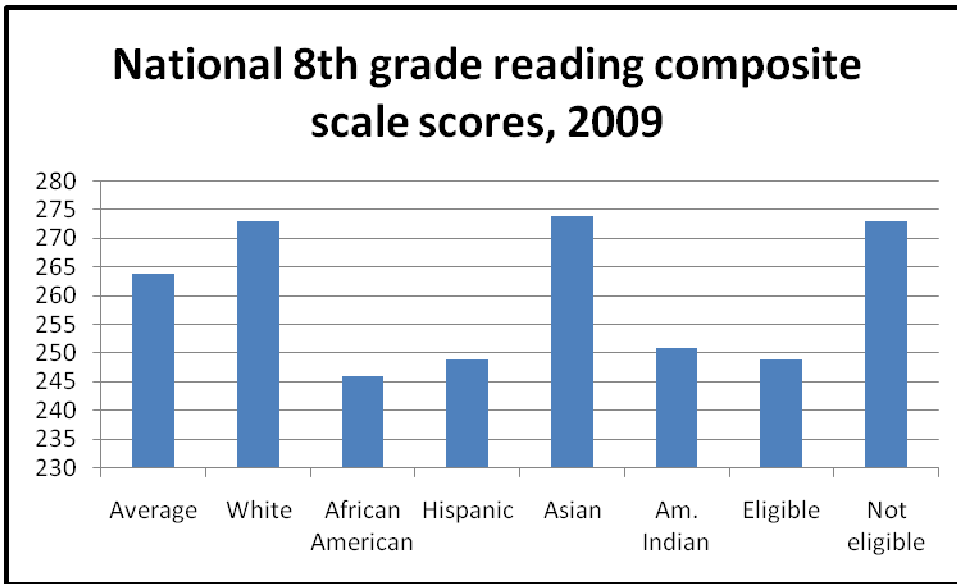


Figure 2. NAEP data eighth grade national reading composite scale scores comparing students by SES and Race, 2009

The data for math scores follow the same trend as the reading scores. White and Asian subgroups on average score significantly higher than the African American and Hispanic subgroups. In addition, students who qualify for free and reduced lunch score significantly lower on academic achievement tests than students who do not qualify. Figures 3 and 4 show NAEP math scaled scores aggregated by race and SES for fourth and eighth grade students. There is a nationally consistent trend for White and Asian/Pacific Islander students to outperform African American and Hispanic students in reading and math. The variation in scores is caused by many factors, one of which could be that teachers hold higher expectations for White and Asian/Pacific Islander students than for Hispanic and African American students.

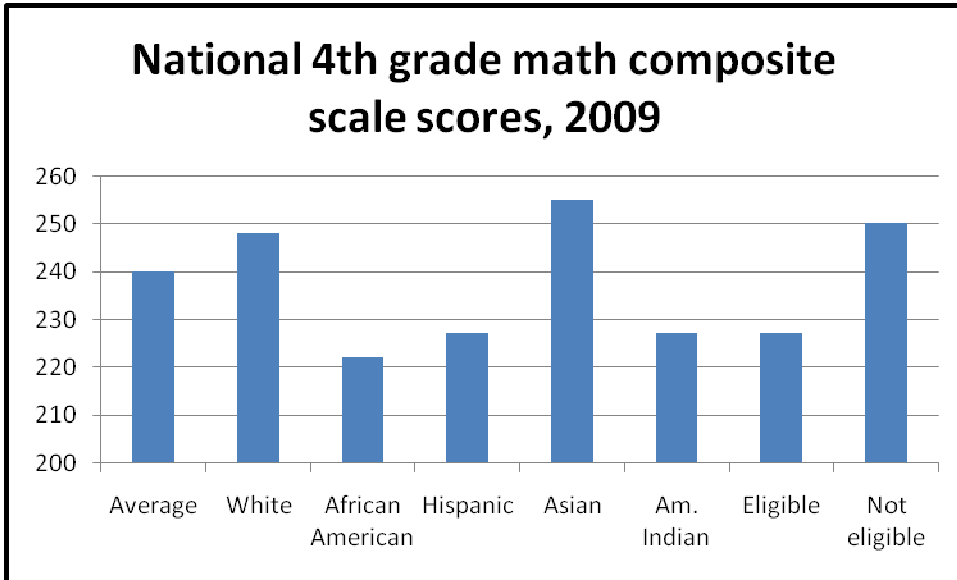


Figure 3. NAEP data: fourth grade national math composite scores comparing students by SES and Race, 2009

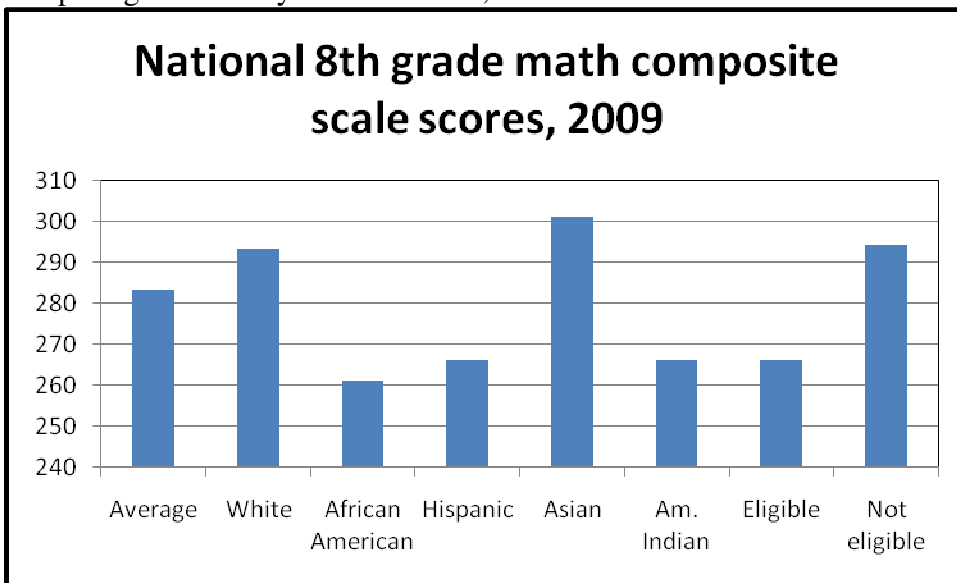


Figure 4. NAEP data: eighth grade national math composite scores comparing students by SES and Race, 2009

In my study, I targeted a school district located in the southwestern part of the United States to serve as a snapshot of a national issue. The tables

below show NAEP data of the state’s reading scaled scores for fourth and eighth grade students compared to the national average of the United States for the subgroups of SES and race. This state’s average reading scaled scores for fourth and eighth grade students were below the national scaled score average. In fourth and eighth grades, students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch performed significantly lower than those students who were not eligible for free or reduced lunch. Furthermore, White students performed significantly higher than African American and Black students in fourth and eighth grades. Data for the state’s Asian/Pacific Islanders were not available. The state’s fourth grade students’ average reading scaled scores for White students and those not eligible for free and reduced lunch were lower than the national averages; however, they were still higher than African American, Hispanic, and low-income students.

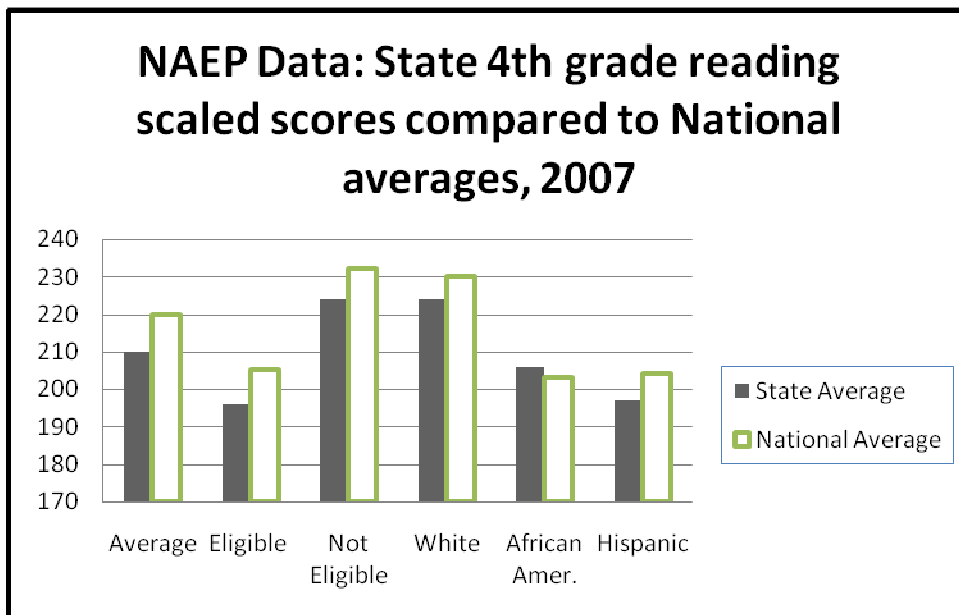


Figure 5. NAEP data: fourth grade reading scaled score averages for state compared to national averages, 2007

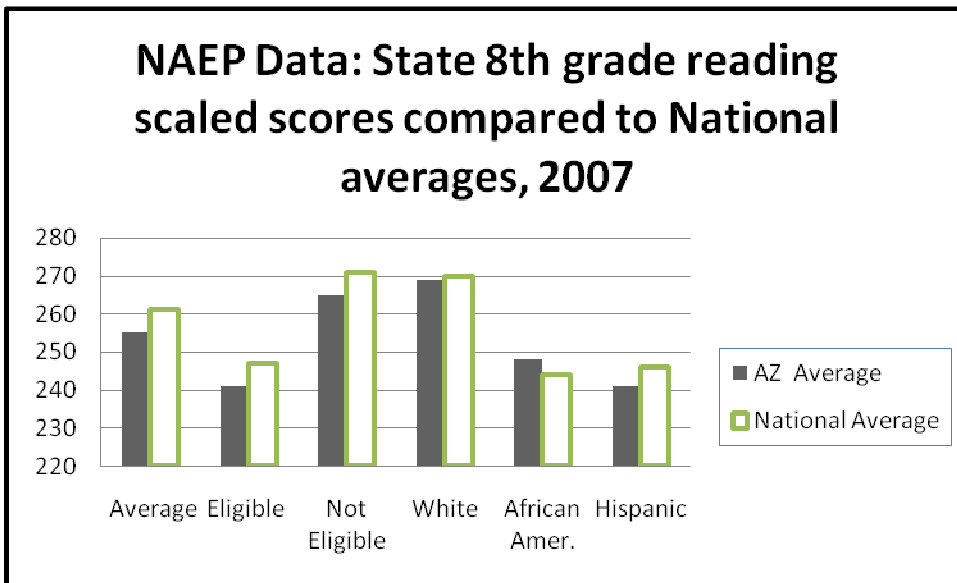


Figure 6. NAEP data: eighth grade reading scaled score averages for state compared to national averages, 2007

The state in which I conducted my study ranked in the bottom 20% in the United States in reading and math according to NAEP data. More specifically, in 2009 the state ranked 48th in fourth grade reading and math as compared to all states in the United States. In addition, this state ranked 42th in eighth grade reading and 40th in eighth grade math. According to NAEP data these states' scaled scores have consistently remained under the national average over the past ten years. One factor that goes unnoticed in their state data is how the achievement gap in the state is similar to the national achievement gap. The public is aware of the state's overall low academic performance; however, when the data is disaggregated, it is clear that the state's schools do well in educating White middle- to upper-class

students who consistently perform above the national average. However, African American, Hispanic and low-income students consistently perform below the national average.

This state's achievement gap is aligned with the national achievement gap among the race and SES subgroups, but the factor that makes this state unique is its demographics. The demographics chart (Figure 7) shows that the combined Asian and White populations are nearly equal to the combined African American and Hispanic populations. In addition, 41% of the students in the state qualified for free or reduced lunch during the 2006-07 school year. The state demonstrates similar academic trends as the rest of the nation with Hispanic and African American students performing significantly lower than White and Asian students; however, the high percentage of Hispanic students is unlike many states that rank higher academically. It is possible that a larger proportion of students in the state are held to lower teacher expectations.



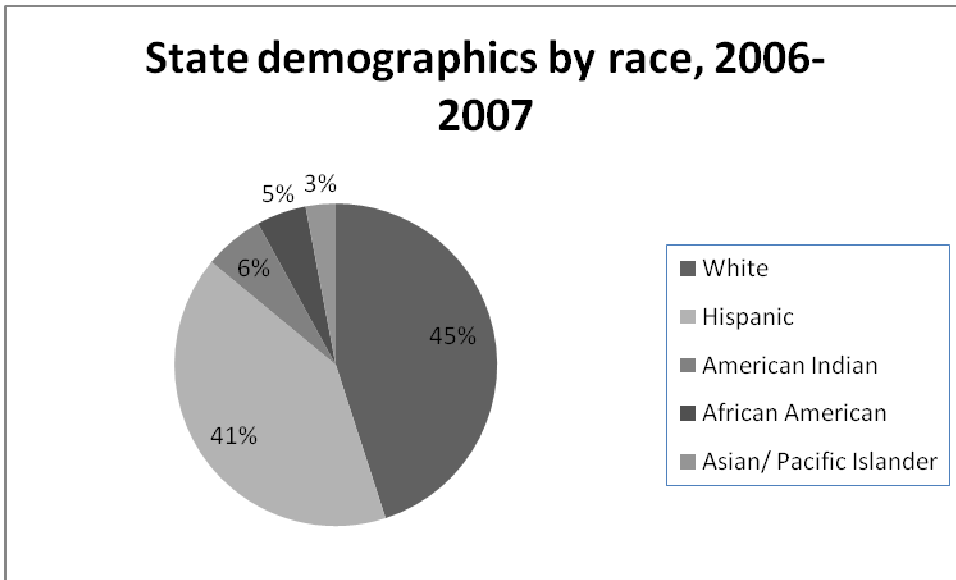


Figure 7. NAEP data: state student demographics by race, 2006-2007

### **Formal Policies Aimed at Decreasing the Achievement Gap**

In an effort to close the achievement gap, school reform movements have focused on increasing expectations for all students. President Ronald Reagan's administration issued *A Nation at Risk* (1983) which sparked a series of reform movements that focused on increasing standards in math and reading for all students (Weinstein, 2002). In 1989, George H. W. Bush created Goals 2000 in an effort to put American students first in the world in math and science by the year 2000. This goal was not attained; according to the 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results; the United States ranked 29th of the 40 top nations in eighth grade science and 35th of the 40 in eighth grade math. The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 added accountability with teeth focusing school reform on rigorous standards and high-stakes testing. A major goal of NCLB

is to have every child proficient in reading and math by the year 2014.

Despite the national legislation efforts to ensure high expectations for all students, the achievement gap continues to exist even after more than 25 years of reform movements aimed at closing the academic achievement gap.

One void in current reform movements is addressing the effect teacher expectations have on student achievement. Social and interpersonal dynamics between teachers and their students are not addressed in current school reform. Yet the day-to-day interactions teachers have with their students have a significant impact on student performance. Social inequities caused, in part, by teacher expectations are often missing from reform language and policy. For example, a teacher utilizing a scripted curriculum who believes that a certain student, or group of students, cannot be successful will carry out the program much differently than a teacher who believes all students can be successful. I feel teachers' beliefs influence their own expectations, resulting in a variance of student academic performance.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Many state and national legislative reforms have been initiated to address this gap, causing state and local school districts to implement formal policies and programs aimed at closing the achievement gap. This study investigated factors that influenced teacher expectations. Furthermore, it illuminated teachers' perceptions of some formal policies and programs

aimed at increasing teachers' expectations as an intervention to ensure academic success for all students.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of my study was to inquire into the following questions:

(1) What are the factors that influence teachers' academic expectations for low-income and minority students? (2) What are teacher's perceptions of the effectiveness of formal policies and programs that are aimed at raising teacher expectations for all African American, Hispanic and low-income students? More specifically, do teachers feel that top-down formal policies such as teacher evaluations, uniform curriculum, and performance-based pay are effective in impacting their expectations, or do teachers believe that bottom-up policies, such as book studies and professional learning communities, make more of an impact on increasing their expectations?

I interviewed ten teachers in a local school district situated in a metropolitan area of the southwestern state from the tables I shared earlier. For purposes of anonymity I refer to the district as the pseudonym "OKB district." The OKB district's student achievement data are consistent with the state and national achievement gap, serving as a local sample of the national trend. This is a large district of 35,900 students that has schools in various SES neighborhoods. I interviewed ten teachers from schools with different student population characteristics. I used Seidman's (2006) three-part interviewing sequence to solicit responses that revealed factors that have

influenced each teacher's expectations. As part of the interview, I had each teacher read six different scenarios involving fictitious teachers participating in various formal policies and programs aimed at increasing teacher expectations. I asked my participants to rate their perceptions of the likelihood of the scenario effectiveness on a five-point scale (see Appendix A for scenarios and interview questions). The interviews, 60- to 90-minute sessions, took place in areas in which the interviewees were comfortable. I gave them a choice to meet in their classrooms or places of their choosing. The majority of the teachers wanted me to come to their classrooms for the interview.

Seidman's (2006) three-part interview sequence is the best approach for soliciting factors that influence teacher expectations because questions about childhood educational experiences were first asked followed by questions about current practices and a series of questions designed to have teachers reflect on their beliefs and expectations of their students (see interview protocol in Appendix A). When teachers read the professional development scenarios about fictitious teachers, they were able to rate the effectiveness of each policy and program in a non-threatening way. My hope was that such an approach took the pressure off them by putting the focus on teachers they do not know. The scenarios, however, would give insight to each teacher's perception on the effectiveness of each program.

## Definition of Terms

There are a few key terms referred to in my literature review that need to be defined. The first term is *the self-fulfilling prophecy*. A majority of the research on teacher expectations mentions a connection between the self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher expectations. One of the earliest definitions of the self-fulfilling prophecy is “in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception true” (Merton, 1948; p.195). Brophy and Good (1970) explained the occurrence of the self-fulfilling prophecy as follows: a teacher develops differential expectations for a student’s academic achievement; then treats the student according to the original expectation; the child responds in alignment with the expectation because he is treated as such, resulting in the child performing at the level the teacher believed the child would achieve. The student outcome validates the teacher’s original belief about the student. The concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy is explained in more detail in Chapter 2 in its own section. The term is also embedded in various sections of the literature review as it is related to the various factors that influence teacher expectations.

Another key factor discussed in the literature review is *teacher self-efficacy*. Warren (2002) defined teacher self-efficacy as the beliefs teachers hold for themselves as capable teachers. A teacher who believes that she is a master teacher, who can guide all students regardless of any barriers to be

successful academically, is thought to have high self-efficacy. In contrast, a teacher who does not feel confident in her teaching abilities to reach all students is thought to have low self-efficacy. A thorough discussion of how teacher self-efficacy influences teacher expectations is in Chapter 2.

The third key term mentioned in the literature review is *school culture*. Warren (2002) defined school culture as “. . . the belief systems of educators as they interact with students and affect the culture of the classroom and school at large” (p. 110) Warren further explained that school culture is the “beliefs (that) are reflected daily in teaching as well as in interactions with students and their parents” (p. 110). Chapter 2 further explains the connection between teacher expectations and school culture.

### **Limitations**

I am a teacher studying teachers. I work in the school district that I am studying and have been influenced by the same factors that I am studying. I have participated in all forms of formal policies and programs that I am investigating and I have developed my own opinions about how each one influences my personal teaching beliefs and expectations. I do however recognize that all teachers respond to factors that influence teacher expectations in different ways and that my experiences may differ from other teachers' experiences. I am very familiar with the school district since I have taught in the district for 15 years. To separate myself from the study I will interview teachers in schools other than the school I work in.

### **Significance of the Study**

It is written in the United States constitution that everyone has a right to a free equal public education. Historically Hispanic, African American, and low-income students have been underperforming academically as compared to their peers causing an achievement gap. This gap can be identified through NAEP data throughout history. The American system is set up to treat children unfairly (Tyack, 1974). Based on this review of the literature, the assumption made in this study is that “teacher expectations” is one factor that contributes significantly to student achievement (Rubie-Davies, 2007; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

This study is intended to be read by teachers, administrators, state and federal legislators, education scholars, and parents. I hope that teachers will be able to use the findings in this study to reflect on their own beliefs and expectations. It will also be important for administrators to identify teacher expectations as an area needing professional development and to hire teachers who hold high expectations to cultivate a school culture of high expectations for all students. State and federal legislators could review current educational policies with a focus on raising teacher expectations. Educational university faculty could point out the achievement gap

trend and instill a paradigm of high teacher expectations for all students in the minds of future teachers. Most importantly it could be beneficial for parents to become aware of this social injustice and become empowered to be advocates for their children.

I was fortunate to have had a relative who held high expectations for me and counteracted the effects of the low expectations school staff had for me. I was also fortunate to have insight that various schools provide varying levels of expectations and my job enabled me the opportunity to place my own children in a school that I otherwise would not be able to afford to put them in. I do believe that being White has also been an asset for my children and me in regards to the expectations teachers held for me in the past and the current expectations teachers hold for my children. Not every child has these opportunities to overcome the effects of low teacher expectations.

Low teacher expectations is a civil rights issue and it is important to bring awareness to the idea that the United States school system perpetuates a rigid social hierarchy that fails to support African American, Hispanic, and children of low SES families in achieving academic success. If we are not careful our students will sound similar to the children in Huxley's science fiction novel. Huxley's exaggerated social castes are not all that far away from



today's reality where the affluent continue to enjoy unequal access to opportunities and resources.

Alpha children wear grey. They work much harder than we do, because they're so frightfully clever. I'm awfully glad I'm a Beta, because I don't work so hard. And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid. They all wear green, and Delta children wear khaki. Oh no, I don't want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They're too stupid to be able to read or write. Besides they wear black, which is such a beastly color. I'm so glad I'm a Beta.  
(Huxley, 1932)

### **Chapter Reviews**

This dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter 1, I discuss the nation's longstanding academic achievement gap in which Hispanic, African American, and low-income student groups continuously achieve significantly lower than their peers, and I discuss the role that teacher expectations play in this achievement gap.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature and my conceptual framework of the factors that influence teacher expectations of low-income, Hispanic, and African American students. It is divided into five themes, or factors, that influence teacher

expectations and includes a discussion of the role the self-fulfilling prophecy plays in each factor. The first factor I discuss is the effects that positive and negative stereotypes based on race and SES have on teachers expectations. Secondly, I review the literature on the influence school culture has on the collective beliefs of teachers and how school culture influences student achievement. Third, I examine the effects that teacher self-efficacy has on teacher expectations of their students. Teachers with high self-efficacy, those who believe they have the skills to guide all students to high standards, tend to have higher expectations than teachers who believe they personally lack the skills to assist students to be successful. The fourth theme is the role language plays in influencing teacher expectations for students who are learning English as a second language. Finally, I examine the literature on formal policies and programs that are aimed at increasing teacher expectations. I examine top-down approaches such as mandating a uniform curriculum, teacher evaluations, and performance-based pay as well as bottom-up policies that include teacher book studies and self-selected professional learning communities.

Chapter 3 explains the methods of my qualitative study. The chapter includes the design and rationale for my study, a description of the location and demographics of the school district and

population, data collection strategies, data analysis strategies, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness of the design and limitations.

Chapter 4 provides the qualitative data that addresses my first research question: *What are the factors that influence teachers' academic expectations for low-income and minority students?* The data are displayed in two formats. First, the qualitative data is presented as individual vignettes of each participant. The vignettes are provided to offer a snapshot of each interviewee's background. I discovered that a teacher's childhood, cultural, community, and educational experiences serve as factors that increase their expectations of their current students. I also discuss the role school culture and teacher's self-efficacy play in influencing teacher expectations. The second part of Chapter 4 is written in a thematic format. I discuss how stereotypes influence students' previous teachers on teacher expectations..

Chapter 5 is focused on the second research question: *What are teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of formal policies and programs that are aimed at raising teacher expectations for all African American, Hispanic, and low-income students? More specifically, do teachers feel that top-down formal policies such as teacher evaluations, uniform curriculum, and performance-based pay are effective in impacting their expectations, or do teachers believe that bottom-up policies, such as book studies and professional learning communities make more of an impact on increasing their*

*expectations?* Chapter 5 is written in two sections. The first section reports quantitative data about the scenarios that teachers rated. The second section discusses each formal policy mentioned in the research question in a thematic format.

Chapter 6 contains three sections. First, the chapter summarizes the findings of the study as it relates the two research questions. Next, it discusses implications and recommendations for policy and practice followed by recommendations for further research in the area of teacher expectations. I turn now to a review of the literature, which serves as a foundation for my study.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.

—Eliza Doolittle speaking to her tutor, Colonel Pickering (Shaw, 1916, p. 95)

As I discussed in Chapter 1, African American, Hispanic, and low-income students on average perform significantly lower academically than their more advantaged White and middle class counterparts (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), leading many commentators such as Anyon (2005) and Kozol (2005) to worry about the achievement gap. Educational reform movements have unsuccessfully tried to decrease the achievement gap for decades (Berliner, 2006; Clark, 1965). One crucial component that needs further attention in carrying out reforms is the role that teacher expectations play in influencing student achievement.

In the previous chapter, I discuss my personal experiences with teacher expectations as a student, teacher, and parent that led me to research teacher expectations. This chapter primarily discusses the literature on teacher expectations, more specifically the factors that influence teacher expectations. In an effort to increase teacher expectations, it is essential to

identify how teacher expectations are formed. Therefore, I examined the research on the factors that influence teacher expectations. There are many factors that influence teacher expectations; however, for the purpose of this literature review I focus on the following four factors that I found to be most relevant in the research: stereotypes, school culture, teachers' self-efficacy, and language. These four factors are important because they influence teacher expectations of African American and Hispanic students and those living in low socio-economic status households. Teachers' low expectations of students that are based on students' backgrounds reciprocally influence student achievement and contribute to the achievement gap. I also discuss formal policies and programs that attempt to increase teacher expectations.

### **Teacher Expectations**

In this dissertation I refer to *teacher expectations* as the level of academic achievement teachers believe or expect their students will attain. Students are heavily influenced by the expectations teachers hold for them (Weinstein, 2002). If teachers hold low expectations for their students then their students tend to only achieve to those low expectations; however, if teachers hold high expectations for student achievement then their students rise up to those expectations (Rubie-Davies, 2006). Expectations can help or hurt students depending on the level of expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). For example, suppose a teacher holds low expectations for her kindergarten students. That teacher may hold the expectation that by the end

of the year his or her students will be able to name the letters of the alphabet and produce about half of the letter sounds. If a student in this class can achieve these skills then the teacher is content. In comparison, a kindergarten teacher with high expectations may expect students to not only name all letters and produce letter sounds but also decode a simple text and expect students to demonstrate comprehension by verbally retelling the story he or she has read. This teacher utilizes various instructional strategies to ensure that all students achieve those expectations. The various expectations among teachers are a common occurrence in the public school system in the United States (Rist, 1970; Ruby-Davies, 2007). Many studies suggest that this difference in expectations also occurs within the same classroom for various student groups. Some researchers suggest that teachers hold lower expectations based on negative stereotypes for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students (Anderson-Clark et al., 2008; Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008; Diamond et al., 2004). This difference in expectations significantly contributes to the academic achievement gap that is discussed in Chapter 1.

Much of the research on teacher expectations mentions the role the self-fulfilling prophecy plays in influencing teacher expectations for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students. It is difficult to examine teacher expectations without the presence of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Therefore, I reviewed the literature on teacher expectations through the lens

of the self-fulfilling prophecy. In an effort to understand how the self-fulfilling prophecy persists, I examined the factors that influence teacher expectations of their students' academic performance.

### **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**

The idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy originated in ancient Greek mythology. The mythological character Pygmalion created a beautiful ivory sculpture of a woman named Galatea. While creating his masterpiece Pygmalion predicted that the sculpture was going to be magnificent. Since he had such strong positive beliefs about his sculpture, Galatea came to life as a beautiful woman (Weinstein, 2002). Later, George Bernard Shaw (1916) took the concept and developed this idea as his central theme in the 1913 play *Pygmalion* that was made into the musical *My Fair Lady* (Lerner, 1956). Shaw's play is about a wager that Professor Higgins makes bragging that he could transform an impoverished girl who sells flowers on the streets into a high society lady simply by increasing his expectations of her.

Within the social sciences, one of the earliest scholars to write about the self-fulfilling prophecy was Robert Merton (1948). He defined the self-fulfilling prophecy as "in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception true" (p. 195). Merton applied this definition to the social prejudices White Americans have against African Americans and stated that it was socially acceptable for Americans to believe that African Americans were inferior due to the "facts."



These “facts” were that fewer African Americans attended college, resulting in a small proportion of African Americans entering highly respected professions such as medicine and law. These so called “facts” were reinforced through negative stereotypes that were collectively believed by society comprised of good will conforming citizens. The inequities in the education of African Americans and the discrimination they endure are factors that contribute to the self-fulfilling prophecy, making the false definition of the situation appear true.

The appearance of negative stereotypes used to evoke the self-fulfilling prophecy continued throughout United States history. In the 1960s, White Americans utilized the self-fulfilling prophecy in conjunction with negative stereotypes to protect the perceived idea that Black individuals were inferior to White Americans. Negatively stereotyped characteristics of Black males, such as impulsiveness and irresponsibility, were consistently reinforced causing Black individuals to act according to those stereotypes (Clark, 1965). “It appears that those who expect weakness or gratification often find what they expect” (p. 68). Clark explained how the self-fulfilling prophecy begins: with the assumption that a child should be educated according to his needs. This assumption translates into the belief that there is no point in having high expectations for Black students because of the believed negative stereotypes that Black students are not able to learn and will just become frustrated. As a result Black children are taught by teachers

with low expectations, leading to reading and mathematical skills that are significantly below their grade level. Clark stated, “Children who are treated as if they are uneducable almost invariably become uneducable” (p. 128). In the above scenario the initial assumption that Black students are academically inferior was reinforced by the negative stereotype causing results to parallel the initial false truth. The presence of a negative stereotype accepted and believed by society assists the self-fulfilling prophecy to occur.

Clark (1965) further argued that despite the desegregation efforts students were still being segregated by the differences in education they received compared to White students. “He (the Black adult) did have intellectual potential but had been damaged so early in the educational process that not even a surge of motivation and his basic intelligence could now make his dreams effective” (p. 67). The deeply rooted negative stereotypes for African Americans influence teachers to expect low levels of academic achievement. These stereotypes hinder the quality of education for African American students.

The self-fulfilling prophecy was examined in the classrooms of one school during the 1964-65 school year in the pivotal study known as the Pygmalion study (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). This study illustrated how the self-fulfilling prophecy can influence teacher expectations of student capabilities. The researchers of the study defined the self-fulfilling prophecy as “how one person’s behavior can quite unwittingly become a more accurate

prediction simply for its having been made” (p. vii). In the study, students were placed in leveled tracks or classes without the use of student achievement data. The teachers solely used their own judgment to decide which level students would be placed into. Low-income and Hispanic students were overrepresented in the low level tracks and underrepresented in the high tracks. The study consisted of an IQ pretest administered to the whole school where the researchers randomly selected 20% of the students and labeled them as *special children*. The researchers explained to the teachers that based on the assessment the *special children* were about to *bloom* academically. In other words, they were about to suddenly make significant academic gains. The results of the study suggested that teachers treated the *special children* differently. Teachers increased their level of expectations for the select group of *blooming* students, resulting in an increase in their achievement. On an average, the special children gained an average of 12 IQ points on a school-wide posttest while the control group made an average of 8 IQ points. The students in first and second grades made more significant gains than grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. In Brophy’s (1983) review of the *Pygmalion* study, he suggested that one possible explanation for the findings was that the teachers in the primary grades interacted with students individually or in small groups more often than the teachers of the upper grades, his explanation of why the self-fulfilling prophecy may be seen more in the younger grades.

In conjunction with the Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992) study, the researchers used a data set from a previous study with the same students in the *Pygmalion* study, in which the Hispanic students' photographs were rated by adults outside the school community as looking more or less "Mexican." These photograph ratings were compared to the results of the *Pygmalion* study. Rosenthal and Jacobson found that the special students in the low tracks who were rated as looking the most Mexican made the most gains in IQ points. The explanation Rosenthal and Jacobson gave was that the perceived most Mexican looking students had the most to gain because in previous years the Hispanic students were held to the lowest expectations. Once they were labeled *special* their expectations were increased. The study's findings suggested that students, regardless of race or SES, are capable of achieving higher expectations and that teacher expectations may influence academic achievement.

The self-fulfilling prophecy influences the expectations teachers hold for their students. Teacher expectations can help student achievement. The *Pygmalion* study served as an example of how the self-fulfilling prophecy can have positive effects. Teachers in the Rosenthal and Jacobson study held higher expectations for the *blooming* students, therefore providing a more challenging curriculum. As a result, the students rose to those higher expectations. These positive effects mirror the outcomes in the Greek

mythology story of Pygmalion; therefore, inspiring researchers to refer to the positive impact as the “Galatea effects” (Rubie-Davies, 2006).

On the reverse side, the self-fulfilling prophecy can also hinder student achievement for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students. The negative impact that the self-fulfilling prophecy has on teacher expectations is often referred to in the literature as “the golem effects” (Rubie-Davies, 2006; Weinstein, 2002). The word *golem* originates from the Hebrew slang word for *dumbbell* (Weinstein, 2002). The golem effects occur as follows: Teachers may have low perceptions of student abilities based on student characteristics such as race and low socio-economic status (Rist, 1970). Then teachers provide differential treatment, such as accepting poor quality work from students who are expected to perform poorly while demanding other students who are expected to excel to produce high quality work (Brophy & Good, 1970). Teachers’ low perceptions reduce students’ academic self-image (Rubie-Davies, 2006), and students may, in turn, exert less effort in school (Brophy & Good, 1974). In addition, teachers might also give minority and low SES students fewer challenging tasks and less high quality instruction, which also leads to low student achievement (Diamond et al., 2004). The difference in the interactions teachers have with students, such as calling on the perceived high-level students to answer questions more often and giving more praise while criticizing the perceived low-level students more often, contributes to the different behaviors of students

(Brophy & Good, 1970). In essence, the teacher's instructional practices, which are influenced by the level of expectations for students, limit what children can learn (Weinstein, 2002). However, some teachers tend to blame student's characteristics, such as race and low SES, on poor student achievement (Warren, 2002). Then students' low academic performance confirms the teacher's initial low expectation of low SES, Hispanic, and African American students causing the self-fulfilling prophesy (McKown & Weinstein, 2002).

In summary, the self-fulfilling prophesy is thus a cycle in which the outcomes are parallel to the false initial estimate of the students' abilities (McKown & Weinstein, 2002). The beliefs teachers hold for students' capabilities influence teacher expectations. The human mind does not like to be wrong (Gardner, 2006); therefore, when a belief is set in a teacher's mind about the academic abilities of their students that belief is reinforced through teacher expectations. Students believed by their teachers to excel will be held to higher expectations. Furthermore, if the same students are not performing to the believed high expectation, then the teacher will utilize many interventions to ensure the performance of those students matches the initial belief so the teacher is not wrong about the ability of those students. On the reverse side, if students are believed by their teacher to perform poorly they will be held to lower standards, leading to classroom experiences that ensure low student academic outcomes. Just as Shaw's play depicts,

students respond to the way they are treated. The manner in which teachers treat their students is motivated by the expectations teachers hold regarding student achievement.

### **Factors That Influence Teacher Expectations**

Teacher expectations are influenced by factors such as stereotypes, teacher self-efficacy, school culture, and language. State legislatures and educational leaders utilize formal policies and programs to influence teacher expectations as well. The following five sections examine each factor. In addition, a discussion on the presence of the self-fulfilling prophecy in all three factors is woven in the discussion on each theme to demonstrate the influence on expectations teachers hold for their students. As I discuss the literature on each factor that influences teacher expectations, I also discuss how the self-fulfilling prophecy is embedded within each factor and how that influences student achievement. See Figure 8 for a pictorial representation.

#### **Stereotypes**

Teachers bring subtle and complex stereotypes and prejudices that are embedded in society into classrooms every day (Anderson-Clark et al., 2008). Stereotypes based on race and socio-economic status influence teacher expectations, which significantly contribute to the achievement gap (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Positive stereotypes associated with particular racial groups, such as Asians and Anglos and middle- to upper-class students,

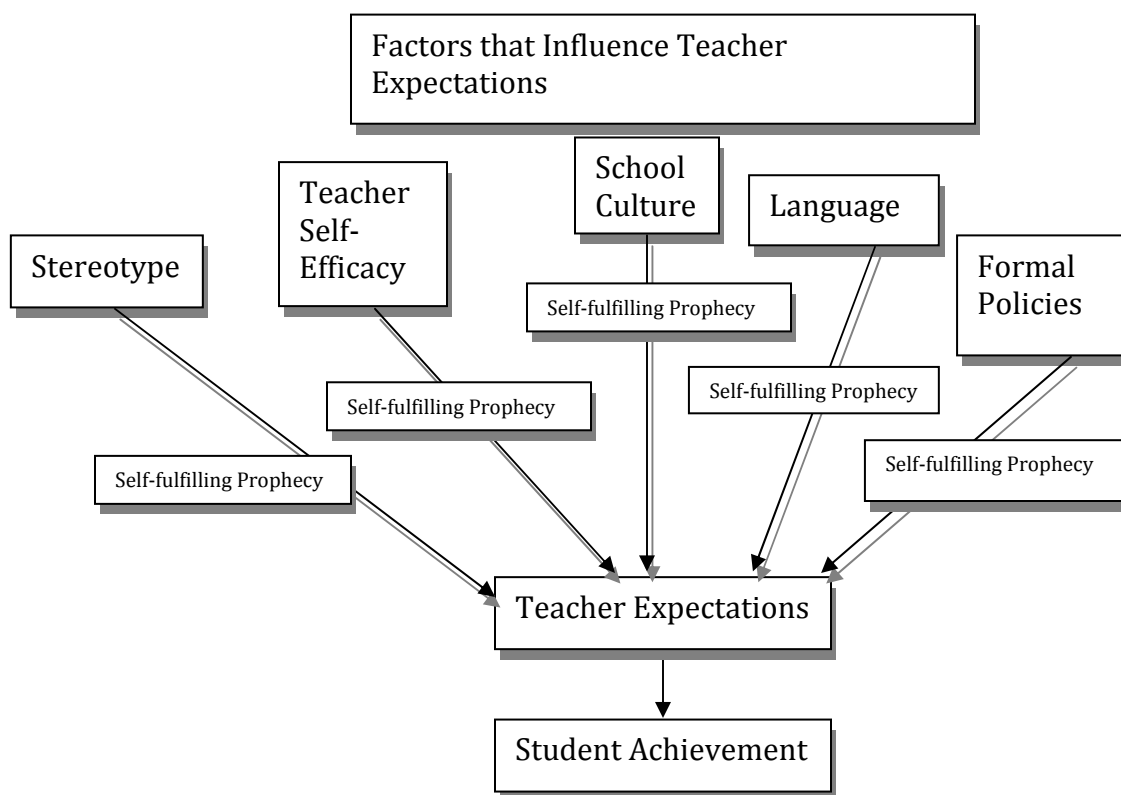


Figure 8. Factors that influence teacher expectations

influence teachers to hold high expectations for these students (Warren, 2002). If teachers have high academic expectations, their instructional practices are likely to reflect these expectations leading to tasks that require higher level thinking skills, more challenging learning opportunities, and a rigorous curriculum (Warren, 2002). These instructional practices result in high student achievement (Benner & Mistry, 2007; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). This illustrates the positive self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers' initial high expectations lead to high results. If a student who was initially expected to achieve high academic skills struggles throughout the school year, the teacher will work hard to provide various



interventions to ensure that student achieves academic success because the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Conversely, negative stereotypes for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students often influence teachers to hold low expectations of these students and to underestimate their academic abilities (McKown & Weinstein, 2002). The self-fulfilling prophecy in conjunction with negative stereotypes occurs in the following manner. The negative stereotypes spark an initial belief that African American and Hispanic students influence teachers to hold low expectations. These low teacher expectations often slow down the pace of instruction. Teachers may also require fewer cognitively demanding tasks (Warren, 2002), thus reducing students' opportunities to learn, which can also result in low student achievement (Benner & Mistry, 2007; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). If students are struggling to understand academic concepts, not many interventions are tried because it is expected of them to not do well. Again the self-fulfilling prophecy influenced teachers as to their instructional practices to ensure that the initial false assumption comes true.

In the sections that follow, I review the literature on how racial and socio-economic stereotypes influence teachers' expectations and impact student achievement.

**Stereotypes based on race.** Stereotypes based on race and social class tend to be intertwined; however, there is some division between the two

factors, according to the teacher expectation research. This section focuses solely on how racial stereotypes influence teacher expectations.

Racial stereotypes can influence teacher expectations causing the negative self-fulfilling prophecy to emerge. A negative stereotype for a stigmatized racial subgroup of students can influence teachers to underestimate students' abilities (McKown & Weinstein, 2002). As a result, teachers may have initially low expectations for academic performance of African American and Hispanic students leading to an outcome of low academic achievement. The influence of racial stereotypes on teacher expectations was illustrated through a quantitative study in which teachers rated their expectations of their students in the beginning and end of the school year (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006). The expectations that the teachers reported before they knew the students' academic abilities were aligned with the end-of-the-year reading achievement of the students, suggesting that teacher expectations influence student performance.

Oftentimes, teachers hold deficit-oriented beliefs for African American and Hispanic students (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Deficit-oriented beliefs assume that students come to school without skills and capacity to learn, thus influencing teacher expectations. Diamond et al. (2004) found that the majority of teachers in urban elementary schools held deficit-oriented beliefs about African American students and held low expectations for their academic success. The researchers connected deficit-orientated responses

and low expectations. The teachers held the lowest expectations for African American students from low-income neighborhoods (Diamond et al., 2004).

***Students' names.*** Stereotypes can even exist because of perceptions of students' ethnic sounding names. Anderson-Clark et al. (2008) conducted a study where 130 elementary teachers read a hypothetical paragraph about a typical fifth-grade boy. The scenarios listed identical positive and negative traits and identified race, either African American or Anglo, and the name of the boy. One name was a popular African American name and the other was a popular Anglo name. The study revealed no significant effect when the race of the child was given. However, there were significant differences based on the names. The teachers were more likely to associate the negative attributes with the African American sounding name while the positive traits were more likely to be associated with the Anglo sounding name. Based on the findings, Anderson-Clark et al. argued that aversive racism exists and it influences teachers' expectations. An example of aversive racism is as follows: Teachers do not hold direct negative feelings that they explicitly attribute to race, but they do have subtle indirect negative associations with names that are influenced by hidden racial prejudices and stereotypes.

Using a similar approach, Foster (2008) found contradictory results and concluded that names hardly matter in influencing teacher expectations. This study looked at the effect that students' ethnic sounding names had on university professors. One possible explanation was that the name-based

effects that occurred earlier in life had already solidified by the time the students reached the university level. While Foster (2008) suggested that teachers' stereotypes of students' names were more evident at the elementary school level, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992) found that teachers' expectations influenced younger students in the primary grades. By the intermediate grade levels, students were not as easily influenced by teacher stereotypes. However, McKown and Weinstein (2002) found the effects of teacher expectations based on racial stereotypes to be consistent in the upper grades with the lower grades, if not greater, and argued that as children get older they are able to consciously identify prejudice in their community and can mitigate its effects.

***Positive racial stereotypes.*** In contrast to the influence negative stereotypes have on teacher expectations, positive stereotypes often associated with Caucasian and Asian subgroups can also influence teacher expectations soliciting the "Galatea effects" or positive self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers may be influenced by the commonly stereotyped belief that Asian students are conscientious and industrious (Warren, 2002). Warren's study revealed that teachers believed that Asian parents typically encouraged a strong education for their children; and, therefore, Asian students came to school with more assets than African American and Hispanic students. The teachers' race-based belief that students would be successful is an example of how the self-fulfilling prophecy can influence

teacher expectations, therefore affecting student achievement in a positive way. If teachers believe students will do well, the teacher expectations are higher. Furthermore, the teachers' instructional practices are likely to reflect this belief, and students will have high academic achievement outcomes. These outcomes are attributed to the initial positive racial stereotype.

In a similar study, Diamond et al. (2004) found that teachers in a school in which the majority of the student population was low-income Asian students, teachers emphasized students' assets in transcribed interviews. The teachers believed that Asian students were excellent in math, reading, and science skills, had the ability to catch on quickly, and had high levels of motivation. The positive racial stereotypes about Asian students perhaps neutralized the low expectations that teachers had for low-income students. These positive beliefs teachers held may have contributed to the academic success of the Asian students, serving as another example of how the positive self-fulfilling prophecy influences teacher expectations.

In the qualitative study *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype*, researcher Stacey Lee (2009) also found that Asian students benefitted academically from positive stereotypes teachers hold about Asian students regardless of their SES status. Asian students from all SES backgrounds were held to high expectations from their teachers. The self-fulfilling prophecy was present as teachers held high expectations for Asian students; therefore,

teachers treating Asian students differently resulted in high student achievement.

The positive stereotype has a complex political background, which Lee (2009) explains in the following way. The students in her study claim that non-Asians cannot distinguish the difference among Asian ethnic groups, such as, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Cambodia, and other Pacific Islander groups. The various Asian ethnic groups band together creating a lump pan-ethnic group often referred to as Asian Americans. Korean parents encourage their children to assimilate to perceived American values by changing their names to American sounding names, dressing in clothes that look very American, and eating only mainstream American food. One student reported that a peer told him that Chinese students would be treated differently by the students if they brought their strange Chinese lunches to school. Since it was difficult for non-Asians to tell Asians apart, it was perceived that all Asians assimilate well. Asians then became thought of as the “model minority” because they were quiet, assimilated into the White culture, and were subsequently treated as being White. Asians were given the hard working stereotype to protect the meritocracy argument that minorities can achieve success with hard work. Derogatory stereotypes such as *nerd* or *geek* are attached to Asian student from peers. Teacher expectations for Asians are high, and Asian students are rewarded and praised, consequently earning high grades. Meanwhile African Americans and Hispanics are

penalized for not assimilating by holding on to cultural traditions and speaking against social inequities that lead to negative stereotypes such as laziness and associations with crime, drugs, and teen pregnancy. The negative stereotypes influence teachers to hold low teacher expectations. Both stereotypes are hurtful. The positive stereotypes are earned through sacrifice because Asians are self-silencing. They are not speaking up for themselves in fear that if they do celebrate their cultural differences negative stereotypes will be attached to their race. Historically, the majority of Asian students have accepted and conformed to their cultural roles. This is a simple explanation of a complex issue.

***Stereotypes based on socio-economic status.*** The effects of teachers' stereotyping expectations caused by stereotypes based on race and socio-economic status are intertwined. Some researchers suggest that ethnicity has more of an impact (Warren, 2002); whereas, others claim that in certain circumstances, a student's socio-economic status influences a teacher's expectations to a greater extent than race did (Diamond et al., 2004). However, researchers have also pointed out that this is a complicated issue and that it is difficult to separate the effects of race and SES because racial minority students are also more likely to be poor than Anglo students. In general teachers hold lower academic expectations for low-income students (Benner & Mistry, 2007) while teachers who see students as having more

resources at home also tend to assume a higher sense of responsibility for student learning which creates higher expectations (Diamond et al., 2004).

In some cases, classroom teachers can reproduce the community's social caste system in their own classrooms by holding various levels of expectations for students based on students' SES backgrounds. One example of the social caste system being reinforced in a classroom occurred with a group of African American students in an urban ghetto school (Rist, 1970). Initially, teachers assigned students into various ability groups during the first two weeks of kindergarten without consulting any prior academic data (Rist, 1970). The groups of students were determined solely on each student's physical appearance, quality of clothing, and family income. The classroom teacher then divided the class into three distinct groups and situated them at three different tables. Table 1 was assigned to students that were labeled as *fast learners* because the classroom teacher viewed these students as having high academic potential, while students at tables 2 and 3 were labeled as *slow learners*. All students whose families received welfare were labeled as *slow learners*. Subsequently, the beliefs the classroom teacher held for each group influenced the way she treated each student. As a result, the academic assessment data from the end of kindergarten was utilized as past performance to create similar grouping techniques in first and second grades.



The kindergarten classroom teacher held higher expectations for the higher SES groups than for the lower SES groups. The expectations influenced the teacher's instructional practices. For example, the fast learners sat in the front of the class and were given more attention from the teacher, resulting in higher academic achievement; whereas, the slow learners were called on less frequently, resulting in lower student achievement. Data from the end of kindergarten supported the initial perception that the fast learners would demonstrate high academic achievement; whereas, the slow learners would show lower achievement, revealing the self-fulfilling prophecy at work. The students' fate was determined by the kindergarten teachers' impressions of student academic performance, which was based upon stereotyped beliefs that low-income students were unable to learn. This study supports Clark's 1963 claim:

If a child scores low on an intelligence test and then is not taught to read because he has a low score, then such a child is being imprisoned in an iron circle and becomes the victim of an educational self-fulfilling prophecy. (p. 129)

Over 30 years after the Rist (1970) study, teachers' expectations are still being shaped by the students' socio-economic status. In a more recent study, teachers judged hypothetical narratives of students perceived to be from higher socio-economic backgrounds as more successful academically than those they perceived to be from low socio-economic backgrounds

(Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008). The higher SES students were thought to have more promising futures than low SES students. This study illustrates the notion that social equality is not always present in the classroom setting. Teachers' prejudices and stereotypes influence their expectations of students, therefore contributing to a lack of social justice in schools.

### **Teacher's Self-Efficacy**

A subtle and often overlooked factor that influences teachers' level of expectations can be related to teachers' own self-confidence or self-efficacy as teachers. Many researchers have found a positive connection between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, 2001, 2002). Self-efficacy is defined as the teachers' beliefs in their ability to educate all of their students to a high standard (Warren, 2002).

Teachers who are confident they have the skills to reach all students, regardless of any barriers, have high self-efficacy (Rubie-Davies, 2007). These high-efficacy teachers believe that all of their students can succeed and provide mastery experiences for all students (Bandura, 1993). Teachers with low self-efficacy do not see themselves as skillful teachers who can guide students to be successful. These low-efficacy teachers tend to blame students' characteristics such as race, SES, and lack of parent involvement as reasons for academic failure (Warren, 2002). Many teachers who believe that low SES is a major cause for low student achievement lack the self-efficacy to make the effort needed to effectively teach low SES students. Their

instructional strategies often exhibit simple low-level thinking tasks such as rote memorization, remedial skills, and drill practice that offer students few opportunities to question, discuss, and synthesize information (Rubie-Davies, 2007). The results of a study of students in low-income urban schools with high African American and Hispanic populations revealed that the students were not given the opportunity to develop higher level thinking skills. In addition, because the students were often held to a lower standard than middle- to high-income White students, they often performed at a lower standard, which contributed to the achievement gap (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008). This is another example of how the self-fulfilling prophecy influences student achievement.

Teachers with low self-efficacy are more likely to be working in low-income urban schools with high minority populations than teachers with high self-efficacy (Warren, 2002). Low-income urban schools have a difficult time finding high quality, high self-efficacy teachers, which results in hiring less confident teachers who can help all their students to learn. Often these schools must hire teachers who have low self-efficacy; they do not believe that they have the necessary skills to assist students overcome the obstacles thought to be associated with low-income students. Teachers' low self-efficacy can cause them to rely on the self-fulfilling prophecy in an effort to mask their own insecurities. In other words, teachers may blame students'

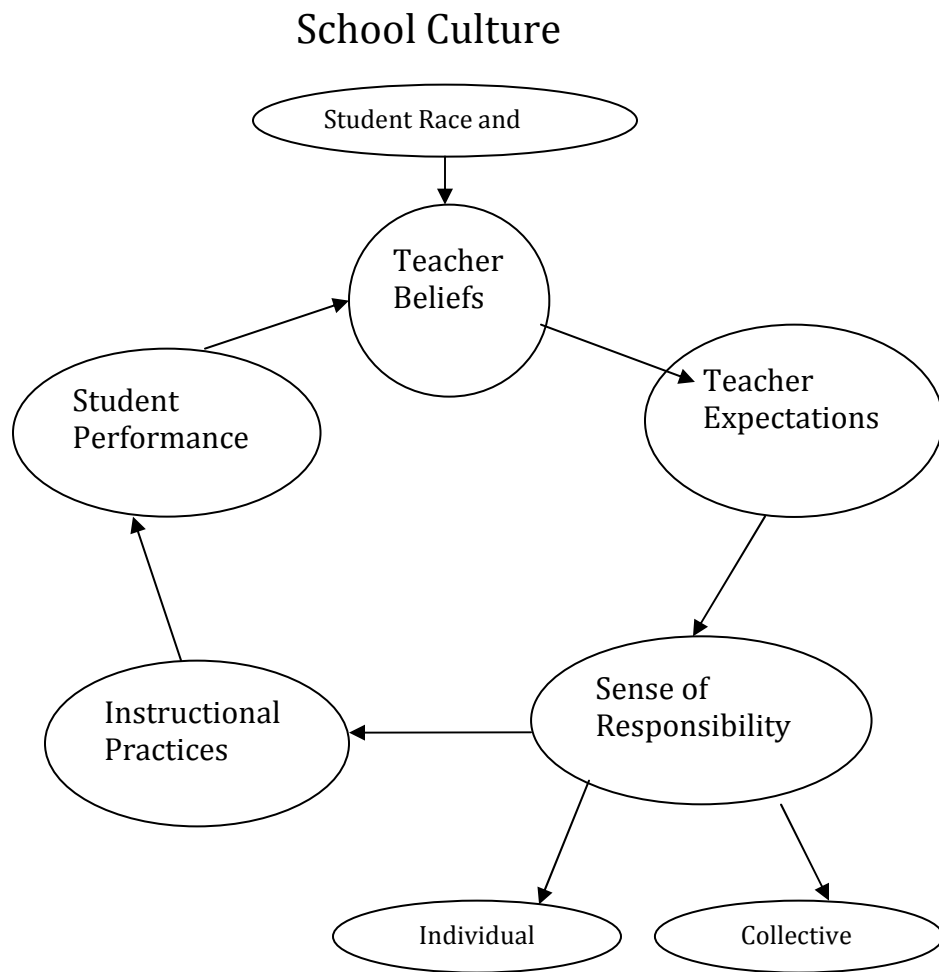
characteristics such as race and SES for academic failure instead of blaming their own instructional skills.

### **School Culture**

Teacher expectations are significantly influenced by school culture. This complex connection involves the following cycle: (a) teachers' beliefs are influenced by students' race and SES; (b) teachers' beliefs influence their expectations; (c) teachers' expectations influence their levels of responsibility for student learning at the individual and collective levels; (d) teachers' sense of responsibility influences their instructional practices; (e) teachers' instructional practices influence student performance (Diamond et al., 2004); and (f) student performance then influences teachers' beliefs, which confirms a self-fulfilling prophecy within the school culture. This pattern circulates within the culture of the school. See Figure 9 for a pictorial representation of this concept. This section further explains the complex relationship between school culture and teacher expectations.

**Teacher beliefs about student abilities.** School culture is defined as “the belief systems of educators as they interact with students and affect the culture of the classroom and school at large” (Warren, 2002, p. 110). The context of teachers' schools influences their beliefs about student abilities (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 2009). As I mentioned in the previous section, racial and social class stereotypes may influence teachers' beliefs about student ability, causing varying levels of teacher expectations (Rist, 1970).

This factor also contributes to the beliefs teachers incorporate in the collective level of school culture. The principal discussed in the earlier Pygmalion study attempted to change his school culture by manipulating teachers' beliefs so as to change their expectations. Doing so led to a change in student achievement (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992).



*Figure 9.* School culture

There is a connection between teachers' beliefs about their students' ability based on students' family's income level and school culture. This

connection was apparent in an ethnographic study of three magnet schools (Mertz, 1987). Parent surveys revealed that there was a collective wisdom among parents who reported that teachers in middle- to high-SES neighborhoods had a school culture made up of higher expectations for student academic success. The savvy parents who wanted high expectations for their children reported that they would work to great lengths to ensure that their children attended schools in middle- to high-SES neighborhoods, despite their limited means.

Low teacher expectations and low level instructional practices can be deeply rooted within school culture. Mertz (1987) illustrated this notion by highlighting the difference in delivery of identical material during the same amount of academic time in two different schools. One school contained a class with students from low SES backgrounds; whereas, the other contained students from middle- to high-income backgrounds. The students in the high SES classroom were held to higher expectations than the classroom with low SES students. Mertz made the argument that teachers' beliefs that were embedded in their school culture influenced the level of their expectations which were reflected in their instruction.

**Teacher beliefs influence teacher expectations.** This subsection examines the role that teachers' beliefs within school culture have as to influencing teacher expectations. Moreover, teacher expectations influence teachers' sense of responsibility at the individual teacher and collective

levels respectively. The following two subsections further examine these ideas.

***Teachers' individual sense of responsibility.*** Within the context of school culture, teachers' beliefs influence their expectations by the amount of responsibility teachers have for their students' learning and academic success. Teachers' sense of responsibility is determined by how willing they are to hold themselves accountable for the learning of all their students (Halvorsen et al., 2009).

Race and socio-economic status can influence teacher perceptions of students' abilities, which can lower their expectations and impact teachers' sense of responsibility for student learning (Diamond et al., 2004). Teachers in low-income schools with high African American and Hispanic populations exhibit a low sense of responsibility for student learning when focusing on student deficits instead of assets (Diamond et al., 2004). Teachers with a high sense of individual responsibility do not blame students for any learning difficulties; instead, they seek ways to help students overcome such difficulties. In a study conducted by Halvorsen et al. (2009) high responsibility level teachers made efforts to reach all kids by taking responsibility for student learning to make sure all their students achieve their academic goals.

***Collective sense of responsibility.*** Halvorsen et al. (2009) defined collective responsibility as "teachers' beliefs about learning, operationalized

at either the individual or the collective level are influenced by the context of the schools in which they teach” (p. 185). The collective responsibility embedded within the school’s culture is revealed through informal teacher talk, everyday conversations among teachers, the tone of the discussions in teacher work rooms, and the types of professional development offered on the campus (Diamond et al., 2004). A 1996 study by Lee and Smith characterized schools as having high levels of collective responsibility in which the shared norms and values of the school culture demonstrated the following criteria: (a) teachers internalizing responsibility for the learning of students, (b) teachers believing they can teach all students (high self-efficacy), (c) teachers’ willingness to differentiate instructional methods in response to individual students’ difficulties and successes, and (d) teachers focusing on student learning.

Low income minority students who live in urban areas are more likely to attend schools in which low collective responsibility is part of the school culture (Halvorsen et al., 2009). As mentioned in an earlier section, race and social class are connected to teachers’ beliefs about student achievement (Lee & Andrade, 2009) because low income Hispanic and African American students are often viewed by their teachers as coming to school with deficiencies (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Teachers tend to demonstrate low expectations in schools where the common beliefs of the teachers and administrators are deficit-oriented. Furthermore, teachers in schools where



the school culture is deficit-oriented, teachers view academic achievement as not their responsibility, but rather the problem is associated with the student's family composition, race, and level of income (Diamond et al., 2004). In other words, the teachers' lack of responsibility for student learning is influenced by the culture of the school.

One area of school reform is aimed at increasing teacher expectations via transforming school cultures with low levels of collective responsibility for student learning to school cultures with high responsibility for student learning. An example of this reform is a case study of a principal who successfully changed a school's culture from low teacher expectations to high teacher expectations (Eilers & Camacho, 2007). The researchers studied an urban low income school where 91% of the students were either African American or Hispanic. The school was in corrective action because it did not meet the state's accountability standards. As part of the intervention, a new principal was brought in with a goal of improving the academic achievement of students by changing the school's culture. The first thing the new principal did was to establish a school vision and mission statement based on high expectations for all students. He instilled this vision and mission statement by having a "no excuse" policy. Teachers at his school were not allowed to blame the students' race or socio-economic background for poor academic achievement. Instead, the principal fostered a professional learning environment where teachers were empowered through staff development to

acquire the skills necessary to reach all students. The principal's collaborative leadership style gave teachers an opportunity to have a voice in school-wide decisions. The teachers' self-efficacy increased and they assumed more responsibility for student learning, which, in turn, increased their expectations of all students. In two years the students made significant academic gains that moved the school out of corrective action. Changing the culture of the school to one with high collective responsibility was essential to improving the achievement of all students.

School culture must be considered in order to enact true school reform and close the achievement gap. It is crucial to understand the impact of teachers' beliefs and how they influence teacher expectations and sense of responsibility. These influences are reflected in practices that may perpetuate inequalities for minority students and those living in poverty (Warren, 2002).

### **Language**

Teacher expectations are often influenced by a student's native language. Teachers hold varied expectations for students who are learning English as a second language. These students are often held to lower teacher expectations than students who speak only English (Marquerite & Dianne, 2000). The low student achievement of ELL (English Language Learners) students are not necessarily a result of low cognitive ability, yet they are often treated as such. Teachers often expect ELL students to learn subject

matter at a slower pace (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). The lower expectations also lead to low language and cognitive demands (Wedin, 2010), which decreases the quality of education students receive and minimizes the opportunities for learning (Sirota, & Bailey, 2009). This section discusses the research on the influence students' language and cultural background has on teacher expectations.

An ethnographic study in Sweden examined ELL students in a primary school for three years (Wedin, 2010). The study revealed three significant differences in teacher instructional practices for ELL students compared to non-ELL students. These instructional practices were influenced by low teacher expectations. The first difference was that ELL students were exposed only to basic language instead of specialized language. For example, a kindergarten teacher who was teaching ELL students about caterpillars used the phrase that caterpillars *lose* their skin instead of the specialized term *shed* their skin. The same teacher used the word *net* instead of the correct term *cocoon*. Furthermore, in a third grade ELL class discussion about temperature the words *water*, *ice*, and *snow* were used without the mention of specialized vocabulary words: *freezing* and *melting*. The language of the teachers was often fragmented rather than stated in complex phrasing. The second difference was the non-demanding cognitive tasks. Reading and writing consisted of single words or short sentences. The third difference

was the low level of student engagement. The ELL classrooms were conducted with high teacher control and few interactions with students.

The researcher in the above study stated that a restricted curriculum in school restricts opportunities for student academic success (Wedin, 2010). The researcher made the connection that the self-fulfilling prophecy took place in that school. He concluded that low teacher expectations for language learners were similar to the several research studies of low teacher expectations for minority and low-income students.

The social interactions and pedagogical relations that teachers develop through their classroom learning environment influence student achievement as well. A qualitative study of one boy from Korea referred to in the study as Hyun-Woo revealed the impact that social interactions with his teacher and peers had on his academic performance (Han, 2010). The low expectations his teacher held for him was evident to Hyun-Woo's peers. The primarily White, English speaking student population was not very friendly to Hyu-Woo. In an interview the teacher reported that he was only hired to teach to the mainstream class. It was not listed in his job description to tend to the social needs of his students. The teacher did not interact with Hyu-Woo and did not call on him to answer questions in class. The teacher explained that he did not call on the boy because when Hyu-Woo spoke in class his language was unclear and incorrect, causing the rest of the class to laugh. The students did not understand that Hyu-Woo was struggling. The

classroom learning environment was not sensitive to the social needs of all students; therefore, it was an unsafe place to learn. The teacher was not open to diversity and was unaware of the cultural differences his ELL student manifested.

Valdés (1996) illustrated in her ethnographic study, *Con Respecto*, that there are complex cultural differences between teachers and their students which, in addition to the language barrier, can have an impact on teacher expectations. Valdes made the point that the goal of the U.S. schools was to change the values of the students to middle class White values and that the school saw Hispanic students as coming to school with deficits. This lack of respect for the native language and rich cultural values the Hispanic students and families had resulted in a breakdown of partnerships, communication, and trust between parents and teachers. Gonzalez et al. (2005) argued that when students' cultural characteristics and native language are viewed as deficits, the teacher expectations for student achievement are lower. When students' cultural backgrounds and native languages are respected by teachers and are viewed as assets, teacher expectations were higher and the students performed better academically. Berliner (2001) argued that the context in which teachers work must be considered when examining teacher effectiveness. The expectations of the community differ among various cultures (Berliner, 2006), causing a "disconnect" between teachers and parents (Valdes, 1996). This disconnect is often referred to as a mismatch

between school and home culture and language (Han, 2010; Sirota & Bailey, 2009).

Children are often forbidden to speak their native language in school, causing those children to believe that there is something wrong with their home language and culture. Brandon, Baszile, and Berry (2009) stated, “The end result is that teachers silence their students’ cultural perspectives and approach them as little broken bodies needing to be fixed.” The cultural mismatch can influence teachers’ attitudes causing teachers to hold lower expectations (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse (2009) found academic success with ELL Sudanese refugee students. Their research suggests that students were most successful in school when parents and teachers were working together to understand each other’s cultural background.

Students learning English as a second language can be successful academically when teachers view students’ first language as an asset and hold high expectations for academic achievement. When teachers hold low expectations for students because they are learning a new language, they tend to teach at a slower pace and have low cognitive demands on language learners resulting in low student achievement (Wedin, 2010). However, when teachers hold high expectations coupled with differentiated instruction that scaffolds learning for ELL, teaching results in academic success (Han, 2010). High teacher expectations begin with the initial belief that students

are capable of achieving high standards. Then the teacher builds on ELL students' prior knowledge of language while scaffolding instruction, offering assistance when needed, and allowing the student to grow. A year-long study that took place in Canada suggested that a group of undergraduate Japanese students were successful in learning English because of high teacher expectations and scaffolding instruction that enabled students to continually improve achieving high academic success (Masaki, 2003). These studies together suggest that if teachers hold high expectations for ELL students then high academic achievement is attainable.

### **Formal Policies and Programs**

The ultimate goal of increasing teacher expectations is closing the achievement gap. Local districts have responded to national and state legislative reform movements by implementing formal policies and programs intended to change teachers' perceptions of student abilities, leading to an increase in teacher expectations. In this section, I review formal programs aimed at increasing teacher expectations that were implemented as either a top-down or a bottom-up approach.

**Top-down formal policies.** Many formal policies have been implemented to increase teacher expectations through a top-down approach, meaning that teachers are expected to comply with the policies imposed by an external force. Bureaucratic educational systems tend to encourage a top-down hierarchical approach to teacher growth and change (Lee & Smith,

1996). In this section, I examine three top-down policies and programs: a uniform curriculum, teacher evaluations, and performance-based pay.

One example of a bureaucratic policy initiated at the state level is a uniform curriculum. Many states implemented explicit state standards, sets of skills that are required to be taught to every student. Textbook companies then aligned their curriculum to the standards of the larger states' standards such as Texas and California and created scripted basal programs that teachers were expected to follow. The simplistic idea to solve a complex problem is that if every teacher taught in a uniform manner all students would have access to the same curriculum and same levels of expectation from teachers, thus creating social equality.

The National Reading Panel (2002) recommended a uniform curriculum targeted at increasing teacher expectations. This panel was comprised of experts and reading gurus. The task of the panel was to complete a comprehensive review of the literature and create a report with recommendations for effective methods of reading instruction. The National Reading Panel reviewed the research on reading and created the comprehensive report titled *The Report of the National Reading Panel (2002)*. Opponents of the report claimed that the literature review only covered research that supported one side of the reading debate and left out reputable studies that did not fit the bureaucratic agenda (Allington, 2002). Furthermore, the slanted report strongly recommended that in order to



increase teacher expectations for all students, teachers must follow scripted basal programs that included a systematic skills-based method ensuring that all students have access to a uniform curriculum. Many school districts followed this report and mandated teachers to follow the recommendations.

In addition to a uniform curriculum, a different formal policy holds teachers accountable for having high expectations for all students. Teacher evaluations are a tool that school administrators can utilize to ensure that teachers hold high expectations for all students. Several researchers would agree that there is a correlation between teacher evaluations and student achievement (Milanowski, 2004; Painter, 2000; Thum, 2003; Whale, 2006). One study measured teacher and school effectiveness based on student assessments (Thum, 2003). Formative evaluations of teachers were conducted as well as pre- and post-academic tests for students. The students' academic post-tests showed improvement; therefore, Thum (2003) concluded that the formative evaluations of teachers had an impact on student achievement.

There is a lack of focus on the role that teacher evaluations play in changing teachers' beliefs about their students and increasing teacher expectations. The research on teacher evaluations focuses on principals' perceptions of effectively evaluating teacher performance (Painter, 2000), the quality of the evaluations (Medley & Coker, 1987), and the debate over the most effective type of evaluation (Noakes, 2009; Odden, 2004; Watras,

2006). Regardless of the quality and type of teacher evaluation used, the literature on teacher evaluations generally disregards the effects the self-fulfilling prophecy has on teacher expectations.

Another top-down formal policy commonly used to increase teacher expectations is performance-based pay. There is potential for performance-based pay programs to increase teacher expectations by triggering positive self-fulfilling prophecy responses or “Galatea effects.” In theory, performance-based pay programs encourage teachers to set rigorous goals for all students in the beginning of the school year and issue monetary rewards for success at the end of the year. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) many school districts across the nation have implemented performance-based pay systems to motivate teachers to increase their expectations of their students and retain high quality teachers (Lavy, 2007; Podgursky & Springer, 2007).

Theoretically, the goal of performance-based pay is to increase teacher expectations for all students in an effort to close the achievement gap. However in many cases, teachers can earn their performance-based pay without increasing their expectations for every student. For instance, many performance-based pay models require a teacher’s class average to increase a certain percentage in order to earn the incentive. This class average does not require all students to meet standards, in theory allowing the achievement gap to continue to exist (Lavy, 2007).

**Bottom-up formal policies.** In contrast to formal policies that utilize top-down approaches, many school leaders attempt to increase teacher expectations from the bottom up. This intrinsic approach aims at changing teachers' perceptions of student abilities by empowering teachers to believe that they can ensure all students will be successful academically, thus having high expectations for all students. This section discusses the following examples of bottom-up programs: professional learning communities, book studies, and "21Keys."

Many schools have developed professional learning communities (PLCs) to create a school culture of high expectations for all students. The approach of implementing PLCs focuses on student learning rather than teaching, and teachers hold themselves accountable for student results (Dufour, 1998). In others words, teachers are encouraged to have a sense of high responsibility for student learning. Teachers are encouraged to support one another, collaborate, and foster a school environment of cooperation. Various ongoing opportunities for professional development are provided while teachers may choose the type of professional development they attend. The goal of professional learning communities is to instill a desire in teachers to become lifelong learners. This goal supports the findings Halvorsen et al. (2009) reported that highly responsible teachers are always looking for new ways to learn and grow. Furthermore, the principal, profiled in the case study by Eilers and Camacho (2007), was successful in changing the school culture

to a culture of high expectations through professional learning communities. He was able to maintain his “no excuse” policy, by increasing teacher self-efficacy through professional learning communities resulting in increases in teacher expectations.

In conjunction to professional learning communities, the principal in the Eilers and Camacho (2007) study was successful in utilizing book studies to change the culture of his school from teachers who hold low expectations to a culture of high expectations for all students. Teachers engaged in a book study have the chance to reflect on their core beliefs and teaching practices. Books such as *Good to Great* (2005) that highlight the high success rate of schools in high poverty schools with majority African American and Hispanic populations can spark a dialogue among teachers. This dialogue may lead to changes in beliefs of student achievement and consequently to changes in teacher expectations. Book studies that highlight effective teaching strategies such as *Classroom Instruction that Works* (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001) are also valuable in increasing teacher expectations.

The school district in my study attempted to change the intrinsic core beliefs that teachers had through the program created by Lou Tice called *21 Keys* (1970). This program supports the research that suggests that improving teachers' self-efficacy will increase teacher expectations (Bandura, 1993; Rubie-Davies, 2007; Warren, 2002). The *21Keys* program first brings awareness that people, in this case teachers, behave in accordance with the

“truth” that they believe it to be. This premise is aligned with the early research of Merton’s (1948) explanation of false truths known as “facts” or truth. Lou Tice stresses that “children have much more potential than they are currently using” (p. vii) and claims that the child is smart enough if the teacher is good enough to bring about the full potential in all children. In other words, if teachers have high self-efficacy and hold high expectations for all students, then all children will succeed. Once the *21 Keys* participants have an understanding of these limiting false truths, then Lou Tice aims to change teachers’ beliefs, causing a change in higher expectations for all students. He commented, “We have enormous potential, but the way we think blocks us. If we change the way we think, we change the way we act. Change the way we think, we change the way we live” (p. 29). In other words if teachers change the way they think about students, increase beliefs about student ability, and increase teacher expectations, then they will change the way they act (difference in instructional techniques).

**Formal policies.** There is abundant research on formal policies and programs that are aimed at increasing student achievement. Yet, little attention in the formal policy research has been directed at the role that formal policies have in changing the perceptions teachers hold for students. In addition, the perceptions teachers have regarding the effectiveness of these formal policies are not thoroughly examined in the research.

These formal programs—uniform curriculum, scripted programs, teacher evaluations, performance-based pay, book studies, and professional learning communities—work against the self-fulfilling prophecy; however, the influence that self-fulfilling prophecy has on teacher expectations is not addressed in these programs. Reform efforts have been historically ineffective because the underlying root of the problem is being ignored, which is teacher expectations (Warren, 2002). The beliefs that teachers have about the capabilities of their students influence teachers' expectations and instructional practices, resulting in corresponding student achievement levels.

### **Conclusion**

You have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul.

(Shaw, 1916, p. 65)

The concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy began in ancient Greece with the mythology of Pygmalion. Later George Bernard Shaw illustrated the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy in shaping a low class woman into a high class lady in his play *Pygmalion*. Throughout history many educators in the United States unknowingly harbored false assumptions through negative self-fulfilling prophecies in public schools. As Shaw demonstrated in his play,

it is possible to utilize the self-fulfilling prophecy in a positive way to increase one's expectations to bridge an existing achievement gap.

I chose to research the factors that influence teacher expectations in order to gain a better understanding of a key influence on the student achievement gap. The four common themes in the current literature that appear to have the most influence on teachers' perceptions were stereotypes, teacher self-efficacy, school culture, and language. The areas lacking research include formal programs and policies that are aimed specifically at increasing teachers' expectations for all students. My contribution to the expectancy research is to utilize my findings to suggest possible policies that will encourage teachers to create "Galatea effects" through positive self-fulfilling prophecies evolved through high expectations for all students. It is my assertion that increasing teachers' expectations for all students will contribute positively to eliminate the achievement gap.

I intend to build on current literature by studying teachers' perceptions on their own factors that influence their expectations. The next chapter will describe the methods design and demographics of my study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

In the first chapter I identified the academic achievement gap in which African American, Hispanic, and low-income students consistently underperform academically compared to their White, Asian, and middle- to upper-class peers. I presented the argument that teacher expectations significantly contribute to the achievement gap. In my review of the literature I found there are many factors that influence teacher expectations, such as stereotypes, teacher self-efficacy, school culture, and language. The majority of the literature on teacher expectations focuses on studies in which researchers gather information through their observations. There is little research, however, on teachers' perceptions of the factors that influence their own level of expectations. In addition, although many studies look at formal policies, there is a void in the research regarding teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of formal policies aimed at increasing teacher expectations. This study builds upon current research on teacher expectations, through gathering insight by listening to the voices of teachers to understand their perspectives.

This chapter explains the methods of my study. In it I discuss the following: the design and rationale for my study, a description of the location and demographics of the school district and population studied, data



collection strategies, data analysis strategies, ethical considerations, trustworthiness of the design, and limitations of the study.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to address the following questions: (1) What are the factors that influence teachers' academic expectations for low-income and minority students? (2) What are teacher's perceptions regarding the effectiveness of formal policies and programs that are aimed at increasing teacher expectations? More specifically, do teachers feel that top-down formal policies such as teacher evaluations, uniform curriculum, and performance-based pay, are effective, or do teachers believe that bottom-up policies such as book studies and professional learning communities, make more of an impact in increasing their expectations of their students?

### **Design and Rationale for the Study**

I chose to conduct a qualitative interview study to gain the perspectives of teacher expectations through the individual narratives of teachers. It is through individual life stories that one can understand social and educational issues (Seidman, 2006). The interview format allows researchers to have access to people's experiences. To better understand how teacher expectations are formed, I used a modified version of Seidman's (2006) three-part interview sequence. I had three sections of open-ended questions: First, I asked teachers about their life history in hopes of better understanding factors that may have shaped each teacher's opinions about

students and education. Second, I asked questions about their current instructional practices. Third, I solicited a reflection of each teacher's perceptions of the effects formal policies aimed at increasing teacher expectations has had on their beliefs and instructional practices.

The questions in the first part of the interview focused on each participant's life history. I wanted to inquire about each teacher's past experiences as a student in school and the context in which they went to school. I examined the context each teacher grew up in by asking questions about the demographics and characteristics of the school they attended. I inquired about their family's values and their family's views about education. I asked how they came to the teaching profession. I believed that asking questions about each teacher's past experiences would provide insight to how deeply rooted beliefs are formed. I was correct in that assumption. I was able to discover connections between teachers' past experiences and their current expectations of their students. I did have a set list of questions; however, there were times when the teachers would mention something interesting, so I asked more questions not originally on the set of questions in order to dig deeper into their experiences. The list of questions served as a springboard that led me to other questions that were unique to each teacher.

The second set of questions was intended to discover each teacher's expectations of their current students. I asked each teacher what she expected their students to achieve by the end of the school year. I asked

questions about their current instructional practices to get an understanding of strategies used in the classroom. The type of instructional practices teachers told me they utilize helped me to have a better understanding of each teacher's expectations.

The third part of interview questions I asked was broken into two different formats. Initially, I had each participant read five scenarios about teachers who were influenced by various formal programs and policies aimed at increasing teacher expectations. I chose this format because I found that researchers' use of scenarios from my literature review provided insightful information that would not have been found with direct questioning. See Anderson-Clark et al. (2008) and Auwarter and Aruguete (2008) as examples of peer reviewed research studies using scenarios as part of their methods.

My study's scenarios were designed by using fictitious teachers in an effort to make the participants more comfortable talking about teachers other than themselves. It was my assumption that their feelings about each scenario reflected their own experiences and beliefs about the effectiveness of formal policies and programs. After the participants rated each scenario, I asked them why they rated them the way they did. It was my intention that this approach would spark rich conversations about each scenario, and I was correct in that assumption. Many teachers shared various opinions and rich discussion about each scenario in addition to connections they made

between the scenarios and their own experiences. After presenting the scenarios, I asked questions that caused the participant to reflect on their beliefs about various programs (if they were not discussed in their previous answers). First, I directly asked each teacher if each program and policy discussed influenced their own expectations. I also asked if they felt the programs and policies influenced other teachers' expectations. A list of interview questions along with the scenarios, are in Appendix A.

### **Demographics of School District**

I chose to study a public school district, which I refer to as OKB district to protect the anonymity of the participants, in a major metropolitan area in southwestern United States to serve as a local example of the national achievement gap trend. Figures 10 through 13 illustrate the academic achievement gap based on race that parallels the national racial achievement gap. The data are from the statewide high stakes normed assessments and are reported on the state's Department of Education website. The Asian/Pacific Islander and White students consistently outperform African American and Hispanic students in math and reading in both fourth and eighth grades.

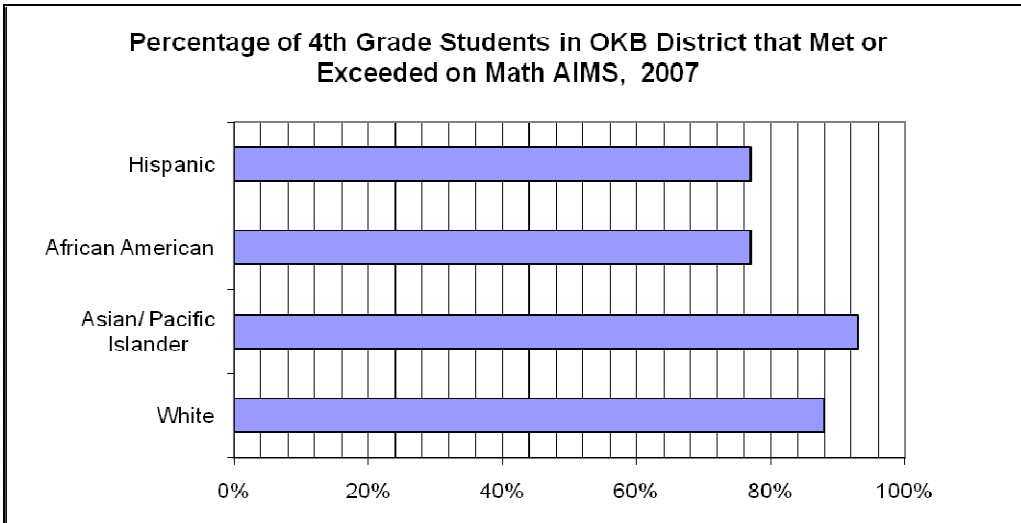


Figure 10. State Department of Education data: fourth grade state assessment math composite scale scores, 2007

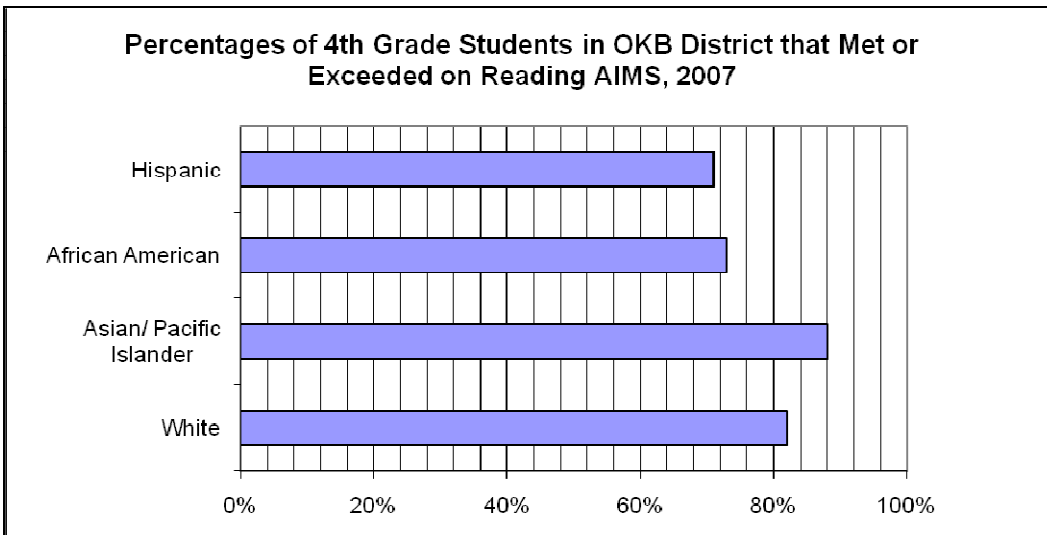


Figure 11. State Department of Education data: fourth grade state assessment reading composite scale scores, 2007

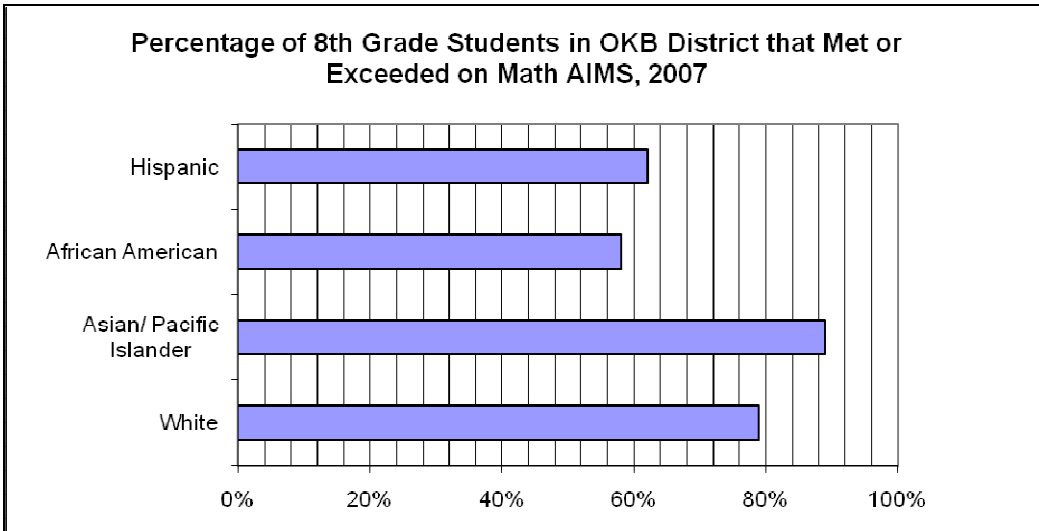


Figure 12. State Department of Education data: eighth grade state assessment math composite scale scores, 2007

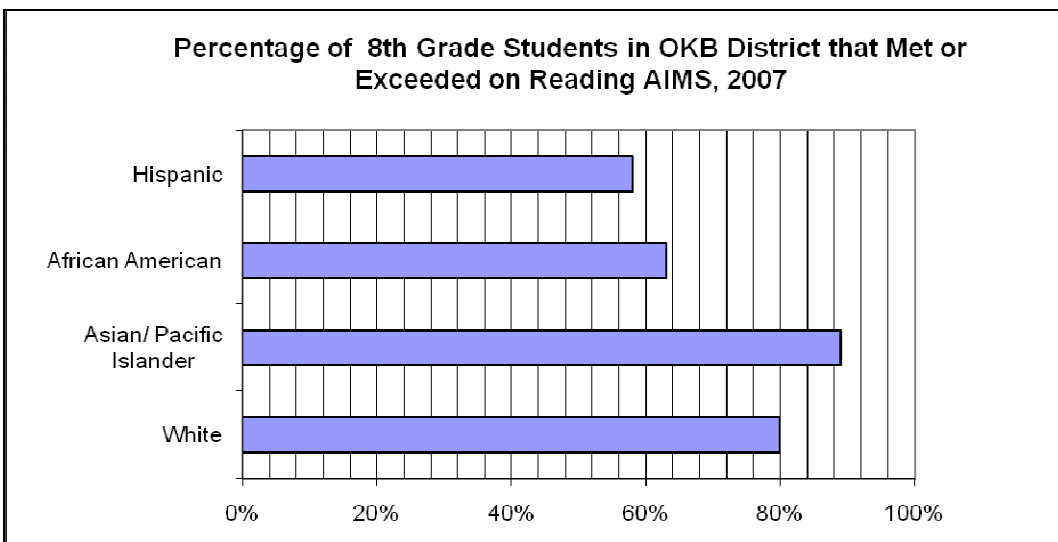


Figure 13. State Department of Education data: eighth grade state assessment reading composite scale scores, 2007

The OKB district has a diverse economic and ethnic population. At the time of this study, there were 37 schools with 35,900 students (District Website, 2010). During the 2007-2008 school year 22% of the district's students qualified for free or reduced lunch based on their families' income.

Figure 14 below shows the district's demographics by race during the 2007-2008 school year.

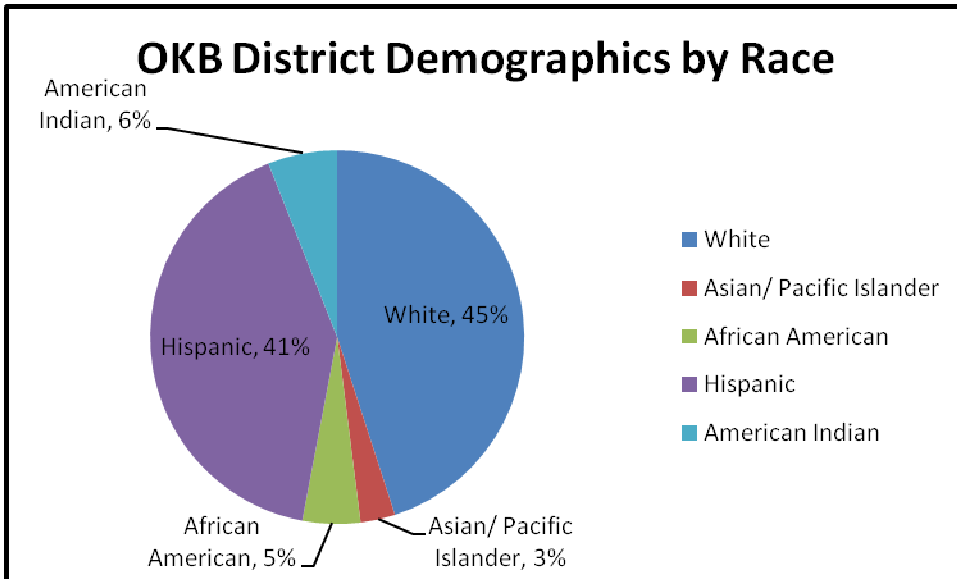


Figure 14. State Department of Education data: OKB district demographics by race

### Data Collection Strategies

I chose two schools within the OKB district, each representing various demographics to gather a comprehensive view of the district. School (A) is a pre-kindergarten through sixth grade school located in an affluent neighborhood with primarily White students, and school (B) is a pre-kindergarten through sixth grade, Title One school serving primarily Hispanic students, with a majority of students qualifying for a free or reduced lunch. See the demographics chart (Figure 15) below for a visual comparison of the two schools.

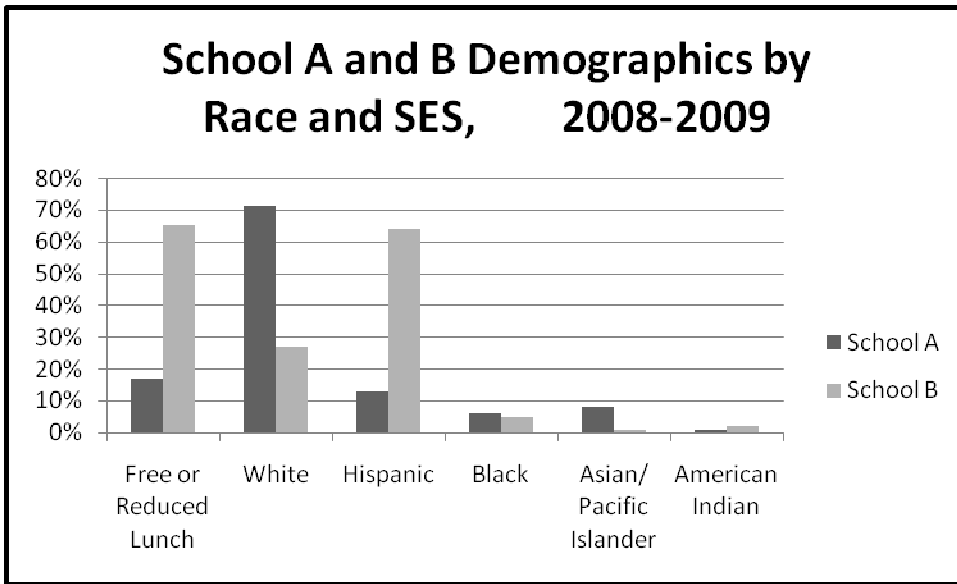


Figure 15. U.S. Department of Education (IES) data: Schools A and B demographics by race and SES, 2008-2009

I interviewed five teachers from School A and five teachers from School B. Initially, I contacted the principals at each school and asked them to recommend teachers for me to interview. I gave each principal a list of indicators in recommending teachers for the study to ensure that I had a diverse sample of teachers. I asked each principal to give me a well-rounded sample including the following characteristics: (1) varying levels of grade taught with at least one kindergarten teacher per school, (2) gender, (3) ethnicity, and (4) years of experience. After the principals agreed to assist they sent out an email to their staff asking for anyone willing to participate. Then I was given two names from the School A principal and one name from the School B principal. After I conducted those three interviews, I contacted the principals again asking if they had anymore teachers to recommend to me. The principal at School A sent out another email to her staff. The first



teacher I emailed replied to that email to the whole staff explaining that she participated and that it was a pleasant experience for her. This motivated two other teachers from School A to participate.

I later found out from a friend of mine who is a teacher in the district at another school that the teachers at School B were uncomfortable to participate in any interview endorsed by their principal because they were unsure of their confidentiality. Once I discovered this information I asked my friend to talk to the teacher she knew at School B. One teacher was willing to meet with me once I assured her that she will have complete anonymity and her identity and responses would be held in the strictest confidence. She agreed to meet with me; however, she didn't want to meet at her school. We met at a restaurant near her house. After that interview she was able to convince other teachers at her school to meet with me. Three out of the five teachers at School B requested that we meet at an alternative location other than their school. All teachers at School A requested that I come to their classrooms. I was very flexible in allowing the participants to choose the location that they felt most comfortable.

I was not able to gather as much of a diverse sample as I had originally intended because I had a difficult time finding teachers to agree to meet with me. Most of the teachers in each school were White females, and all ten participants were White females. In addition, the majority of the teaching staff at both campuses were veteran teachers, meaning they have taught at

least 15 years. These factors along with difficulty in finding teachers willing to participate added to the difficulty in creating a well rounded sample.

Below is a list of the teachers' years of experience and grades each participant currently teaches. The names listed are pseudonyms to protect the identities of each teacher.

Table 1

*Grade Level Taught and Years of Experience of Each Teacher Interviewed*

Teacher Name	School SES	Grade Level Currently Teaching	Years of Experience	Teacher Ethnicity
Nancy	Non-Title I	5	5	White
Shelly	Non-Title I	Preschool	18	White
Kayla	Non-Title I	K-2 Special Ed.	8	White
Linda	Non-Title I	1	20	White
Racheal	Non-Title I	2	37	White
Holly	Title I	4	18	White
Cecelia	Title I	6	34	White
Elizabeth	Title I	Reading Specialist	20	White
Maggie	Title I	4	30	White
Kerri	Title I	6	23	White

I originally felt it was important to choose kindergarten teachers from School A and School B because Rist's (1970) study suggested that teacher

expectations are partly influenced by the students' previous teacher. Since kindergarten teachers are the first teachers to meet students, their expectations of students shape future teacher expectations. Unfortunately, I was unable to find a kindergarten teacher at each school willing to participate. However, I was able to interview a preschool teacher at School A. She is a certified special education preschool teacher and was able to provide valuable insight. I also made sure to ask each teacher I interviewed if they collaborated with their students' previous teachers prior to meeting their students each year to see if their expectations were influenced by other teachers. Those results are shared in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 90 minutes in one session each. The majority of the interviews lasted an hour. I audio taped the interviews and then transcribed each interview. I was able to transcribe most interviews within a week after each interview. The interviews took place in November and the first two weeks of December of 2010.

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

After I gathered the data using Seidman's (2006) three-part interviewing series, I analyzed the data, which I share in two parts in Chapter 4 and two parts in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. Chapter 4 focuses on the first research question: *What are the factors that influence teacher expectations?* The first part of Chapter 4, I wrote individual vignettes of each teacher similar to the way Michie (2005) shared his data in his ethnographic

study *See You When You Get There*. This format provides insight into the childhood experiences each teacher had growing up that helped shape the beliefs, practices, and expectations they have today.

The second part of Chapter 4 includes the data I gathered from the first two series of questions I asked each teacher about their early experiences with school, and each teacher's current instructional practices and beliefs about students. I compared the responses from each teacher individually and discussed common themes that I found to have influenced teacher expectations.

Chapter 5 reports on the data I collected on the various formal policies that the OKB district utilized to raise teacher expectations. This chapter focuses on the second research question: *What are teacher's perceptions regarding the effectiveness of formal policies and programs that are aimed at increasing teacher expectations? More specifically, do teachers feel that top-down formal policies, such as teacher evaluations, uniform curriculum, and performance-based pay are effective, or do teachers believe that bottom-up policies, such as book studies and professional learning communities, make more of an impact on increasing their expectations of their students?*

The first part of Chapter 5 reveals the quantified data I collected on formal policies and programs through graphs that show a numerical measurement on the perceived effectiveness of each policy. There is a brief

discussion of data trends. The second part of Chapter 5 is a qualitative discussion on the reflective responses the teachers gave regarding each policy. This part is written thematically as the five separate formal programs and policies I mentioned in the research question. I compared and contrasted teachers' opinions on the effectiveness of bottom-up policies versus top-down approaches.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Each participant has the right to privacy and confidentiality. Therefore, it is essential to protect the anonymity of each participant (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). All participants were referred to by unidentifiable pseudonyms. The names of the state, district, and schools also have pseudonyms so the participants could not be easily identified by location. All participants were informed of the confidentiality measures that are in place. All teachers signed the informed consent form that was approved by Arizona State University's Internal Review Board (IRB) before the interview started.

The transcribed data was only used for purposes of this study. Once the dissertation is complete all audio recordings will be erased and the transcribed data will be destroyed. The participants' real names do not appear on the transcriptions.

### **Trustworthiness of the Design**

The design of my study relied on gaining trust from the participants that their responses were absolutely confidential. It was essential that the

participants trusted me in knowing that I would not judge their answers nor would I report their answers to their administrators. Their trust in me enabled the participants to feel comfortable giving honest answers. This strengthened the data and added trustworthiness to the design.

The three-part interviewing sequence was designed to make connections between participants' life histories, statements on current instructional practices, and teachers' reflections on their current practices, beliefs, and growth. When a participant reiterated ideas and beliefs in the first set of questions with ideas and beliefs in the other set of questions, it showed that the participant was consistent in her thought processes. This strengthened the trustworthiness of the interviews.

### **Limitations**

The methods in my study follow Seidman's (2006) three-part interview series; however, I have modified it slightly. I only met with each participant once for a 60- to 90-minute time frame. Seidman suggested that each part should be interviewed at three separate sessions with a few days in between each interview so the participant had time to process. It is possible that my adapted method caused the teachers' reflections to be weaker because they did not have the proper time to process everything. I chose to ask all questions in one sitting because it was difficult to find teachers willing to take the time to be interviewed. Asking teachers to commit to meeting with me three separate times would have turned many teachers away.

I was unable to gather the diverse sample that I wanted to ensure a well-rounded perspective because my sample was limited by teachers who were willing to meet with me. I also discovered that the type of teacher who would be willing to take time to participate in a study that did not offer any compensation are highly motivated teachers who are more likely to have high expectations. I was expecting a similar phenomenon, therefore, I added questions. I first asked direct questions about how each policy and program influenced their expectations and then I asked them how they felt each policy and program influenced other teachers. Many times both answers were very different. This approach sparked rich discussions, and I felt that I gained an accurate perspective of many teachers in each school and gained an understanding of the culture of each school.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter explains the methods of data collection and the demographics of the school and the district I studied. The next chapter, I present the individual vignettes and a thematic discussion on the factors that influenced the teachers I interviewed.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS: PART 1—TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

My expectations—all students can learn regardless of their socio-economic status or their hardships. So, no, we are all the same. It doesn't matter. —Cecelia, a sixth grade teacher

There are various factors that influence teacher expectations. It is a complex concept to identify because teachers are human beings with varying experiences and different viewpoints and opinions. I collected qualitative data using Seidman's (2006) three-part interviewing sequence. This chapter reports the findings from the first two sets of questions in the three-part interviewing sequence. These questions were intended to answer the first research question: *What are the factors that influence teachers' academic expectations for low-income and minority students?* The first set of questions were designed to gather information about each teacher's experiences growing up as a learner that may have influenced her deeply-rooted beliefs about learning and which influenced her teaching expectations. The second set of questions was designed to gather insight into each teacher's level of expectation by noting her current instructional practices and beliefs about students. Discussions of teachers' beliefs about students and instructional practices revealed various factors that influenced teachers' expectations.

This chapter is organized into two parts. Part 1 reveals the findings of this study through teacher vignettes that show how individual life experiences influence teacher expectations. Part 2 discusses two themes I



discovered in the first two sets of questioning: stereotypes and previous teachers' influence on teacher expectations.

### **Vignettes**

This section presents the data gathered in the first two sections of questions through individual narratives or vignettes that illustrate various factors that influence each teacher's expectations. Each teacher is an individual with many different experiences that have shaped who s/he is today. However, I did notice some common themes that appear to have influenced their expectations; these include motivation, childhood experiences as a learner, community of childhood and adolescence, language, self-efficacy, and a need for approval.

First, most of the teachers who I interviewed appeared naturally self-motivated. For example Nancy said, "I was always extremely self-motivated so my parents just sort of let me run with it." The self-motivated teachers generally had high expectations for themselves as well as for their students. Some of the teachers I interviewed mentioned that they thought some teachers lack the motivation to change, causing low expectations. These teachers' level of expectation was similar to what was expected of students when they first started teaching. Since the levels of expectations have drastically increased in the past 20 years, old expectation levels are considered low in comparison to today's standards.

Second, in the vignettes I examined the teachers' unique childhood experiences as learners because many times those experiences served as a factor that influenced their expectations of their current students. Some characteristics of the community and family in which teachers grew up also contributed to teachers' beliefs about their current students. Fourth, teachers' childhood experiences with language also played a role in the level of expectations they had for their English language learners.

Fifth, I attempted to identify the level of self-efficacy the teachers had through the descriptions of their current practices and beliefs about themselves as teachers. I asked each teacher the following three questions to try to determine their level of self-efficacy: (1) How do you ensure that students are reaching their highest potential? (2) What do you expect your students to accomplish by the end of the year? (3) Why do you believe your students will accomplish what you expect them to accomplish?

Sixth, a few teachers demonstrated a need for approval, whether it was my approval or the approval from their parents. I discuss this connection within some of the narratives and how that influences their expectations.

### **School A**

Before I begin with the vignettes of teachers from School A, I will describe the school culture school, which I refer to as School A to set the context in which the teachers work in. I discovered in my own research, just

as research discussed in my literature review, that the culture of the school was one factor that influenced teacher expectations.

School A is located on a busy intersection in an affluent suburb. There is a neighborhood behind the school comprised of beautiful homes with well manicured lawns. The school is in a middle- to-upper-class neighborhood. The majority of the students are White. The parents in the school are involved with the school. Many parents volunteer in the classrooms. The SES demographics have changed slightly in the past five years due to the economy. There have been some home foreclosures in the neighborhood served by the school, making it possible for middle class families to purchase or rent homes in this neighborhood. Prior to the dip in the economy, the homes in the school's community were occupied by upper class families.

School A has been labeled an *excelling school* for the past five years, meaning that a high percentage of students have scored above the standards on the state-mandated assessment. There is an *excelling* banner posted on the school building that can be seen from the busy street that the school is on.

School A's principal seems easygoing, which creates a relaxed feeling on the campus. All of the teachers I interviewed at School A were very comfortable in their jobs. In a short informal conversation with the school's principal, she told me that she uses what she referred to as the "Jesus method," which she explained as presenting opportunities for staff to grow

without requiring or pushing teachers to increase their efficacy. The principal explained to me that she believes the “Jesus method” consists of having many opportunities for teachers to grow professionally. She hoped that when teachers were ready to learn, grow, and improve they would participate in the various staff development activities that are offered. This approach is the opposite of a dictatorship in which teachers are told what to do. Her approach seems to work in the community since the school’s test scores continue to remain high. The teachers appear to be happy at the school and liked working there. For instance, Nancy, a young fifth grade teacher in her mid-20ss who had been teaching for five years said,

I like the culture of the school. I like my teammates. I like the other teachers here at my school. I like my principal; I feel supported by her. I feel like a human being, you know. When she talks to me, I’m not just another robot on the assembly line or something. It’s nice to feel like I’m home. Like I feel like I’m in a school—this is what a school is supposed to be and I like that we actually have a good amount of kids who actually stay here from kindergarten all the way through. I like being a part of their family.

Most of the teachers that I interviewed at School A are self-motivated and participate in various professional learning communities and staff development opportunities. Yet many teachers told me that there are teachers with whom they worked with are not highly motivated and who

held low expectations for their students. Shelly said, “There are negative teachers out there who see what kids can’t do versus what students can do.” I then asked her if she felt any teachers at School A had this negative attitude about students. After a long pause she said, “Here on this campus it is about half and half negative beliefs.” At the end of the interview I asked Shelly if there was anything she would like to add, and she voiced this concern:

My perceptions are probably not the perceptions of all teachers. The way I answer questions are different than the way other teachers would answer them. It made me think about that the type of teachers that would take the time to talk to you are the over-achievers. I know the other teacher you interviewed is just like me in that we are both over-achievers and both have high expectations. Here at the school teachers are all over the place in terms of their expectations.

The culture of School A is comprised of a variety of teachers who are given the freedom to teach the way they want. There were many teachers who participated in book studies and workshops as there were many opportunities to grow; however, teachers were given the freedom to choose whether or not they participated in these learning opportunities. There were also teachers with high expectations for students and others with low expectations.

**Nancy.** Nancy is a young fifth grade teacher who has taught at School A for three years. She is in her mid-20s and has been teaching for five years.

She has taught French in the elementary setting; she has also taught kindergarten, and she is currently in her second year of teaching fifth grade.

Nancy called herself self-motivated; as she said, “I was always extremely self-motivated so my parents just sort of let me run with it.” Her parents had high expectations for her to succeed academically. When I asked her about her parents’ expectations for her academic success she said, “It was definitely, you were expected to do well. And I always did well so my parents just kind of stayed out of my hair and, you know, as long as I get good grades they figured they knew what I was doing.” She told one story that demonstrated her parents’ high expectations for her:

I remember coming home with a progress report in high school where I had two A’s and four B’s and I remember my step dad screaming at me. How could I get such horrible grades and how could I just give up on everything like that, and I remember thinking, you know, these aren’t bad grades. I mean I usually get straight A’s and I’ll bring them up by the end of the semester and it won’t be a big deal.

She concluded with the story:

I got them up by the end of the semester. It was all fine. My parents were very—I knew education was important. I knew I would get in trouble if I got bad grades, but I was motivated enough that they just kind of left me alone. I did my own thing very well.

She recalls this self-motivation driving her even as a child. School was easy for her as she never had to struggle to do well academically; in fact, she was advanced academically. She said,

I remember going to a private in-home preschool when I was probably four. . . . I remember learning phonics, I didn't know it was phonics. But we learned the letters and sounds they made and probably that combined with I don't know what else basically made it so I could read before I started kindergarten. . . . I remember other kids not being able to read. And that's when I kind of realized that, oh, this is very advanced.

Nancy grew up in a small town comprised of primarily White middle-to-upper class people. The demographics in the school she attended as a child were similar to the demographics at the school she currently works in. The school she attended was a hub of social interactions for many families in her neighborhood. She felt the social aspect of school was more important than academics. She said,

There was not necessarily an emphasis on education but an emphasis on the school's place as a part of the community. Not on the educational aspect of it but on that the school was a part of the community and the community was involved with what goes on at school and they—I mean the events that the school had were the social events of our community. You know our Halloween carnival

was that was the big thing that everyone in the community did. We had different fund raisers. We had a five-K fun run every year and everyone did that and so. The education [i.e., academics] wasn't a huge part of it but the school in the community was a big thing.

Her expectations for her current students were more focused on character development and community rather than academics. It appeared that her childhood experience, in which the expectations at her school growing up were more focused on social development, may influence her academic expectations of her current students. For example, Nancy said,

I want my students to go out into the world knowing how to be safe and responsible adults. I know they don't obviously leave this room as adults but you know they do a little growing up while they are with me. And I, I want them to be even if they learn nothing academic from me, I want them to go out into the world knowing better how to take better care of themselves and how to take care of the world that they live in.

Nancy did not expect all her students to be highly successful academically. For example, when I asked her what she expected her students to accomplish by the end of the year, her reply was:

It's just really completely impossible. I try to hit the standards which sometimes means I just say, "Oh by the way, and this happened in history," you know, it's just absolutely impossible for them to master



the standards. . . . As far as what I actually expect them to be able to do. . . . I actually expect them to study for a test. I [pauses] expect them to be able to ask for help. I expect them to be self-advocates. I expect my students to be able to work with any person they are assigned to work with. Not to like any person they are assigned to work with but be able to work with them. Um, I mean honestly my goals for them are preparing them for life as a human being, you know, out there in the world and, you know, we work on the academic standards and I want them to be able to multiply and divide and, you know, . . . know their times tables and things like that but you know as far as the standards go I try to hit them. I really do—but you know, I’m more concerned that they are a good human being.

My first impression of Nancy was that she had high self-efficacy. She demonstrated strong self-efficacy in a couple of ways. She spoke with confidence about herself as a teacher and she was seen as a teacher to whom other teachers went for assistance. During our interview, one teacher called her asking technology questions, and another teacher came in to ask for assistance in planning for a science lesson. She spoke to both teachers with confidence and knowledge and appeared to be a leader among other teachers. She talked about how she scaffolds her instruction for students to ensure that her struggling students could still be exposed to the same standards as all students. She said, “I want them to succeed and I want to give

them every tool that I can. . . . When they feel more confident they will succeed more often.” She gave the example of how she differentiates instruction for struggling readers in social studies:

One major thing that I do is the note taking for students who I know have difficulty extrapolating information from their own from the reading. I will give them guided notes where students can read and comprehend on their own. They can take their own notes. So in a subject like social studies or something like that where it is more reading and note taking.

She also differentiated instruction for struggling students in math:

I think math is where I use more differentiated instruction the most because that is where you see the biggest range of ability level. One of the things that I find that works really well is to help students with setting up the problems. A lot of times they know the steps to follow; they just need help trying to set it up so I will help students by setting up the problem on the page and say now you work from here.

She did, however, reveal that she held low academic expectations for some students. She illustrated this belief when I asked her where she expects her students to be in 20 years:

Some of them I see living in their mom’s basement still, you know, 20 years from now. I, I see my students being successful intelligent members of society. I have had students who I worry about what’s

going to happen to them when they grow up but I can see potential in every one of my students. If I can show them the path that they can learn, what they need to be a grown up member of society who contributes productively to society. I, I don't see everyone going to college. I don't think that is realistic. I don't think that is fair. Everyone should have the opportunity but I don't think they should be forced to take that opportunity, you know. I have students who can become very talented artists. And, you know, an academic path is not for them. I have students who work and try very hard but they are just never going to be academically stellar and that doesn't mean that they are not good people. So I, I know as my job I need to teach them the academics of school but I'm more interested in teaching them just how to be good members of society and I see all my students doing that, being productive members of society.

Nancy wanted her students to be self-sufficient and self-motivated like herself. When I asked her what she would like to tell the parents of her students, her reply reflected her desire for her students to be self-sufficient and self-motivated. She said,

Stop making excuses. . . . That's what I would say to parents is, 'I know they are your babies, I know they are your darlings, I know that you love them so much. Sometimes part of loving someone is not holding their hand. You know, sometimes part of loving is letting go. And you

know, you got to do that, you know, and stop making excuses, you know, start expecting your child to succeed. Start expecting your child to be responsible and they will. Children, all children will rise to the occasion if they know that that's what they need to do. And, you know, I have parents who tell me, "Well, you know, they don't do the homework at home and they refuse to do.". But in my classroom I tell them to do work and they do it because there is no choice. That is the expectation and they will follow it. So that's what I would say to parents.

Nancy's self-motivation and childhood experiences growing up in a school with a focus on character development are factors that may influence her academic expectations for her students.

**Shelly.** Shelly has been teaching for 18 years. She has taught various grades in special education and currently serves as the preschool special education teacher at School A. Shelly's students vary in ability. Some students have mild speech issues while other students have severe physical and mental disabilities. All of her students have been identified through a preschool screening process as needing early interventions before entering kindergarten. All students in her program have an IEP (individualized education plan). The majority of her students are White.

Shelly grew up in what she describes as a "tight middle-class community." The demographics of the school she grew up in were very

similar to the school that she currently teaches in. She describes her community as “White middle class.” The school she attended was a brand new school in which the first year the school opened was the year she started kindergarten. Shelly said, “Everyone knew everyone and took care of each other.” Shelly told me her mom was a stay-at-home mom who often volunteered in her classroom. She said, “My mom took an active role in my education.” She mentioned that her dad worked long hours and she did not see him often.

Her family had high academic expectations for her while she was growing up. She stated, “I don’t remember ever having a discussion with her [her Mom] about grades. It was just expected that I would do well.” She continued to say, “It was never discussed, but I always knew I would go to college even though my mom said she would love me even if I was a ditch digger.” She believes in her students and holds high expectations for her students similar to the way she was held to high expectations by her mother. When I asked her how she ensured that all of her students would reach their highest potential, she said,

I have high expectations. I let kids know they can reach those expectations. I monitor to make sure they all meet those expectations. There is no failure in here and you will be successful. . . . always striving for more.

Shelly's family's values growing up were influenced by the church they attended. She spoke about how the church influenced how she treated people:

My family values were in line with the church we attended. We treated others with respect as we would want to be treated. We stayed away from violence and confrontation. We helped one another and we showed empathy for those that were different.

Her empathy was revealed when she told me how she decided to choose special education as a career:

I had to take an Intro. to Special Education course and as part of the class, we took a field trip to a place called Rainbow Acres. It was the most amazing place, as it was a self-sustained residential facility for adults that had disabilities. I don't remember any specific interactions, but I do remember crying on the bus ride home knowing that I would do special education. From that day to this present day, my love of special education has not waivered at all. I know that no matter where life takes me, I will always work with such special people.

She further validated her empathy when she later told me, "I want to help the sad little student who is sitting in the corner afraid to come out and feel comfortable in the classroom."

I gathered from the interview that Shelly was a self-motivated teacher who is motivated by fulfilling the needs of her students. She spoke of a story

in which she worked for one district and felt that her program was not adequately staffed to fulfill the needs of the students and it really upset her.

She said,

I had 53 kids on my caseload. . . . The HR [human resource] department wouldn't give me the paraprofessional support to help me out. I'm passionate about teaching special education. I spent my nights crying when I knew I wasn't meeting the needs of all the students. I saw students in grades K through eight, which is too much for one person.

Shelly's special education training influenced her expectations because she individualized expectations for students. She stated that she held high expectations for her students; however, those expectations were varied depending on the ability of each student. It is important to understand that Shelly works with students with varying severities of disabilities. When I asked her what she expected her students to accomplish by the end of the year she said, "I want them to be the best they can be. It is individualized for every child. I want them to be happy and have a positive preschool experience." When I asked Shelly what her aspirations were for her current students she answered:

It varies from student to student. Some I aspire them to be reading fluently, others to be able to have a conversation with a friend, others

I just hope they will be able to use the toilet independently. It varies from child to child. I want each child to do their very best.

Shelly's teacher expectations may be influenced by her strong academic expectations that her parents held for her, by her church's influence, and her special education training. When I asked her why she felt that her students would accomplish what she expected them to accomplish she simply stated, "I believe in them."

**Kayla.** Kayla is a special education teacher in her mid-30s who has been teaching for eight years. She has taught special education at several different schools and has taught fourth grade. This was her first year teaching primary special education. She has taught at School B for the past three years.

Kayla grew up in a White affluent neighborhood similar to the neighborhood her students live in. Both of her parents did not attend college; however, her Dad expected her to go. She said, "He felt everyone should go through it even though he didn't." Her mother, on the other hand, did not push her to high academic standards, and instead allowed Kayla to find her own way. She explained her mother's viewpoint:

She [her mother] had trouble in school and my sister had a lot of learning disabilities and she just felt ok. This is what she wants and I'm going to encourage and encourage and, of course, she wanted her



kids to go through college but if we didn't she wasn't going to get on us because she didn't. So she just knew—you go with your strengths. Kayla appeared to be self-motivated. She demonstrated her motivation when I asked her about her parents' role in her education:

My parents were there if I needed them, but I was the type of student that was always very hard on myself, and from very early on. They knew if I had a bad grade they wouldn't get on me because I would kick myself enough. That's what they always told me. But they were very encouraging and really just try to encourage me to be my own teacher and try to figure out. They were like, "I'm here if you are stuck." I can make up my own timelines. They put the responsibility on me.

Kayla's self-motivation is what led her to attend college. She went because she wanted to attend college and not because she was expected to. She held the high academic expectation for herself. She told me that on the day of the interview she attended workshops to continue to grow as a teacher. She said, "I am doing more workshops and talking with more colleagues and I will be doing more classes on really the best way to teach reading." When I asked her how she differentiated instruction for her students, she said,

Every which way imaginable. Tactile learning we do things orally. I utilize a smart board . . . . You know, a lot of data, just gathering a lot of

data. I have nice big file folders that are just full of IEP [individualized educational plans] goals and every week we go through. And we are checking to see how we are doing with the goal and measuring it. And trying new things and try to push them to do new things. . . . So just working with who needs to be worked with in order to make those steps.

Kayla's sister motivated her to become a special education teacher.

She said, "I see my sister and I saw the struggles she had in school so I decided to be a special ed. teacher." The experiences she had witnessing her sister struggle with a learning disability may have influenced her expectations of her students with disabilities. For example, when I asked her where she saw her students 20 years from now, she said,

For a majority some of them still with their parents. A small few, I see really overcoming a lot of their hurdles and may be able to live in some assistive learning or even on their own. Some of my students with typical learning disabilities, I see them struggling still because I see that with my sister. My sister struggled with that her whole life and she still will struggle. She has overcome a tremendous amount and sometimes she does things that just blows me out of my mind and I'm reminded, hey, she's an adult, yeah, of course, she should be doing this. But still you see the little person who struggled.

She had high goals for her students, yet she did not necessarily believe that all her students would achieve those goals because she compared her students to her sister. For example, when I asked her what her goals for her students were, her response was:

To just get them out of special education is always my goal. When I taught in previous years. . . . I always said, it is my goal to get you out of special ed. By seventh grade, you know, I want you out. So they always loved that. On the first day of school, it is like, “ok what’s my goal?”, and I would say, “My goal is that you will not need any services once you finish sixth grade. I want you done.” And I will say a couple of those kids I think made it. . . . Unfortunately I think most of them were still pretty low unfortunately. But that was my goal. I want them to progress and try to become independent.

Kayla seemed to have conflicting expectations for her students. On the one hand, she was self-motivated and worked hard trying various strategies to meet the needs of her students. She had high goals for her students; however, she did not truly believe that all of her students would achieve those goals. It is important to remember when discussing Kayla’s level of expectation that she worked with students who had various disabilities. It appeared that her experience with her sister growing up influenced her expectations of students as well.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth is a 40-year-old teacher and has been an educator for 20 years. She has taught fourth and second grades and currently works as a reading specialist at School A. She has worked at School B as a reading specialist for 10 years.

Elizabeth grew up in a middle- to upper-class farming community 30 miles south of where she currently teaches, and her family had high academic expectations for her. She said,

They [her parents] had high values for us. My dad was an optometrist, an eye doctor, so he was in the professional center and wanted us to be contributing members of society and do our best. We did come from an old school kind of philosophy, you know, my dad was the worker. He would come home, my mom took care of the house and did all that stuff. They expected me to read, but doing it all together I don't remember that. It did happen I just don't remember it. But I know they were, they valued education and expected us to do our best.

Elizabeth told me that she was an average student. She did not struggle in school nor was she above average academically. She said,

I was more like a natural student. I wasn't an excelling student but I was a good strong average student and my family really valued education. They encouraged us to excel and helped with homework

and schoolwork and went to all the conferences and that kind of stuff so there was a high value placed on education in my home.

She spoke of a childhood experience involving various reading groups in her class. She said,

The only thing I can really remember is reading and doing SRA. You know the SRA kits and being grouped. My friends being in the higher reading group, I do remember that but I don't remember being, feeling like I was not as good or dumb or whatever.

Elizabeth originally became a teacher because she thought that teaching was a simple job that would be easy to have while raising her own children. She said,

This is really sad but I got married young, went to school for a little. Then got married and was in the banking industry. And got pregnant, had a baby and decided I needed to work for a living. You know back then it was like, I could be a teacher, I can have time off with my kids. I had a distorted viewpoint at that time. You know, going through college wasn't so bad but going out to the field, oh my gosh, it's so different then, that people, people's perception of education. So that's what happened. I had children and I decided that I need to go back to school and get a degree where I can have a schedule similar to my kids. That was my ultimate, um, that's what drove me, my motivation at that time.

She had since changed her viewpoint as an educator and saw teaching as a professional career. She later went back to school again, earned her master's degree, and became a reading specialist.

Elizabeth works with students who are struggling readers. She had high expectations for her students and told me that her goal was to have every student she worked with to become good readers. She commented on this goal:

I just want to instill a love of reading in them, of course, and the willingness to take a risk, you know, not being afraid to try. I'd love for them to be at grade level in reading. I would love for my kids to be able to read grade level passages and understand it and I guess pass a test to show that they can do that. That would be my goal for them.

She explained how she ensured her students would meet her goals for them.

She said,

We are doing that Shipley system. It's more where you get the kids to buy into their progress. I have my data over here, my DRA [developmental reading assessment] data and my DIBELS [Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills] data and we came up with a goal and a mission statement. And the kids help me do that and we're calling our kids top quality kids, QT kids. We're trying to use data a little more.

I asked Elizabeth if the students were involved in the goal setting and data collection and her response was:

Right, they are a part of it. So they are and they know what the goal is. We're working toward getting there. They will make reference to it at times like, "Oh, I need to get there," or "I need to do this to meet our goal." I do think it's valuable. I think it's great to include them, buy in. Let's just hope it makes a difference.

She demonstrated her high expectations for students when she answered some reflective questions I asked her. For example, I asked her what was the most important thing to her as a teacher and her response was:

I just think that if we could help our kids become well rounded individuals academically socially, emotionally, we, we're not in charge of all of that but I think we touch their lives in lots of different ways. I just think that we need to value kids as an individual, as a human being, to do our best to make them feel like we care, that we care, and that we want them to succeed.

When I asked Elizabeth where she saw her students in 20 years she said, "I would expect them to be successful adults, family people. . . . raising their kids with the high expectations that we have for our kids now and lots of technology."

There were times that I felt that Elizabeth wanted to make sure she was giving me the "right" answers and she was looking for approval from me

instead of answering the questions based on her own thoughts. For example, at the end of the interview she said, “I’m not sure if I gave you good answers.” Seeking approval from others and wanting to be right could be a factor that influenced her high expectations. It may also be that her family’s high academic expectations for her as a child growing up were a factor that influenced her teaching expectations.

**Rachel.** Rachel is a second grade teacher in her 60s who has worked at School A for 11 years. She has been an educator for 37 years in various capacities. She started her career as a special education teacher. Her current classroom was a general education classroom; however, she had many students with learning disabilities. At the time of the study the OKB district was moving towards an “inclusive practices” paradigm, in which students with disabilities were in the mainstream classroom as much as possible. Since Rachel had the strong special education background, she was the teacher in her grade level that included students with disabilities. She also had a few ELL students. The majority of her students were White. She team taught with the second grade teacher next door. The two teachers asked their principal to build a door between the two classrooms a couple of years ago, So now the two teachers group their students by ability for math as the students walk back and forth between the two classrooms throughout the day. Rachel typically worked with the lower groups in math as her colleague typically worked with the higher students.



Rachel explained to me her inspiration to become a special education teacher when she said, "I went into special ed. because I had got a cousin who has Down syndrome." She also spent time in an administrative position and decided to go back into the classroom because she loves working with kids. She said,

I was the support specialist, and I decided that I did not really enjoy doing meetings all of the time. I wanted to be working with kids, and so there was a second grade position open on this campus and the teachers kept sending me notes. They sent kids up all day long. So, that's where I was supposed to be. That's how I switched over.

Rachel grew up in a military family and moved around often. She spent several years as a child in Germany in a school in which only German was spoken. This experience influenced her expectations for ELL (English language learner) students. She said, "I relate really well to the ELL kids coming in that speak no English because that's what I did in Germany." She has high expectations for students learning a second language because she was able to succeed in a German school as German was her second language. She explained how her experience as a second language learner continued to influence her beliefs about her ELL students:

I see them come in and I see their big eyes. The fear, you know, it really takes me back, because that's exactly how I felt. When the other kids get frustrated with our EL kids I bring out my German story

books. I read to them or I start giving them directions in German.

Their eyes get big and I say, “Now, now, let’s talk about this.” You know, it really does make a good more understanding for the kids of the ones that are coming in. And all of a sudden I had lots of helpers.

Rachel’s family had high expectations for her academic success and her family valued education. She explained her family’s values with regard to education: My dad came from a family of educators. Before he went into the service he was a teacher and a principal of a one room school house in Alabama. So before he was drafted he was in education and his sisters were all teachers. So, it was highly respected in our family and education. There was never any question, are you going to go to college? It was *when* you go to college.

Rachel had high expectations for her students and communicated those expectations with her students daily. When I asked her what her expectations for her students were for the end of the year she said, “They need to be ready for third grade. It is right up there on the wall. . . . We talk about it a couple times a week at least and when they come to the rug they’ll say, “We are ready to learn.” I then asked her why she believed her students would be ready for third grade, and she replied, “Oh you know what, they are so eager to learn at this age. If you teach carefully and you put forth enough effort and really manage your own teaching they’ll be ready.”

Rachel appeared to have high self-efficacy. She had confidence in herself as a teacher and believed that she had the ability to guide all her students to achieve high academic achievement. When discussing her students' reading achievement data, she told me about her success as a teacher:

Last year and typically this year, I had half my kids were at risk at the beginning of the year. And there is only three that are still at risk. The rest have either moved to benchmark or strategic.

I asked Rachel the question, "What do you think is the reason for your success?" Her reply was:

You put the expectation out there. "This is where we need to go, boys and girls," and they work hard. . . . It's the community in the classroom. It's building the team and I really believe that they need to be cared for. They need to know that you care about them and what's happening. And to feel like they are competent and if they feel they can.

Rachel's self-efficacy was influenced by her intrinsic motivation to constantly grow as a teacher. She demonstrated her self-motivation by attending professional development workshops and classes. She said, "The teacher next door, we push each other so it's been very good. We take classes together and book studies. We say, "Look what I found." I asked her if she was required to take the classes or if she chose to take the classes and her response was:

No, choosing to take. We have taken a bunch from Walden one year. We decided we were going to focus on reading. So we did a bunch of the Walden classes and then we felt better about what we were doing in reading. We thought about, now, let's look at writing.

She added that she attended workshops and classes and she offered trainings to other teachers. Providing in-services for teachers showed that she was a teacher leader and wanted to share her knowledge with her colleagues. She continued:

I became a trainer for *Write from the Beginning*. So it's really good to get out and to share. The PLC [professional learning communities] groups, we've done a couple PLC's and we facilitated those. That's a really good way to see what other teachers are doing and get better ideas.

Rachel was a teacher with high expectations. Her expectations may have been influenced by her childhood experience as a second language learner and by her family's strong values regarding to education. Her high level of self-efficacy caused by her intrinsic motivation to continuously attend and teach many professional development opportunities also likely influenced her expectations.

### **School B**

School B is a Title I school that is located in the middle of a low-income housing neighborhood. Many families in the neighborhood receive

government subsidies for rent and utilities through Section Eight housing. There is a high mobility rate at the school. Many students attend School B part of the year and a school in a different city the rest of the year. This yearly move occurs because these students' families work for the horse racing stadium in the neighborhood. These families constantly travel with the horse racing season, leaving the school mid-year and returning the following year. Many students at School B are immigrants from Mexico, and English is their second language. The majority of the student population at School B is Hispanic.

The campus is composed of mainly veteran staff; in fact, several teachers at the school have been teaching at School B for 20 to 30 years. There are teachers who have been teaching in the same classroom for many years; for instance, Holly had been teaching fourth grade for 12 years in the same classroom and Kerri had taught sixth grade in the same classroom for 22 years. I asked the teachers why they stayed at the school so long. Most teachers from School B mentioned that the school had a family-like atmosphere. For example, Linda, a first grade teacher with 20 years of experience teaching, seven years at School B, said,

There is a great family there. There's a really good family. It's a tough school though, very tough school. It is very low socioeconomic, um, Title 1, very many needy kids. Whether it's just, um, socio economic

part where they are struggling financially but there is just a lot—  
there's—it's just really tough. It is. Every day is a challenge.

The teachers at school B all spoke about the degree of opportunities for staff development efforts that occurred at the school. It appeared that the principal and the district office used a hands-on approach with this school. It was not until the very end of my interview with a teacher from School B that I learned about the transformation that had occurred at the school during the past two years. I inferred that its culture was of low expectations for student achievement; however, there seemed to have been a recent shift in the culture of the school. When I asked Maggie, a fourth grade teacher who had taught at School B for 17 years, if there was anything she wanted to add at the end of the interview, she said, "I think all the teachers are really, really trying hard. We are, and I can tell you so many teachers have changed what they have been doing for years and years and years." I then asked her what caused the change and she said simply "pressure." When I inquired a little bit deeper and asked where the pressure was coming from, she said, "Well, from the district." She continued to add:

I think our principal is being more critical, constructive but I feel the pressure's on her. But I know two years ago when our scores were the lowest, we were . . . underperforming . . . [named district associate superintendent] came down and talked to us. He talked to us

extremely unhappy; certainly got the message across to us. . . . It was at a staff meeting. Dead silence, let me tell ya. . . .

She continued to explain the message the associate superintendent sent when she said, “. . . no excuses, in other words, was his point you know. You can’t say that kids are Hispanic, you can’t say that kids come from a poor background.” I then asked her if she agreed with what the associate superintendent said, and her response was, “Oh I think it’s showing. You know, it was hard at first; as they say it was hard for teachers to change their way of thinking. But we’ve had a lot of workshops.” She then described the workshops she attended and some ways that she had changed her instructional methods. This year School B has increased their school label to *performing plus*, which is two categories above underperforming, the category they were in two years prior to the interview.

The majority of the teachers I interviewed at School B all spoke about the high expectations they had for their students. However, I did notice that many teachers did not necessarily believe that all their students could achieve those high expectations. One reason teachers felt that some students could not achieve high academic standards was their language. For example, Holly, a fourth grade teacher in her late 30s who had taught at School B for 14 years, said,

There are so many differences to look at and so many things to take into consideration you know. Student aren’t speaking English

(chuckles). They are not going to be reading or writing English, but you expect them to take these tests and exceed and be at grade level. Well maybe in their own language they are, but they are not when it comes to English. And we see that a lot at my school. So, you know they have different experiences.

Another phenomenon I witnessed was a cultural disconnect among teachers and parents. Many teachers I spoke with at School B believed that the parents of their students did not want to be involved in the school nor did they value education. Holly also said,

We don't really have a strong parent involvement. A lot of our parents, I don't know if they don't care or they are not around. I really don't know what their reasoning is, but they are not there to support their kids in education. A lot of them don't view it as a very high expectation in life —that's kind of frustrating.

Many of the parents of the students at School B had two parents who worked full time or lived in single parent households. The full time working parents did not have the time and economic means to volunteer in the classroom. It appeared that some teachers viewed the lack of parent involvement in the schools as the parents not caring about their child's education. I provide examples of teachers at School B stating their high expectations and also provide examples of how they believed their students



might not achieve to their high expectations in some of the following teacher vignettes from School B.

**Holly.** Holly is a single parent in her mid 30s, who has been teaching at School B for 14 years. She has taught fourth grade in the same classroom for 12 years. Her whole teaching career has been at School B. Her fourth grade class is a general education heterogeneous class of students with varying levels of abilities. She has some ELL students, and the majority of her students are Hispanic from low-income households.

Holly grew up in a primarily White middle class neighborhood in a metropolitan city. The cultural and demographics of the school she attended as a child were very different from the class she teaches today. Her dad earned enough money in his career allowing her mom to be a stay-at-home mom. Her mother, along with many mothers in the school she grew up in, volunteered in her school. Her parents, who held high academic expectations for her, saw education as being very important. She said, "My parents always encouraged myself and my siblings to finish school and not to take a year off. Just continue and take all the necessary classes and get a great education."

She taught at a different school than her daughter attended. She believed that it is important to volunteer in her child's classroom just as her mother volunteered in her classroom. Therefore every year she has taken a few personal days off work to volunteer in her child's classroom. I asked her why her daughter did not attend the school she worked at and she said, "The

standards are much lower at my school and I want my daughter to attend a school where she will be pushed.” Her daughter attended a school in an affluent White middle-to-upper class community on open enrollment because her school is outside of the attendance area she lived in. Holly understood that different schools have different levels of expectations and she wanted the best education for her child.

Holly showed evidence of high expectations for her students. When I asked her what she expected her students to accomplish by the end of the school year, she said,

I expect them to accomplish working at grade level. I really push responsibility and respect in my classroom. I tell them it equals success, and I have a poster in my room with that, and I refer to it constantly. So I let them know that is what is expected of them. Not just in school but in the real world, in life.

When I asked how why she believed that her students would accomplish working at grade level she said, “They know my expectations. I remind them of the expectations. I progress, monitor, and assess.” I asked her questions about what her expectations would be for two fictitious low-income students and she said,

My expectations are the same for all students because I think they can all achieve what they need to achieve. And I tell them too, if you are not being responsible then you are being lazy. And so my expectations

are the same. It doesn't matter to me where they live or what their parents do or, you know, I just expect them to be responsible and do what they need to do. I don't want them being lazy and careless.

She also said that she has high expectations for students' life skills as well as academic skills. When I asked her the reflective question, "As you think about your role in preparing students for their future lives, what is the most important to you as a teacher?" she responded:

That I can prepare them to be ready for what is expected of them, not just for the next grade level but expected, um, as far as even as life skills. I know that is not part of our curriculum but I think that it is just something that they need to have to build on because it does help them academically and behaviorally.

Throughout the interview Holly talked about her high expectations. Yet, she revealed that she sometimes viewed these expectations as idealistic and commented that realistically she did not believe all her students could achieve to those high expectations because she worked at a Title 1 school. She said,

I have never worked in a school that was not a Title I so I know people always say, "Oh, they can do the same thing," you know. I have heard people tell me that at district office and they should be exceeding. Ok, well I would like them to exceed [she is referring to the highest achievement label on state assessment] too but sometimes my

expectations and their expectations aren't going to be realistic. . . . And I have heard . . . if this school can do it and these teachers can do it, then you can do it. And so I don't know. It gets kind of frustrating because I don't know if they are in a position to really judge cause when we have students that are at that same level as far as academics, usually because of the language barrier, it is just frustrating to hear that. We hear it all the time. It doesn't validate what we do all the time. We do a lot of extra to get those kids to where we want them to be and get them to where they are expected to be.

She continued to talk about her frustration with what she saw as a lack of parental involvement in her school. She said,

We don't really have a strong parent involvement. A lot of our parents, I don't know if they don't care or they are not around. I really don't know what their reasoning is, but they are not there to support their kids in education. A lot of them don't view it as a very high expectation in life—that's kind of frustrating.

Later in the interview she brought up the lack of parent involvement at her school again and said,

A lot of the parents don't work with their kids at home at my school. I ask them and they say no. I ask the parents and the kids. . . . A lot of the times it is because they are busy and lot of the times there are many siblings and a big family and they don't have time. And a lot of

them can't read and they don't understand it so a lot of them are illiterate. So it is frustrating but we keep going because we love it.

In the first part of our interview, Holly spoke about her own childhood experiences in school. She said that she grew up in a mostly White middle-to-upper class neighborhood in which most mothers were stay-at-home moms. She talked about the parents' involvement when she said,

The community was very involved. The PTA was very strong. A lot of the moms were stay-at-home moms, and they were very involved with the school in a very positive way. They tried to help and improve things when needed. But it was a very strong influence on the school.

Her community while growing up was very different from the school community in which she currently worked. I wondered if her frustration with the perceived lack-of-parent involvement at her school conflicted with her idea of what parent involvement should look like. It appeared that there was a cultural disconnect between Holly and her students. (Chapter 5 includes a discussion on how a cultural disconnect between home and school can be a factor that influenced teacher expectations).

**Cecelia.** Cecelia is a sixth grade teacher in her late 50s. Cecelia has been an educator for 34 years in various teaching positions. She was an art teacher for the first part of her career. She had taught fourth grade and has been teaching sixth grade at School B for the past 19 years. Cecelia grew up

in a small Lutheran college town in a mid-western state of the United States.

She described it as follows:

We had maybe a total of 2,000 people in the town. So I was always in a classroom with maybe 18 students, 20 students max. These were all small schools. . . . Either you were German or you were Norwegian. You were a blond-haired, blue-eyed Anglo. We did not see any Hispanic, Black; and the surrounding region was agriculture farming. It wasn't until I moved to [named city and state of school B] did I encounter different cultures.

She continued to explain that the college was an influence on the community and education was highly valued. She said,

I lived in a predominately Norwegian town and a college town and so education and going to school was a given, especially with the focus of that small community. Plus with the parents it was upmost top of the list.

When I asked Cecelia about her family's values, she said, "Go to church every Sunday, work, work, work. Go to school. Do family activities together." She considered her family to have a "very strong background." She continued to explain to me that both her mother and father started working on their master's degree when Cecelia was in the sixth grade. She mentioned that her parents attending college served as a model of high expectations for her own educational values. She said, "I come from a very college, college family. . . . So

there wasn't much television time. Everything was study and sit around the big table and everyone was studying together looking up words."

Cecelia was influenced by her family to become a teacher. When I asked her why she wanted to be a teacher, she said,

My grandmother was a teacher, my mother was a teacher, and I think it was decided that I also would be a teacher. You know, you have that role modeling set forth. I was always helping her with her lesson plans, grading papers, make bulletin boards, you know, just doing everything along the way with their parents.

She struggled academically as a primary student. Her parents both achieved to high academic standards and her sister always did well in school; therefore, her teachers held high expectations for her. She said that her teachers were surprised when she did not rise to those expectations:

My sister was a year and one week older. She was straight A student and perfect. So I had the same third grade teacher and she expected me to be like my sister and I wasn't. And so I, I came along and she said, "Well, I see that you are not quite as smart as your sister, but we will see what we can do with your reading."

She was upset with herself for struggling in school because she had high expectations for herself. She demonstrated her motivation as she told the story of how she overcame her academic difficulties in school. She said,

I was in the low reading program. I was in the blackbirds and I needed to be in the bluebirds. Also with math. So I got up every morning at five in the morning and my mother sat with me while I had to finish all of the blackbird unit. I decided that I could read a lot better than what I was doing and on my own I challenged myself, just because I did not like blackbirds and I wanted to be a bluebird. My mother helped me every morning from five to seven and then I would go to school. In order to work out of that, I had to complete all lessons, all worksheets, everything at home, and I made it to the bluebirds.

I asked her if she worked hard to move into the higher reading group due to pressure from her parents or if it was her own self-motivation that inspired her to work hard. Her response was:

My motivation, because I didn't like some of the students that were in the blackbirds either. This was a small town that I lived in. I was being made fun of and even my sister told me I could be a bluebird and that she believed in me.

She concluded her story by telling me her reason for her academic struggles, "It wasn't until fifth grade that they realized that I had a vision problem and a stigmatism and a problem reading. Then I was able to get glasses. My life turned around." This experience influenced Cecelia's expectations of students that are struggling. She believes that all students can achieve high standards yet not all students can be taught the same way to achieve those standards.



She demonstrated this belief when she talked about how she differentiates instruction for her students:

We all learn differently. There are some commonalities and similarities, some work faster. They are needing all the different styles so you have to have a lot of different materials available. You can't just do all straight talking. You have to mix it up and they all work differently.

She also mentioned that one of her first instincts when trying to help struggling students is to have their vision checked. She said,

First off, I would want to know about his eye exams because the traditional eye exams don't catch everything and then you would want to find out, um, if he had any birth traumas, you know, just a little background there, you know, different things that went on.

Cecelia put forth a tremendous amount of effort to ensure that her students rise to her high expectations. She said,

Well, this is where we are now with technology, and thank goodness for smart boards. Thank goodness for games and rubrics and giving them choices and different activities. Because it is not just cut and paste and one mold fits to Johnny and one mold fits to Sally. So there's a lot of different things that are taking place before and after school because we are only one person. Sometimes you have to use your other team members and you have to work with the before- and after-

school programs to ensure that they are excelling and grasping those concepts.

I found a discrepancy between Cecelia's verbalized high expectations and her true beliefs about all students' ability to meet those expectations. This discrepancy is similar to what I discovered with her colleague Holly who also teaches at School B. For example, some of Cecelia's statements demonstrated the high expectations she has for students and all the effort she put into ensuring that her students reach those expectations. However, at the end of the interview I asked Cecelia a series of reflective questions whose answers suggested otherwise. For example, when I asked her why she believed her students would accomplish what she expected them to accomplish, Cecelia talked about students' progress on the state mandated assessments. She said,

Wouldn't that be wonderful to get all those kids who get "falls far below" and "approaches" and everybody that has that ability to work hard and get "meets" on everything and be successful. Of course, that is an idealistic situation but it doesn't happen. You're "falls far below" in third and fourth grade and the most you can gain, it's been statistically proven, 20 points. And you have to master 40 points just to get from "falls far below" and "approaches." That it's going to be unattainable. You know, you try to get as much as you can and for the kids that are just on the border line of "approaches," yes, you can pull

them up and get their 15 points to” meets,” but when they are so far under, and it’s been statistically proven 20 points, is what you can get each year.

She also commented on the role parent involvement plays in increasing test scores. She said, “It is tough; unless those parents are committed to being a team member with you and getting them into a tutorial ship or summer school or extra help, it’s a lot of work to pull them up.” She brought up her feelings about her students’ families at her school when I asked her what her aspirations were for her current students were as they left the school. She said,

You just are hoping that they will continue with their academics and that they will be successful and that they will graduate from high school. Because of the big strong Hispanic culture that, that’s about all the parents require of them. I will be lucky if 20% or 25% are putting on the expectation and raising the bar for college.

Cecelia reiterated this thought when I asked her what the most important thing to her was as a teacher in preparing students for the future. She said,

Number one, to have them graduate from high school and to have them value education and to build goals, attainable goals, whether it’s a six-month goal, a one-month goal, one-year, five-year, to build goals to reach for some of their dreams to pull out these goals. Have them start talking about it, what they want to be, what they want to do in

their future, to have these conversations with them because it may not be happening at home.

A possible explanation for this discrepancy was that in the beginning of our interview she did not know me, but as the interview continued, she became more comfortable with me and was able to share her real beliefs about students. Another explanation for the inconsistency may be that, idealistically, Cecelia has high expectations for her students; however, her experience over the years may have tempered her idealistic views into what she perceived as realistic. Cecelia's high expectations might have been influenced by her own self-motivation to achieve high standards, her ability to overcome her own difficulties as a student during her childhood, and her family's strong educational values. However, her feelings about the lack of parent involvement and a possible cultural disconnect between teachers and students' family values may be factors that influenced her expectations as well. Cecelia's upbringing in a small White middle class community was vastly different from the culture of the students in her classroom. This difference may contribute to the cultural gap between Cecelia and her students. This cultural disconnect may also be influenced by the school culture because a couple of her colleagues displayed similar beliefs.

**Linda.** Linda is a 41 year old woman who has been teaching for 20 years. She has taught fourth and second grade. She currently teaches first grade. The past seven years she has been teaching a general education first

grade class with a majority of Hispanic students with a variety of abilities. She works in a job share at School B meaning that shares a class with another teacher. They each work part time, working a couple days a week. She does this so she can volunteer time in her own kids' school. Linda feels strongly about being involved in her own children's education as she views parent involvement in schools as an important role of each parent.

Linda said that her parents always encouraged her; however, they did not pressure her to achieve to high standards. The high standards that she has came from self-motivation. She said,

My parents . . . always encouraged me. They never put pressure on me to get straight A's. That was my own internal pressure, just kind of perfectionist and that kind of thing . . . but . . . they were always there to support me.

Linda grew up in a small middle class Norwegian community in an American city. She explained the demographics of the private Lutheran school she attended as mostly White. She recalled, "I don't remember growing up with, except one in high school that was probably a mix, half Black, half White person, but other than that it was really Norwegian." She has fond memories of school and she said "I loved school" and "I behaved well." She mentioned that school was not easy for her; however, she was successful and still enjoyed school. She demonstrated her self-motivation with her explanation of herself as a student as she said,

I did well but I always had to study hard for my grades especially like in high school. Some people things came super easy for and I just put a lot more effort into it. I ended up getting my straight A's but I probably put more effort into it.

Linda appeared to have high expectations for her students just as she held high expectations for herself. When I asked her how she ensured that all her students were reaching their highest potential, she said,

Well you have to set high goals and you have to—your expectations have to be there. You don't back down. So you know because they have such behavior issues, we are expecting the best out of their behavior and we're really praising the ones that really are doing it right.

She continued to talk about the math and reading goals that she had for her students. She told me that she collected data constantly to ensure her students were reaching those goals. I asked her why she believed her students would reach those goals and she said, "Well, we basically keep telling them that they are going to. So you just tell them over and over and over." I asked her what she would do if she had a student who was struggling, and she replied, "I would expect to be doing more for the child. You know, I would put more time in on my own one-on-one. That is the kind of thing for that child just because that's what we do." She continued to explain how she differentiates instruction for her students:

You have to scaffold the lessons. So you often have to pull the kids aside and do some reteaching. You also have to buddy a kid up with a kid that understands it. Have them go to the side and then whenever you can you pull them into small groups for those kids that can't understand it.

Despite Linda's high expectations, I noticed that she exhibited similar beliefs to her co-workers, Holly and Cecelia, in that not all of her students were expected to achieve high standards. For example, when I asked her what she expected her students to accomplish by the end of the year, she said, "In a perfect world I want them to be able to"—then she gave high specific first grade benchmark goals. Then she continued to tell me that her personal goal for her performance-based pay was to get "100% of the kids to get a 75% or better on the 30-question math quiz we made." When she told me how her students achieved that goal she said, "That one we made by the skin of our teeth." It appeared that Linda had high expectations for her students but was not able to help them achieve to the high level that she wanted to, which in turn influenced her beliefs about her students achieving her high expectations.

She had high expectations for her current students' future; however, she said so with a slight hint of uncertainty. For instance, when I asked her what her aspirations for her current students were when they left her school, she said,

Oh I hope that they—no drop outs. That they go off to college or trade school, community college, anything like that— that would be after high school. So they get trained in something so they can be successful and break the cycle that many of the families have, you know, living on, being in poverty, getting welfare and getting food stamps. Just break that cycle.

Linda conveyed hope for her students' high achievement with a caveat that some students may not achieve to her high expectations. She answered my question about where she saw her students 20 years from now. She said, "Happy in whatever they're doing profession-wise and, um, not in jail that, um, you know, that they are contributing to our economy; that they are, you know, success in whatever they chose to do."

Linda appeared to have high expectations for her students. However, she seemed to be unsure that all of her students would rise to those expectations. Her initially high expectations might have been influenced by her own self-motivation; however, her belief that students might not meet her high expectations may be influenced by experience, lack of self-efficacy, and possibly school culture. The White middle class Lutheran culture that she grew up in is very different from the primarily low-income Hispanic culture of the school she currently works in. This cultural gap may also contribute to a cultural disconnect between her and her students, similar to the cultural disconnect her colleagues exhibited.



**Maggie.** Maggie is a woman in her early-to-mid-50s who has been teaching for 30 years. She has been teaching fourth grade for the past 17 years in the same classroom at School B. Each year the fourth grade teachers at School B designate one teacher to have all the students with special needs mainstreamed in her classroom. This year Maggie has that class. She reported that half of her class is either ELL or a student with special needs. The majority of her students are Hispanic.

Maggie enjoyed school growing up. She said she “had fabulous teachers” and “all my experiences were good, positive, I can’t complain.” Maggie grew up in a culturally diverse blue collar community in Chicago, Illinois. She described her community growing:

We were very multi-ethnic. There were a lot of Polish, Italian, Servo-Croatian, and Swedish kids. We had a real multitude of names, Hispanic, Mexican mainly, not too many Puerto Rican, and there were no Black children at that time.

Maggie’s parents came from Yugoslavia. She said that her father was not able to help her with her school work because English was his second language, which served as a barrier for him. She said,

My father was an immigrant from Yugoslavia so he had a lot of challenges with the language himself, and writing. So he couldn’t help me much in education, you know, homework or anything like that.

Maggie described her mother’s role in her education:

My mother was not an immigrant but she was as a child. She went back to Yugoslavia and spent her school years there so she was almost like an immigrant in that she had to relearn English and so on. But she helped me a lot. She helped me as much as she could and she was great.

I asked her if she learned her father's native language and she responded:

Well being the oldest in my family, yes, I did learn the language. Then when my younger brother was born I lost more because we spoke English more. So now it's more of, I will understand it, but it's hard for me to get the words out.

I asked if she grew up in a bilingual house and she said, "No our parents, let's say 75 %English. . . . Our parents always spoke the language to each other, to us sometimes, you know." I asked her why English became the dominate language for her family and she said,

I think that the fact that my mother was born in the United States, so she had a good strong background in English. I think that was a part of it. You know, even though she had to relearn a lot, but it was quick, real quick. She came back after being in Yugoslavia for 20 years. She came back after the war and had that knowledge. She went up to second grade here so, you know, your first and second grade years, you learn the alphabet, writing, and so on, the basics. I think that was part of it because I know other people in our circle of friends, their

kids had a stronger knowledge of language than we did, you know the Servo-Croatian language.

I then asked Maggie if her mother ever shared with her about any difficulties she had going to school in Yugoslavia as a young child learning in a second language environment and she said,

Oh yes! She did when she went; they were kind of the little freaky kids who didn't know the language. They had a little bit of knowledge from their parents but—but still it was hard, very hard for them. They were the outsiders. So but she became thoroughly bilingual.

Maggie was surrounded by immigrants and was inspired by a retired teacher who taught students who were immigrants. When I asked her how she decided on a profession in education, she said,

My teachers, I loved my teachers they were always influential, good role models. I admired what they did. Our land lady, who owned our building when I was very small before we had our own home, was a retired teacher. She was a big influence on me. She was just great. She would tell me stories about children who she got as immigrants, you know, right from Italy and Germany and how she would help them. It was pretty inspirational.

I noticed that Maggie appeared to have low self-efficacy, as evidenced by her lack of confidence when I asked her how she ensured that all of her students were reaching their highest potential. Her response was a nervous

laugh followed by, “I don’t know if I am.” I then asked her why she responded that way and she explained:

I can’t ensure it. I don’t know if I am, but we pretest, we posttest, and those students who do not do well on the post test you know we take them back and re-teach another way, and let’s look at it again, and let’s try it again, and hopefully that will get them to their highest potential.

Maggie’s low self-efficacy may be a factor that influenced her expectations. She was aware of the standards that her students must achieve; however, she does not expect all her students to achieve to those standards. For instance, when I asked her what she expected her students to accomplish by the end of the year she responded:

They all have to be *meets* or *exceeds* on [the state mandated assessment] at grade level. Unfortunately, I know some won’t, but let me put it this way: I think everyone should go up and that’s the thing the [state mandated assessment] test doesn’t show us, does it? You know, you have kids down here and they’re up here, but they are still not quite at grade level. But did they make a significant leap?

She later explained that she did not necessarily expect all students to achieve grade level benchmarks; instead, she expected them to show some improvement. When I asked her what her expectations for a student who was a year behind academically she said, “I would hope to at least increase

that child by a whole grade level at least—” In other words that child would continually be a grade level behind because if he just increased one grade level a year, that child would continue to be one grade level behind. She did not necessarily expect that child to be able to improve to the current grade level standards.

Maggie’s expectations may be influenced by her low self-efficacy and experience with her own students not being able to rise to high expectations. She has been inspired by success stories of immigrant students and grew up with immigrant parents, which may also have influenced her expectations of second language learners.

**Kerri.** Kerri is a teacher in her mid-40s who has been teaching sixth grade in the same classroom at School B for 23 years. She said that originally when she applied for a third grade position that turned out not to be available. She was then offered a sixth grade position and reluctantly took the job. She ended up staying in the sixth grade teaching position for the past 23 years because she loved it. She said, “I would not trade them for anything in the world, they are wonderful.” Kerri teaches a reading block to her homeroom class and writing to all sixth grade students at School B. Her grade level team departmentalizes. Each teacher teaches reading; then they rotate the students for the other content areas. Her students have varying abilities. Some of her students achieve high academic standards, some are average, and some students struggle. She has a few ELL students and students with

special needs in her classes as well. The majority of her students are Hispanic.

Kerri's face lit up when she talked about her family growing up. She said she had "the best family in the world." She has a twin brother and a younger sister. She mentioned that her parents held high standards for her and her twin brother and younger sister. She said, "My parents were firm. I wouldn't consider it strict. They had high expectations for us." She illustrated her family life growing up as, she said,

It was the typical family: mom stayed at home and dad worked. When you got home, you sat down and you did your homework. There was no TV, there was no playing; you did your homework first; and then if I was having difficulty—I did in math— my Dad would sit down with me and help me work out the math problems. When we finished our work, then we read. No TV during the weekday, not at all, just on the weekends. What we did was read.

As a child, Kerri said she was motivated to get good grades in school to make her father proud. She said, "My father, we just wanted to please him. You wanted to do everything right. At least I did." She appeared to have been influenced to achieve high academic standards by a need of approval from her father. She described her community as "a very strong community and a neighborhood where we all moved in when we were young and we stayed there, so it's a very strong neighborhood." She said that her neighborhood

was comprised of mainly White lower-to-middle class families. I asked her how her community viewed education and she replied, "Oh very strongly. It was again in the school community, it was sit down, it was read, write, arithmetic all rote."

She appeared to have high expectations for her students. When I asked her what she expected her students to accomplish by the end of the year, she said, "Well, of course, the standards, the sixth grade standards and hopefully a little bit of seventh grade standards. You know, maybe the beginning of the seventh grade." I then asked her why she believed her students would accomplish what she wanted them to accomplish, and she said, "The kids are fantastic; they're fun; they're interested. I guess because they know what I expect and they know that they can accomplish it because they're doing it so far."

Kerri had just gone through a drastic change in her classroom instruction. She had taught whole group instruction for the past 22 years and this summer she attended a class based on the book *The Daily Five* (2000) by Fredrick Jones. I asked Kerri if her methods of instruction were different before she took the class and she said,

Completely, it was the text book story. We do one story a week. We sit here and we listen to the tape. Then we read the book and then we do this worksheet and aauugh. Well, I still do the textbook stories and I've stretch them out for two weeks. I pick and choose the stories

along with the skills that we do in our small lesson. And I never had time for one-on-one or a small group, because you if you do that all these other kids, they don't know what to do. With this they know exactly what to do and they follow it, no problem.

I asked if the class had changed her expectations, and she said,

Yes, yes, I expect more from them because they know what to do. I guided them. You spend a whole month teaching them this, which is kind of crazy. You don't give any grades; it makes teachers nervous, but after they practice it over and over again, they know what you expect. They know time management, how to run their own learning. When I'm with small group or individuals, they know exactly what to do.

It is possible that the motivation to completely change her instruction leading to an increase in her expectation for students was influenced by wanting to seek approval from her administrators. She may have responded to the lecture the district superintendent gave a couple of years prior or the change in school culture may have influenced her as well. However, Kerri did not tell me what motivated her to change other than she was just ready for a change. She said,

First I thought, nah. After 22 years I was dragging. I needed something, something different, so I checked out the book, got on the website and started to get really excited about it. Then I just



revamped the whole thing over the summer because I wanted to try something different.

Kerri revealed her beliefs about the future of her students when I asked her a couple of reflective questions. I asked her the following question: As you think about your role in preparing students for their future lives, what is most important to you as a teacher? She responded:

I guess that I hope that they continue to be learners. Enjoy school, but more enjoying learning, self-motivated to learn, find out new things and experiment with new things. I hope I've prepared them in some aspects for the real world life and not just our six hours here at school.

She revealed a low set of expectations for her students with regard to going to college. This was a similar pattern I found from teachers who worked at School B. She said,

I've never been one to push college. I think college is for people, you know, certain kids. It's not for everyone and it should not be pushed on everyone. So we talk about all kinds of professions and jobs. I just, I guess, I hope I see them successful. I hope that they have families that they want, jobs they enjoy, doesn't have to make, you know, a huge amount of money, and just happy.

The last question I asked her was if there was anything else she would like to add, and she responded:

Well, I just think that a school community is made up of three groups. It's not just teachers. It's teachers, students, and parents. They all have to be there and we all have to put in the effort. It can't just be the teacher. The parents have to get the kids to school, feed them, clothe them, and come to us if they've got problems. Kids, the same way, they have to do their job. I've told the kids that their job is school and they have to follow through with that. I think that's very important. They need all three of us, all three groups.

Kerri expressed high expectations for her students' success in her classroom, which may be influenced by the high expectations her family had for her. Her need for approval from her father, as well as possibly the need of approval from administrators may have also influenced her expectations. Her low expectations for her students' future may be influenced by the school culture as many of her colleagues have the same feelings.

### **Reflection on Vignettes**

Every teacher is an individual human being. Each teacher I interviewed had a different story as to how they experienced education growing up. There are several factors that influence teacher expectations, and some of them coming from childhood experiences. Some teachers had been self-motivated to do well in school and continued to utilize that same self-motivation in their teaching practices. The communities in which teachers grew up also had an impact on their expectations. The data here

suggest that if a teacher's experience with education in her own childhood is very different from the parenting styles and norms of the community in which she teaches that this may cause a cultural disconnect—a new theme I developed further in the next chapter. This lack of understanding can cause teachers' expectations to be lowered.

There are also factors in teachers' current situations that influence their expectations for students. One factor is school culture. There were similarities in the way many teachers at School B viewed students, especially when examining on what teachers expected their students to achieve in the future. Many teachers hoped their students would be doing well but felt that some of their students might drop out of school, as Linda mentioned, or join a gang, use drugs, and end up in jail like Maggie predicted for some of her students. The teachers' expectations, of their students going to college was consistently low at School B—a school with a culture characterized by teachers believing that their students were not necessarily college bound. For example, Cecelia's long-term goal for her students was "to have them graduate from high school and to have them value education and build attainable goals." She never mentioned college as a goal for her students. Kerri said, "I've never been one to push college. I think college is for certain kids. It is not for everyone and it should not be pushed." Maggie said that each student was "individual—some of them you can sure pick out right away—which ones are going to college. . . . And I can tell which ones are

going to end up joining a gang, being on drugs.” Linda’s long-term goal for her students was “hopefully happy in whatever they’re doing profession-wise and not in jail.” These common beliefs were embedded into the culture of School B.

An additional factor was teachers’ self-efficacy. Teachers who were confident in themselves as teachers held higher expectations for students than those who were unsure of their ability to guide all students to high expectations. Discussions on cultivating a school culture of high expectations for all students and increasing teacher self-efficacy are found in Chapter 6.

In the next section I analyze two themes I noticed in the first two series of questions that I asked participants, which are not included in the vignettes.

### **Thematic Factors That Influence Teacher Expectations**

During the first two sets of questions I also discovered that there were two additional factors that influenced teacher expectations, which I did not discuss in the vignettes. These were stereotypes and opinions from previous teachers. This section discusses the findings of those two factors that also influence teacher expectations.

#### **Stereotypes**

Contrary to the literature reported on in the literature review, stereotypes about African America, Hispanic, and low-income students (McKown & Weinstein, 2002 ; Rubie-Davies et al. 2006), most of the teachers

I interviewed did not hold stereotyped beliefs about students. The majority of the teachers I interviewed reported that they held high expectations for all students. Maggie from school B said,

The economic area of the school, of course, plays a big part in the students. I'm not sure it should or does play a part in the expectations you have about kids. This area is low but I expect—I along with many other teachers here expect them to still read grade level, math grade level. We have some extremely high ones, extremely low ones, but you got that in any school in any economic area. I don't think it changes our expectations at all.

Unfortunately, I did have one teacher from school B who revealed that her stereotyped views influenced her expectations about low-income students when she said,

Well, they each are individual. Some of them, you can sure pick them out right away, which are going to go on to college. I have a maybe a talent for certain skills. Some kids can run your classroom; you can see them in a managerial position. Honestly sometimes I can look at kids and I can tell which ones are going to end up joining a gang, being on drugs.

When I asked her how she could tell which students would end up joining a gang or end up on drugs her response was:

Very bad home life in the first place, you know. Every once in awhile you get kids who are homeless. You know the kids that come to school and they really stink because their parents are all cracked up. I'm telling you these kids, I want to take them in the nurse's office and just shower them down. You know, with no parental followup at home, nothing you call, you might as well talk to this thesaurus [she picked up the thesaurus off the desk as a prop]. "Hello!" [said with sarcasm] And I wonder what's to become of those kids because they don't value what we're doing here at school. This isn't important to them, not at all. You know, here I'm telling them the prefix, ok, but those kids, you hope maybe someone will catch them. But you do see a few kids who you think are just going to fall through the loop holes. They are going to drop out; they are not motivated. I hate to say that but that's what you can see.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, most teachers held the same expectations for low-income and Hispanic and African American students as any other student. I asked teachers about a fictitious student named Leroy who is struggling in reading. Most teachers, nine out of ten, reported that they would have the same expectations of him. For example, when I asked Rachel what her expectations for Leroy would be, she said, with confidence, "To have him at grade level by the end of the year." Yet, one teacher mentioned that she would only expect one year's growth instead of getting them to grade level. For example Maggie said, "I would hope to at least

increase that child by a whole grade level, at least minimal.” This is a lower set of standards that allow the student to always be a grade level behind.

I followed up the question about Leroy with the question: Would your expectations change if you found out that Leroy’s father was a doctor? This question revealed that despite the high expectations for all students, five teachers had different expectations for the parents based on the parent’s level of education and SES. Shelly said, “I don’t have high expectations of the family. I have high expectations for students.” Nancy felt that a parent who was a doctor should have noticed and corrected his or her daughter’s academic problems. She said,

I would wonder why the problem hadn’t been addressed previously. I would think that going along this far, you know, if your father is a doctor, he can read, so he would have noticed that he can’t. I have parents who I know are illiterate. Honestly I think, “How can they help their child?” but I would blame his father. I would not think differently about the student but wonder what is wrong with his father. Why hasn’t he brought this up and tried to get you some help? or something like that. So I would blame the parents.

Linda had a similar response as she said,

I would think that they would have some money to get additional help outside of school. I would guess that the parents are educated enough to know how to help their child but that isn’t always the case. That’s

not always the case because if they're a really busy family and they don't, they don't have time, and they, you know, have a nanny or something else, might not happen that way. But yeah my expectations would be that, that child would have better support (pause) systems.

Maggie assumed that if the student's father was a doctor, then that student came from a family who valued education more than a student who came from a family whose native language was not English. As a side note, I never mentioned anything about language. Maggie brought that up when she said,

I think if his father was a doctor, for some reason, I would think he comes from this, you know, household that holds education more highly than someone whose maybe parents didn't even speak English, not that they don't value education, but they do. But maybe can't help the student as much. I think I would expect him to do better, yeah.

Elizabeth would have the same expectations; however, she would have expected that a student whose father was a doctor would experience more parent involvement. She said,

I would, I was just going to say, I would expect more parent involvement you know. I would hope that would be there, but, no, I would still have high expectations for the student.

All teachers reported that they would have high expectations for a girl when I asked them: What would your expectations be for a student named Maria who lives in a single parent household in which her Mom is receiving



food stamps? For example Cecelia said, “My expectations, all students can learn regardless of their socio-economic status or their hardships and so, no, we are all the same. It doesn’t matter.”

Even though all teachers reported that they would have high expectations for Maria, two teachers assumed that Maria was struggling even though I never said she was. For instance Kerri said she would “bring her to grade level” and Nancy said,

I would expect that probably homework wouldn’t be coming in on a regular basis. I still expect that it should be done but I know that what I’m probably going to see is that it is not coming in on a regular basis, um. I would figure probably if it is coming in it’s not going to have been done particularly well, not for lack of trying but for just lack of assistance.

Then I asked the question: Suppose you found out from her previous school that Maria did well academically last year. Would your expectations be different for her academic success? To my surprise, some teachers interpreted that Maria was doing well the previous year, but now suddenly she was on food stamps and not doing well. I did not intend for teachers to interpret the scenario in this manner, nor was it written that way; however, there was an assumption that since she did well last year, then the single parent status and food stamps were new developments. For example Kayla said, “I would do what I can if she needs more help or if she is having trouble

concentrating because of lack of food. I would make sure that I would still hold them high.” Shelly said it was more important to look at students’ abilities more than their SES status when determining expectations for that student. She said,

I would hope that my expectations would be the same regardless of the SES. We are all human. . . . We all have a right to an education. Some kids need to work harder because they lack the intellectual abilities. You need to look at abilities. Are the basic needs being met? Look at the girl, does she have dirty clothes? Is she getting adequate food? I work as a team with the family.

### **Opinions From Previous Teachers**

I asked the question: Do you collaborate with students’ former teachers about their ability? Some teachers needed me to ask the question more directly: “Before the school year starts, do you ask the previous teachers about your students to form your expectations?” The majority of teachers said that they waited until after the school year started so they could form their own opinions before they talked to the previous teachers. For example, Nancy said, “In general I avoid asking the teachers from last year about the students.”

A few teachers said that after they formed their own opinions and expectations about their students, they might talk to former teachers, only if they need advice on strategies that worked best with that individual student.

Rachel said, "Not until I have had them for a couple of weeks. I like to kind of get them in and see what they can do and if there is some real concerns about what is going on and then we go and talk." Nancy gave me an example of a time that she went to one of her student's former teacher after working with the student for awhile:

I had a student who was not turning in homework and I was not getting the straight story about it and, you know, and I asked the teacher, you know, did you have problems with this last year, and she said, yes, I did, and she said, talk to Mom and Mom will really get on her about it.

One teacher was aware of problems the previous teachers had with the whole grade level of students before she met them this year. This may have influenced her expectations. Linda told me that she heard about her current first grade students from the kindergarten teachers last year. She said, "In first grade we have the group that we heard about last year, you know, the one that will go through and will be challenging for every grade, and it is very tough."

I also asked Shelly, the preschool teacher, if she talked to her students' following year teachers to give them an idea of where her current expectations were for her students. She said, "I try to give next year's teacher as much information as I can. I try to tell teachers everything I know about where the child is exactly at."

According to the teachers I interviewed, it appears that it is not common for teacher expectations to be influenced by their students' former teachers. Teachers may go to former teachers after they have developed their own expectations about students to seek advice on specific students. There are some exceptions, such as Shelly's willingness to inform her students' next year teachers about them and Linda's example of a group of kids that had made enough of an impression of a previous year's teacher's experience with those students.

In conclusion, I have identified six factors that influence teacher expectations; of these, some come from the individual teacher's childhood background and experiences. The family, community, and cultural experiences teachers had as young learners can also influence their current beliefs. I discovered that in some cases in which the individual teacher's demographics were much different than the demographics of their current students, there was a cultural disconnect, which lowered teacher expectations. I also discovered that teacher's self-efficacy and school culture can influence teacher expectations.

The next chapter reports the quantitative and qualitative data in regards to formal programs and policies the OKB district utilized to influence teacher expectations. The data reveal teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the following five formal policies and programs: teacher

evaluations, performance-based pay, a uniform curriculum, book studies, and professional learning communities.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS: PART 2—FORMAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS AIMED AT INCREASING TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

You have to set high goals. Your expectations have to be there.  
—Linda

Teacher expectations are influenced by various factors outside of the classroom. Individual teacher's cultural, community, family, and childhood experiences have shaped and influenced teachers' values and beliefs; thus has influenced teacher expectations of their current students. The previous chapter revealed various factors that influenced the teachers I interviewed. This chapter examines teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of formal policies and programs utilized by educational leaders with the intention to influence, rather increase, teacher expectations. The third series of questions I asked each teacher in my three-part interviewing series was aimed at addressing the second research question: *What are teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of formal policies and programs that are aimed at increasing teacher expectations? More specifically, do teachers feel that top-down formal policies, such as teacher evaluations, uniform curriculum, and performance-based pay are effective, or do teachers believe that bottom up policies such as book studies and professional learning communities make more of an impact on increasing their expectations of their students?*

The teachers I interviewed were asked to read scenarios that depicted fictitious teachers who had participated in various formal policies and programs resulting in a positive change, or an increase in the teacher's expectations. Teachers were asked to rate each scenario on a scale of one to five on how realistic they felt the scenarios to be. Then I proceeded to ask questions about each scenario to solicit teachers' own experiences with each formal policy and program. Part 1 of chapter 5 is a short section that reports the quantitative data I collected about the scenarios. Part 2 reports on the qualitative data I collected in regards to the formal policies and programs aimed at increasing teacher expectations. Part 2 is written in a thematic format.

### **Quantitative Data**

Teachers read five different scenarios, each about a fictitious teacher responding to five different policies and programs aimed at increasing teacher expectations. The scenarios were written as though the teachers had increased their expectations due to the formal policy and program. I asked each teacher to rate how realistic they perceived the scenarios to be, using a Lickert scale in which five is "most likely" and one is "least likely" to be realistic. Figure 16 displays the average score of all participants for each policy or program.

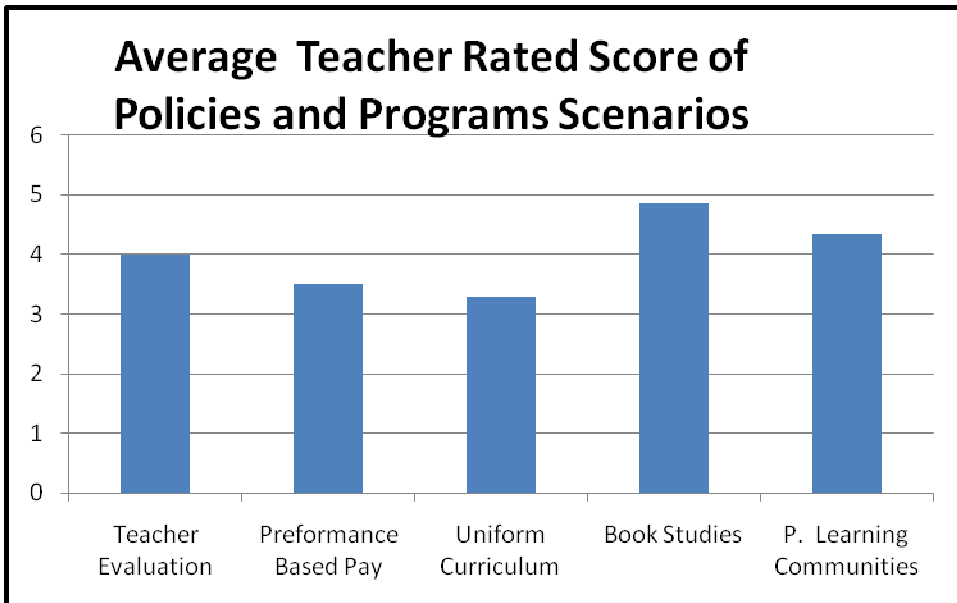


Figure 16. Average teacher rated score of policies and programs

### Data Trends

There are some quantitative trends I noticed when looking solely at the number each teacher assigned for each formal policy. Table 2 shows how each teacher rated each scenario. As stated in my methods section, School A is a non-Title 1 school with primarily White students, and “School B” is a Title 1 school with primarily Hispanic students. Book studies is the only program that has consistently high scores from every teacher. All teachers assigned book studies either a four or a five making it the highest averaging policy. All teachers at School B viewed teacher evaluations as being very influential as to their expectations. On the contrary, four out of five teachers from School A scored teacher evaluations a two or a three because many teachers at School B felt that their administrator did not utilize the teacher evaluation effectively. Although most teachers said negative things about performance-



based pay, they still scored it high. I elaborate on those comments in the qualitative section about performance-based pay below. Holly, Maggie, and Kerri rated all programs highly. It is possible they were seeking approval from me by wanting to give me the “right” answer. All teachers at School B ranked professional learning communities highly with consistent fives, while the scores on professional learning communities were inconsistent from school B. All School A teachers ranked uniform curriculum low, yet most School B teachers valued it highly.

Table 2: Lickert Scale Survey Questions Related to Research Question 2

Teacher Name	School	Teacher Evaluation	Performance-Based Pay	Uniform Curriculum	Book Studies	Professional Learning Communities
Nancy	A	2	4	1	5	2
Shelly	A	3	1	2	5	3
Kayla	A	3	4	3	4	5
Elizabeth	A	4	2	4	4	4
Rachel	A	3	4.5	3	4.5	4.5
Holly	B	5	4	5	4	5
Cecelia	B	5	5	3	4	5
Linda	B	5	1.5	3	5	5
Maggie	B	5	5	4	5	5
Kerri	B	5	4	5	4	5

### **Qualitative Data About Each Policy**

The quantitative data reported above gives a narrow perspective of how teachers perceive each formal policy and program's effectiveness in increasing expectations. The discussions about each scenario and the responses as to why each teacher scored each scenario they way did provided a deeper insight to the effectiveness of each policy and program. This section reports the qualitative data I collected about teachers' perspectives of the effectiveness of various formal policies and programs aimed at increasing teacher expectations.

#### **Teacher Evaluations**

The teachers I interviewed read a scenario that described the teacher evaluation tool used successfully to increase teacher expectations. The scenario can be found in the interview questions that are located in Appendix A. Overall, the teachers rated the teacher evaluation scenario as being highly likely to be realistic in increasing teacher expectations. All teachers at School B felt that it was realistic for teacher evaluations to increase teacher expectations and rated the scenario as a five. For example, Linda, a teacher from School B, responded to the question, "How would you rate the scenario about teacher evaluations?" as follows:

I think it's realistic. I think five. I mean if you are being evaluated and you were told that this was your area of needs improvement, that

would be what you probably focus on because you wouldn't want to be in that needs improvement again.

Maggie, from School B, stated that there has been a big change in her school's level of expectations for students and that the teacher evaluation was instrumental in that change:

I think it [teacher evaluations] is definitely because I can tell you, well speaking for myself—all of us—I think we have all had to change the past couple of years, big time. I didn't do data boards before. I did group in reading ability group in reading. I never ability grouped in math. You know, I, of course, individually helped students, and I've changed with the technology we have, with the way I'm dispensing the information, you know, so, yeah.

A couple of teachers at School B stated that the teacher evaluation has increased their level of questioning, which would result in an increase in higher expectations. Holly noted that teacher evaluations increased her level of questioning, "I know we are supposed to differentiate and ask questions based on Bloom's and do the higher level thinking questions. So, yeah, I do think it would be identified." She was referring to high teacher expectations being identified in the teacher evaluation.

Linda admitted that the observation portion of the teacher evaluation system influences her level of questioning. She said, "I know there is a level of concern when you're getting observed that, you know. Am I using higher

level questioning? Am I—is my lesson plans complete in all areas?” The teacher evaluation caused Linda to think about increasing her level of questioning techniques in her lesson plans.

Cecelia mentioned that the teacher evaluation system could be effective in increasing teacher expectations if administrators utilized it similar to the way a teacher utilizes pre- and post-tests:

Some principals will put forth more effort to stating ahead of time what they are looking for. So there are no surprises to the teachers and they will let them know immediately the type of programs they are working on for their CIT or school goal. Now, if this is a new teacher and she has only taught one or two years and this has not been imparted to her, I, I find it rather unfair.

She went further on to say that the teacher evaluation system could be used as a punitive tool that is sometimes used to strike teachers instead of encouraging teachers to raise their expectations. Cecelia felt that when the evaluation tool is utilized this way it is not effective in increasing teacher expectations. She said,

Just lack of communication. Now the same thing can happen with a teacher that has been teaching for ten years and the principal wants them to change but does not tell them that, but instead scores them low. Without the principal having a talk ahead of time, these are the things I want you to start doing and these are the things I’m going to

look at. . . Now, for the next year they work on this one thing they took a ding for. Year two, they are taking two more dings. Well, you never told me. Year three, ok, you improved on those two. Here is another two dings. You know it's always like a double whammy, and they're not given a lot of support and guidance.

Cecelia continued to talk about how the use of the evaluation tool in her experience had once been effective in a positive way; however, she felt it had recently changed in a negative way. It is sometimes used as discipline instead of a way to empower teachers:

The principals who use to raise you up and praise you are not here. The principals who wanted to work with you and "I want to help you with another mentor teacher and set you up with these teachers' success," that doesn't happen. It immediately turns towards, "and what are you going to do about this next year?" And, "I can't believe that you have been teaching for two years and didn't even know about this or even learn about it in your university." It's always a little with a lecture instead of a help.

Cecelia continued to say that since teachers are embarrassed to talk about their evaluations, it is not a factor that influences teacher expectations:

Most people will not talk about their evaluations with other teachers so therefore it won't be an influence because a lot of teachers are very embarrassed. It's very private; they will not tell you. And they aren't

about to open up on that at all. If they do tell their closest friend, it stops right there.

If teachers were more apt to talk about their evaluations and share their areas of improvement needs, then they could reach out to other teachers and collaborate ways to improve, but because they are embarrassed, they lose that opportunity for growth.

Many teachers stated that it depends how the principal utilizes the teacher evaluation system, and I gathered that teachers perceived that the principal at School A did not use the teacher evaluation system to increase teacher expectations. The teachers at School A rated teacher evaluations as a factor that influenced teacher expectations inconsistently. Most teachers at School A felt that the evaluation has potential to increase teacher expectations; however, they reported that they felt it was not being used effectively at their school. For example Elizabeth stated:

I hate to say this, but sometimes I think it is just easier for principals to just say “everything’s ok” . . . Then nothing ever changes in the classroom. And so I do think that we need to be more open about the things that are going on. And I mean, teachers are here because they want to help kids and they want kids to learn but we all can use some constructive criticism or some change or, um. So I do think depending on how it’s presented to the teacher it would present a positive

change. If there is an area of need and a teacher was given strategies to use to help increase that and then it should actually did increase. Elizabeth's colleague Shelly had a similar response. Shelly explained her feeling that the teacher evaluation was not effectively being utilized at her school:

Personally, the teacher evaluation system, I don't value. It is a hoop we jump through. My principal doesn't know special education or early childhood. When she evaluates me I always get "Yeah, I don't know if I should say this. What is another way that is not so crass? Um, anyways . . . I believe that I can poop on the carpet during my lesson and my principal would say, "Yeah! You are doing a great job." I have always felt that way. . . . I know I'm doing a competent job, but I don't see this as a successful system.

Many teachers did not see a connection between the teacher evaluation system and their own expectations. Some teachers felt that there was a difference between teaching and student achievement. When I asked Kerri if she thought the teacher evaluation influenced her expectations she responded, "No, the way they evaluate me, they are evaluating me, not the students. I still expect the same high achievements from my students." Many teachers felt that the teacher evaluation system changed their instruction and methods of teaching but did not view this as increasing or changing their expectations. For example, Nancy stated, "No, I think it changes our

perception of what we need to do in our classroom or make it look like we are doing. But I don't think it changes our expectations of student achievement." The further discussion about teacher evaluations with Nancy revealed the low expectations she has for some of her students. She believed that no matter how well she teaches; there will always be students who are going to fail:

I think that it influences teaching instruction, methods, and things like that. I don't think it really does effect the expectations of student achievement though. I think that for most teachers their teaching is their teaching and student achievement is student achievement. They're almost unrelated things, and I think academically we know that they are related, but you know, it's like, ok, I'm going to teach it this way and those of you who are going to do great are going to do great and those of you who are not going to do a good job are still not going to do such a good job. I think there is kind of just almost fatalist idea, and I can get up here and teach the best anybody's going to be taught and those two kids are still going to get F's.

Some teachers who initially believed there was not a connection between teaching instruction and teacher expectations changed their beliefs towards the end of our discussion on teacher evaluations after they had time to reflect on this concept. I did notice one teacher start to realize that a



change in instructional practices raised their expectations. Linda's reflected thought process can be captured with the following quote:

I don't think that they affect my, my expectation for student achievement. I think they affect how I teach. How what I do and I need to be thinking more about meeting all of those things—which in the end is going to make me teach them better, which is going to help them be more successful.

Many teachers stated that teacher evaluations influence themselves differently than they influence other teachers. First, I asked the direct question: Do you feel the teacher evaluation system in your district changes your expectations about student achievement? Then I proceeded to ask the indirect question: How do you think it influences other teachers' expectations? I asked both questions to counteract the possibility that the teachers most willing to meet with me may have higher expectations than those not willing to participate. I wanted to get a feeling of most teachers' perceptions. These two questions gave me contrasting answers. Many teachers stated that the teacher evaluation system influenced their own expectations because they constantly wanted to improve, grow, and viewed the teacher evaluation as an avenue to improve. Kayla said, "It helps you know what you need to work on." Those same teachers stated that teacher evaluations do not influence other teachers because some teachers do not want to change. Shelly said, "The reason is that there are teachers who think

they know it all. They will not change.” Rachel also felt that the teacher evaluation system influenced her expectations differently than some other teachers. She said, “I think that good teachers teach regardless of what the tool is that’s laid out there, and you know, the teachers that are going to be out the door at 3:30 are going to be out the door regardless.”

Many teachers who have high self-efficacy stated that the teacher evaluation system did not influence their expectations as much as it influenced some other teachers because they believed that teachers with high expectations would always have high expectations, and teachers with low expectations would always have low expectations. Holly said, “If no one came into my room, I would still expect the same from my students, regardless of if someone was observing me or evaluating me. It wouldn’t make a difference. I would have the same expectations.” When I asked Holly if the teacher evaluation system would influence other teachers she said, “I think it could. I think it would depend.”

Some teachers felt that the teachers who have low expectations were not influenced by the teacher evaluation system because they did not see the tool as a threat to their job nor did they feel there would be any consequences for not increasing expectations. Rachel shared, “No one really feels that the evaluation tool is going to make them leave. We, we’ve all watched teachers who, you know, are not doing a really good job and they are here year after year after year.” Shelly’s response was similar as she said,

“It takes an act of God to get a teacher fired. So the evaluation system doesn’t change for those teachers who do not want to change.”

The teacher evaluation system is a top-down approach that has mixed reviews of effectiveness. It appears that there are some teachers who believe that the teacher evaluation system increases their expectations while other teachers do not feel that way. I gathered from the data that it depends on how administration utilizes the tool. More discussion on this is found in Chapter 6.

### **Performance-Based Pay**

Most teachers are unhappy with performance-based pay and mentioned many negative aspects of the system. Yet some rated the performance-based pay scenario higher than I would have expected based on their conversations with me. Teachers felt that performance-based pay impacts teachers. Nancy said, “I know that for a lot of teachers that I have talked to that performance pay is huge.” Rachel also said, “I think that the performance pay really impacts teachers, especially in this economy.”

Despite the impact that performance-based pay has on teachers, most teachers I interviewed felt that performance-based pay did not influence teacher expectations. Elizabeth felt performance-based pay did not influence her expectations because she already has high expectations regardless of the bonus money:

I'm not sure it changes my beliefs about students' ability. I mean, I think that my goal is to get them where they need to be no matter what, not because I'm getting paid to do it—although that's a bonus. So I don't think that would change my beliefs about students' ability.

Most teachers from School B admitted that not only did performance-based pay not influence their expectations, but it also made them angry.

Linda said, "I think at my school it really frustrates us, quite honestly." I asked Holly whether a teacher who did not earn her bonus one year because of low student achievement would be motivated to increase her expectations of students to earn the money the following year. She concluded:

No, it just makes them mad; it makes them angry that they need to jump through hoops, jump through hoops, and I've heard that from many teachers: "jump through hoops" to earn the amount of money that the voters already voted for them to get. So, I mean, I think, yeah, we have to have certain . . . things that show that we do our job, but I don't think the pay should be based on that.

Kerri voiced a similar anger about performance-based pay when she said,

Yeah, it's realistic, and, sure, I want the money, too, but I get angry when they dangle a carrot in front of us thinking that we're doing a poor job because—because we don't make enough money. So, here, give us some extra and that will boost us. That makes me angry. For

some, that's what it would take, and that's fine for them. We are all doing our jobs.

One teacher from School A mentioned that some teachers at her school were not influenced to increase expectations even if they did not earn their performance-based pay one year. The scenario was written to demonstrate the philosophy behind performance-based pay. If a teacher with low expectations does not earn money one year due to poor student achievement, then his or her expectations would increase in an effort to earn the money the following year. Nancy said this is not a realistic outcome and instead performance-based pay makes teachers angry:

They [teachers] get really upset when they don't get it. I don't see though, and it could just be in how it is administered that holding that carrot in front of them changes anything. I don't see the teachers are so upset that they didn't get it last year that they make drastic changes. "Well, I'm going to be so much better this year because it is." No matter how good I teach, those five kids are going to fail. So I know that they like it and I know they are happy to get it, but I don't think that it changes that much for them.

One teacher revealed her varying levels of expectations when she said, "I don't think it really changes my beliefs because I think the kids are going to be able to do it or they are not. Some of them don't want to do it or they are lazy about it."

Teachers mentioned negative effects performance-based pay has on teachers and students. The first negative effect is the frustration that performance-based pay causes. Shelly said, "It adds frustration to teachers. In today's economy teachers, they want the extra money. They take out the frustration on the kids." I asked her how teachers take out their frustrations on the kids, and she said, "It is not intentional, but they are more negative. They may yell, "Come on, try harder."

Another negative side effect of performance-based pay is that it appears to encourage teachers to manipulate the system to earn money without raising their expectations of students. Shelly said, "It is not changing the expectations but the appearance that we are raising expectations." One form of manipulation is that teachers tend to write goals that are easily attainable and lack rigor to ensure that they earn their money. That is why Rachel said, "I think it would be better if we weren't setting our own goals (pause) that you know you can make." In addition Linda said,

That's because you really want to make that goal, but you also when you are making this goal for your 301, for your money, you don't make it the top-of-the-line goal because you try to make the money, so you make just what you think everyone can do, high goal, but nothing like, you know what I mean. I'm setting it lower than I would.

Elizabeth also mentioned that teachers write low goals when she said,

I think sometimes we just write goals that we know we can reach because so much is placed on us, so I'm not sure. And I know that our goals are rigorous but I think that—sometimes I just think that it's not the—it's not the best way to motivate teachers. . . . We are all here for kids. We all want what's best, but when it's tied to money, we are going to do what we know we can achieve the easiest way we can get there because there is just so much pressure put on us. . . . I'm not sure it's the best way to increase student achievement or expectations of teachers or students.

Maggie told me about her performance-based pay goal when she said, "Our goal is to get 80% of our students must score 80% or higher on a multiplication quiz." She paused a moment, then said, "This is lame to me." I then asked her how she came up with that goal and her response was:

We came up with this goal because the fifth grade teachers complained that the fourth graders don't know their multiplication. Well, certainly we go over it and over it, and it's essential to division, right. They can't divide if they can't multiply. It's good, but my thought with this is, you're going to teach this hard anyway, you know learn your multiplication, and I—I think maybe could have had a different goal, but I think part of it was this was easily measured, and that's part of it, too.

Cecelia is a teacher union representative and she talked about performance-based pay through the perspective that every teacher is entitled to the money and should not have to earn it through achieving goals. She said,

This is just one of the steps we have to go through to get the legislative money to show that we have done something for it. Teachers can choose a hard goal or choose a medium goal and administrators can “yea” or “nay” that goal and choose one for them. That’s a little bit harder. All goals are attainable. If a teacher or a grade level has chosen a goal that is not attainable, they better be calling their [teacher union] rep because all goals can be attainable, but if an administrator makes you write one that’s not, you can grieve that. They have to be able to get this money somehow.

Shelly mentioned an extreme example of a teacher misrepresenting the student data. “A teacher at our school got caught cheating on a standardized test so she can meet her goals to earn the extra pay.”

Another disturbing side effect of performance-based pay was the way the system is set up. The system in the OKB district encourages teachers to increase their class average to earn the money which causes them to focus more on students who are close to making the benchmark while ignoring the students that scored at the very bottom. Here is Nancy’s explanation of this occurrence:



If you have a student that is right on the cusp—let's say that they need a 70 and they are at a 68—that student gets a lot of help to get just bumped up to 70. If you have a student that is at a 38, and they are not going to make a 70, then that student just kind of gets written off as a loss. And we have often said for a school performance goal that you know when we are doing AIMS, it is those kids that are up at the top of *approaches* and we need to get them up to *meets* and I'm like, "What about these kids that are at *falls far below*? What do we do for them?" And they kind of get left behind. And what really makes me sad in that is that you have that kid that goes up from 68 to 70 and that is a 2% improvement, but because they made it to 70, we are excited, but we have this kid who is down here at 38 and they make it up to 60. They made this amazing jump that that student made that is huge but because it is only a 60, we don't care about that jump. We just care about that final number, and so, you know, looking at one individual student at a time, um, I think that it is great, and I think that for me it really motivates me, and it motivates the students to see their own growth. . . . You know, for me I don't want to look at it as a percentage of kids, you know, I want to look at, you know, which students didn't make it and where are they. Did they improve by this giant leap? Well, then, look at them. It should still be a thing. It is still important. I think that it influences teacher expectations because they can look at the

kids that are already passing at the beginning of the year, and they are, like, "I'm going to ignore you guys." They expect that they can just leave those kids alone and they will sail through the year. You know the kids at the bottom, you know, they are a lost cause, and they really focus on those kids that are just right there in the middle. And you know that's not fair to anybody.

The teachers at School B felt it was unfair for teachers to be expected to hold the same level of expectations as teachers in non-Title I schools. Holly felt that students at her school should be held to a lower standard because many of her students are learning English as a second language:

I have heard different things from teachers, but overall, it's not good because also they are comparing in this district. They are comparing schools, and not all schools are the same. I mean you can't compare things that are not the same. There are so many differences to look at and so many things to take into consideration, you know. Students aren't speaking English (laughs). They are not going to be reading or writing English, but you expect them to take these tests and exceed and be at grade level. Well, maybe in their own language they are, but they are not when it comes to as far as English. And we see that a lot at my school. . . . You know, they have different experiences.

Another teacher from School B felt it was unfair for teachers at a Title I school to be held to the same standards as teachers at non-Title I schools when it came to performance-based pay. Linda said,

I don't really believe in having to attach money to your performance just because I'm at [School B] and we have so many things against us and you know you can have some kids there that have so many things against them and you, you have to have expectations for them as well. But when it's attached to money, it's kind of, like there's been a couple years where we didn't meet our goal for our school. Well, then all these other teachers are—we're working our tails off just like you guys are and we're not getting it so I kind of have a problem with that.

Only two teachers, who both work at School A, mentioned the positive effects that performance-based pay had on them. Rachel said, "I mean everybody works. You know, it's—it's the kids they work for. Give them a reason, an incentive, and they are going to work harder for you. It's just a good job." Kayla also had a positive comment about performance-based pay when she said "It's an encourager; that's for sure."

The OKB district organized their performance-based pay by having teachers choose a goal, administer a pretest, mid-test, and a post-test. All teachers found that this aspect of performance-based pay increased teacher expectations and all had positive comments about the process. It was not really the money that raised teacher expectations, but instead, teachers felt

focusing on short-term benchmarks and progress monitoring each student was what increased teacher expectations. Shelly said, "This is from basic training in special education. This determines what the child needs to develop skills." Nancy added, "I find that on an individual basis for a specific student that can work very well." Elizabeth found that having student goals was important. She said, "I do think that's important for us to have goals and short term so that we can work toward that and have successes and then move on to the next goal." Kayla found that monitoring short-term benchmark skills is essential to guiding students to meet the goals that the teachers with high teacher expectations would hold for their students:

Yes, you have to monitor. Otherwise, you get to the end of the year, and you know the students have been working hard, but the student doesn't make the goal, and he could plummet. So it's a good way of keeping tabs. You have to keep tabs on them.

Cecelia also felt that goal setting and monitoring short term benchmarks were a useful tool:

It's just another tool to monitor students. It does help you to see right away the few remaining ones that need extra support because once the students have that goal, then, yes keep them exceeding and achieving. Then do come and it does show that the ones that need more support and they should be going to the reading specialist to get additional support.

Holly talked about the importance of including the student in on their goals and their progress towards their goals as a way to guide students to high academic standards:

At least during the pre-, the mid- and the post-, you know, I think it does help, and I use data boards so the kids actually see their growth and see their progress, and they do get excited about it. They want to know. You know, a lot of times they take these tests and they don't know their scores, you know. And this kind of shows them what their scores are. The communication is there, and I think some kids need that. Some people forget they want to be included as well.

When I asked Linda how she felt about having a goal for student achievement and monitoring short-term benchmarks, she said,

Super important, if you do not have that information along the way, then you are not going to know which learning step for each kid is coming next. You not going to be able to identify the kids that can't get past that point and you got to go back; otherwise, yeah it's really important.

Kayla felt that sometimes over-testing takes away from teaching:

There's so much testing. I do see all these little tests becoming very overwhelming on teachers, and they feel like they take away from their actual teaching. Um, it's such a toss-up because it just depends on, you know, the tests need to be, um—what's the word I'm looking

for? not quite heartfelt, but, you know, I mean you have to, um—  
Meaningful tests, they have to be meaningful tests and not just  
because someone over in a department at district wants to check on  
how someone is doing.

In conclusion, performance-based pay is a top-down approach that  
has many negative side effects. The teachers I interviewed felt that it was not  
the most effective way to increase teacher expectations. Holly summarized it  
best when she said,

Well, I guess we all want the extra money, but it can't be the only  
thing. It has to be you are there for the kids. I mean they are going to  
dangle that dollar sign over our heads. That's just—I don't know. I  
don't think that's right. You have to do what is right for the kids.

### **Uniform Curriculum**

The OKB district has adopted a reading and math curriculum. The  
rationale behind requiring teachers following these two research-based  
curriculum guides is to ensure that all students are receiving the same high  
level of instruction leading to the same high level of teacher expectations  
causing high student achievement. The intention is that the curriculum  
would provide consistently high standards, therefore, raising teacher  
expectations. The programs are scripted; however, teachers have the  
flexibility to use the curriculum that best meets the needs of their students. I  
asked each teacher I interviewed to read a scenario that depicted the correct

use and desired outcome a uniform curriculum would provide. The scenario stated that the teacher felt her high expectations were caused by using the uniform curriculum. I asked each teacher to rate how realistic they believed this scenario was on a scale of one to five. Out of all policies and programs I asked about, a uniform curriculum was scored the lowest even though a majority of the teachers I interviewed liked using a uniform curriculum. There were various reasons for these low scores that I discuss in this section. The three main reasons were the following: a uniform curriculum increases expectations, however, not every teacher utilized it correctly, a uniform curriculum lowered expectations, and some teachers did not believe that every child should be held to the same standards.

A majority of the teachers I interviewed liked the uniform curriculum and felt it increased their expectations. Holly stated she used the uniform curriculum because “it lets you know what is expected for the students to know at that grade level.” Maggie also had a similar opinion as she said, “Harcourt increases my expectations in that I expect the kids to know the skills that are presented in Harcourt, you know, main idea, detail, and sequence and all that new vocabulary.” Harcourt is the OKB district adopted uniform curriculum used for teaching reading. Linda also felt that a uniform curriculum influenced her expectations when she said, “I would say that it [uniform curriculum] would be more consistent and I would raise my expectations for students.” She continued to say that a uniform curriculum

raised expectations by creating consistency and promotes collaboration among teachers:

It also helps when you are all doing the same thing because it's easy to share. . . . Oh yeah, we are on the *I Am Butterfly* story, um—I found this really neat thing on the web and it's easier to add to it when you're all together.

Cecelia also mentioned that a uniform curriculum encouraged collaboration, “Well it makes it very easy per grade level and for team planning and it also makes it very clear for the teachers and the parents.” Elizabeth talked about the value of consistency that a uniform curriculum creates when she said,

I think across the board then it makes it easier to transfer in and out of schools, we are all teaching the same skills; and if the district thinks it's good enough to adopt, then we should be following it. I don't think that necessarily everybody has to be on the same page on the same day on the same time, but I do think that having a district wide curriculum adoption or a map of curriculum, a map of what is expected at this time of the year is good. I wish we could have that across the board nationally too and then it's up to teachers to meet the needs because there is varied needs in the classroom so they would definitely have to differentiate within the curriculum, but I do think that everyone can benefit from the core curriculum in math and in reading.



Rachel said that a uniform curriculum increased expectations, “I think it would increase expectations, and I think it would increase student achievement.” She mentioned that she is frustrated that teachers at her school do not use the district-adopted curriculum because the result of not using the curriculum for students who lack foundational skills. She said,

So we’ve got four teachers in first grade and all four teachers are doing phonics in a different way. We’ve got kindergarten teachers who are doing phonics in a different way than the first grade teachers are doing it. By the time they get to second grade they are totally confused and when we ask them what a vowel or a constant is they look at us like it’s a foreign language. So the vocabulary and the content, if we were doing, laying the building blocks every year, when they got to us, we wouldn’t have to go, “Oh, wow, we gotta make up two years and this year all in one year.”

Despite the fact that most teachers I interviewed felt a uniform curriculum increased expectations, many teachers rated the uniform curriculum scenario low because they felt that the curriculum was not being used by all teachers. When I asked Cecelia how realistic this scenario was, she said,

In a perfect world, but we don’t have that perfect world. We only have several schools that are doing this, all right, the other schools are using different types of programs, different types of supplemental.

It appears that lack of consistency has led to varying levels of instruction students are receiving, which has led to varying levels of teacher expectations.

Many teachers felt a uniform curriculum was a useful tool; however, some teachers felt that the district-adopted curriculum needed to be supplemented with other materials to reach the needs of all students. When Kayla was asked to rate how realistic she felt the uniform curriculum scenario was, she said,

I want to say a 3 because with my background not everyone learns the same way. By using anything uniform, no matter what, you are going to have to do something different to supplemental for some students.

Not everybody is going to know the same thing.

Maggie liked using a the district adopted curriculum, and felt it raised her expectations; however, she did mention, "It's kind of weak in the informational text which is always where we are low, so that's where we have to supplement."

Three out of the ten teachers I interviewed felt that a uniform curriculum lowered teacher expectations if the curriculum was followed without supplementary activities. For example, Kerri said,

I don't know if it changes my expectations, I think that in some cases, it limits my expectations of student achievement. I like to put more, extra. I guess you call them supplements. I call them fun things, more

true-to-life activities than strictly the scripted reading stories in the basal that some of them are just not very exciting. Actually, I think math, scripted math lessons, are more realistic than scripted reading lessons.

Nancy felt that a uniform curriculum caused students to fail because she believed it limited how she could teach:

I do not know any good teachers who like scripted curriculum. Most of us hate it—absolutely hate it. It is putting us in a box. It's putting our students in a box. I don't know any student who likes it because their teachers sound like robots.

Shelly believed that a uniform curriculum lowered her expectations because she did not like the program. She said, "Personally I have an attention span of a gnat. After awhile with using a scripted curriculum, I get bored and lose my enthusiasm. My expectations get down, I get lazy. I like to be creative."

Some teachers have different levels of expectations for different students. These teachers had a hard time with a uniform curriculum because it did not allow them to have various levels of expectations for students. The uniform curriculum expects all students to master the same set of skills.

Kayla, a special education teacher at School A, said she disagreed with the teachers who believed that every student at each grade level should be expected to meet the same skills:

Not everybody is going to know the same thing. . . . Well, they [other teachers] might think exactly the opposite of me. Some may think, no, everyone needs to be doing this, and they are in third grade and they should be taught this way. This is a third grade student and they better give me this answer. They may disagree with me.

Cecelia at School B had a similar feeling as Kayla and felt that not all

programs fit all schools because the demographics are different. She said,

This uniform program that they developed doesn't fit for all schools and I will tell you why. Because of the socio-economic backgrounds and the demographics that are so different and the different components this might work good for three northwest schools, but then as you start moving east of the freeway, this isn't always going to be what works for Johnny and Maribel. That there has to be some allowances for individualism and diversification so it—it, um, is what I call in an ideal world. Now, you have to understand that we have different students in the classroom as well. We have special needs kids; we have all types of students now that are the old fashioned term, *mainstreamed back in*. . . . But we are not all the same alike, perfectly matched to everybody else. So we do need different types of programs.

Teachers with high self-efficacy such as Holly did not believe that the uniform curriculum increased her expectations because she felt she already

had high expectations, yet she still viewed the uniform curriculum provided by her district as a valuable tool. Holly said, “I don’t think it changes my expectations. It just reinforces my expectations.”

A district-mandated uniform curriculum is a top-down approach to increasing teacher expectations. Despite the low rating teachers gave about the uniform curriculum scenario, I feel confident in concluding that the majority of teachers I interviewed perceived uniform curriculum as successful in increasing teacher expectations. Maggie felt that it was important that the adopted curriculum is research-based. She asked, “But it is research based? The programs are research-based right? [I said yes.] So it must. It’s good to know that everyone is using the same curriculum.” It appeared that teachers perceived they needed flexibility in supplementing the program to fit the needs of their students. It also appeared that many teachers wanted school and district leaders to push teachers who were not using the curriculum harder to ensure everyone was using the adopted curriculums with fidelity.

### **Book Studies**

The teachers I interviewed rated book studies as the highest formal program or policy that influenced their expectations. Every teacher rated book studies as either a four or a five. The majority of the teachers reported that they had participated in a book study. In fact, Linda said, “I’m actually in a book study right now,” and Kerri said, “We are doing a book study now.

Actually I'm leading it—*The Daily Five* [Boushey & Moser, 2000]. When the teachers heard me talking about it this year they wanted to get in on it." Both Linda and Kerri teach at School B.

Most teachers said they had increased their teacher expectations after participating in a book study. For example, Linda said,

I think that whenever you can do a book study and you're learning something new and you can take it back to your class, you're definitely going to raise your expectations of what your kids can do because you're adding something new.

The OKB district in conjunction with a state-mandated initiative has a new teacher rubric which requires teachers to complete a certain number of professional development hours each year. One option for teachers to earn these hours is to participate in book studies. There were many teachers I interviewed who said that their motivation for participating in a book study was solely to fulfill those hours; however, many teachers were surprised at how much they really grew from the experience. Nancy energetically spoke about how the experience she had with a book study and how the book study influenced her expectations:

Ok, until last month I would have probably have given this a 1. I'm currently doing a book study with another fifth grade teacher who is out on maternity leave. And to be honest, we started doing the book study because, you know, we need our professional development

hours to get our money. She's been out and so there's not much that she's been able to do, and so trying to think, you know, what is something we can do together while she is still at home taking care of the baby. So I said, "Hey, let's do a book study. Let's read the book and get together on a Saturday and gab together and see how easy is this." It was kind of this idea that we could do to sort of blow off real work and we started reading *Positive Classroom Discipline* by Fredrick Jones [2000], and we're eating it up. We are absolutely love it, and it was a random book. I just went into our professional library, and I said here there are two copies of this; you take one and I will take one. We are just absolutely eating it up.

I asked Nancy if the book study changed her expectations of students and her reply was:

Oh, definitely, definitely, and I love trying the things that it said and seeing it work and—oh my gosh—that's real. And until I did it myself, I would have said "no," that book studies are silly and nobody really does anything with them. And, you know, if it was a different book it might have been different.

Nancy continued to tell me about how excited she was implementing strategies learned from the book and sharing that success with her colleague who participated in the book study with her:

I didn't expect to get anything out of this book and, you know, like I said it depends on the book, but it's—it's speaking to me, and I love that she's so excited to come back, and I call her every day, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, remember that strategy that it said"—and I tried it today, and it worked, and it was like magic, and so I would say that this is, um, this is a five.

On the other hand, there are teachers who are required to attend book studies. Their experiences did not influence their expectations because they did not like being forced into them. Elizabeth said,

I mean I know it has to be done, but we are forced to do it so we're not going to enjoy it. . . . I mean it's not that bad but it just seems like we need the morale to be boosted a little bit. I'm not sure how that's going to happen in the near future, but we're all feeling like aaauugh. And so our—and it could be we could be doing a great book study, but because the way we had to go about it we're just not. It's just not beneficial because we're all moaning and groaning and complaining about it because we have to do it. So I don't know how you fix it, but, um, hopefully someone will. . . . I think we are motivated more because we have to have the hours. I just think, um, we have to change our attitudes too.



Cecelia also said that book studies did not influence teacher expectations if the only motive for teachers was to fulfill their professional obligation. She said,

It depends on who the leader is and what they are trying to achieve or is it just quickly to get six to fifteen hours quickly scored off on the 301 t-eval [teacher evaluation system] personal component. If it's just to talk about the book, if there's no practical application, no hands-on, you know, someone is just putting in their time or someone's just putting it to use.

I wanted to see if teachers felt there was a difference in the influence a book study had on teacher expectation when the teacher chose to read the book. I asked teachers the question: Does it make a difference if you choose the book yourself instead of being told what book to read? The majority of the teachers stated that it did make a difference. For example, Holly said,

I think it would make a difference. I think it would be more beneficial for the teachers to choose a book that's something she would be interested in or something she is trying to improve or change on. As far as her expectations . . . one book may apply to one teacher but not another teacher, especially when you talk about a reading specialist or a math specialist. I think it would depend on the teacher. I think that it would be better for teachers, could form a group and choose what book would be most beneficial for them.

Linda talked about the book study she was in, mentioning she liked the book study because she had a choice in it:

I would think so. What if you had no interest in it [the book]? Because right now I'm reading the *Essential Fifty-Five* [2003]. It's an easy read. . . . It's so easy to read and applicable. I know that *Daily Five* is suppose to be an easy read and some people like the first day they read it, but if you had something that is real technical and had research stuff in it and can't pass the first page without rereading it, then I wouldn't be as apt to do it.

Nancy randomly chose a book from the teacher resource room but felt it was better that she had the choice instead of being told what to read. She said,

I would think so, like I said. I still chose it randomly. It was just anything off the shelf, but if it was anyone else telling me, "Hey read this book and get better." I would be like, "I don't want to get better. I don't want anyone telling me what to do." . . . If it was forced then people wouldn't even read it. They would just highlight random pages.

I am assuming that the book was in the school's professional library because the principal saw value in it. But the principal did not tell the teachers to read it. She just made the book available, and Nancy was able to choose the book.

Some teachers felt that it was better to choose the book for the book study so teachers could find books that would fit a need they had. Rachel said,

I think it does because you choose a book that fits your need. You know, something that's relevant to where you are going and what you need to improve, what you feel you need to improve.

Kerri compared a book study that was chosen for her and one that she chose. She found the book that she chose was more beneficial to her. She said,

Because it is something that interests me. We've had book talks in the past that have been actually put out there and asked who would like to join this book talk and it's—it's been about discipline. A lot of this has been about discipline, data-driven and you know, not exciting and not something that you can actually be put into use. It might be a philosophy, just a different way of thinking but this is something that you do every single day with the kids. And this [*The Daily Five*] does away with a lot of the discipline problems.

Elizabeth preferred to choose her own book but was able to find some value in a book that was chosen for her. She said,

I think that would be more beneficial, yeah, because each school has different needs, and I mean I agree that there are some things like Marzano's [2001] book was good for everybody to have because then we are all on the same page across the district on the vocabulary. I just sometimes—I just I don't know. What book was it? The *Fair Isn't Always Equal* [Wormeli, 2006]. I liked some of the theory in there and some of the things that I learned, but others of it I thought did seem a

little unrealistic, but it—I don't know. I think you can get beneficial information and not necessarily agree with the whole book.

Some teachers admitted that they did not like being told to read a book, which affected how open they were to what the book had to offer. For example, Kayla said, "If someone else tells me to specifically read a book, I have no desire to read the book." I asked Maggie if teacher expectations would be increased if teachers were required to participate in a book study with a specific book and she responded:

That depends (laughs) on the teachers and the book. The book might be fabulous. Some teachers might love it and then, of course, some teachers might totally resent that they have to read this and they don't want to. Then it's not going to affect anything.

As I found in many scenarios, teachers sometimes gave different responses to how formal policies and programs influenced their expectations and how the formal policy and programs influenced other teachers' expectations. Book studies were no exception. I had three teachers say that participating in book studies increased their expectations; however, they felt that book studies did not always influence all teachers' expectations. Rachel admitted that book studies had increased her expectations; yet when I asked her if book studies influenced all teachers' expectations, she said "All? No, some, yes." I then asked her why it did not influence all teachers' expectations and she replied:

You know I just—part of it is being a veteran staff and you know this is what I've done and I'm ok with it, and you know we are going to stay there. But you have to keep changing. You know it's never the same. You know you got to keep moving it forward.

Shelly had a similar difference in her responses. When I asked her if book studies influenced her expectations she replied, "It changes me greatly. For me personally I would give it a 5." Then I proceeded to ask her if it would influence other teachers' expectations. She responded,

I don't think the majority of people would benefit. If I am not interested, it becomes a chore. People don't find merit in reading about education. They think they know it all. My buddy teacher is negative about book studies. She believes she will not learn anything from it but I tell her, "You will! You will!"

Kayla felt that some teachers would benefit from participating in a book study, as she said,

Yes, I think the book study offers encouragement from another person in the same profession, so I would say that is a 4. I know a lot of teachers get their encouragement from authors.

Kayla also felt that other teachers would not be influenced through book studies, as she said, "It depends how you take it from the book. Some people don't like to be told how to feel and, um, even if they read it in a book."

Maggie summarized with:

I think if someone goes to a book study and chooses to, I think it will influence them. I think the people that don't want to go that aren't interested just aren't interested. It's a good option.

I found that a couple of teachers were self-motivated to participate in a book study. Rachel attended book studies without being required because she wanted to continually grow. She said, "The teacher next door is, we push each other so it's been very good. We take classes together and book studies and so, and we say "Look what I found." Kerri was self-motivated to participate in a book study because she felt that she needed a change. She signed up for a summer course offered through the district that discussed the book *The Daily Five* [Boushey & Moser, 2006]. She said,

After 22 years, I was dragging. I needed something, something different so I checked out the book got on the website and started to get really excited about it. Then I just revamped the whole thing over the summer because I wanted to try something different.

I asked Kerri if this book study influenced her, and with an excited reply she said,

Oh yes, . . . In me, I'm not tired. I'm happy. Kids are happy, um. As far as I can tell so far, they love to read. They run up with a book and say, "You got to read this."

I asked her how Kerri's instruction had changed and she replied:

Completely, it was the textbook story. We do one story a week. We sit here, and we listen to the tape, and then we read the book, and then we do this worksheet. And, aaauugh, well, I still do the textbook stories, and I've stretched them out for two weeks, and I pick and choose the stories along with the skills that we do in our small lesson. And I never had time for one-on-one or small group, because if you do that, all these other kids, they don't know what to do. With this they know exactly what to do and they follow it, no problem.

I then asked Kerri if the book study had changed her expectations of her students and she said, "Yes, yes, I expect more from them because they know what to do." Kerri was very excited about this book and her experience with the book study over the summer that she wanted to share it with her campus. She started a book study at her school with the same book—*The Daily Five* [Boushey & Moser, 2006]. Here is what she said about sharing this with her colleagues:

The teacher next door is starting *The Daily Five*. She has a scaled down—version of it. Mine is again more intense only because I worked on it all summer and got it going the very first thing. I've had teachers come in and look—you know, the ones who are doing our book talk, fifth grade teacher, is implementing it also, and another fifth grade teacher, brand new, is starting it also. It's slowly—more people are looking at it. I'm trying to talk primary into doing it.

Many teachers felt that it was not just the simple act of reading the book that influenced their expectations, but it was the dialogue with colleagues about the book that made the most impact. Kayla said, “Mostly the dialogue, that usually does it for me.” Cecelia also brought up the conversations with peers about the book being important as she said, “Through sharing, through talking to your peers, that’s where we learn the best from one another.” When I asked Rachel if book studies increase her expectations, she said “yes,” but focused more on the dialogue with other teachers about the book more than just reading the book. She said,

You know in talking to other teachers and taking the book, the Marzano book, and then brainstorming and saying what do you do, and how do you do that, and you come back to your classroom, and you try something new, and you go, “Wow, that’s—that’s really powerful.”

Holly also felt that spending time with colleagues was the most influential, as she said,

I think they can change expectations. I have never participated in an actual book study with other teachers. . . . But I do think that any type of time that you take to spend with colleagues, regardless if it’s a book study or just discussing different practices or methods, then it is beneficial and helpful. You get new ideas and new perspectives, so I think it could help.



A couple of teachers mentioned that the group of teachers coming together added an accountability aspect that they needed. Elizabeth said, “It’s always good for me to keep up with reading and the current trend or whatever, so that was good, and if I did not have a book study, I might not do that—had an accountability group.” Linda also felt that book studies increased her expectations because there was an accountability component and she explained how it worked in her situation:

For instance, we met four times, and then we said, next time, we are going to talk about this chapter, this chapter, and then I just type something up so we have documentation. So, I say, ok, today wrote, we did this and this, and we are using this and this in our classroom.

From the teachers’ responses I concluded that a book study is one good option for teachers to increase their expectations if teachers are given a choice. In other words, if the book study is implemented as a bottom-up approach in which teachers are given the freedom to choose the book they read, then it can be effective in increasing teacher expectations.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

Many schools in the OKB district have professional learning communities to increase teacher expectations. These are in-services on various topics available for teachers to attend if they choose to. Many professional learning communities are taught by teachers, and the in-services usually have a small group of teachers in attendance. Every teacher

at School B gave a five, meaning most realistic to the scenario depicting a professional learning community as the cause of one fictitious teacher's high expectations. I received mixed responses from teachers at School A. On average, professional learning communities were highly rated commensurate with book studies.

Most teachers reported that professional learning communities increased teacher expectations. Linda said, "I would say definitely that would raise your expectations because you are learning and you're going to try new things." Kayla also felt professional learning communities influences her expectations, as she said,

This one is definitely a five. We are continuing our education by going to the workshops and the seminars and the lectures, and we are learning all the new programs out there and new ways of learning, and I finally was able to go to Write from the Beginning, and I didn't know how much you can do with it and what it really meant, and I have gotten great ideas on teaching writing.

Rachel said that professional learning communities changed instructional practices. She gave the following example:

Yes, in practices. You go to one, and you see a smart board, and you are like, "Wow, I have to have that," so I do the DVtech pro [the name of the technology professional learning community] and, you know, and you start using it and someone else comes in and then we've got a

technology PLC going on in here every Monday. And you know, everybody's like, "Wow, you can do that!" and "That's so much easier," and "Can I come watch your kids?" "It makes a huge difference when you see it in action. So I think the PLCs are very powerful.

Most teachers gave similar responses between how professional learning communities influenced themselves and how professional learning communities influenced other teachers. For example, Rachel said that professional learning communities influenced her practices as well as those of other teachers. She gave the following example:

I think it's changing their practices, you know, because everybody said, "Why would I come to technology? I don't have a smart board in my classroom." But I said, "You could have a pseudo-smart board, with projectors," and so now everyone is getting projectors, and it's like, "Wow." It's amazing how much. You know, this is easier; the kids are more engaged, and so a lot more people are interested. Our principal was begging people to go to DVTech pro to get the smart boards and now people are starting to say, "I think I want one." It sparks the interest.

When I asked Maggie if professional learning communities influenced her expectations, she said, "Sure professional learning opportunities give you a lot of new information." Then I asked her if it influenced other teachers' expectations, and she said, "I hope it influences them too." Kerri also

responded with similar answers for both herself and other teachers. When asked if her expectations were influenced, she said, “Yeah, that’s a five. Yeah, I think so. When we all get together small groups and we choose the groups that we want to join, yes, yes, I think so.” Then when asked if professional learning communities influenced other teachers’ expectations, she said, “Yeah, again when you’re given a choice and they’re actually going into a group that they want more information from and want to collaborate and get other ideas, definitely.”

Nancy felt that the self-motivated teachers who wanted to continually grow were influenced by professional learning communities, yet not all teachers would want to participate:

I would say this is a two and that’s more of a percentage. It’s like 40% of the teachers. I do know teachers who work very hard to develop professionally and learn the latest and greatest and be abreast of all the new developments, and I can’t fault them. They are good teachers.

The majority of teachers though, I think, just want to teach in their classrooms the way that they have always taught and be left alone.

And I know that in our district there are a lot of professional development opportunities offered but people do not take them.

Nancy mentioned that paying teachers to attend professional learning communities might motivate teachers. I asked her if they were paid to go would it increase their expectations, and she said,

That's really tough to say. There are teachers that will go to get paid. They would sit through the workshop and do crossword puzzles. I don't—I don't know if it will actually change their expectations. I think for some teachers—I think that there are a lot more teachers who would like to go and would like to learn, but they just can't afford it, either time-wise or because the workshops can be expensive, um, and who would like to go. There are other teachers, who even if you paid them a million dollars to go, they will still not get anything out of the workshop. So I think probably 40% would actually go and do this, and I would say another 20% would like to and could really learn and benefit from it. And then 40 more percent are just, no, I'm just where I'm at, and I'm just where I want to be and leave me alone so.

Two teachers felt that professional learning communities influenced their instruction but not their expectations. Shelly said,

It won't change my expectations, but I would know better what is required of me. Most of the time staff development has nothing to do with me. I am a life-long learner. There are always things to learn. I want to learn. I don't want to waste two-and-a-half hours.

Some teachers do not see a connection between teacher instruction and teacher expectations. For example Holly said,

I think it builds on my expectations. I don't think it changes my expectations. If the professional development something is useful and

beneficial to what I am teaching and what I am doing, then I think they are very helpful and beneficial, but I don't see how it would change my expectations. I already have the expectations to do what they need to do. I think it just builds on it. And maybe gives me different tools to use.

The OKB district requires teachers to complete a certain number of professional development hours, and professional learning communities is one option teachers have to fulfill those hours. I asked each teacher the question: Does it influence your expectations if you are given a choice which sessions to attend? Cecelia and Maggie felt that it needed to be a requirement for teachers to attend some sort of professional development but be given a choice on which to attend. Maggie said, "I think they need to be required to go." Cecelia said, "Well, actually, we need both, we need both. It's always nice to be able to choose." When I asked Cecelia to elaborate on that she said,

I would say that this is going to be such an individual school again because each school sets out their development for that year. They might have a committee and maybe they don't and maybe their principal is setting it up. I don't know how they are generating that. If it could be where the staff selects and works with the principal. It could be teacher-based in selecting and has that focus. I think if there is more buy-in, then I think it would be more successful. If it is just straight from the principal, you will, you will, you will, I would say

that, you know, probably less enthusiasm. You know, here again you are just told what to do and you don't have any say or any buy-in, and that's a hard school to work for. So if the teachers can work with this and get a nice balance and get some things on the professional development and the presentations that they are interested in, I would say that would be fantastic! Let me come to that school, Yah!

Shelly felt that it would be better to allow teachers a choice and they would be more willing to learn. She said, "I think having the ability to choose what professional development activities to go to would increase my wanting to do professional development." Kayla said that if teachers were not given the choice then they would not be open to grow. She said,

No one wants to be treated like a child, even the children don't. Fortunately, that's what we are learning, different ways of having them do work, and they will argue with you because they don't like being told what to do. You have to find different ways to do it, differentiated instruction, um, so yeah. If I'm given a choice, then I'm more apt to do my best at it because I know it falls on me because I chose it.

Many teachers liked being able to choose professional learning communities that addressed an area of need they needed to work on. Rachel said, "If you are not interested, if it's not an area of need for you, then you're not going to change what you are doing." Linda said,

If you can choose something that you feel like you—it's an area of need for you. It's way better, or you have interest, or you are excited about it. Because I've been in certain things that I kind of felt like I've had to go to this, and it's been boring, and I got nothing out of it.

Where I went to something I was really excited about and I'm writing notes, I'm writing, can I use it in my classroom. I'm real excited about it, so.

Elizabeth said that allowing teachers to have discussions with educational leaders about their areas of need would increase teacher expectations because teachers could choose topics for professional learning communities that would address those needs. She said,

I think that they should have a choice, at least have some buy-in. As a school, if we have a goal to increase math achievement, then if we have a PLC [professional learning community]—for math at least, we all bought into that. We all know we have an area of need there, and we're trying to offer that so maybe not necessarily, not a lot of different choices, but some conversation, some dialogue to find out what exactly, what the need is. I think both of them could work if you gave them different choices, or you said, "Well, we need to focus on this, so we are going to have this."



Holly gave a specific example about a need for a professional learning community in technology so teachers could utilize technology more effectively to increase expectations. She said,

We have gotten a huge amount of technology, and some of this stuff, I don't know how to use it. It just has just been given to me, and I don't know what to use it. And they expect us to use it, but I'll use it as long as I know how to. So to have opportunities to have, um, to take professional development classes that will help me and help my students, yeah, I think that would be better, yeah. Yes, definitely.

A couple teachers brought up time factors that hinder professional learning communities. Nancy felt it was difficult to take the time to attend professional learning communities, as she said,

I know that in our district there are lots of professional development opportunities offered but people do not take them. I don't know that's because they don't want to, or they don't have time. I know a lot of times you have to get a sub, and it is so much work to write all the sub plans and deal with the aftermath and it's not worth it, or it's on a Saturday and I need to grade all these papers on a Saturday. I don't have time to do that.

Linda felt teachers lacked time to process what they learned so they could implement new strategies in their classroom. Linda said,

One thing we are lacking is time to implement it. Time to—we hear all these great ideas and you go back into the classroom, and you’re like, “Oh man, I really like what I did,” and “What was that again?” It was in your notes somewhere but you didn’t have time to process.

Maggie talked about the importance of processing new ideas immediately or else they might not influence teacher expectations. She said, “If you don’t apply this right away in the first week it’s going to go in your folder of ideas.”

Professional learning communities have potential to influence teacher expectations. They appear to be most effective when teachers had a controlled choice. In other words, there needs to be some sort of requirement and accountability; however, teachers should have the opportunity to choose professional learning communities that best fit their own area of need. Professional learning communities can be implemented as a top-down approach in which teachers are required to attend with a bottom-up component in which teachers may choose from a variety of professional learning communities that best fits their individual needs.

### **Conclusion: Top-Down Versus Bottom-up Approaches**

It is inconclusive whether a top-down or a bottom-up approach is more effective in increasing teacher expectations. The qualitative data suggests that a combination of each approach is needed to influence teacher expectations. A discussion on a top-down approach versus a bottom-up approach is further explored in the next chapter. In Chapter 6, I review the

results of this study. I also discuss recommendations for policy and practice, and recommendations for areas of further research in the area of teacher expectations.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

The future depends on what we do with the present. —Gandhi

An educational achievement gap exists and has existed throughout history in the United States (Tyack, 1974). African American, Hispanic, and low-income students consistently perform significantly lower than their peers (Kozol, 2005). There are many complex explanations for this gap. One contributing factor for the achievement gap is the role that teacher expectations play. The literature review in this dissertation revealed that there are teachers who have lower expectations for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students. These lower expectations influence student achievement and allow the achievement gap to continue.

This study focused on understanding the factors that influence teacher expectations. I believe that in order to change teacher expectations it is crucial to understand how expectations are formed. Chapter 6 contains three sections. First, I summarize the findings of my study as they relate to my two research questions. Next, I discuss implications and recommendations for policy and practice and make recommendations for further research in the area of teacher expectations.

## Summary of Findings and Conclusions

This section summarizes the findings and conclusions for each research question individually. Each section restates the research question, includes a summary of the findings, and discusses various themes within the findings. The themes are based on the findings of this study that support and build upon the literature regarding teacher expectations.

### Research Question 1

Research Question asked, *What Are the Factors That Influence Teacher Expectations?*

**Summary.** The literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that there are various factors that influence teacher expectations. I discovered four common factors most often mentioned in the current literature that influences teacher expectations. Those factors are teacher self-efficacy, school culture, stereotypes, and language. My qualitative study revealed that these four factors still continue to influence teacher expectations. In addition to these four factors, I also discovered that teachers' personal experiences growing up influence their expectations of their students. Teachers' cultural, community, and family backgrounds influence their beliefs about education and expectations for their students. I discovered that individual characteristics such as motivation also influence teacher expectations.

**Teacher self-efficacy.** Teachers who have strong self-efficacy tend to have high expectations. If a teacher is confident in her own ability to reach all

students and to guide them to be successful, then she is more able to have high expectations. I discovered that many teachers were aware of high expectations and noted that they would love to have high expectations themselves. Yet these teachers felt it was unrealistic to have high expectations because in their experience, they had not been successful in helping all students rise to high standards. I uncovered insecurities teachers had when I asked the question: Why do you believe your students will accomplish what you expect them to accomplish? For example Maggie said,

I don't know if I am. . . . I can't ensure it. I don't know if I am. We pretest, we posttest, and those students who do not do well on the posttest, you know we take them back and reteach another way. Let's look at it again and let's try it again. Hopefully, that will get them to their highest potential.

Teachers want what is best for students. They may simply lack the skills to guide students to high achievement. Recommendations for school leaders to increase teacher self-efficacy are found in the recommendations section of this chapter.

**School culture.** Previous research suggests that school culture is a significant factor that influences teacher expectations (Diamond et al., 2004; Halvorsen et al., 2009). I found evidence of this in my study as well. For example, School B had a transformation in its school culture. A couple of years before, the test scores were very low; and the district associate

superintendent spoke of his disappointment to the staff. The message that the staff received was that there would be no excuses. For example, a teacher at School B said, “No excuses, in other words, was his point you know. You can’t say that kids are Hispanic. You can’t say that kids come from a poor background.” Since that discussion the teachers participated in book studies and various learning communities. Teachers who had taught the same way for decades began trying new strategies, and there was an increase in teacher expectations. The school increased their test scores two years after that change in school culture.

A change in school culture is one of the first steps that educational leaders should take when wanting to increase teacher expectations. Cultivating a school culture of lifelong learners would also increase teacher self-efficacy. The two factors go hand-in-hand. More discussion on school culture is found in the recommendations section of Chapter 6.

**Stereotypes.** The review of the literature in the area of teacher expectations suggests that stereotypes teachers hold influence teacher expectations (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Lee, 2009; Warren, 2002). I did not find that teacher expectations of students were influenced by stereotypes alone. The majority of the teachers mentioned that they held the same expectations for all their students, regardless of race or SES. However, the factor that I discovered to be more influential was teachers’ lack of understanding of their students’ family and cultural backgrounds. Teachers

did not blame students for poor achievement; instead, they tended to blame the parents. This finding leads into the next section: teacher's culture, community, and family background as being factors that influences teacher expectations.

**Teacher's culture, community, and family backgrounds.** The majority of the teachers I interviewed at School A attended schools in communities that were similar to the demographics and cultural characteristics of the school they worked in. The teachers seemed to understand the culture of their students. Most teachers I interviewed from School B attended schools that were vastly different demographically and culturally. This difference in cultural backgrounds may have influenced teachers to hold lower expectations of the parents of their students.

I discovered low levels of expectations for parents from the teachers at School B. Holly voiced frustration for lack of parent involvement:

We don't really have a strong parent involvement. A lot of our parents, I don't know if they don't care or they are not around. I really don't know what their reasoning is, but they are not there to support their kids in education. A lot of them don't view it as a very high expectation in life—that's kind of frustrating.

Teachers' interpretations of parent lack of involvement have caused teachers to believe that the parents did not care about their children's education.

Holly, along with many teachers at School B, informed me that their fathers



had steady jobs, which made it possible for their mothers not to work. Therefore, their mothers had the opportunity to volunteer in their classrooms growing up. Many students at School B either live in single parent homes or in homes where both parents work causing it to be very difficult to volunteer in the classroom. Recommendations to address teachers' cultural disconnect are further discussed in the recommendations section of this chapter.

**Language.** Sirota and Bailey's (2009) study suggested that teachers expect ELL student to learn at a slower pace. I found this true for a couple of teachers at School B. It appears that there is a collective belief embedded in the culture of School B that it was unfair to expect ELL students to be held to the same standards as their same-aged peers. Many teachers I interviewed from School B felt that it was unrealistic to expect ELL students to achieve high standards.

Childhood experiences also influenced teacher expectations of ELL students for two of the teachers I interviewed. Rachel used her own experience as a second language learner in Germany to understand the needs of her ELL students. She was able to learn academics in a German only speaking school, therefore, believed that all her students could achieve to the same grade level of academic standards. On the other hand, Maggie held lower standards for her ELL students. Her experience with her father as a second language learner might be a factor that influenced her expectations of

her ELL students. She mentioned that her father was not able to help her with her homework because he did not understand the English language.

Students' language was a factor that influenced teacher expectations. Teacher's self-efficacy with regard to teaching ELL students influenced teacher expectations. The school culture also influenced how teachers viewed students learning English as a second language. Many factors that influenced teacher expectations also influenced one another.

**Motivation.** Many of the teachers I interviewed spoke of childhood stories that demonstrated they were self-motivated. Nancy and Kayla called themselves self-motivated, and each teacher explained that their parents did not have to hold high expectations for them because both teachers held high expectations for themselves. Cecelia also demonstrated her self-motivation as a child when she described how hard she worked to overcome her reading difficulties. These three teachers also mentioned that they continued to be highly motivated teachers who held high expectations for students.

Motivation is one possible factor that influences teacher expectations.

**Conclusion.** The many factors that influence teacher expectations are complex and difficult to simplify. However, teachers appear to be shaped by their own cultural, family, and childhood backgrounds. These experiences can influence teachers' beliefs about their current students, resulting in varying levels of expectations. It is important to understand the outside

factors that influence teacher expectations in an effort to increase teacher expectations.

The next research question addresses the formal policies and programs that educational leaders have utilized to influence teacher expectations.

### **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asked, *What are Teachers' Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Formal Policies and Programs that are Aimed at Increasing Teacher Expectations? More Specifically, Do Teachers Feel that Top-Down Formal Policies Such as Teacher Evaluations, Uniform Curriculum, and Performance-Based Pay are Effective or Do Teachers Believe that Bottom Up Policies Such as Book Studies and Professional Learning Communities Make More of an Impact in Increasing Their Expectations of Their Students?*

**Summary.** I asked teachers to read five fictitious scenarios. Each scenario depicted an increase in teacher expectation caused by one of the following formal policy and programs: teacher evaluations, a uniform curriculum, performance-based pay, professional learning communities, and book studies. This section summarizes the findings of teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of each program with an embedded discussion of top-down versus bottom-up policy approaches.

**Teacher evaluations.** The OKB district utilized teacher evaluations as a mainly a top-down approach to increase teacher expectations.

Administrators observed teachers and rated their effectiveness using a specific measurement tool. Some teachers felt that the teacher evaluation tool was necessary to increasing teacher expectations for some teachers. Other teachers felt that teacher evaluations were more punitive than encouraging. Cecelia explained:

The principals who use to raise you up and praise you are not here. The principals who wanted to work with you and, "I want to help you with another mentor teacher and set you up with these teachers success," that doesn't happen. It immediately turns towards, "And what are you going to do about this next year?" And, "I can't believe that you have been teaching for two years and didn't even know about this or even learn about it in your university." It's always a little with a lecture instead of a help.

Many teachers found that the teacher evaluation tool could be effective in increasing teacher expectations; however, it depended on how principals utilized the tool. Rachel from School A said, "I think so much depends on the principal. The tool, I think, is getting better every year, our evaluation tool, but I don't know that it is always used effectively you know." Rachel continued to say, "We, we've all watched teachers who, you know, are not doing a really good job and they are here year after year after year." Many teachers at School A felt their administrator did not utilize it effectively. Shelly who is also from School A said,

Personally, the teacher evaluation system I don't value. It is a hoop we jump through. My principal doesn't know special education or early childhood. When she evaluates me, I always get, "Yay!" . . . I believe that I can poop on the carpet during my lesson and my principal would say, "Yah! You are doing a great job." I have always felt that way.

The teacher evaluation tool is a top-down approach that can be effective in increasing teacher expectations if school administrators utilize it effectively.

**Uniform Curriculum.** A uniform curriculum is typically a top-down approach, yet teachers felt it would be more effective if it contained a bottom-up component. For example, educational leaders could mandate that all teachers utilize a specific curriculum for math, reading, and writing (top-down approach) while giving teachers the freedom and creativity to utilize the program in any way that met the needs of their students (bottom-up).

My research revealed that some teachers believed that a uniform curriculum influenced teacher expectations because it guided teachers to hold the same high level of standards for all students. Rachel said, "I do like all the curriculum programs that we are using." She continued to explain that she wished that all teachers at her school utilized the uniform reading curriculum to avoid the frustration she had with the lack of cohesiveness:

So we've got four teachers in first grade and all four teachers are doing phonics in a different way. We've got kindergarten teachers

who are doing phonics in a different way. Then the first grade teachers are doing it. By the time they get to second grade they are totally confused; and when we ask them what a vowel or a constant is, they look at us like it's a foreign language. So the vocabulary and the content, if we were doing, is laying the building blocks every year. When they got to us, we wouldn't have to go, "Oh, wow, we got to make up two years and this year all in one year."

As an educator who has been in the field for 15 years I agree with Rachel in that a uniform curriculum is effective in increasing teacher expectations. The curriculum serves as a road map for teachers to know what to expect from their students so that all students are held to the same standard. Yet, I also agree with the teachers, such as Shelly, who believed that a scripted one size fits all curriculum is not effective in increasing teacher expectations. Shelly said, "There are times when scripted instruction doesn't meet the needs of kids. If only using scripted they are missing out. They don't have the flexibility to meet the needs of all kids."

If school leaders require teachers to utilize a uniform curriculum while allowing teachers to adapt and supplement the uniform curriculum to meet the needs of their individual students, then I believe that a uniform curriculum would be effective in leading teachers to hold the same level of high expectations for all students.

**Performance-based pay.** Another top-down approach that the OKB district utilized to increase teacher expectations was performance-based pay. Teachers were required to meet specific student achievement goals to earn a yearly bonus. If that goal was not met, then teachers did not receive their bonus. A couple of teachers I interviewed expressed their frustration with this top-down approach. For example Kerri said,

I get angry when they dangle a carrot in front of us thinking that we're doing a poor job. We don't make enough money, so here give us some extra and that will boost us. That just makes me angry.

Performance-based pay may contain an element of a bottom-up approach. The OKB district allowed teachers to write their own goals. The majority of the teachers I interviewed felt that performance-based pay did not increase their expectations because they admitted that they wrote easily attainable goals. These easily attainable goals demonstrate low teacher expectations. For example, Elizabeth said,

I think sometimes we just write goals that we know we can reach because so much is placed on us. . . . We are all here for kids. We all want what's best but when it's tied to money we are going to do what we know we can achieve. The easiest way we can get there because there is just so much pressure put on us. So, I'm not sure it's the best way to increase student achievement or expectations of teachers or students.

There is more discussion on performance-based pay in the implications section of this chapter.

**Professional learning communities and book studies.** The majority of the teachers I interviewed felt that professional learning communities and book studies were the most effective formal policies and programs in increasing teacher expectations. Each program was generally a bottom-up approach in that teachers were given choices. Teachers could choose the book they wanted to read and form their own book study groups. Professional learning communities were typically run by teachers, and other teachers had the opportunity to participate in any PLC that was offered.

Teachers did mention that a system of accountability needed to be in place in order to motivate teachers to participate. Some form of top-down accountability requirement needed to be in place. Teachers might not volunteer to participate in book studies or professional learning communities unless required to do so. The most effective approach to book studies and PLCs was to require teachers to participate in a set number of hours, allowing teachers the flexibility to choose how they met those hours.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches is needed to increase teacher expectations. All teachers are individuals who are motivated in different ways. And just as a good classroom teacher must provide a variety of strategies to reach all students,



educational leaders must also utilize a variety of methods to increase all teachers' expectations.

### **Recommendations**

In the following section I discuss implications and recommendations for policy and practice and make recommendations for future research in the area of teacher expectations.

#### **Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

My study revealed that teacher expectations are influenced by various factors. Some factors such as stereotypes that have been shaped by teachers' family backgrounds, cultural, and community experiences are beyond the control of educational leaders. However, educational leaders *can* influence teacher expectations through formal policies and programs. This section includes implications and recommendations for policy and practice that educational leaders can utilize to increase teacher expectations. The following recommendations are discussed: cultivating a school culture of high expectations for every student, increasing teacher self-efficacy, evaluating performance-based pay, evaluating the cultural disconnect between teachers and students, hiring high quality teachers who exhibit high expectations, and preparing future teachers to hold high expectations for all students.

**School culture.** School culture is a factor that significantly influences teacher expectations. It is the job of school leaders to create and maintain a

school culture of high expectations for all students. It is important to have a school vision and mission statement that includes high expectations for all students in which all teachers have buy-in and believe in. The vision and mission statement should include a no excuse focus. Teachers should not be allowed to blame students' SES background, race, or language on poor student achievement.

School leaders should also cultivate a school culture of lifelong learning of teachers. There should be encouragement for teachers to always be learning to improve their craft. This leads to the next recommendation of increasing teachers' self-efficacy.

**Teacher Self-Efficacy.** Teachers need to be empowered. They need to feel confident in their teaching abilities in order to have high expectations for students. In other words, teachers must have high self-efficacy-belief in themselves as capable teachers who can guide all students to high levels of achievement. This self-efficacy can develop through staff development experiences that are positive and fit the needs of teachers.

Many policies and programs that are aimed at raising teacher expectations are punitive and have a negative connotation. These connotations encourage negative feelings from teachers and lead to low expectations of students. I inferred a sense that the teachers at both schools felt beaten down and punished for not having high student achievement. Teachers at both schools mentioned that they had experienced not earning

their performance-based pay due to lack of student performance increase. Yet all teachers mentioned that they felt that they worked hard. One teacher said, "It felt like a slap in the face" when she did not earn her performance-based pay check. All teachers work hard and want what is best for their kids, but they might not know how to bring about higher student achievement. Maggie said, "I think all the teachers are really, really, trying hard." It frustrates teachers when they work hard but are not successful because they lack self-efficacy. Programs like performance-based pay do not appear to increase teacher's self-efficacy. Instead they appear to reward those teachers who are effective and penalize those teachers who are not as effective. More recommendations on performance-based pay are discussed in the next section.

Several teachers mentioned by several teachers that the teacher evaluation system could be a great tool in assisting administrators to develop teacher's self-efficacy. If the evaluation tool were utilized to point out to teachers which areas were strengths and which areas teachers needed to improve in, then the tool could increase teacher's self-efficacy. Most teachers I interviewed were very open to constructive feedback from their administrator. The area of concern was when the evaluation system was administered as a punitive measurement instead of an encouragement method.

Building teachers' self-efficacy comes from leadership. I recommend that school leaders utilize positive strategies such as book studies and professional learning communities to build up teachers' self-efficacy. Teachers with high self-efficacy tend to have high expectations for their students. Programs that are more positive, such as professional learning communities and book studies, in which teachers have the opportunity to choose books or PLCs that addressed the areas of improvement teachers individually needed would be most effective in increasing self-efficacy, which would, in turn, lead to a rise in teacher expectations.

**Performance-based pay.** I recommend that educational leaders evaluate the structure and implementation of current performance-based pay incentives. In evaluating performance-based pay, I urge educational leaders to examine whether the program is accomplishing the goal that the program intends to accomplish. One goal is increasing teacher expectations for all students, thus causing an increase in student achievement.

One disturbing finding I discovered was the negative effects that performance-based pay caused that actually encouraged low expectations for some students. The OKB district had performance based pay set up in two formats. The first phase of bonus money was given to teachers within a school whose test scores demonstrated student proficiency. This proficiency was determined by school average test scores. Several teachers mentioned that they were more likely to make the school goal if they focused most of

their attention on students who were close to meeting the benchmark and ignoring the students that were way down on the bottom score. The reasoning behind this was that if a student scored *falls far below* on the statewide test in the fall they would still be likely to be below benchmark in the spring. However, if a student who scored in the *approaching* area improved by five points, they made the *meets* benchmark in the spring and the teacher and school's average showed improvement. This phenomenon further contributed to the achievement gap. A second way that performance-based pay was set up in the OKB district was by having teachers write their own goals, based on increasing their class achievement in a skill area. Most of these goals are written to be attainable, therefore, they were often written with low expectations.

It appeared that the format of performance-based pay did not encourage high teacher expectations as originally intended by the district leaders. Thus, this policy should be evaluated. There needs to be a system that motivates teachers to expect all students, including very low achieving students. Performance-based pay programs should focus on individual student growth and reward teachers based on this growth.

**Cultural disconnect.** I discovered that when a teacher's personal cultural background was very different from their students' cultural background, then there was often a disconnect between students' school culture and their home culture. Valdes (1996) demonstrated the importance

for teachers to understand, respect and value the culture of their students in her ethnographic study *Con Respecto*. I recommend that school leaders address this issue. A book study with Valdes' book is one possible way to spark a discussion on cultural differences between students and teachers. I believe that teachers are more likely to have higher expectations for their students if they understand and respect their students' culture.

Learning does not occur solely at school. Students learn at home as well and come to school with various funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al, 2005). This should be recognized as a strength and built upon. It is important to solicit parent involvement. Parent involvement is an area that needs to be addressed further. Teachers must not only have high expectations for students but also for students' parents as well. Mutual respect, collaboration, and expectations must be in place between teachers and parents. Communication with parents is essential as parents, teachers, and students should work as a team to assure that all three stakeholders are held to high expectations. Kerri mentioned the importance of collaboration between parents, teachers, and students, as she said,

Well, I just think that school community is made up of three groups. It's not just teachers. It's teachers, students, and parents and, you know, they all have to be there and we all have to put in the effort. It can't just be the teacher. The parents have to get the kids to school, you know, feed them, clothe them, come to us if they've got problems.

Kids the same way, they have to do their job. I've told the kids that their job is school and they have to follow through with that. I think that's very important. They need all three of us, all three groups.

**Hiring new teachers.** When hiring new teachers, it is important for human resources to find teachers who are naturally self-motivated and who hold high expectations for all students. The interviewing process should include questions that give human resources departments and administrators and other educational leaders insight into the level of expectations that potential teachers have for their students. I discovered in my study that if I directly asked teachers about their expectations for student achievement, they gave me superficial answers. However, I was able to gather meaningful insight to the teacher's true levels of expectation when I asked the following three indirect questions about teacher expectations: (1) What do you expect your students to accomplish by the end of school year? (2) Why do you believe they will be able to accomplish what you expect them to accomplish? (3) How do you ensure that all students are reaching their highest potential? I would recommend that educational leaders include questions similar to these when interviewing new teachers. I especially recommend that administrators of low income schools strive to place high quality teachers who exhibit high teacher expectations in their schools.

The teacher preparation departments at the universities can also assist and support local school districts by instilling the belief of high levels

of expectations for all students in future teachers. In addition, I also recommend that universities conduct further research in the area of teacher expectations. The next section discusses specific areas of research with regard to teacher expectations.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Teacher expectations is a topic of research that continues to need further exploration. This teacher expectation research began with the role that the self-fulfilling prophecy plays in influencing teacher expectations. There is significant research suggesting that teacher expectations contribute to the achievement gap. There is evidence that teachers hold differing expectations for students based on SES and race. In particular, there is a significant amount of research that suggests that teachers hold lower expectations for African American, Hispanic and low-income students. The next step of research in the area of teacher expectations should address the question: What are effective ways to increase teacher expectations for all students? Research is needed into how to bridge the cultural gap between teachers and students to eliminate the cultural disconnect that occurs when teachers come from different backgrounds from their students. Further research is also needed to determine the best strategies in cultivating a school culture of high expectations for all students while increasing teachers' self-efficacy.



## **Conclusion**

The long standing, pervasive achievement gap needs to be addressed. Teacher expectations is one factor that significantly contributes to the achievement gap. Efforts to decrease the gap should include raising teacher expectations for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students. There are many factors that influence teacher expectations. Teachers are influenced by their own cultural and family experiences. School culture and teacher self-efficacy are also factors that influence teacher expectations. Educational leaders can influence teacher expectations by utilizing a combination of top-down and bottom-up formal policies and programs to increase teacher self-efficacy and cultivate a school culture of high teacher expectations.

“Be the change you want to see in this world.” —Gandhi

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL



### **Focused Life History (Goal: To place participants' experiences in context)**

- Tell me about your earliest experiences in school.
- What was your family's role in your education?
- Tell me about your family's values.
- Explain to me your community growing up. How was education viewed by your community?
- What were the demographics in your school/ neighborhood growing up?  
(SES/race)
- How did you decide a profession in education?
- What is your position at the school?
- How did you decided to work in your current position at your current school?

### **Current Instructional Practices (Goal: To ascertain concrete details of participants experience with regard to teacher expectations)**

- Do you utilize ability grouping? If so how do you determine the groups?
- How do you differentiate instruction for your students?
- How do you ensure all students are reaching their highest potential?
- How do you utilize data in your practices?
- Do you collaborate with students' former teachers about their ability?
- What do you expect your students to accomplish by the end of the year?
  - Why do you believe your students will accomplish what you expect them to accomplish?
  - What are your aspirations for your current students when they leave this school?

### **Reflection on Formal Policies Aimed at Increasing Teacher Expectations**

- What would your expectations be for the students in the following scenarios:
  - Leroy's last year teacher shared that he had a very difficult time grasping reading skills. He is a grade level behind academically.
  - Would your expectations change if you found out that his father is a doctor?

- What would your expectations be for a new student named Marie who lives in a single parent household in which her mom is receiving food stamps?
  - Suppose you find out from her previous school that she did well academically last year. Would your expectations be different for her academic success? In other words would you expect her to be able to complete difficult tasks?
- Think about Leroy and Maria as you read the following scenarios of teacher expectations being influenced by the following formal programs and policies and rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 most likely to 5 least likely) how likely they are to occur and explain why.
    1. Mrs. Herman is a third grade teacher. Her principal observed her classroom instruction during two formal evaluations and several classroom walk-throughs during the school year. At the end of the year Mrs. Herman read her evaluation and noticed that she had low marks in classroom instruction. During a conference with her principal, her principal identified that she needed to improve her classroom instruction by adding more differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students. The following year Mrs. Herman focused in improving her instruction. Her principal noticed a positive change and she received higher marks on her teacher evaluation.
      - Do you feel that the teacher evaluation system in your district changes your expectations about student achievement?
      - How do you think it influences other teachers' expectations?
      - How do teacher evaluations and classroom walk throughs effect your expectations of student achievement?
    2. Mrs. Pompe is a first grade teacher. A DIBELS pretest shows that 75% of her students are reading at grade level according to the oral reading fluency subtest. She has a performance based pay goal that states that she would earn a \$1,000 bonus if 90% of her students pass the oral reading fluency subtest by the end of the year. Mrs. Pompe is highly motivated by earning extra money so she tries various reading interventions all year to ensure she meets her goal. The end of the year DIBELS post test shows that over 90% of her students met their goal and Mrs. Pompe is happy to receive her bonus.

- Do you feel that performance based pay changes your beliefs about student's ability?
  - Do you feel progress monitoring short term benchmarks to reach a long term goal such as fractals or DIBELS assist in ensuring all students meet the standards by the end of the year?
  - How do you think it influences other teachers' expectations?
3. Mrs. Searcy is a fifth grade teacher. She believes that she delivers high quality instruction for all her students because she follows a research based uniform reading and math program. Her reading lesson plans are scripted from a basal and every teacher in her grade level is following the same plans. Her math lesson plans come from a research based program that follows a script as well. Her whole school utilizes the same programs so every child is receiving the same level of education.
- Do you feel that the use of a uniform curriculum in your district changes your expectations about student achievement?
  - How do you think it influences other teachers' expectations?
4. Mr. McDermott is a sixth grade teacher. He is always striving to become a better teacher. He believes that his instruction improves after being part of book studies. One book study he was involved with read the book "Good to Great". He had meaningful discussions with his colleagues and reflected on his own instructional practices and found new ways to ensure all students in his classes achieve high standards.
- Do you feel that the use of a book studies changes your expectations about student achievement?
  - How do you think it influences other teachers' expectations?
  - Have you participated in book studies such as *Good to Great* or *Marzono*? If so how did it affect your expectations of student achievement? If not are you familiar with the concept of this book? How has it been incorporated in your school? What kind of effect does it have on your teaching practices?

5. Mrs. Green is kindergarten teacher who confident that she is a high quality teacher. She believes that she has the necessary skills as a teacher to assist all students in meeting high academic standards. She feels that she has learned these skills and continues to learn through experience and self selected professional learning communities. The school she works at offers many professional development opportunities throughout the year and she chooses to attend as many as she can in the areas that she feels would help her grow as a teacher.

- Do you feel that the use of professional learning communities in your district changes your expectations about student achievement?
  - How do you think it influences other teachers' expectations?
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- As you think about your role in preparing students for their future lives, what is most important to you as a teacher?
  - Where do you see your students 20 years from now?
  - What would you want to say to the parents of your students now?
  - Is there anything else you would like to add?