

**A Study Examining Region Service Center and Texas Education Consultants' Views  
on Low School Performance and Prescribed Interventions for Improvement**

Introduction

Public school education in the United States has been under reform for centuries throughout the history of this nation. The United States public education system educates approximately 90% of American students. Education reform movements have surfaced throughout history in an effort to improve the public education system to be able to improve productive citizenry. One of the major goals of any school reform effort is to ensure that we offer a rigorous educational program for Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in order to prepare students to be ready to undertake the challenges at the university and in the workforce.

An accountability issue tied to school reform includes the strengthening of the curriculum to better serve the needs of a fast-growing, diverse student population who come to school with various backgrounds, experiences and resources. Curriculum restructuring has included standardization of concepts and skills to be taught in K-12<sup>th</sup> to comply with standard-based education reform. Perhaps one aspect that has been interwoven into any education reform is raising the bar on achievement expectations. High expectations must be accompanied by strong beliefs that all students can and will learn. Students of diverse backgrounds who speak languages other than English are expected to achieve at the same level and to reach the same high standards as students who are monolingual English speakers. Having high expectations for these diverse

student populations must include the commitment and support for school reform efforts which are grounded in principles that take diversity into consideration during the restructuring of education.

Public education can be restructured to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century student diversity and respond to standard-based accountability without sacrificing the students' language and culture. The process of "being" restructured must include viable alternatives for providing equitable education which upholds high expectations while providing students with the necessary instructional tools to achieve at high levels regardless of their backgrounds. Despite education reforms and research-based information that reiterates the belief that "all students can learn given the appropriate education," schools which serve great numbers of minority student populations are still at unacceptable and low-performing status. These schools are raising the bar to meet accountability standards, but raising it so high that they are leaving many children behind in their education. This educational disparity is impacting students' educational achievement and creating a major gap between what students learn and how they perform on standardized tests.

The magnitude of effects which occur as a consequence of education reforms that target low-performance from the "catch-up" perspective, learning for short-term, is not closing the gaps. It is actually widening the achievement gaps more and more. Additionally, an effect that seems to be placed by the wayside is focusing on achieving higher test scores rather than helping students reach higher levels of achievement relating to increased content knowledge, skills development, and long-term learning. There are

multiple goals that foster the preparation of students to make learning not only accessible but attainable.

### Review of the Literature

Research on school reform identifies practices in the public education system that include high expectations, strong instructional leadership, building of teacher capacity, working collaboratively rather than in isolation, and sharing best instructional practices that help students of all backgrounds succeed. Nevertheless, the underpinning issue remains to be performance on standardized testing. The following review of literature contains historical bits and pieces of educational reforms in the United States for the past few years that relate back to standard-based accountability and student performance.

### *Excellence in Education Act*

#### *AMERICA 2000*

The Excellence in Education Act also known as AMERICA 2000, was introduced in 1991 by the Bush Administration as a strategy to implement six goals that had been developed to answer the call for education reform. This act proposed a framework by which educational systems could operate regardless of the types of programs they were implementing. AMERICA 2000 looked at a strategy that included several tracks. First, track one called for better and more accountable schools. This track identified the “quality” aspect of this education reform. Second, track two called for innovative research programs to create models for a new generation of American schools. This track

focused on innovation in educational practices that could help reach students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Third, this track focused on the adults in the United States who needed further education, further training or retraining, and motivation to learn. Accessibility to education even for adults in this country was part of the strategy. More educated or trained citizens, more productive and prosperous country. Fourth, this track emphasized the building of communities where learning could take place. Learning communities were established by involving every neighborhood, town and community to become an AMERICA 2000 community. Becoming an AMERICA 2000 community meant adopting the National Education Goals; develop a community-wide plan to achieve the goals; design a report card to measure the results; and plan for and support a New American School. The underlying premise for AMERICA 2000 was to transform American schools in order to ensure that our children's and nation's future were secured. The 21<sup>st</sup> century was almost upon us as a nation and there needed to be a plan for designing new schools for a new century.

### ***National Education Goals***

The National Education Goals of 2000 provided a framework for a new, public school education reform for 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. In order for the United States to be able to compete in this global economy and for the citizens of this nation to achieve their fullest potential there needed to be consistent goals to be reached. The first goal related to all children in America being able to start school ready to learn. This meant that education standards needed to include early interventions and prescribed practices to make learning accessible to all children through HeadStart and other early learning

programs to give children an edge. In doing so, children would enter schools ready to learn. The second goal was linked to high school graduation rates. This goal looked at increasing graduation rates to at least 90%. High school dropout intervention programs were implemented to help prevent students from dropping out of school. The third goal called for students in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades would demonstrate competency in challenging subject matter such as English, math, science, etc. and that these students would be able to use their minds well. Preparing students for responsible citizenship, further learning and productive employment were also part of this goal.

The fourth goal dealt with preparing students in the United States to be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement. Being leaders in math and science seemed to be a forerunning ideal. The fifth goal looked at creating a nation of literate people. Every adult in the United States needed to be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy. They would also be able to exercise their rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Finally, the sixth goal was that every school in the United States be free of drugs, violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol. Additionally, schools would offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Additional goals were included in the original goals that created access to programs for the continued improvement regarding professional development for the teachers. This goal further stipulated that teachers be given the opportunity to acquire and refine their knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, a goal that promoted partnerships between the schools and the homes

was created to increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children in United States schools.

### ***No Child Left Behind Legislation***

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is a landmark in education reform because it moved school reform to another level. Accountability became more focused and aggressive making school performance non-negotiable. It was designed specifically to improve student achievement and change the culture of United States public schools. The overhauling of the Elementary and Secondary Act created NCLB legislation in an effort to support and maintain elementary and secondary education in the United States. Keeping in mind that the purpose of the law was to ensure that every child in America is able to meet the high learning accountability standards set forth by the state in which they live. NCLB was based on accountability for results, an emphasis on best teaching practices that work based on scientific research evidence, increase parental involvement, and increase local school districts' control and flexibility.

The goals of the NCLB as posted in the Federal Register include: a) all students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014; b) all students will be proficient in reading by the end of the third grade; c) all limited English proficient students will become proficient in English; d) by 2005-2006 all students will be taught by highly qualified teachers; e) all students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free and conducive to learning; and f) all students will graduate from high school.

The stringent requirements of NCLB help school districts and schools to implement the law. These requirements include annual testing of all students using standards in reading and mathematics in 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades and in science at three times in a student's schooling including once in high school. Additionally, school districts and schools are required to aggregate and disaggregate student achievement results and report these results. School districts and schools are expected to use the aggregated and disaggregated data to make some informed decisions regarding teaching and learning. Furthermore, a state definition and timeline for determining whether a school, district and the state are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The aggressive goal of ensuring that 100 percent of students are meeting standards by the 2013-2014 school year has created enormous pressure on administrators, teachers, students and parents.

Many schools throughout the United States who work with minority populations find that meeting AYP can be challenging and at times virtually impossible. The disaggregated data for many of schools across the states show that this student population is not meeting the standards required by AYP and often are an overrepresented number in special education classes. Schools that have faced AYP concerns and who fail to meet the requirement of showing adequate yearly progress are rated low-performing and in some instances unacceptable. There are many variables which play a role in why some of our students do not meet AYP. Some of these may include: a) limited English proficiency; b) limited experiences in various aspects of life that limit their ability to relate to academic settings and expectations; and c) cultural and linguistic differences that are not taken into account in the educational arena. For schools who do not meet the AYP requirements, the state education agency provides technical assistance and then

sanctions for the state, school districts and schools for not meeting AYP. These schools receive assistance and then are given corrective action if they still fail to make progress. Moreover, the Secretary of Education will be authorized to reduce federal funding to a state if it fails to meet their performance objectives and show academic achievement results. The foundation behind NCLB is “quality” in education. The quality of public school education is imperative for children in the United States. All children, regardless of their language, culture, or background should be able to learn, succeed, and have the same access to education in our public schools.

### Research Emphasis

This research study was conducted for the purpose of linking the perspectives of Texas Education Agency and Education Region Service Center individuals who work directly with low-performing schools in an effort to understand their involvement in providing technical assistance for these schools. The information obtained through this research study will help to create a better understanding of the role of technical assistance from the state level and the technical support provided by Education Region Service Center personnel.

### Research Design and Instrument

The research design being used for this research study is qualitative. The data was gathered through a 12 item questionnaire which was created by the researchers in an effort to connect what the body of research has to say with regard to turning low-performing schools around and what people who provide technical assistance as the

initial part of the sanctions of NCLB have to say about prescribed interventions they have offered to improve school performance. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the participants to further expand the responses.

### Participant Profile

The participants for this research study include Region Service Center and Texas Education Agency consultants who are assigned to provide technical assistance to schools who did not meet AYP requirements. Three of the participants are retired school administrators who are considered external members of the technical assistance task force; two are actively involved Region Service Center technical assistance providers who also serve as external members of the technical assistance task force; and two hold positions with school districts and are considered internal members of the technical assistance task force. The participants vary in experience from 15-30 years. They are very well-versed individuals who know many facets of education from curriculum to instruction to assessment. Some of the technical assistants work in a border town and some service several South Texas communities.

### Preliminary Research Findings

The preliminary data for this research study are presented in this section and the findings are interpreted and discussed. Relevance to various aspects of education reform is made as each of the responses on the questionnaires is explained. The following information was obtained from participants' responses to various questions pertaining to low school performance.

Question - 1 Describe some characteristics you have observed that are common in low performing schools. Explain.

- **Lack of strong instructional leadership** –“The fact that the captain of the ship can clearly see the port is no use if the crew continues to paddle in a different direction.” Leadership is not a spectator sport – it requires active and continual engagement.
- **Lack of CIA alignment** – the teachers do their own thing vs. following a prescribed curriculum, teaching to the curriculum and then having both formative and summative assessment. This alignment lacks proper and purposeful monitoring of what is happening in the classroom. Without proper monitoring there can be no adjustments made to the instruction to meet the needs of all students.
- **Lack of an instructional focus** – establishing the essential learnings a student is required to master in order to be successful, and adjust the curriculum and teaching strategies to realize that goal. These schools have a focus on coverage and not mastery. The level of academic rigor is not to the level it should be (this goes hand-in-hand with expectations).
- **Not able to handle change** – our schools are very traditional, thus any change effort violates our sense of who we are. What passes as change is frequently no more than tinkering around the edges. *Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose.* (The more things change, the more they remain the same.)
- **Homogeneous grouping that leads to tracking.**
- **Not data driven.** These schools look at data superficially and not in depth. Lack of a system to diagnose instruction. Data disgregation is looked at as just another requirement from central office vs. a system to impact/change/improve the instructional program.
- **Lack of central office support.** Too much of the role of central office is compliance driven vs. “how can we assist the campuses to improve teaching and learning.”

Question 2 What have you observed in the instructional component of these low performing schools that may contribute to low performance?

- Lack of truly understanding the essential learning discussion.
- Lack of understanding the state curriculum (TEKS) – Student Expectations.
- Lack of specificity in the essential learning.
- Formative assessment is not used to diagnose instruction.
- Looking for the “silver” solution vs. improving the quality of the instructional program.
- Isolation of teachers – lack of dialogue among teachers and leaders.
- Lack of monitoring of the instructional program.
- Lack of resources and time for struggling students.

Question 3 – What have you observed regarding curriculum implementation in the identified low performing schools you are working with?

Curriculum is the plan for learning which identifies the student's "interaction... with instructional content, materials, resources, and process for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives". Curriculum reflects the mission and goals of the school and community and enables all students to be fulfilled and confident persons as they participate in a democratic society.

- Lack of integration of curriculum which leads to a lost of instructional time.
- Misalignment of the intended curriculum and the taught curriculum.
- Misalignment of curriculum and the instruction – teachers teaching “love” units vs. teaching the curriculum that has been decided on by the teachers.
- Lack of proper monitoring by leadership team.
- Leadership teams not having the curricular background to assist struggling teachers.
- Lack of discussion of the following general curriculum principles to develop a common understanding of what they mean and how they support specific curricular disciplines and programs. Discussion of the five (5) general curriculum principles listed may result in strengths and weaknesses. OR Such a common understanding can be applied to discussions in the specific curricular disciplines and program areas. The school's entire curriculum "provides a planned sequence of learning experiences of adequate breadth and depth to:
  - develop individual responsibility for learning and personal actions;
  - address the unique needs, personal interests, and capabilities of each student;
  - provide for the mental and physical well-being of each student;
  - contribute to each student's intellectual, social, vocational, artistic, and expressive growth; and
  - provide opportunities for students to recognize their potentials and be prepared for a lifetime of learning."

Lack of discussion in the effectiveness of curricular and program areas. The Texas Essential and Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) should serve as reference for these discussions.

- The curriculum addresses the major concepts, themes, and skills identified in the TEKS.
- The curricular or program area provides an articulated sequence of opportunities that is free of gaps and unnecessary repetitions.
- The curricular or program area encourages students to assume responsibility for their own learning and personal actions.
- The curricular or program area provides for the unique learning needs, personal interests, and capabilities of each student.

- The curriculum or program is revised to incorporate current research.
- The curriculum is designed to further students' understanding of both the curriculum and its relevance to their world.

Schools shall maintain instructional programs that provide all students with opportunities to acquire proficiencies in all Pre-K-16 curricular areas. The school's curricular offerings shall include a "balance of learning experiences" and provide a "planned sequence of learning experiences of adequate breadth and depth".

- The written curriculum identifies concepts and skills that students are expected to learn. The curriculum considers the changing educational needs of the student body and reflects the values of the community.
- An organized process is employed for developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising the school's curriculum. Local, state, and national guides and resources are used to support curricular work.
- Curriculum review and revision procedures involve the entire school community.
- Curricular goals and objectives are communicated within, between, and among grade levels, programs, and buildings throughout the school corporation.
- The curriculum provides students opportunities for developing lifelong learning skills.
- The school assures that the written curriculum is taught and is aligned with assessments to provide valid student performance information.

Question 4 Describe the actions taken by the instructional leaders in the low performing schools you have been assigned to that reflect what may have contributed to the performance of the school.

- Instructional leaders guide the school community in identification of shared beliefs, affirmation of the school's mission and establishment of mutually agreed upon goals. Leaders facilitate the development of a healthy learning environment and the accompanying curricular and instructional models which move the school toward realization of the mission. Instructional leadership is dynamic in that school improvement is a process, not an event. It is dynamic in that different persons assume different leadership roles. Leaders empower others to be leaders and encourage all members of the school community to be active participants in the teaching-learning process. NOTE: Instructional leaders include, but are not limited to, principals, assistant principals, deans, department heads, team leaders, guidance counselors, staff members, board of education members, and central office personnel. The instructional leaders did not meet the following thresholds:
  - Instructional leaders encourage members of the school community to work toward a clearly defined mission.
  - Instructional leaders communicate and work with one another.
  - Instructional leaders share ownership and responsibility for evaluating current programs and making school-wide decisions. Leaders delegate responsibility where appropriate.

- Instructional leaders promote resources to improve student achievement and staff performance.
- Instructional leaders incorporate research-based schooling practices into the school improvement planning process.
- Instructional leaders demonstrate that learning is the most important reason for being in school and clearly communicate instructional expectations to students, staff, and patrons.
- Instructional leaders observe teachers in classrooms and provide positive, constructive feedback aimed at solving problems and improving instruction.

Question 5 Describe the actions taken by the teachers in the low performing schools you have been assigned to that reflect what may have contributed to the performance of the school.

Teachers are well intentional. They follow the lead of the leaders on campus. Teachers who are not monitored/supervised/coached/mentored in the appropriate manner revert back to inappropriate teaching practices and thus impact student performance in a negative manner. Teachers who are performing up to par do some of the following:

- Not using best practices
- Not following the intended curriculum
- Lack of high expectations for all students
- Lack of understanding of formative assessment – assessment
- Lack of passion for teaching and learning
- Lack of innovativeness in the classroom
- Lack of preparation for monitoring of instruction throughout the instructional period

Question 6 – Describe the actions taken by the instructional leader in the low performing schools to implement programs needed for student success.

Closely involved and monitoring the following (not an all inclusive list):

- Aligned curriculum
- Increased and effective use of instructional time
- Ongoing assessment
- Immediate intervention for students experiencing difficulty mastering concepts
- Teacher knowledge of the content
- Instructional materials and teaching techniques
- Differentiated instruction
- Focused professional development
- End of the year analysis of educator and student performance

- Sound administrative practices, e.g., monitoring of instruction, meeting with teachers to discuss instruction, knowledge of instructional best practices, etc.
- Teachers and students working together – use instructional group activities in which students and teacher work together to create a product of idea.
- Developing language and literacy skills across all curriculum – apply literacy strategies and develop language competencies in all subject areas encourages students’ use of first and second languages in instructional activities.
- Connecting lessons to students’ lives – contextualize teaching and learning in students’ existing experiences in home, community, and school.
- Engaging students with challenging lessons – maintain challenging standards for student’s performance; design activities to advance understanding to more complex levels.
- Emphasizing dialogue over lectures – instructs through teacher-student dialogue, especially academic, goal-directed, small-group conversations rather than lecture.
- Culture of high expectations and caring
- A safe and disciplined environment
- A principal who is a STRONG instructional leader
- Hard-working, committed, and able teachers
- A curriculum focused on academic achievement that emphasizes basic skills
- Increased instructional time
- Ongoing, diagnostic assessment
- Parents as partners in learning
- Professional development
- Collaboration
- Building coaching vertical teams
- Monitoring instruction with reflection time
- Disaggregation and unpacking of data
- Use of Gap Analysis
- Planning to facilitate unity of purpose and alignment

Question 7 Describe the actions taken by the teachers in low performing schools to implement programs needed for student success.

Teachers always following the lead of a strong instructional leader. Teachers working together to nurture and cultivating an attitude that all students can and should be able to learn the prescribe curriculum. Do whatever it takes to have student success.

- Rich and stimulating classroom environment
- Classroom climate conducive to learning
- Clear and high expectations for all students
- Coherent focused instruction
- Thoughtful discourse
- Authentic learning
- Regular diagnostic assessment for learning

- Reading and writing as essential activities
- Support for mathematical reasoning
- Effective use of technology

Question 8 What interventions to improve the school performance were taken by the instructional leaders prior to your consultation?

Instructional leaders were providing from none to many interventions strategies to improve student achievement. The key was not having a plan to formulate “how to” implement “change” strategies needed to improve student achievement.

Question 9 What interventions were taken to improve school performance by the teachers prior to your consultation?

Some teachers were doing a good job in trying to meet the needs of their children – pockets of excellence. Again, teachers will follow the lead of their leadership.

Question 10 How is assessment data used at the identified low performing schools to develop a school improvement plan?

A primary aim of planning is to facilitate **unity of purpose**, or **alignment**. Alignment is the process of reaching mutual understanding about common goals. It gives shared meaning to the work of the school or school district, thereby enabling successful accomplishment of the goals of the organization.

Alignment, like a magnet, is a force that coalesces and focuses all stakeholders and propels them forward as one. Alignment ensures that the organization is in balance; it makes certain that all parts and all parties ‘fit’ together and are moving in the same direction.

The absence of alignment, i.e., *misalignment*, is “conflict” – among people, programs, processes, resources, etc. Like an automobile out of alignment, misaligned schools or districts develop serious problems when underlying issues are not addressed in a timely manner. They become difficult to ‘steer;’ the ‘parts’ rub against one another, generating ‘heat’ and producing ‘friction’ and rapid ‘wear-&-tear.’ In sum, such organizations

operate at less-than-peak performance, and the results they produce are often inconsistent.

A disciplined framework for planning is a vital tool for bringing about alignment of people, programs, processes and resources. The resulting plan offers a coordinated roadmap for continuous improvement of educational practices and student achievement. Such a plan is, in reality, an expression of the school's or school district's fondest wishes for students, staff and stakeholders.

Question 11 What recommendations did you have for the low performing schools you were assigned to in the following areas? Instruction, Curriculum, Program Implementation, Testing and Other.

Instruction –

- All teachers should have a broad base of academic knowledge with depth in area of study.
- Teachers should will know and be able to use a variety of strategies and settings that identify and accommodate individual learning styles and engage students.
- Teachers will be adept at acting as coaches and as facilitators of learning to promote more active involvement of students in their own learning.
- Teachers will teach in ways that help students to develop into competent problem solvers and critical thinkers.
- Teachers should convey a sense of caring to their students so that their students feel that their teachers share a stake in their learning.
- Teachers will utilize technology in their instruction in ways that improve student learning.
- Teachers will integrate assessment into instruction so that assessment does not merely measure students, but becomes part of the learning process itself.

Curriculum –

- Each school will identify a set of essential learnings – above all, in literacy, language, math, social studies, science, and the arts – in which students must demonstrate achievement.
- Integrate the curriculum to the extent possible and emphasize depth over breath of coverage.
- Teachers will design work for students that is of high enough quality to engage them, cause them to persist, and when successful completed, result in their satisfaction and their acquisition of learnings, skills, and abilities valued by the community.

- The content tot the curriculum will connect to real-life applications of knowledge and skills to help students link their education to the future.
- Assessment of student learning will align itself with the curriculum so that students’ progress is measured by what is taught.
- Each student should a personal plan for progress.
- Vertical teaming with campuses.

Program implementation

- Their has to be plan for implementation - who is responsible for monitoring, report to committee, look at data, make changes if needed.

Testing –

- Testing has to be integrated with curriculum and instruction. Testing has to be diagnostic and formative in nature to make the needed corrections in the instructional program. Teachers and administrators need a great deal of training in this area.

Question 12 In your professional opinion, what do you think contributed to improvement or lack of improvement of the low performing schools you were assigned to?

**INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP, INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP, INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP .....**

Summary and Conclusions

Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have gone through major restructuring in order to comply with the accountability system. This restructuring is not new but in fact is a continuation of reforms that were previously enacted to improve education in the United States. Meeting the requirements of state standards and state mandated exams is only one part of this reform. The underlying premise found in the reform is making education accessible and equitable to all students. This accessibility is achieved through equal opportunities for education regardless of students’ ethnic or economic backgrounds. Perhaps the most important aspect of the reform is maintaining high expectations for all

students. Low performance in many instances is linked to expectations. Having high expectations for all students seems to resound in every single education reform throughout history. Yet, many of our students are still not meeting the standards required by state exams. They fall behind and seldom catch up. The learning gaps are seen in schools where a majority of the students come from diverse backgrounds and who have speak a language other than English. In some instances, these students are identified as “special education” when in fact they are facing a language problem not a learning problem.

In an effort to help low performing schools turn around, the Texas Education Agency hired external members to evaluate curriculum and instruction to identify practices that may have contributed to the low performance. Their reports seem to indicate that low performing schools still have teachers working in isolation rather than collaboratively. They further indicate that some of these teachers do not have a broad base of academic knowledge. Teachers are teaching but not reaching all students because they are not teaching to match students’ learning styles. Additionally, teachers are not teaching students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers. They lower expectations of students depending on their backgrounds. This does not facilitate learning, it hinders learning. Furthermore, curriculum is not integrated to connect learning of skills across content areas. Many skills are taught in isolation and disconnected from the total curriculum. There is not enough alignment of curriculum happening in low performing schools. Students learn under a generic curriculum that is not tailored to meet their needs. Teachers often do what they think is best and don’t follow a prescribed curriculum. This happens quit often in low performing schools. Without the appropriate

monitoring of curriculum, instructional and assessment alignment, accommodations are not being made to meet students' needs.

Another very prevalent issue that has been identified by external members as impacting the students' performance which in turn impacts the schools' performance is the lack of instructional focus. The focus in many of these schools is getting material covered not necessarily the mastery of skills. In the age of stringent accountability, teachers find themselves rushing through the content and skills in preparation for a "test" rather than for long-term learning. This causes students' to learn for the moment and it becomes evident when students go from one grade level to another with deficits in learning. These deficits create major gaps which may not ever be closed.

Grouping strategies also play a role in low performance and lack of student success. Many schools practice a homogeneous grouping strategy that seems to facilitate the teaching not the learning. In many instances, students are tracked to the point of segregation when this type of grouping strategy is used. Low performing students are grouped together and this perpetuates low performance. The students don't get the opportunity to learn from other students who could very easily help raise the bar for many students who need interactions from their peers. The peers not only help to produce high expectations, they also serve as role models for learning.

Finally, low performing schools see their data on a superficial basis rather than in a more in-depth basis. After the data is disaggregated, teachers and administrators often put it away and don't use it to make instructional decisions that can improve instruction and student success. Many teachers are fearful of data and see disaggregation as another

task rather than as a possible solution to low performance. Until educators and administrators can use data to drive their instructional decisions, low performance is the outcome. How can you fix what is wrong if you don't know what is wrong.

Education reforms come and go but low performance impacts lives forever.

Administrators and teachers need to work towards improving the quality of instruction if they are to tackle the low performance status. Many low performing schools have turned their performance around by looking closely at practices that have not been successful in the past. Stakeholders need to be empowered to look at the process of getting to the end. Strong leadership requires involvement which is active and constant. Teachers need to be able to be trained and empowered to know curriculum and instruction well enough to make more sound instructional and curricular decisions. Instructional practices should include essential learning tools that students need to master the curriculum and learn the necessary skills to add to their long-term learning. Learning is non-negotiable. It should be accessible to all students.

Public education has and will continue to go through education reforms as a continual effort to help all students be successful. Educators, administrators and policymakers should have one goal in mind "student success" for all students regardless of their ethnicity or background. Unity of purpose is what drives curriculum, instruction, assessment outcomes and the culture of learning. Instructional leaders can make a difference in turning low performance around when the unity of purpose is well-defined, implemented and monitored.