



January 21, 2022

## Lessons from High Poverty, High Success Schools



“Sustainable change, after all, depends not upon compliance with external mandates or blind adherence to regulation, but rather upon the pursuit of the greater good.” – Douglas B. Reeves [Leading Change in Your School: How to Conquer Myths, Build Commitment, and Get Results](#)

In the previous [Issues](#), we presented data that demonstrates the ongoing existence of gaps in our education system. Research data also demonstrates that there are practices that are time-tested in closing these gaps. We present some of these approaches and methods in today’s article.

Doug Reeves studied schools with demographics of 90% poverty and 90% minority students, yet achieved 90% passage on state assessments, and in his book, [Achieving Equity & Excellence](#) (2019), he recognizes the numerous researchers who have come to the same conclusion over the past 20 years - that success can be replicated on a large scale, not with a commercial program, but with the key difference being the daily decisions of teachers and leaders. **There is a high level of evidence that points to the importance of consistent practices, not programs, making the difference in closing these gaps in achievement.** This is an important point, because in fact, the schools who are most in need of focus, are often the most fragmented! They are bombarded with numerous programs and initiatives, ultimately resulting in lower student achievement (Reeves, 2011). The research has remained robust and reliable over time, clearly distinguishing between temporary fads or programs that may or may not bring value and imperative practices that have continuing value.

According to this research, schools that achieve despite the demographics previously noted, implement the following practices consistently and with fidelity:

### 7 Practices of High Poverty, High Achieving Schools

1. Organize their school or district as a professional learning community
2. Prioritize a persistent focus on student achievement
3. Conduct collaborative scoring and grading
4. Emphasize writing that is nonfiction
5. Utilize frequent formative assessment with numerous opportunities for success
6. Analyze data in a constructive manner
7. Engage in cross-disciplinary units of instruction

For consistency in utilizing the seven practices, there must remain stable leadership at the district, building and classroom levels. **A culture that ensures access for all students coupled with high expectations is much more likely to occur when there remains consistent and reliable leadership and teacher teams that commit themselves to these practices**, rather than a culture of frequent change in leadership and programs.

In subsequent articles we will return to the seven practices, digging deeper into each one.

Reeves, D.B. (2019). [Achieving Equity & Excellence: Immediate results from the lessons of high poverty, high success schools](#). Bloomington: Solution Tree Press.  
Reeves, D.B. (2011). [Findings your Leadership Focus: What matters most for student results](#). New York: Teachers College Press.

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