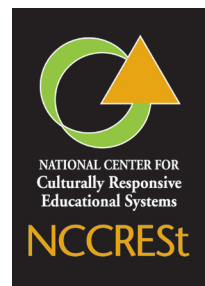




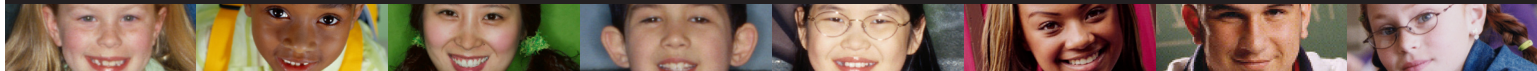
Living the Dream in the Promised Land

Features of Highly Successful Schools that Serve Students of Color

NANCY J. HARRIS-MURRI, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY



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I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1963)

Millions of children historically have failed in American school systems, particularly children of color from urban and rural low socioeconomic status (SES). Schools cannot change poverty or the living conditions of those children, however schools can change ways to reach and teach all children (Nieto, 2004). This exemplar summarizes the High Performance All Students Success Schools Model (HiPass Model), which describes features of highly successful high-poverty elementary schools as documented by Dr. Jim Scheurich (1998) and his colleagues and students.¹

We should note that the researchers did not focus their work on the reduction of disproportionate representation of students of color in special education.² However, the cultural profiles of these schools have significant implications for the prevention of the disproportionality problem since achievement levels in these high poverty schools that served a predominantly racial minority student population were at least on par with the performance level of low-poverty schools. Poverty is one factor often associated with lower academic achievement and minority student development and correlates with overrepresentation in special education (Artiles et al., 2002).

The HiPass Model: What is it and What Evidence Supports it?

The HiPass Model is grounded in the belief that all culturally and linguistically diverse children can reach academic success. Specifically, all children can achieve high performance success through the loving and compassionate commitment of principals and school staff, reformed curriculum, and innovative instructional practices. This whole school commitment creates a system change that set high performing expectations for all learners, students, and staff. The HiPass Model is comprised of a visionary leader, a committed school staff representing all races, a highly collaborative and democratic school of empowered parents, and an ethos that values the ethnic culture and language of each child. The HiPass Model shows evidence of culturally responsive practices.

Evidence for the HiPass model was collected through the collaborative efforts of James J. Scheurich, colleagues, and doctoral students in the form of interviews and observations in rural and urban areas in selected elementary schools on the border regions of Texas. The target schools were selected through a collaborative process with educators in these

regions. The research evidence was collected over a period of 2 years. Research teams typically interviewed parents, teachers, administrators, and other school staff members and observed various aspects of the school all morning, and met during lunch to share insights on their collected data. Interviews and observations continued through the afternoon, and in the evening, the teams would meet again to share what they had observed and heard. This form of evidence triangulation allowed them to reveal best practices and successful programs. As a result of Scheurich's collaborative research efforts, five core beliefs and seven organizational cultural characteristics emerged.

What are the Beliefs and Cultural Characteristics of the HiPass Schools?

THE 5 CORE BELIEFS These highly successful elementary schools embraced five core beliefs, and Schuerich (1998) described how the beliefs were enacted. He connected these beliefs to work by Gloria Ladson Billings, Linda Darling-Hammond, and other scholars. Box 1 lists the five beliefs and their definitions.

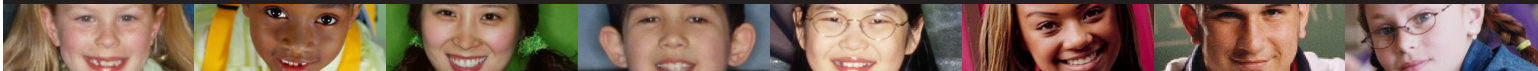
The first and second core beliefs were enacted by educators when they created conditions that facilitate learning in a way that matches, supports, engages, and energizes each child. These educators set high standards and expectations focusing on the possibilities for each learner.

The third core belief required all aspects of the school (see Box 1, next page) to be continually shaped and reshaped in order to reach high levels of performance for every child. For example, if the instruction was not working for a child, instruction was changed in order for the child to succeed.

The fourth belief strived to incorporate students' culture with their learning activities by responding to the culture of the home. Teachers in HiPass schools recognized the importance and the uniqueness of each child's language and home culture. For example, principals often shared the home language and culture of the

¹ This exemplar is a summary of an article published by Jim Scheurich. The original source is Scheurich, J. J. (1998). Highly successful and loving, public elementary schools populated mainly by low-ses children of color: Core beliefs and cultural characteristics. *Urban Education*, 33 451-491.

² Disproportionate representation is related to "unequal proportions of culturally diverse students in special [education] programs. Two patterns are associated with disproportionality, namely over- and under-representation" (Artiles & Trent, 2000, p. 514). Specifically, it refers to "the extent to which membership in a given group [e.g., ethnic] affects the probability of being placed in a specific special education disability category" (Oswald et al., 1999, p. 198).



BOX 1: FIVE CORE BELIEFS OF THE HiPass MODEL

1. **SCHOOLS ARE CHILD OR LEARNER CENTERED.** High expectations and high achievement for all children are enacted by truly committed individuals who create loving, facilitating conditions that deliver learning in ways that fit, support, engage, and energize the child (p. 461).
2. **ALL CHILDREN CAN SUCCEED AT A HIGH ACADEMIC LEVEL WITHOUT EXCEPTIONS.** The loving ethic is oriented in historical communal practices of communities of color and in the principals' and the teachers' connectedness, solidarity, and common affiliations with their students. This union creates the mission that the children's needs are their needs, and the children's successes are their successes, and the plight of the children is their plight (pp. 453-464).
3. **ALL CHILDREN MUST BE TREATED WITH LOVE, APPRECIATION, CARE AND RESPECT, WITHOUT EXCEPTIONS.** The entire school community is focused on the academic success and the holistic well-being of the student meaning that teaching, curriculum, organization of school, conduct of students and staff, parental involvement, and staff development are all driven by whatever it takes to achieve high levels of success and a positive, healthy environment for all students (pp. 461-462).
4. **THE RACIAL CULTURE, INCLUDING THE FIRST LANGUAGE OF THE CHILD, IS ALWAYS HIGHLY VALUED.** Teachers and principals recognize the critical importance of language and culture and positively integrate both into teaching and learning within the classroom and the overall organizational culture of the school (pp. 464-465).
5. **THE SCHOOL EXISTS FOR AND SERVES THE COMMUNITY.** Educators see parents and themselves as collaborators in the education of the children, and they do everything they can to positively promote this collaboration through respect, care, inclusiveness, trust, empowerment, and commitment (p. 467).

majority of their students. If they did not share the home language, they faithfully focused on valuing the home language and culture as evident in their formal and informal communications with families. For instance, all communications were in English and Spanish, and whenever there was a school program to which parents were invited, interpreters were always there. Additionally, if home cultures and languages were different from their own, principals would bring in experts on those cultures and languages to work with the teachers in order to deepen their understanding of those cultures and languages.

The fifth belief interweaves the school and the community as collaborators in the education of their children. For instance, at one particular school during the start of the school year, teachers would ride the bus and would get off at each stop to introduce themselves to the parents, thus demonstrating their appreciation and respect for each parent. This practice emphasized the importance of families in building a collaborative bridge in the success of the children.

What are the 7 Cultural Characteristics?

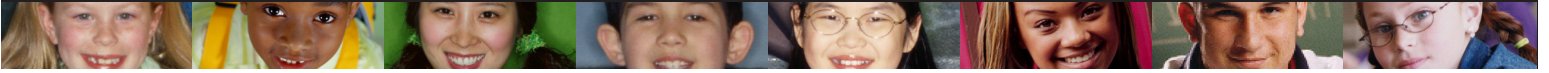
In addition to the five core beliefs, the HiPass schools created a climate based on seven organizational cultural characteristics. These cultural characteristics provided the foundation for the nature of these schools. School staff as a whole held themselves accountable for the success of all children. The characteristics of the HiPass schools' cultures are listed in Box 2.

The seven organizational cultural characteristics were closely interlaced and mutually strengthened by one another. The first cultural characteristic embraced a vision that schools can be established in ways that ensure the success of all children. School leaders were active facilitators in promoting togetherness, and through this togetherness, all participants were successful. The second cultural characteristic was based on creating a loving, caring environment for the whole school system: an environment based on communication, trust, and love. Principals guided school's transformation by truly acting out of love and embraced staff with this powerful commitment. "The loving and caring environments that developed were driven by the principals. Each one of them had this attitude toward the students and their parents. They all felt strongly that their students could learn just as well as any students could, and they all had a strong respect for the parents. To me, they communicated this in everything they did. It was like it was part of the core of who they were" (J. J. Scheurich personal communication, February 13, 2006).

Along with this type of environment, the third cultural characteristic promoted the notion of "we are family here." For example, as one principal looked for new staff members, the primary focus became whether or not the person could bond with the school community and staff.

BOX 2: SEVEN CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HiPass SCHOOLS

1. A strong shared vision.
2. Loving and caring environments for children and adults.
3. Strong collaborative "We Are Family" approach throughout the school.
4. Innovative, experimental, openness to new ideas.
5. Hardworking school staff but not to the point of burn out.
6. Appropriate conduct for all members built into the organizational culture.
7. School staff as a whole holds themselves accountable for the success of all.



The fourth cultural characteristic featured closely-knit groups of educators continually investigating and trying out new ideas to improve their work with children. For many of these schools, investigating a new practice involved looking at current research, doing background readings, watching the idea in practice, discussing the practice, and then carefully considering a pilot for the practice, making sure it improved student's work efforts.

The fifth cultural characteristic depicted a hard-working staff. As teachers work towards improving their practices, they were energized rather than drained as they worked to engage all students in their classrooms. This energy resulted from collaborative teams working together, experiencing success together, and therefore avoiding burnout. At one school, teachers readily volunteered to tutor a child before school or after school.

The sixth cultural characteristic described school staff as treating all children fairly, equally, and moreover, with love. Appropriate conduct was built into the organization culture of schools, communicating reciprocal responsibilities for all: students, staff, and administrators. Through this reciprocal approach, schools strongly established and highly reinforced expectations for appropriate conduct. If appropriate conduct is violated, consequences are rendered fairly, respectfully, and immediately.

Finally, the seventh cultural characteristic held the principal and staff collaboratively accountable and responsible for all children in the school setting. One approach looked at schools reviewing state test data, which resulted in a whole school accountability measure. This whole school accountability was used to drive teachers' instruction. Rather than yield to issues connected to state assessments (i.e. culturally biased tests), teachers, through their successes, took the opportunity to show their students and schools that they, in fact, were the academic equal to other students and schools.

Through these collaborative efforts, teachers were not just responsible for the learners in their classroom but responsible for the success of all students in the school community.

What is the Evidence on the Impact of the HiPass Model?

Outcome data indicated high levels of student success both academically and behaviorally. First, all students in HiPass schools performed exceptionally well on the state assessments, which placed them in direct competition with Anglo-dominant schools.

One of the HiPass schools maintained a 97% attendance rate and according to the state education agency was rated in the upper 5th on state testing for all the state schools. In general, teachers viewed these testing results not only as a measure of their students' learning, but also as measures of their effectiveness in using high quality instructional practices. Teachers looked at students' strengths and needs and adjusted their teaching to promote student progress. Additionally, since classrooms were designed to highly engage students by aligning their culture with the curriculum, discipline problems were reduced. Overall, these highly engaging environments led to a high attendance rate for students.

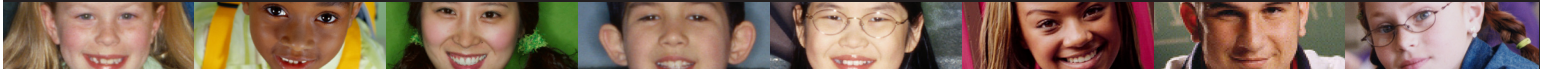
How can we Implement the HiPass Model?

The key to implementing this model begins at the school level. At the school level, principals and school staff live the vision of successfully reaching and teaching all children in a loving and caring environment. This whole school vision creates a system, which sets high performing expectations for all learners, students, and staff. The vision also impacts the areas of professional development, parental involvement, and community outreach.

In order to implement the HiPass model, principals led the staff in cultivating the five foundational beliefs, as well as instilled the commitment that all children will succeed at the highest levels. All invested participants must be unwilling to accept the negative mainstream assumptions regarding low SES children of color. Moreover, they must be committed to imparting this vision throughout their professional development, parental involvement, and community outreach.

Facilitating the HiPass Model begins with the principal's and the school staff's commitment to systematic change within the school. Changing the curriculum and instruction creates a strong learner-centered and truly loving environment. This systematic change can begin with:

- Dedicated commitment of the principal for a particular vision that strongly values children and their parents
- Dedicated commitment of school staff representing all races
- Highly valuing the ethnic culture and first language of the child
- Treating children of color with love, appreciation, care, and respect
- Believing and proving that all children of color can achieve at the highest academic levels

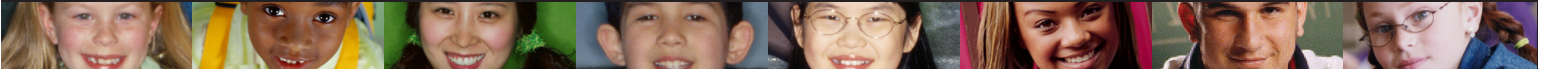


- Focusing on community more than competitive individualism
- Unwillingness to accept the negative beliefs about children of color knowing that their children are just as capable as other children
- Recognizing the need to intersect cultures of color and the dominant Anglo culture bringing in what is useful for students (e.g. the use of high stakes testing to direct instruction)

School wide change occurs when the school culture and the community unite to create a common vision of expected high performance and success for all students, regardless of color or socioeconomic status. Supports in place suggest that through these opportunities for success and this commitment to loving, caring beliefs and cultural characteristics, schools can significantly change the historical trajectories of their children towards reaching academic success and living the dream so inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

What Barriers May Block the Success of this Model?

Practitioners should not consider this model a formula that can be replicated exactly even though aspects of the model can be generalizable. As Scheurich (1998) states, exact replication cannot occur. However, we must consider that these beliefs and practices may change the direction of traditional schooling today, shaping a better way to do schooling, therefore ending the reproduction of academic differences based on race, class, or gender.

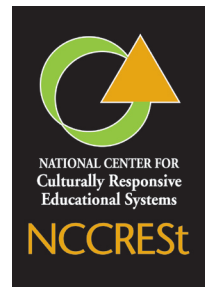


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Additional Resources

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UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT DENVER AND HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER
1380 LAWRENCE STREET, SUITE 625, DENVER, COLORADO 80204

EMAIL: NCCREST@CUDENVER.EDU

WEB: WWW.NCCREST.ORG

PHONE: 303.556.8449

FAX: 303.556.6141