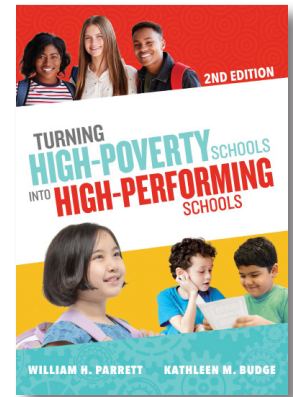


ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools

2nd Edition

by **William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge**



Contents

Introduction: We Can Do This
Page 2

Turning Any High-Poverty
School into a High-Performing
School Page 2

Learning from High-
Performing, High-Poverty
Schools Page 2

Understanding Poverty and
Our Moral Responsibility
Page 3

Using a Framework for
Collective Action Page 3

Building Leadership Capacity
and Collective Efficacy Page 4

Fostering a Healthy, Safe,
and Supportive Learning
Environment Page 4

Focusing on Student,
Professional, and System
Learning Page 5

Eliminating Practices That
Perpetuate Underachievement
and Inequity Page 5

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

This second edition of *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools* continues to support schools in “doing business differently.” Those who work in high-poverty schools can benefit from the information provided here, as can anyone working in a school where an achievement gap exists between students who live in poverty and their more advantaged peers.

In this edition, William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge have modified their original Framework for Action to be a Framework for Collective Action to acknowledge that a relentless sense of urgency to better serve all students is part of the cultural fabric of high-poverty/high-performing (HP/HP) schools.

Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools is for every adult in the school community who is interested in better serving the needs of children and youth who live in poverty. It takes everyone (including those in the roles of administrators, teachers, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, specialists, media specialist/librarians, counselors, coaches, paraeducators, cafeteria staff, custodians, bus drivers, security staff, and front office staff) working *collectively* to turn a high-poverty school into a high-performing school.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What educators in HP/HP schools do to make a difference.
- Why high-poverty schools need to change the way they do business.
- Practical applications of strategies used in HP/HP schools.
- Why it takes everyone in the school community working together to turn a high-poverty school into a high-performing school.



Based on *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools 2nd edition* by William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge. Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 2 Christy Drive, Suite 302, Chadds Ford, PA 19317 USA. • Copyright © 2021 by ASCD. All rights reserved. © 2021 by ASCD. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. • To subscribe, visit www.ascd.org or contact ASCD, 1703 N Beauregard Street, Alexandria, VA 22311.

Introduction: We Can Do This

High-performing, high-poverty (HP/HP) schools are *models of the possible*. They are places where the belief that transformation is possible has been proven correct and where students who live in poverty experience success. These models and experiences lead to optimism, hope, and self-efficacy.

High-poverty schools do not become high performing by tinkering their way to success. A former superintendent of a high-poverty rural district described the district's efforts to confront underachievement like this: "We could not continue to do what we knew would, at best, only minimally raise student achievement . . . and for only some of the kids. We had to fundamentally change the way we did business."

The following theories, research, and practical ideas can be applied to your unique context to help your school to become high performing and to close achievement gaps.

Turning Any High-Poverty School into a High-Performing School

Most students who drop out—more than 1 million a year in the United States—leave school between the ages of 14 and 16 after enduring years of schooling in which frustration, embarrassment, failure, and minimal achievement were daily realities.

Not all students who drop out or who underachieve live in poverty, but many do. Despite recent modest progress in student achievement at the elementary and middle school levels, most of our high schools continue to demonstrate little success in closing long-standing achievement gaps between low-income and more advantaged students.

Improving student learning in high-poverty schools is one of the most daunting challenges confronting public education today. The work is highly complex and demanding. Yet public schools continue to demonstrate that the work can be accomplished, and the successes can be sustained.

Learning From High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

For this second edition of *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools*, twelve HP/HP schools were carefully selected and rigorously profiled. Chosen from an initial sample of 51 schools, all of the schools selected had to first meet the following two criteria:

1. Secondary schools had to have a minimum of 60 percent of their students qualifying for the federal free and reduced-price meal program; elementary schools had to have a minimum of 65 percent qualifying.
2. All schools had to have demonstrated a pattern of performance at or above state averages for *all* public schools in their respective states in *all* areas of mandatory state achievement testing.

One example of the twelve schools profiled is Evergreen Elementary.

Following years of being the lowest-achieving elementary school in the Bethel School District in Washington State, Evergreen Elementary embarked on a journey to change its results. "We were on the verge of being closed . . . we needed to do something," voiced several of the school's staff.

Led by a committed group of teachers and a supportive principal, the school slowly began to realize modest achievement gains that moved them up from last place. But the team wanted more and, with the district's support, attended the annual conference of No Excuses University, which culminated in a group decision to apply for membership in the network and embrace its approach to school improvement.

Five years later, in 2015, Evergreen, with an enrollment surpassing 67 percent low income, became the highest district performer of its 16 district elementary counterparts, and it continues to garner this distinction today.

Principal Jamie Burnett fully credits the leadership and hard work of his "pillars," a group of veteran Evergreen teachers who were in place from the beginning, for leading the way. He further acknowledges the crucial structural importance of the school's partnership with No Excuses University, which helped them establish the Eight Exceptional Systems that drive their success: Culture of Universal Achievement, Collaboration, Standards Alignment, Assessment, Data Management, Interventions, Building-wide Discipline, and Character Counts. Blended together, these systems support growth in academic, social, and emotional learning throughout the school.

Burnett and his staff's daily standards-based instructional approach exemplifies how their system adherence has translated into increased academic success for Evergreen students. Classrooms reflect increased rigor and expectations for all students as staff turned to a consistent use of student data to guide instructional decisions and support. Teacher-led grade-level teams assume a "no excuses stance" as they collab-

Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools

orate to tackle challenges and improve practice, particularly for students who are underperforming. The instructional day increased to extend learning, and Response to Intervention (RTI) supports were deployed and shaped to better help individual students improve reading and math skills.

Burnett and his staff attribute their sustained success to a change of mindset regarding their expectations of their students, an established “code of collaboration” among staff that translates to growing collective efficacy across the school, and a sense of urgency to do better for their students.

Understanding Poverty and Our Moral Responsibility

Improving schools begins with educators who are unequivocally committed to equity—and that commitment starts with a better understanding of the meaning and influence of poverty in the lives of the students they serve.

As of 2017, 19 percent of all people who lived in poverty were children—more than 14 million, or 19 percent of all children in the United States. Children of all races live in poverty. How does poverty influence lives and learning? Poverty often places constraints on the family’s ability to provide material resources for their children. Substandard housing, inadequate medical care, and poor nutrition can affect the rate of childhood disease, premature births, and low birth weights, all of which influence a child’s physical and cognitive development and, consequently, his or her ability to benefit from schooling. Family stress and trauma can adversely affect the ability to make decisions, solve problems, and set goals. It can cause people to lose hope and view their actions as futile.

Although improvements in public education alone will not eliminate poverty, such improvements are an important part of the solution. The question is not whether too much is being asked of public schools, but rather, have we held up our end of the bargain?

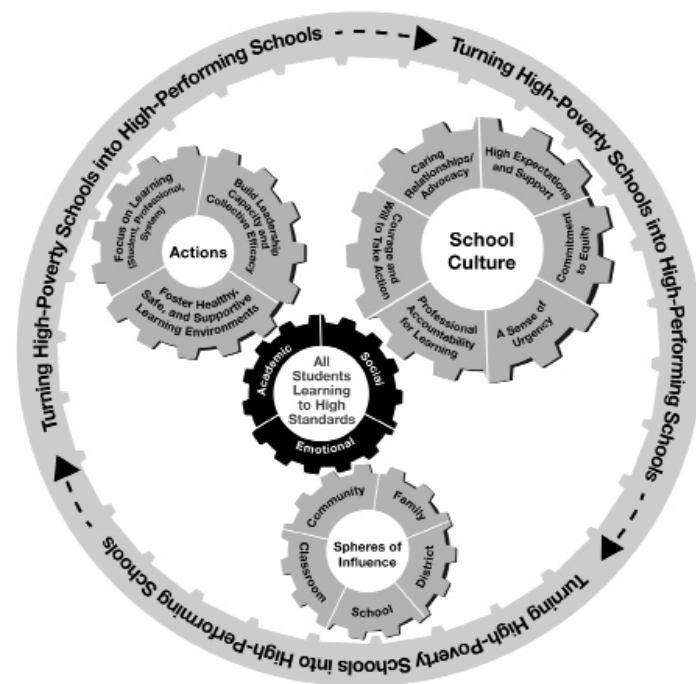
Using a Framework for Collective Action

A Framework for Collective Action helps explain the relationship among the various interactive components that need to be in place for a high-poverty school to become a high-performing school.

A Framework for Collective Action features the following gears: (1) All Students Learning, (2) Actions, (3) School Culture, and (4) Spheres of Influence. These four gears

are placed within the largest gear, which represents the idea that school improvement process is propelled from within—by the smaller gears.

Figure 4.1 A Framework for Collective Action



The All Students Learning to High Standards gear reflects the central mission of high-performing, high-poverty schools. It is the “drive gear.” In these high-performing schools, it is recognized that each student matters and each student’s needs are known, supported, and met through the interaction of all components of the gears.

The Actions gear focuses on three arenas in which educators need to act: They must develop and build the leadership capacity and collective efficacy needed to foster the creation of healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments, and support a relentless focus on student, professional, and system learning. Taking action is the necessary first step in making any kind of change. It’s through strategic action that the norms, values, and beliefs, which constitute school culture, begin to change.

The School Culture gear represents the characteristics of culture in HP/HP schools. Such culture is characterized by caring relationships and advocacy for students, high expectations and support, a commitment to equity, a sense of urgency, professional accountability for learning, and the courage and will to take action.

Finally, educators' concerted efforts to take action and change the school's culture are targeted to affect the Spheres of Influence gear on students' education, including their classroom, school, school district, family, and community. Leaders and the entire school community work in partnership and collaboration with stakeholders in these various spheres to ensure that every student succeeds.

Building Leadership Capacity and Collective Efficacy

Leadership capacity acts as the context for improvements in learning and the learning environment. Three elements characterize leadership in HP/HP schools: (1) shared and distributed leadership, (2) a spirit of reciprocity, and (3) the principal as lead learner.

Six guiding questions can serve as leverage points for building leadership capacity and collective efficacy:

1. How are we developing an inquiry stance and embedding reflection into professional practice? This process typically involves identifying a problem, gathering and analyzing data, setting goals, selecting and implementing strategies, and conducting an evaluation. Although this form of planning is likely used in many schools, what distinguishes HP/HP schools from others is the manner in which such a cycle of inquiry becomes the norm. In these schools, people tend to be curious about their practice and eager to innovate.

2. How does our data system support data-informed problem solving? HP/HP schools facilitate an ongoing, courageous look in the mirror. These schools have access to accurate, timely data that enable educators to set goals and benchmarks; monitor progress; make midcourse corrections; and design and successfully employ effective instruction and targeted interventions.

3. How are we developing relational trust? Bryk and Schneider (2002) defined relational trust as mutual respect, personal regard, competence to do one's job, and integrity.

4. How are we deploying resources effectively? Several leaders in HP/HP schools began their remarkable turnarounds by making tough calls—and many of those decisions were about how to use resources. One school deferred a planned textbook adoption in order to redirect monies to provide literacy coaching and targeted assistance for students.

5. How are we optimizing time? Extending academic learning time can occur in at least two ways—literally

extending the available time for students to learn or better using the time within the traditional school day. High-performing, high-poverty schools do both.

6. How are we ensuring equity? To transform a low-performing, high-poverty school into a high-performing school, leadership must be shared, distributed, reciprocal—and equity focused. Such leadership begins with educators who have answered the question, as Palmer (2007) puts it, “Who is the self that leads?” Understanding one's self means understanding one's mental maps, which entails facing personal biases and blind spots.

Then such leaders ask a second vital question: “Why am I engaged in this work?” The embodiment of leadership cannot be separated from the leader's purpose, for good or for bad.

Fostering a Healthy, Safe, and Supportive Learning Environment

To learn, children and adolescents need to feel safe and supported. Without these conditions, the mind reverts to a focus on survival. Educators in high-performing, high-poverty schools have always recognized the need for providing a healthy, safe, and supportive environment for academic as well as for social emotional learning (SEL).

One HP/HP elementary school in a West Coast state uses the acronym CARES to express how they support social, emotional, and academic learning. CARES stands for Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, and Self-Control. CARES provides the entire school community with a common language and common norms. Students, families, and educators alike live their “CARES.”

Comprehensive support derives from a “whatever it takes” mindset. Educators in HP/HP schools adhere to the key principle of continuous improvement—acknowledging that the work is never completely done—and ask these key questions to guide their actions:

1. How are we ensuring safety?
2. How are we developing an accurate understanding of poverty?
3. How are we strengthening the bond between students and school?
4. How are we engaging parents, families, and caregivers?
5. How are we engaging the broader community?
6. How are we ensuring equity?

For example, when it comes to strengthening the bond between students and school, some HP/HP schools have started student advisories. At The Preuss School, the educators were committed to making the school more personal and helping students meet high expectations. So they created a highly effective advisory program as one of the required foundational blocks of the school's detracked curriculum and instructional day. Teachers, as well as the principal, convene their advisories of 25 students two to three times each week, guiding students on their path to success in school, graduation, and beyond.

Many HP/HP schools provide additional protective factors, such as restructuring into small learning communities. These schools create focused learning environments that help keep smaller groups of students connected with one another, as well as to a smaller group of core teachers throughout the day.

In large or moderately sized high schools, this approach may be in the form of 9th grade academies. These academies "protect" 9th graders from the impersonal nature of the large, comprehensive high school experience in which it is too easy to get lost.

Focusing on Student, Professional, and System Learning

Is your school focusing on student, professional, and system learning and the links among the three? Five questions can support educators as they make student, professional, and system learning agendas the focus of their actions:

1. How are we employing a pedagogy of possibility?
2. How are we ensuring that every student can read proficiently?
3. How are we providing targeted interventions for students who need them?
4. How are we providing job-embedded opportunities for professional learning?
5. How are we ensuring equity?

For example, let's discuss employing a pedagogy of possibility. Unpacking standards, aligning curriculum to those standards, creating a common vision of what excellent teaching looks like, using research-based instructional practices focused on student engagement and empowerment, integrating SEL objectives into academic learning and the learning environment, and developing and using common assessments are all part of creating a pedagogy of possibil-

ity that brings coherence to teachers' professional practice and positively influences the instructional core.

Too often, schools continue to use ineffective curricular approaches and instructional practices with students who live in poverty. Such practices are described as a "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman, 1991), which is characterized by overuse of teacher-controlled discussions and decision-making, lecture, drill and decontextualized practice, and worksheets.

Rather than a pedagogy of poverty, students who live in poverty need "powerful pedagogy"—powerful instruction resulting in powerful (or deep) learning. Powerful pedagogy has been conceptualized in various ways: as relevant to the learner, meaning centered, supportive in the development of various kinds of understanding, accelerated, strengths based, empowering, and encompassing of higher-order thinking, deep knowledge, and connections beyond classrooms.

When a powerful pedagogy is employed, students are actively engaged in making meaning and developing understanding not only of content but also of one's self as a learner.

Eliminating Practices That Perpetuate Underachievement and Inequity

Committing to equity in our public schools is fundamentally about providing all students with an equal opportunity to learn. That won't happen until we confront the low expectations that often stem from classist and racist beliefs. Such beliefs are foundational to the inequitable conditions and counterproductive practices found in far too many schools that continue to perpetuate underachievement.

High-poverty schools become high performing in part by abandoning what doesn't work and replacing those approaches with those that *do* work. HP/HP schools work to eliminate the pervasive and destructive outcomes for students that accompany nine specific practices, which perpetuate underachievement and achievement gaps by denying students the opportunity to learn:

1. **Toleration of low expectations.** Leaders and educators in HP/HP schools don't tolerate excuses for underachievement. They're relentless in their efforts to help all students feel safe and develop a sense of belonging at school, they honor the effort required of students, and they celebrate student accomplishments.
2. **Inequitable funding.** HP/HP schools commit to the equitable use of resources. They create and maintain

Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools

budgets that become moral documents intended to target support where it's needed most.

3. **Inequitable teacher assignments.** Unfortunately, higher proportions of low-income students than their higher-income peers are taught by teachers who are not certificated in the subject they're called on to teach. In contrast, the most effective teachers in HP/HP schools are routinely placed with the highest-need students.
4. **Ineffective instruction.** Collaborative efforts, coaching, and other forms of assistance are used to support underperforming teachers who appear to have the potential to improve. Nevertheless, if improvement does not occur, principals in HP/HP schools initiate appropriate processes to dismiss a teacher, regardless of tenure status.
5. **Retention.** HP/HP schools typically do not employ traditional forms of retention. When students fail to learn, they focus on the individual needs of their students, with a goal of catching them up. Students are carefully assessed, and improvement plans are constructed and implemented around their specific needs.
6. **Tracking, ability grouping, and misuse of pull-outs.** HP/HP schools begin with the expectation that all students can and will achieve to standards. That mission stands in stark opposition to the practice of tracking students by ability or, far worse, by the perception of ability.
7. **Misuse of multitiered systems of support.** Many public schools use some type of multitiered system of support (MTSS), also known as Response to Intervention (RTI). Although many schools have experienced satisfactory results for their students, a study of RTI practices in elementary schools cautions educators regarding its effectiveness.
8. **Misassignment to special education.** Educators in HP/HP schools prevent disproportionate placement in special education by (1) providing excellent core instruction and follow-up interventions as needed; (2) fostering healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments in the classroom and schoolwide; and (3) developing a culture of high expectations and support for every student.
9. **Suspension and Expulsions.** Most HP/HP schools engage in a number of systemic interventions, which often prevent misbehavior or address it in a far more productive manner. Positive behavioral interventions and supports; restorative justice; social and emotional learning approaches such as responsive classroom; student courts; teaching self-regulation strategies; and, more recently, meditation, yoga, and mindfulness are some of the approaches HP/HP schools use.

We can do this work. The primary determinant in an HP/HP school's success is garnering and maintaining the collective will to ensure that all students succeed. Commit to embarking on your own transformational journey. Your students are worthy of nothing less.



William H. Parrett has received international recognition for his work in school improvement related to children and adolescents who live in poverty. He has co-authored eleven books, the past three being best-sellers. As Director Emeritus of the Center for School Improvement & Policy Studies, (1996-2019), Bill coordinated funded projects and school improvement initiatives that exceeded \$80 million. Recently honored as the Indiana University School of Education's 2021 Distinguished Alumni, he continues as a frequent speaker at international and national events. Contact him at wparret@boisestate.edu or on Twitter at [WHParrett](https://twitter.com/WHParrett).



Kathleen M. Budge brings a blend of 26 years of practical experience as a teacher and administrator combined with 14 years of work dedicated to bridging the gap between the university and the teaching profession. As associate professor Emerita of Educational Leadership in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Foundational Studies Department at Boise State University, she continues her research focus on poverty, rural education, school improvement, and leadership development. In addition to this book, Budge co-authored with Parrett, *Disrupting Poverty: 5 Powerful Classroom Practices*, and the video series *Disrupting Poverty in Elementary and Secondary Classrooms*. She continues to maintain that her most important and significant work has been teaching first graders to read. Contact her at kathleenbudge@boisestate.edu or on Twitter [@KathleenBudge](https://twitter.com/KathleenBudge).

Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools by William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge, copyright © 2020 by ASCD, has been summarized by permission of the publisher, ASCD. ISBN 9781416629009. Summary copyright © 2021 by ASCD. Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries ® www.summary.com.