Transformational Leadership: Transmitting an Educational Reform Agenda in a Low Performing Urban Middle School Using Innovative Strategies, such as Hip-Hop and High Interest Curriculum

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Abstract
After 12 years since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind legislation and six years of Race to the Top national educational policy, both designed to address the educational achievement gap and improve many of America's failing schools, the persistence of failing schools in urban communities continues to exist. This problem demands bold, innovative, even non-traditional initiatives. The research of this dissertation, called the Queens Middle School (QMS) Study, looks to determine the strategies implemented by a transformational leader at a low performing Queens, New York middle school, 10 years ago, in a manner that reveals new educational models that reveals best practices that will help today's urban school leader. The QMS study contributes to the body of knowledge on educational reform by introducing new practices and generating new theories regarding improving student outcomes in an urban school setting. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the decision-making process, programmatic strategies, and the engagement of multiple stakeholders by a transformational leader engaged in an agenda of change in an urban, low-performing middle school. More specifically, the study evaluates the use of hip-hop as a motivational tool to engage students and faculty at QMS in a reform effort. The design of this qualitative study utilized focus groups of three distinct stakeholders--teachers, students, parents to assess their perceptions of what led to the improvement of QMS. Through the lens of transformational leadership and educational change theory, this study assesses the impact of change on school improvement.

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Janice Kelly

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Fran Wills

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Transformational Leadership: Transmitting an Educational Reform Agenda in a Low Performing Urban Middle School Using Innovative Strategies, such as Hip-Hop and High Interest Curriculum

By

Shango A. Blake

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Janice Kelly

Committee Member

Dr. Fran Wills

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

December 2015
Dedication

I dedicated this to God, my family, and the countless students of color, and their parents, who deserve a quality education but are often languishing in poor schools with limited resources, therefore, are the recipients of an inferior education. I pray that this Doctorate allows me to refine my work as an advocate for voiceless children, and their families.

First, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength, patience, and endurance to get through the process of completing my dissertation. Second, I would like to thank my wife, parents, and children for their support, encouragement, and patience. I could not have completed this process without you. The time I spent engaged in my research, writing, and editing caused me not to be involved with you. Thank you for your understanding. Third, to my siblings, thank you for listening to me talk about my research. It helped me think about my approach to studying my topic. Fourth, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Janice Kelly for guiding me through the dissertation process, and pushing me out of my comfort zone. In addition, I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Fran Wills, for stepping up and providing feedback and support. Fifth, Dr. Josephine Mofett, thank you for the vision and leadership you have provided in the continued development of St. John Fisher’s Ed.D. Executive Leadership program. Last, but not least, I thank those who took time out of their busy schedule to participate in this study.

I'd like to give special acknowledgment to Dr. Bessie W. Blake—without your help I would not have been successful, Special thanks go to Dr. Barbara R. Thompson,
Dr. Hardy, Dr. Latasha Hamlett, Cohort 5, Team SCALE, Sonia Marshall, Donna DeSimone, Rob F. Jones, Victor P Arroyo—my personal trainer who gave me the mental toughness to complete the process, and Forrest Muhammad for those long uplifting talks. I dedicate this study to the memory of Troy R. Edwards rest in peace. Thank you for being a true friend. Thank you all for your guidance and support.
Biographical Sketch

Shango Blake is the CEO of TRU SK Consultant, LLC, an educational consultant company. In addition, he is a national speaker about issues and solutions in urban education; from pioneering unique collaboration between students, teachers, parents, and the community towards sustaining a vibrant academic atmosphere; to his successful tenure as a New York City principal, he has proven to be an authentic voice in urban educational reform.

Through his company, Mr. Blake provides to urban schools, school districts, parent organizations, and civic groups, innovative professional development workshops for teachers; leadership development for principals, assistant principals, and core instructional teams; parent empowerment training, and youth mentorship programs.

Because of his work in educational reform, Mr. Blake has been featured in several local and national media outlets; including New York local news WABC channel 7, and WCBS channel 2. In addition, he was featured on, 98.7 kiss FM, and in Vibe magazine.
Abstract

After 12 years since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind legislation and six years of Race to the Top national educational policy, both designed to address the educational achievement gap and improve many of America’s failing schools, the persistence of failing schools in urban communities continues to exist. This problem demands bold, innovative, even non-traditional initiatives. The research of this dissertation, called the Queens Middle School (QMS) Study, looks to determine the strategies implemented by a transformational leader at a low performing Queens, New York middle school, 10 years ago, in a manner that reveals new educational models that reveals best practices that will help today’s urban school leader.

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The design of this qualitative study utilized focus groups of three distinct stakeholders--teachers, students, parents to assess their perceptions of what led to the improvement of QMS. Through the lens of transformational leadership and educational change theory, this study assesses the impact of change on school improvement.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In 2001, for the first time federal law titled No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (No Child Left Behind Act, [NCLB], 2001) required all states to close the achievement gap between students of color and their white counterparts. In addition, every student had to perform to a set of minimum standards. Thus, states were required to develop a system of designing, collecting, and reporting student outcomes on standardized assessment instruments.

New York State, in turn, designed a series of standardized tests as well as a means of monitoring instructional strategies and learning outcomes for all school districts. For middle school students, at the end of their eighth year, the New York State Department of Education (NYSED) began to administer tests designed to assess level proficiencies and skills in English language arts (ELA) and in mathematics. These test results determine whether students in a given school are performing at or above grade level (nysed.gov, 2004). Based on the percentage of students reaching the desired benchmark, which is either a level 3 - meets the minimum academic standards in ELA or math, or level 4 - meets or exceeds the minimum academic standards in ELA or math. NYSED then assigns the school one of four designations, which is published annually as the New York State (NYS) school report card. First, a School In Good Academic Standing (SIGAS) is considered a high performing school that satisfies state learning outcomes in ELA and math. Second, a School Requiring Academic Progress (SRAP) indicates an overall
improvement except for a subgroup of students such as Special Education, English Language Learners, or Black and Latino. Third, a *School in Need of Improvement* (SINI) fails to meet annual yearly state targets in ELA and math for all students. Finally, a *School Under Registration and Review* (SURR) is a school that over 3 years consistently fails to meet annual state targets in ELA and math. Thus, these schools are subject to closure or takeover by the state. Therefore, the NYSED can ultimately reconstitute a school under a new charter, which means closing a school and reopening it under a different name. Possible implications of such an act are firing school leadership, forcing staff to reapply for their jobs, and reopening under a different charter and name.

However, before the NYSED can move to reconstitute a school, a corrective action plan will be implemented over a three to four year period (nysed.gov, 2003; Wall, 2015).

All school districts in NYS are accountable to the NYSED outcomes assessment process (www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability, 2015). In 2003, after decades of decline in student performance rates, in certain areas, New York City, home of the nation’s largest school district, initiated a series of instructional and organizational reforms (McDonald, 2013). These reforms, titled Children First, were intended to improve teachers’ practice, increase parents’ involvement and raise the level of student achievement by developing effective school leaders (nycdoe.gov, 2003), as later described by Liszt (2008) and Moss (2008).

The reform effort was implemented citywide and resulted in a new empowerment reform movement that assigned significant authority and accountability to principals requiring them to address past high dropout rates, low graduation rates, and poor student performance on standardized assessments (McDonald, 2013). Wong, Sproul, & Kasok,
(2008) state the first phase of school reform was about asserting mayoral control over city schools. As a result, 32 school districts, each with its own elected community school boards, who in turn hired their respective community school district superintendent, were phased out. These community school districts were replaced with 10 regional districts that were centrally controlled by the newly installed school Chancellor of NYC schools, Joel Klein. Klein would lead both this new restructuring effort and then follow up with a second phase of reform based on principal empowerment and accountability. The core tenets of Chancellor Klein’s agenda were to empower principals, decentralize bureaucracy of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), and support teacher development, resulting in the second wave of reforms which redirected central resources to local schools. In addition, principals had discretionary control over staffing, the school calendar, and budgeting. Moreover, Chancellor Klein eliminated the superintendent’s authority to hire and fire school principals and teachers; control each school’s budget and calendar; and set the instructional agenda for a school. The Community School District Superintendent’s new title was Network Leader of School Support Organization (SSO). The development of SSO, organized to deliver technical and instructional support to school principals, shifted the power within the NYCDOE from district-level administration to local school leaders. Thus, the new role of a superintendent was to advise and coach, not direct or instruct. Indeed, the NYCDOE stressed leadership, empowerment, and accountability as the pillars undergirding the new role of the principal (Children First, 2004).
Problem Statement

In May of 2003, simultaneously with the sweeping *Children First* reform changes in the New York City public school system and the implementation of high stakes accountability measures by NYSED, an assistant principal who had served for a year in a low-performing middle school in Queens, New York, referred to in this research as Queens Middle School (QMS), was promoted to principal. In fact, this researcher was the principal that oversaw the school reform efforts between the periods of 2003-2007. QMS was located in a school district designated as a District in Need of Improvement (DINI) by NYSED because all but one of its five middle schools had SINI designation. One other school ranked last in terms of student performance and earned the designation of SURR; which was worse than SINI because if the school did not dramatically improve, it could be closed by NYSED. (nysed.gov, 2003). Otherwise, all five schools shared the same demographics, resource allocations, and mandates to reverse the downward trend of academic achievement as evidenced by minimum benchmark standards set by the state (nysed.gov, 2003). Similar to New York City public schools today, the goal of QMS and its DINI counterparts was to attain and maintain the NYSED designation as a SIGAS. However, few resources and even less administrative direction were provided as to how to fulfill city and state mandates. The most common problem for principals was, and remains, how to change school policies and practices in ways that positively influenced teachers, parents, and students who were intended beneficiaries of needed reform (Fullan, 2003; Smith, 2008).

When the new principal took the leadership reins at QMS in 2003, he was well aware of the school’s problems. His challenges similarly relate to today’s principals who
work in underfunded, low-performing school districts (McDonald, 2013). The charge for this principal and his colleagues in the DINI district were to improve student attendance, boost teacher morale and improve teacher practices as well as to increase parental involvement (personal communication, November 6, 2002). All the mandated Children First changes initiated by Chancellor Klein were intended to raise the level of student performance (Childress & Clayton, 2010). As exemplified in the District Memorandum, mandates for improvement were often issued in the absence of information or models on ways to proceed. Therefore, most principals in the DINI were unable to lead their schools in making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), which means they were unable to establish a year-to-year improvement that helped a school become SIGAS (nysed.gov 2003).

Ironically, the stresses and failures that the DINI principals experienced were duplicated throughout the city and the country (Wong, et al., 2008). When referring to principals in poor urban neighborhoods, Lucas (2001) states that, they sorely need tools that equip them to tackle the negative forces that plague their schools. In fact, he said they need to “involve more people in leading the schools,” and this would probably require a shift in leadership strategies (p.19).

The stress of today’s principals is compounded by the increased risk of job loss. An unintended outcome of the exaggerated emphasis on high stakes testing seems to be the generation of high turnover rates among urban principals that perpetuate instability in urban schools (Jordan, 2007; Smith, 2008). The continuous loss of leaders in schools where there is a need for talented principals has created a problem that has reached a crisis magnitude (Center for Public Education, 2015). This uncertainty and lack of continuity in leadership, underscores the need for qualitative research data that illuminate
effective models and strategies applicable to inner city schools with predominant student populations of color (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Manansala, 2011).

For several reasons, a qualitative study of QMS was a feasible option for adding to the knowledge and practices useful to addressing the leadership crisis in schools attempting to serve the learning needs of low-income students of color. First, such a qualitative study afforded an opportunity for an in-depth examination of the change strategies of a new principal, who had not been a principal prior to his assignment at QMS, for his full tenure on the job in a low-performing inner city school. As such, it generated insights regarding leadership attributes that were potentially effective in schools where high student failure rates persisted. Second, QMS was a feasible candidate for a qualitative study of leadership strategies in an urban setting because of its shared demographic profile with the student populations and problems encountered by today’s inner city school principals.

Third, the primary researcher was the former principal of QMS and had the sphere of influence to access necessary records and networks to conduct the study. This researcher was aware that conducting a study of the school where he was a former principal had the potential for bias. However, in social science several researchers have also been participants in their own study. In addition, in qualitative research there is an inherent bias; a fact of which this researcher was aware and had taken steps to limit (Blum, 2006; Mead, 1992).

Fourth, a qualitative study allowed this researcher to assess stakeholders’ attitudes and values concerning school improvement while searching for common themes through the process of focus group interviews. Thus, this researcher was exploring whether or not
his assertion about QMS school improvement aligned with stakeholders. Finally, such a study emphasized the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents. In doing so, it gave voice to people—especially poor minority students and parents—who were often rejected by society and whose voices were rarely heard in the shaping of educational policies and practices (Hilliard, 2000; Kozol, 1991).

In the year prior to the start of the principal’s tenure, only 15.5% of QMS students were performing at or above grade level in math and only 29.7% had achieved the required standard in ELA, as evidenced by student performance on the eighth grade NYSED standardized tests as shown in Table 1.1 (NYCDOE, internal school document, June 1, 2005).

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DINI Middle schools 2002-03</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>QMS</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math students on or above standards</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA students on or above standards</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The combined ELA and Math scores along with its AYP reports earned QMS the dubious distinction of a next-to-last ranking among the DINI schools.

The challenge of raising test scores at QMS was compounded by its location in a predominantly minority school district that was plagued by poverty. The ethnic backgrounds of the 1,463 students enrolled in the school were 49% African American, 26% Asian, 22% Latino, 2% White, and 1% American Indian. From 2005-2006, school records also showed that the family income for 68% of the students fell below the
poverty line as evidenced by their eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program federally funded by Title I (nysed.gov, 2006).

Lee (2009) would later describe inner city schools like QMS as places where mandated high stakes standardized tests fail to take into consideration the socioeconomic condition of students of color, the lack of appropriate funding for schools with high percentages of Blacks and Latinos, and the shortages of qualified teachers in those districts. For example, the poverty rate for the QMS district in 2003 ranged from 40% to 73%, while in a more affluent district, located in the newly formed regional district, the poverty rate ranged from 9% to 30%. In addition, while QMS’s school district had 20% of its students taught by unqualified teachers, its counterpart in comparison had 12% of its students taught by unqualified teachers (nysed.gov, 2003). Moreover, NYS report card data reports, in 2003, in QMS’s district, 58% of students qualified for free lunch and were Black or Latino. In contrast, the number of students that qualified for free lunch in its affluent counterpart was 20%. In addition, the majority of the students in the more affluent district were White and Asian. As indicated by Fiscal Year School Allocations (2004), the majority of QMS school’s funding came from tax levy and was designated for instructional services, which included teacher salaries. Therefore, lack of additional resources for enrichment activities at QMS was a contributing barrier to improving the school environment. This is what Kozol (1991) meant when he stated that there is a savage inequity regarding school funding formulas. Because affluent school districts receive better funding, as well as additional resources from upper class White parents, it made it very challenging for impoverished school districts to compete. Orme (2009) agreed that these urban schools, with predominant populations of students of color, tend
to bring social problems to the educational environment that go unaddressed. Orme further stated, that schools with demographic profiles, like QMS and the other DINI schools, often foster school cultures that significantly impede teaching and learning. Such was certainly the case with QMS according to a district memorandum (personal communication, November 6, 2002).

For example, in 2002, while still in the role of assistant principal, the soon-to-be principal along with the school staff underwent a comprehensive walk-through, which was conducted by the superintendent and other key executives from the district office. The superintendent and his executive team found that “there was a ton of chaos” at QMS where “students appeared not to be certain of the locations of their classes” (personal communication, October 9, 2002). In addition, the team reported that “parents felt their concerns were not being addressed and one parent expressed concern about the climate of the school as it related to cursing, discipline, and inappropriate behaviors displayed.” In addition, the report detailed shortcomings and concluded with extensive recommendations for improvements in all subject areas as well as in support services for students and teachers (personal communication, November 6, 2002). Indeed, the culture of the school, in 2002-03, was such that it acted as a barrier to learning.

In the fall of 2003, NYCDOE installed a new principal at QMS. The new principal implemented three primary change initiatives: Teaching, Innovation, Motivation, and Excellence (TIME), The Hip-Hop Project, and Parents Empowering Students Today (PEST). Principles that undergirded his approach to change included:

- Unhealthy school environments act as a barrier to school change (Orme, 2007)
• High-interest curricula are more likely to engage urban students in the learning process (Stovall, 2006; Low, 2009; and Irizarry, 2009).

• Parent-community partnerships are crucial to student outcomes (Love, 2014).

• Teachers’ practices improve when teachers have a greater voice in curriculum planning, and increased access to staff development (Smith, 2007; Weingarten, 2012).

• School improvement occurs when collaborative action is sought from stakeholders—students, teachers and parents (Mosley, 2009 and Love, 2014).

TIME. The first change strategy, TIME, became the motto that encapsulated the core values of QMS. “Teachers—it’s all about the teachers; they teach us. Innovation—we innovate, we’re improving. Motivation—we motivate our minds. Excellence—we succeed; we hear; we shine. The TIME is now. It’s Time to Shine…” (Blake, 2009, para. 1). This rap lyric had a two-prong focus: student engagement and teacher development. Through the promotion of three CDs, three rap videos, and staff development on cultural competency lyrics, it communicated a new vision for a new mindset at the school as it conveyed urgency for positive change. It also engaged students as stakeholders in school improvement.

Accolades for the lyrics and its subsequent video came from several media outlets. HBO Family touted the rap video as a model for other schools, broadcasted it on its network, and posted it on its website for two years (Queens Courier, 2006). Praise from teachers for the TIME video curriculum efforts included comments such as, “I like the idea of how the principal came with the rapping and how he relates it to the academics.” “A lot of people think of how hip-hop is negative; the principal is changing,
and showing how it can be a positive connection to students.” In addition, a veteran assistant principal stated, “I have worked in several schools, and I am impressed with our improvement.” “I have seen tremendous change over a short period” (The Results, 2006). The question is how these changes were accomplished. The QMS qualitative study dug beneath the general references of “how it can be done” and unraveled specific change elements that may be adapted to similar schools.

The hip-hop project. The second initiative, The Hip-Hop Project, was concisely summarized in a Vibe Magazine (2006) article entitled “Hip-Hop Education 101.” It stated the principal:

…used hip-hop to create a holistic learning experience where students make their own videos and short films. In the process, they end up learning production and graphic design, script writing, editing, marketing, and sequencing. Their student videos have been featured on HBO Family and premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. The results are dramatic—and have proven that teaching from a “culturally-relevant” perspective… decreased drop-out rates, boosted, reading test scores, … increased math test scores; and attendance is up to 93%. [This was achieved] while simultaneously producing well-rounded, civic-minded community members. (p. 1)

More specifically, QMS collaborated with the Producers' Project—a non-profit organization in Manhattan, which provided technical assistance for the student-designed Hip-Hop Project. Teachers linked student work on the project to NYSED math and ELA standards. For example, mathematics teachers incorporated the students’ need to manage the project budget as they covered required math concepts and skills. English teachers
developed lesson plans aimed at sharpening students’ ELA skills while focusing on the research, reading, and writing skills necessary to produce scripts for the videos. The initial hip-hop project started as an after school program consisting of 60 students, and developed into a curriculum that was integrated throughout every academic subject (The Results, 2006). In short, the QMS principal followed the suggestion by Lucas (2001) to involve more people in leading the educational change process.

The Hip-Hop Project lasted for three years and produced three videos: TIME to Shine, Tuck That Shirt In, and The Results. For two consecutive years, the Tribeca Film Festival featured QMS shorts (Tribeca Film Festival, 2006). In addition, as reported by Time Ledger (February 3, 2005), more than 700 people packed the York College auditorium to celebrate QMS’s achievements. Notables among the speakers included School Chancellor Joel Klein, Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, and rap legend Kurtis Blow. The Chancellor and Deputy Mayor commended the school for its overall improvement. Blow’s friend, hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons, attended QMS as a student: Blow recalled stories of the days when students fighting, pulling fire alarms, and roaming the halls without passing plagued the school. Then, he praised the school for its use of hip-hop as a vehicle to motivate student learning. The Times Ledger (Morton, 2005) article ended by stating that the hip-hop DVD project taught students “real-life” applications of the state education standards, and after months of work they ended up with a professional quality video that explained their school's turnaround.

Parents also expressed appreciation for the project-based learning curriculum that allowed students to apply their academic training. One parent stated, “The Licensed Pre
Nursing (LPN) program, engineering classes, and the film crew are exposing them [the students] to careers (Tribeca Film Festival, 2006).

**PEST.** The third primary change effort, PEST, was formed in response to parent frustration over their lack of voice in school planning and activities, a school mission focused on the safety of children, and assisting in improving the school environment. In doing so, they patrolled a 10-block radius around the school and prevented student assaults or bullying on their way to and from school. To make them easily identifiable to students, the principal provided uniforms and walkie-talkies for PEST members on patrol duty. According to the *Queens Courier* (2005), they also made sure students did not loiter in the community on the way to school, or destroy homeowners’ property while leaving the school. Homeowners who did not have children in the school began to help with dismissal and to assist the school in forming community partnerships with the local police precinct and with the merchants. Through the PEST initiative, the principal developed what Love (2014) described as a common purpose between parents and community members of improving student outcomes. (Tribeca Film Festival, 2006).

Concurrent with the implementation of TIME, The Hip-Hop Project and PEST strategies, the QMS principal reorganized the operation of the school so that teachers were relieved from the hallway and cafeteria duty. The reorganization freed teachers to engage in staff development modules such as one-on-one peer coaching, collaborative grade team meetings, and planning data-driven instructional training. In addition, the establishment of a teacher’s resource center provided access to workshops and periodicals that fostered curricular efficacy in their subject areas. Teachers also dedicated time to curriculum planning, and participated in strategy sessions on how to
incorporate the use of outcomes data into the development of their lesson plans, (*School Quality Review*, 2006). Student learning outcomes initial results were evident at the end of the first year of intervention. By the 2004-2005 school year, the school experienced an 8% jump in the number of students functioning on grade level in math while one of its sister schools had a slight improvement and three showed a decline in performance as shown in Table 1.2 (NYCDOE, Superintendent to S. Blake, June 1, 2005).

Table 1.2

*One-Year change (from 2004-2005) in Math scores for schools in “DINI.”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Students Performing on or Above Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QMS</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one-year jump in math scores reflected positively in QMS’ year-to-year annual yearly progress (AYP) report. Though there was a marginal dip (from 31.9% to 29.7%) in its ELA scores, the school experienced continuous year-to-year improvement in math (New York State Report Card, 2005). Otherwise, over the four-year period of intervention—from school years 2002-03 to 2006-07—QMS sustained increases in student performance and by school year 2006-07 had leapfrogged from next-to-last in the district, as shown in Table 1.3, to number one in the percentage of students performing on or above grade level.
Table 1.3

NYSED 2002-03 and 2006-2007 Eighth Grade Math/ELA Test Results for QMS and other District Middle Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>29.3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA students on or above standard</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Middle Schools 2006-07</td>
<td>QMS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math students on or above standard</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA students on or above standards</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the end of the 2006-07 school year, the rise in the percentage of QMS students performing on or above grade level, coupled with positive AYP reports earned the school the NYSED designation of SIGAS in math. The school was approaching SIGAS for ELA, but designated as SRAP due to failure to meet AYP targets with the subgroup special education student population.

The difficulties that QMS faced were not unique; the other four schools in the district struggled with the same problems, resources and mandates for change (nysed.gov, 2003). What was unique, however, was the immediacy and magnitude of the school’s turnaround. In school year 2006-07, NYCDOE retained an independent educational consultant firm to conduct a School Quality Review of QMS that found:

- The school has improved significantly over the years.
- The principal provides strong charismatic leadership and parents, teachers, and community greatly respects his focused vision for the school.
- There is a positive climate in the school, resulting in proactive behavior and improved student commitment to the school.
There are good examples of innovative curriculum, which increase the engagement of students.

The school is continually evaluating its performance, and seeking new ways to improve the learning and progress of the students.

The principal and the core leader team insure the school has further capacity for improvement. (School Quality Review, 2006, p.4)

In addition to the quality review, due to improvement in year-to-year student outcomes, the school received a bonus award from the NYCDOE and the Council of Supervisors & Administrators (CSA) (Council of Supervisors & Administration, 2007). Moreover, according to NYCDOE records the school received a report card grade of B for the 2006-07 school years (Reportcard.nysed.gov, 2006. There is no doubt that positive change occurred during and following the implementation of new strategies at QMS. NYSED standardized test results and NYCDOE reviews confirmed that overall school improvement and a reversal in student performance did, in fact, take place. However, the quantitative data—collected through ongoing program assessment—did not provide descriptive information regarding the extent to which one intervention strategy might have been more successful than the other; nor did it tease out particularly effective features embedded within a given strategy. The big question, then, is why and how did the improvement occur?

The purpose of a QMS qualitative study was to help principals in urban, impoverished school districts narrow the achievement gap between their students and students of more affluent districts. Specifically, by pinpointing what worked from the perspectives of students, teachers and parents, the research sought to gain a fuller
understanding of how change strategies shaped the reversal of student performance at QMS. Such findings may be useful to principals as they struggle to respond to the demands of the various stakeholders in urban school districts.

**Theoretical Rationale**

A persistent challenge in low-performing urban schools is ineffective leadership in addressing the problems of students, teachers, and parents who deal with complex social issues that impede learning (Love, 2014). These problems were best understood through theoretical lenses that illuminated leadership styles and educational change efforts in urban school settings. There are two sets of theories that provided the foundation for exploring these problems. Transformational leadership was the macro or overarching theory relevant to the study, while educational change theory provided the micro or context specific understandings that frame the study.

**Transformational leadership theory.** This theory allowed for an examination of leadership styles as it pertained to school culture, parent engagement, high interest curriculum, and teacher effectiveness. Theorists such as Bass (1985), Kouzes and Posner (2012), Avolio (2011), and Leithwood, and Jantzi, (2006) offered significant insights regarding the impact leadership of style in bringing about desired organizational outcomes. Northouse (2013) characterized transformational leaders as:

- Raising followers’ levels of consciousness about the importance and value of specified and idealized goals.
- Getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake the team or organization.
- Moving followers to address higher level needs (Northouse, 2013, p.20).
Northouse (2013) developed a model based on the work of Avolio and Bass, (1995), named *Full Range of Leadership* that outlines four factors of transformational leadership that encourages workers to exceed productivity:

- **Influence and charisma** - where there is a de-emphasis on position and title and an emphasis on relationship with the follower.
- **Inspirational motivation** - where leaders get followers to see past their own self-interest and strive for the good of the organization by modeling the way.
- **Intellectual stimulation** - where the leader encourages debate and dissent from the leader’s point of view in order to promote learning within the organization.
- **Individual consideration** - where the leader shows concern for the needs of each follower. (p.191)

An understanding of leadership characteristics is important to the evaluation of a leader—in the case of the QMS study, a principal’s capacity to motivate students, teachers, and parents in engagement in school improvement efforts. The theory helped connect specific principal behaviors to changes in school climate, parent involvement, teacher effectiveness, and student performance.

Stemming from this theory on transformational leadership style, a self-assessment instrument was developed that helped leaders evaluate their impact on their followers. In an attempt to assess the effectiveness of theory on leadership style, Bass and Avolio (1994) designed and collected data with a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The researchers also used the MLQ assessment instrument to evaluate followers’ perceptions of their leader. The instrument was useful in developing focus
group interview questions for the QMS qualitative study of the principal leadership behaviors on effective school change.

**Educational change theory.** Fullan (2000) outlined a specific model that addressed a how-to framework for developing, monitoring, and rethinking what works in evaluating changes in school climate and practices. At the heart of the latter’s theory are 10 elements that are helpful in terms of studying transformational practices. Among these factors are design elements such as, focusing on instruction and linking it to organizational change, and reviewing the capacity of the research project for future change. Even in the early stages of its development, Fullan’s theory proved critical to the refinement of the QMS qualitative study that was aimed to assist principals in urban settings in applying effective how-to strategies necessary for change in low-performing schools.

Even more crucial, however, was Fullan’s (2000) E=MCA2 formula in which he described the school change process. In his formula, E refers to the rate of efficacy of the system. M refers to the motivation for reform. In other words, it explores the will, purpose and commitment of the reformers. C refers to the capacity for reform—especially in terms of skills, expertise and available resources. A2 refers to assistance times and accountability. Fullan’s E=MCA2 formula was useful in describing specific characteristics of the change initiatives that was studied: TIME, PEST, and The Hip-Hop Project, as well as organizational changes at QMS that have implications for practice by other principals.

In other work, Fullan (2003) stressed that the need for school reform efforts go both deep and wide. He defined depth as the moral issues and consequences of teaching.
Width included community outreach, parental involvement, and university connections. This theory expanded the scope of the school setting and the stakeholders that principals are accountable to if they are to be effective in establishing and sustaining educational improvements. Not only does such an understanding help to sharpen the research problem, this part of Fullan’s theory was useful in shaping the research questions for the study.

The QMS qualitative study was best conceptualized, then, in terms of leadership and educational change theories. This framework connected principal behaviors to the transformations of school culture, teacher attitudes and practices, and parental involvement in the life of the school, and ultimately to improvement in student learning outcomes.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the QMS qualitative study of a low-performing middle school in Queens, New York was to document the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents regarding change that occurred in the school, as well as their perceptions of principal behaviors that affected that change. Specific objectives that flowed from the main purpose were:

- To identify specific elements of the principal’s educational change strategies that contributed to improvement in the school climate;
- To determine how features embedded in an overall strategy, like The Hip-Hop Project, for example, were linked to effective curriculum planning, teaching and learning outcomes; and ultimately,
• To identify effective “how-to” strategies that assisted the school in raising the performance levels of students as evidenced in standardized test results.

Research Questions

An examination of outcomes data at QMS clearly documented increases in student academic performance as evidenced on NYSED standardized tests, AYP targets, and NYCDOE School Quality Review reports. However, without links of the results to particular practices and behaviors, it was not clear how and why these changes occurred. Reviewed literature on leadership styles and educational change theories, as well as a look at applied research studies on school culture and the role of hip-hop in educational settings have helped to shape three research questions for the QMS qualitative study:

1. What role did the principal play in transforming the school environment?
2. What did the stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) view as practical processes (best practices) that effectively helped students to improve academically, and socially?
3. What attitudes and practices existed during the implementation of reform at QMS?

Significance of the Study

The QMS qualitative study expanded the existing body of knowledge and practices of urban education, which was fraught with complex social issues. It was the kind of study suggested by Moseley (2007) when he concluded that further study is needed on new ways to enculturate parents, teachers, and students in the process of school improvement. It was this researcher’s assumption that the how-to nature of the data collected from the QMS study also helped to stem the high turnover rates among
urban principals that perpetuates instability in leadership in urban schools (Jordan, 2007; Smith, 2008).

Definitions of Terms

- Hip-Hop is an artistic youth culture that consists of four elements: *rapping, dee-jaying, break-dancing, and graffiti* (Petchauer, 2010).
- Urban Schools are schools that are in densely populated areas of the United States. (US Census Bureau, 2013).
- The racial classification of Latino is Latin American, Hispanic, and Caribbean American (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).
- Student Outcome is student performance in school course work, and on standardized assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).
- Low Performing School is a school that consistently fails to meet *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)s* as mandated by NCLB (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2013).
- School Culture is the learning environment, and the operational norms of the school (Low, 2009).
- No Child Left Behind is federal education legislation enacted by the President George W. Bush, which introduced national learning standards and school accountability for student achievement on standardized examinations (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).
• Race to the Top (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009) is an educational policy that was introduced by President Barack Obama. It offers additional educational funding to states that agree to participate in national college readiness standards, and evaluate teachers based on student performance on college readiness standardized exams called Common Core College State Standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

• Change Agent is a school leader leading a reform initiative in and urban school district (Mosley, 2007).

• Transformational Leadership is school leadership by a charismatic leader that inspires his/her followers, through idealized influence and intellectual stimulation, to achieve more than what the follower envisioned he/she could achieve by modeling the way, capturing the heart, developing clear vision, and being concerned about the well-being of the followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

• Negative School Culture is acceptable norms by members of a school community that lead to an unsafe, unproductive, and disorderly school environment (Esquerdo, 2001).

• Chancellor is the education leader of all New York City Public Schools (nycdoe.org, 2015).

• Children First is a reform initiative implemented under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg and former Chancellor Joel Klein (McDonald, 2013).
• Middle School is school that educates the adolescent population between the age of 11-13, and a governance structure of grade 6, 7, & 8 (Shearer-Shineman, 1996).

• Autonomy Zones is the name of the special districts created in New York City as a part of Phase II Children First Reform in NYC. The Autonomy Zone was a test pilot program geared towards giving school leaders more control over school budget, calendar, and staffing (McDonald, 2013).

• Superintendents are leaders of school districts who are in charge of instruction, budget, safety and overall administration of schools within school districts. Superintendents report to school boards (Glenn, 2008).

• Quality Review is an evaluation of school data integrated with interviews with parents’ teachers and students and a walk through of the school (McDonald, 2013).

• District In Need of Improvement (DINI) is a designated status for a district that is not in good academic standards according to performance on New York State assessments (nysed.gov, 2003)

• SIGAS- School in Good Academic Standing (nysed.gov, 2003)

• SURR-School Under Registration and Review for closing (nysed.gov, 2003)

• SRAP –School Requiring Academic Progress (nysed.gov, 2003)

• SINI is a designated status of a school that is not in good academic standing according to performance on New York State Assessments (nysed.gov, 2003).

• AYP is the Adequate Yearly Progress a school makes on state assessments in reading and math (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2009).
• CEP is the Comprehensive Education Plan that every school in New York State must file annually. The report allows to schools to assess school data and develop a school improvement plan (nysed.gov, 2003).
• Parent Teacher Association is the recognized parent representative organization in a school responsible for supporting school goals and fundraising (Woyshner, 1999).

Chapter Summary

This study examined the initiatives an urban school principal implemented as a part of a school reform strategy. In doing so, first, this study sought to explore what specific strategies contributed to the improvement of the QMS. Second, did one particular strategy lead to school improvement over the others? Third, were teachers, parents, and students' perceptions of what led to improvement aligned with assertions embedded in the narrative of the schools’ change? Therefore, an evaluation of QMS strategies for school improvement sought to deepen what Fullan (2003) defined as educational change theory. As a result, this study offered principals insight into potential strategies to elevate positive school change such as:

• An increased need for principals to adapt to evolving definitions of learning,
• The expanding role of the principal from organizational leader to instructional leader,
• An increasing concern about job security as the principal evaluation becomes more and more connected to student performance on standardized tests,
• Increased pressure on principals due to greater public scrutiny of schools by those who have no pedagogical training (Osborne & Piver, 2011).
The study further sought to understand how the QMS principal implemented changes that led to improved results, the impact of his leadership style on parents, teachers, and students; and stakeholders perceptions of what led to improved school results.

In addition, Chapter 1 provided the foundation for a review of literature in Chapter 2, which examines the state of the literature on transformational leadership and educational change. Specifically, Chapter 2 confirms prior findings, reviews related research methods, and reports gaps in the current literature. As such, the second chapter offers a more detailed overview of literature that examines and explores:

- Theorists who have contributed to knowledge regarding leadership and school reform,
- The role school culture plays in school improvement efforts,
- The effectiveness of using the high interest, curriculum, like hip-hop, as a transformational tool in the school reform agenda.

Therefore, through an analysis and reporting of the studies on school improvement, this researcher has added to the knowledge of effective strategies for urban school improvement. Thus, in Chapter 2 the researcher provides a literature review that is the foundation of the theoretical framework and rationale for the study. In Chapter 3 the researcher provides methodology for the study. In Chapter 4 the researcher presents and analyzes the results of the study. In Chapter 5 the implications and conclusion for this study are discussed.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Beginning in 2001, federal, state, and city government undertook massive educational reform efforts. The first was a federal law titled No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which required all states to close the achievement gap between students of color and their White counterparts (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Next, in New York, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) responded with a series of standardized tests for all of its school districts (nys.report.card.gov, 2002). Then, New York City, in turn, underwent a complete overhaul of its structure and policies, and in an effort to improve access to a quality education for all students, the newly formed New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) assigned to principals authority and accountability for addressing poor student performance on standardized tests. With their new responsibilities, a common problem among principals of low performing schools was how to affect the mandated changes required of them (Children First, 2004). In addition, lack of resources affected their ability to invest in school improvement initiatives. Voloch (2015) stated the fair funding formula that was intended to support children first reform initiatives was often unfair; thus, negatively affecting the schools it was designed to help. Therefore, without additional resources needed to invest in school reform, many of New York City’s low performing public schools failed to achieve positive school improvement results.
At the height of these governmental changes—from 2003 to 2007—students at a low-performing middle school in Queens, NY (called QMS in this study) did experience academic success. Within a two-year period, QMS went from next-to-last to number one in its district. Evidence presented in Table 1.3 of Chapter 1 confirmed that student performance on New York State standardized tests in math and language arts increased dramatically. Thus, the New York State designation as a school in need of improvement was lifted and the school became a school in good academic standing. Though they shared the same demographic profile and common resource allocations, QMS improved while other schools in the district continued the struggle to achieve the NYSED designation of SIGAS.

The question of this study, then, is not whether QMS was successful in increasing student academic performance as indicated by both NYCDOE and NYSED school report card and quality review data (nysed.gov, 2006; School Progress Report, 2007). Rather, the question is what aspects of the change strategies—Teaching Innovation Motivation Excellence (TIME), Parents Empowering Students Today (PEST) and the Hip-Hop Project—employed at QMS are more closely correlated with student academic success experienced at the school. Specifically, the QMS study examined:

- The relationship between the school’s improvement and characteristics of effective leadership described in transformational leadership and educational change theories, and
- QMS stakeholder (students, teachers, and parents) views regarding practices that helped students to grow and to learn.
As was the case in the QMS school district a decade ago, leadership challenges regarding how to implement needed changes in inner city low-performing schools persist. According to an April 29, 2015 PBS News Hour, which reported, because of the challenging mandates, work environments, and culture faced by urban school leaders, more attention is being paid to urban school principal training by universities and foundations. The report highlighted the struggles of urban school principals in Chicago, the report focusing on these challenges:

- Peer violence
- Violence against faculty
- Low faculty regards to expectation of students
- Low performance by students on state assessments
- Poor community reputation (pbs.org).

Therefore, a related question of this study concerned the extent to which strategies employed at QMS are adaptable to similar schools and to similar urban school districts.

To sharpen the focus of the QMS study, Chapter 2 provides an overview and analysis of previous studies on the role of leadership in transforming schools, and on the potential of popular culture to shape needed educational change. More precisely, this review of the literature examines the transformational leader’s impact on effective school reform in urban settings. In its examination of educational change theory and practices, the review also gives specific attention to how popular cultural phenomena like hip-hop can be used as tools to support educational reform in urban communities.

Finally, a review of data collection methodologies and a report on gaps in the literature provides a current overview of the research about transformational leadership
practices; about the impact of school culture on urban school reform; and about the use of innovative tools in implementing effective educational change. The review has shed light on the problem of failing urban schools and help to shape leadership strategies that have potential for adaptation that fosters increased student engagement and academic achievement in urban settings.

**Review of the Literature**

With increased perceptions that the quality of American education is declining, in the last 30 years, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT) were established federally to address society’s concern with this decline. In response, the country’s largest school district—NYCDOE—undertook a reform movement that spawned research attempting to evaluate the success of the numerous change efforts. Among the changes were policies and practices that placed particular emphasis on the role of the principal in affecting positive change in their schools (McDonald, 2013). As a result, much of the research conducted and the theories generated emphasized leadership traits of principals as important characteristics of excellence in education. Consequently, the successful QMS experience was best understood by an examination of the role of leadership on educational reform. The review of the literature, then, was undertaken through the lens of theory and practice of transformational leadership and its role in educational change.

In an attempt to understand the impact of specific strategies employed by the QMS principal, literature on the prior use of hip-hop as a tool in academic settings was reviewed and analyzed. As the methodologies and findings of previous relevant studies were compared and contrasted, the QMS study sought to identify specific
transformational leadership strategies, as well as the different utilizations of hip-hop as a tool supportive of academic success. The purpose of the study was to delineate practical improvement strategies and applications in the context of low performing urban schools.

Transformational leadership. In the mid to late 70s, two sociologists—James Victor Downton, Jr. and James McGregor Burns—set the framework for the concept of transformational leadership. Downton (1973) first introduced the term in his Ph.D. dissertation research topic: “Rebel Leadership: Revisiting the Concept of Charisma.” He defined transformational leadership as traits of a leader who has a charisma, vision, and is transformative (Gill, 2006). In his subsequent book entitled Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process (Downton, 1973), he continued to explore the effect of charismatic leaders in the process of change. While Downton provided the foundational research on this style of leadership, his definition of the style did not lend itself to the day-to-day implementation of the characteristics of a transformational leader.

As Burns (1978) expanded Downton’s definition, he focused on the motives of both followers and the charisma of leaders. As a Pulitzer Prize winning presidential biographer, he re-conceptualized transformational leadership by shifting the emphasis from the leadership effectiveness trait to the relationship that the leader has with the follower. From his study of presidents, he observed that leading with charisma and with an understanding of the motives of followers, results in the actualization of the goals of both leaders and followers. In his study of the impact that the transformational leader’s charisma has on the follower, he unraveled the positive nature of a mutually beneficial
relationship between leaders and followers. Burns further contended that inspired followers perform beyond the bounds previously set by their leaders.

As he focused on the leader-follower relationship, Burns (1978) identified two distinct leadership styles: one transformational and the other transactional. He defined transactional leadership as a leadership approach based on an exchange between leader and followers. For example, a bonus to an employee who exceeds his or her goal, or a reduction in pay for a worker for being late, illustrates a transactional style. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, was defined as leadership that engages others and develops relationships that motivate followers to exceed prior performance expectations. Ultimately, Burns concluded that the transformational leader’s concern with the needs of individual followers motivates them to work to their full potential. While Burns provided a clear definition of the dynamics of transformational relationships, the scope and purpose of his study did not include a framework for the implementation of transformational leadership practices. His work did however, provide a foundation for future work on the behaviors of transformational leaders.

Building on the work of Burns’ (1978) theoretical context, Bass (1985) in turn, focused on the followers rather than on the leader. Unlike Burns, who theorized that transformational leadership and transactional leadership are distinctly separate leadership styles, Bass views the two as working together. The latter defined in detail the transformational leader as one who motivates their followers to do more than what is expected from:

- raising followers’ levels of consciousness about the importance and value of specified and idealized goals
• getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization
• moving followers to address higher level needs (Bass, 1985, p.20).

Both Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) agreed that it is important for transformational leaders to focus on the needs of each follower. They theorized that the individual consideration of followers places the leader in the role of mentor and coach. In such a role, the leader positions him/herself to promote intellectual stimulation and celebrate innovation. Burns noted, however, that the leader should be careful to avoid public humiliation of followers. He contended that there are leaders who have a transformational effect on people and organization in a negative way. He referred to these leaders as pseudo transformational. Northouse (2013) refers to such leaders as self-absorbed, exploitative, and narcissistic, rather than authentic transformational leaders—a term introduced by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999). According to them, authentic transformational leaders are inspirational. As they challenge followers to strive for organizational excellence, these leaders are concerned with the collective good. They push followers past their comfort zones and they have the charisma to foster a strong connection between followers and their own visions for the organization. As a result, productivity increases.

In Bass’ (1999) paradigm, the transformational leader models the mission, sets the example and embodies the values of the organization. In the setting, the leader becomes an idealized influencer who earns the respect and admiration of the followers. The byproduct of the transformational leadership style described is often a creative, innovative approach to problem solving. In fact, Bass hypothesized that the consistent
modeling of transformational leadership practices causes followers to mirror the leader’s values and thereby maximize organizational effectiveness. He stopped short, however, of illustrating for school leaders how to apply traits of the transformational leadership style that he described.

Bass (1999) and Burns (1978) theorized that a transformational leader is concerned about both needs of each follower and the collective needs of the followers within his or her organization. Such understandings proved helpful in shaping questions regarding the motive and modeling behaviors of the school leader in the QMS study. However, their theories pointed to broad leadership characteristics like creative, charismatic, innovative, and visionary, but did not outline specific sets of behaviors that flow from charismatic leadership. The question remained, then, how might a principal without charisma, or who is not naturally creative and innovative acquire these characteristics? Moreover, the characteristic described by Bass and Burns did not include strategies that may be employed when such charisma is absent. The QMS study filled a portion of the gap between theory and practice as it examined leadership strategies and innovative models employed in one inner city school that experienced a successful change effort.

Bruce J. Avolio, (2011) a current theorist on transformational leadership, published a number of joint publications with Bass. However, in his analysis, Avolio added greater specificity to Bass’ (1999) characteristics of the transformational leader. He held that the transformational leader:

- has a conscious goal whereby the leader develops followers into leaders
- has a development plan in his /her head about each follower
- stimulates challenge as opposed to suppressing it when it arises
- is deeply trusted and exhibits the moral perspective to warrant such trust
- has an ability to be vulnerable and to self-sacrifice in ways that builds tremendous trust among followers along with ownership in the form of identification with the leader’s mission or cause
- has a willingness to self-sacrifice that is often associated with similar patterns of self-sacrifice among their followers in a sort of dominoes effect.
- works to leave behind an organization, community, or even society that is better positioned to succeed than when they first begin their work. (Bass, 1999, p. 51)

In addition to the characteristics of transformational leaders, Bass (1985) asserted that transformational leadership is contingent upon an effective transactional leadership approach. For example, a strong union contract, health benefits, and retirement package are transactional practices that allow for transformational approaches to leading. In fact, these transactional negotiations between union leaders and management set the tone for transformational leadership. He concluded, though, that transformational leadership is a more effective approach to leadership. Avolio (2011) builds on Bass’ theory by bringing together the two styles—transformational and transactional leadership—in his Full Range Leadership Development (FRLD). Avolio said leaders fit into one of three styles: transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire.

In comparing and contrasting the various elements of transactional versus transformational vs. laissez faire leadership outlined by both Bass and Avolio (1994), Northouse (2013), identified seven factors, Bass (1985) calls this full range of leadership
model, that underpin each of the three styles. The transformational leadership style of interacting with followers was characterized by four factors:

- influence and charisma - where there is a de-emphasis on position and title and an emphasis on relationship with the follower.
- inspirational motivation - where the leader gets the follower to see past their own self-interest and strive for the good of the organization by modeling the way.
- intellectual stimulation - where the leader encourages debate and dissent from the leader’s point of view in order to promote learning within the organization.
- individual consideration - where the leader shows concern for the needs of each follower (Northouse, 2013, p.34).

In Northouse’s (2013) summary, Bass’ (1985) model of these four underlying factors of transformational leadership encouraged interpersonal relationships between leader and follower that leads to the organization exceeding productivity. In addition, Northouse assigned three transactional leadership factors:

- contingent reward and constructive transaction - where the leader rewards the follower for behaviors that are consistent with leader’s or organizational expectations; and the leader negotiates a set of work rules with follower that will dictate the follower’s behavior.
- management-by-expectation and active and passive - where the leader sets clear expectations for the follower and develops a system of active and passive practices to reinforce expectations.
• corrective transaction - where the leader punishes follower for behaviors that the leader disapproves (p.191).

Northouse (2013) concluded that transactional leaders set expectations that are rooted in underlying factors that emphasize the desire for the follower to complete organizational goals, rather than out of a desire for the development of the follower. Finally, the laissez-faire leadership style was assigned one factor, non-transactional, which is defined as a handoff style where almost anything goes. It is an approach to leadership where the leader is not visionary, does not set expectations, and does not actively engage the follower.

By combining the leadership styles together, Bass’s (1999) full range leadership model and Avolio’s (2011) Full Range Leadership Development (FRLD) theory mirrors Maslow’s (1954) concept of the hierarchy of needs, which states that a person cannot self-actualize if he/she does not receive the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. Maslow’s concepts that bolstered the credibility of the theory purported by Bass (1985) and Avolio (2011) were that basic needs like job security and health benefits better positioned companies to introduce transformational practices because followers are not preoccupied with survival. However, when applied to school settings, Bass’s (1999) transactional transformational leadership theory continuum, such as, union benefits, serving as a foundation for latter transformational practices, is better served by a discussion of barriers that unions pose to educational reform. Zhang (2009) clearly described teachers’ unions as barriers to school improvement. For example, in his study Zhang found that highly unionized districts afforded senior teachers’ preferences as to where to teach, regardless of evaluation. Thus, they have a greater concentration of
unqualified teachers in low performing schools. In addition, the Zhang study found that districts often have to find creative ways to work around union based seniority rules to staff their low performing schools with qualified teachers. This included hiding vacancies until senior teacher transfer dates expired and developing informal agreements with the union around staffing needs of low performing schools. The shortcoming of the Zhang study was its singular emphasis on the negative aspects of the transactional nature of union leadership. The QMS study sought to broaden the discussion by alerting school leaders to possible ways in which unions can hinder, as well as help efforts to narrow the academic achievement gap in urban schools.

In an attempt to assess the effectiveness of each FRLD leadership style, Avolio (2011), in a joint effort with Bass (1985) designed and collected data with a Multifactor-Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The researchers used the MLQ assessment instrument to evaluate followers’ perceptions of their leader. As a result, organizational leaders used the MLQ as an evaluative feedback tool regarding the effectiveness of their leadership practices. Their two main findings, published in a professional manual by Northouse, (2012), were as follows:

- Organizational leadership styles are reflected in the effect of the practices of their followers; and
- Leaders may fit into more than one of the three leadership styles outlined in the FRLD theory, but one leadership style is usually more dominant than is the other.

While the MLQ (Avolio, 2011) rates leaders on their effectiveness as an organizational leader, it does not make specific recommendations on how to apply the
findings of the evaluation. However, the MLQ is a widely used instrument for leadership training because a correlation exists between MLQ appraisal and subordinate satisfaction. Indeed, as the characteristics of leadership evolved in the various iterations of FRLD theory and as the MLQ instrument has been used increasingly for training, in the last 10 years we have seen a number of studies developed regarding the relationship between school leadership and school improvement in urban school districts.

Owoaje (2006) conducted one such study on principal leadership characteristics and practices. With its single school focus, the study has significance for the QMS study in that it focused on the relationship between school leadership and school improvement. Through a semi-structured interview of representative key stakeholders, Owoaje conducted a qualitative, descriptive-analytic study with a view toward finding out stakeholder perceptions of leadership practices that lead to sustained improvements in student achievement. While the principal in Owoaje’s study was unavailable for interview due to maternity leave, the researcher was able to move forward with analysis of stakeholder perspectives, and a review and analysis of pertinent documents. Helpful information was gathered from the Plan for Student Achievement dossiers, which contained student support plans; from School Site Council meetings; and from state test results that showed improved student achievement. Thus, Owoaje was able to identify seven leadership practices crucial to student academic success:

- continuity in leadership
- distribution of leadership throughout the school
- data-driven decision-making
- parent involvement
• high expectations
• discipline and order in the school environment, and finally
• a belief system that embodies the principal’s core values about children and learning (Owoaje, 2006, p.127).

In addition to these seven leadership practices, Owoaje found that stakeholders repeatedly reported that in an urban school setting like theirs, a principal needs to have more than technical know-how; they needed courage, passion and a willingness to stand up for what they believe.

The fact that Owoaje’s (2006) research applied the theoretical framework of transformational leadership at the local school level is viewed as a strength. Theorists define how to recognize transformational leadership characteristic, but Owoaje delved into the complex environment of a low performing urban school and extracted best practices that may serve as a guide to other inner-city principals. However, the limitation of the study lied in the fact that the researcher was not able to interview the principal, who might have provided valuable insights into how she delegated leadership throughout the school, or the ways in which high expectations were communicated to teachers and students, or the specific definition of core values she held about children and learning. The QMS study intended to build on the Owoaje study with a qualitative study that attempted to generate specific strategies that principals may employ as they begin to implement the best practices that Owoaje found to be crucial to student academic success in an urban school setting serving low-performing students of color. In doing so, the QMS study sought to expand the leadership-training paradigm by presenting specific
models that have the potential to alter a principal’s leadership style once evaluative feedback suggests the need for change.

Of particular relevance to the QMS study is teacher perception of the principal’s leadership style. The central question of Anderson’s (2014) study focused on how teachers’ perceived the transformational leadership behaviors of their principals. Data were collected in two high schools at different stages of implementing a personalized mastery learning module. With structured journaling and critical incident analysis of surveys and interviews, Anderson found that implementing new classroom practices require the use of transformational leadership behaviors. He concluded that educational leaders who are interested in implementing personalized mastery models would benefit from an understanding of the role that transformational leadership behaviors play in organizational change. Thus, Anderson recommended further research that provides a framework for educational leaders to shape their leadership practices in a manner that support teachers as they work together to implement student-centered models of education. The QMS study examined models that have potential for principals to adapt their leadership strategies to the needs of their students—especially in low-performing urban schools. As with Anderson’s study, the QMS study also sought to explore means of shaping the effective leadership practices have on stakeholders during a period of school transition.

**Transformational leadership and educational change.** Transformational leadership approaches in urban schools are necessary given the current demands and pressures urban school principals must overcome. In their study of school leadership, Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, and MacFarlane (2013) found that the role of the
principal has dramatically shifted in the last decade from the building manager to educational leader. As such, principals are responsible for leadership in implementing educational programs and paradigms that increase student achievement (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). In addition, they must use their leadership in a manner that positively influences school culture (Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007) as they establish a clear vision of school purposes and priorities (Burke, 2011). Indeed, principals are required to understand the external culture that surrounds the school, as well as external mandates to assure aspects of social justice are practiced within the learning environment (Larson & Barton, 2013). Given these new responsibilities, school leaders need new innovative strategies to assist them in transforming the expectations and roles of primary stakeholders—teachers and parents—and their mandatory engagement to truly address the educational needs of all students (Anderson, 2014).

According to Abbas, Waheed, and Riaz (2012), transformational leadership is an ideal style of leadership for the educational sector because such leaders are analytical, active, effective, results oriented, and direct followers to a new set of corporate values and behaviors. “They are appropriate for promoting pragmatic change, amazing potentials, determination, willpower, and innovation in the organizations” (Abbas et al., 2012, p.19). This leadership framework for school improvement that was initiated by researchers such as Oakes, Quartz, Gong, Guyton and Lipton (1993), Kytle and Bogotch (2000) and Lucas (2001) was reaffirmed by Avolio (2011) with his conclusion that transformational leadership is most suited for educational organizations. Avolio further asserts that the need to have stakeholders actively engaged in leading school change requires a leader that is motivated, innovative and is concerned with the development of
their followers. Avolio clearly stated, this type of leader is self-reflective and embodies the ideas and values of the organization--especially those of the followers. Consequently, followers become more committed to the goals of the leader. In fact, they take ownership of the change process. Thus, successful educational reform does not rest solely on the shoulders of the principal as school leader. While transformational leadership does not require a change in school culture, there is research that both suggests and asserts that there is a connection between school culture and school improvement (McCarley, 2012; Mees, 2008; Mosley, 2007; Smith, 2007).

A leading educational change theorist, Canadian-born Michael Fullan, has done groundbreaking work in the field of educational reform. His books, *The Moral Imperative* and *What’s Worth Fighting for in Education*, co-authored with Andy Hargreaves (1996) provide a seminal theoretical framework for understanding school culture, which is the shared vision, meanings and norms of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The vision and meanings are derived from external obstacles and internal systems. For example, how employees receive discipline for infractions or what the group celebrates is an indication of how culture is developed. Moreover, Fullan and Hargreaves, (1996) see culture as rooted in an organization’s mission, shared vision, and the core values of its members. Therefore, as an organization strives to reach its stated goals, the culture of the organization evolves.

In their collaboration on *What’s Worth Fighting for in Education*, Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) concluded that teacher quality and morale were key to student achievement and well-being. To this end, Fullan’s (1985) work on educational reforms included teacher empowerment strategies that were based on the following:
1. Teachers strong on content and pedagogical knowledge, and who care deeply (have moral purpose) about learning and students are more effective.

2. Teachers who use internal (assessment for learning) and external (assessment of learning) data on an ongoing basis for both improving learning and marking progress are more effective.

3. Teachers who learn from others (again, on an ongoing basis) inside and outside the school are more effective.

4. Teachers who are led by principals and other school leaders who foster the first three qualities are more effective.

5. Teachers in districts that focus on developing district-wide cultures that develop and cultivate the previous four elements are more effective.

6. Teachers in state systems that integrate accountability and capacity building while establishing partnerships across the three levels (school and community, district, and state) are more effective. (p.1).

Through his ongoing consulting work with school districts, teacher groups, research institutes, and governments, Fullan continually advances the field of educational reform. More recently (Fullan, 2011), focused on the leadership of the principal as the main framework for the school improvement agenda. In his book, entitled *Motion in Leadership*, he shared leadership strategies for connecting peers to purpose, gaining trust, overcoming resistance and providing transparency. In this latest publication, he builds on educational change theory (Fullan, 1985) in which he outlined how-to strategies developing, monitoring, and rethinking what works in evaluating changes in school
climate and practice. At the heart of the theory are 10 strategies that are helpful in terms of studying transformational practices. They are:

1. develop a plan,
2. invest in local facilitators,
3. allocate resources (money and time),
4. select schools and decide on scope of projects,
5. concentrate on developing the principal’s leadership,
6. focus on instruction and link to organizational conditions,
7. stress ongoing staff development and assistance,
8. ensure information gathering and use,
9. plan for continuation and spread, and
10. review capacity for future change. (Fullan, 1985, pp. 405-412)

The expansive nature of Fullan’s theoretical framework allowed for frequent updates. Fullan (1998) provided a formula for the change process. It is called the E=MCA2 formula in which he described the school change process. In his formula, E refers to the rate of efficacy of the system. M refers to the motivation for reform. In other words, it explored the will, purpose and commitment of the reformers. C refers to the capacity for reform—especially in terms of skills, expertise and available resources. A2 refers to assistance times and accountability. Fullan’s E=MCA2 formula was useful in describing specific characteristics of change models to be studied such as TIME, PEST and The Hip-Hop Project, as well as organizational changes at QMS that may have implications for practice by other principals.
Fullan (1999) adds three elements to his how-to strategies for rethinking educational change:

1. become assessment literate,
2. get a handle on collaborative work culture, and
3. develop moral purpose and hope.

Fullan (2000) used qualitative research and narratives to explain the process of change, as well as barriers to change and to identify strategies for successful change in improving public education. Fullan illustrated “three stories of reform” as a metaphor for the sustainable change process. These reform stories were called the Inside Story, the Inside-outside Story, and the Outside-in Story of sustainable educational reform. Fullan states, the Inside Story is “what we know about how schools change for the better in terms of their internal dynamics” (p.581). The Inside-outside Story is “what effective schools do as they contemplate the plethora of outside forces impinging on them” (p. 581). Finally, the Outside-in Story demonstrates “how agencies external to the school organize themselves to be effective in accomplishing large-scale reform at the school level” (p. 581). Fullan asserted that sustained change cannot happen without linking the three stories together around a common change agenda. Therefore, linking the three stories creates the framework for school reform. He contended that the enemy to large-scale school reform is overload and fragmentation. Thus, the “three stories” framework provides a hopeful context in which to implement school change.

Understanding how to evaluate and work effectively within organizational culture is the most important role of a leader (Avolio, 2011). Fullan provided school leaders with the how-to way of thinking that Avolio discussed. Not only did Fullan suggest how-
to strategies for educational change, he took into account the various stakeholders—teachers, parents, and community—and outlined best practices for principals to engage them in the change process.

Smith (2007) emphasized the importance of school culture and its impact on school reform. He found that urban schools struggle with unhealthy school culture issues. It is a problem he deems significant in creating barriers to sustainable school improvement. Furthermore, Smith stated that the evaluation of school reform is a process that is undeniably linked with an examination of school culture, as culture can influence positive or negative results on standardized performance assessments. Therefore, he recommended that school leaders reflect on whether their leadership approaches help or hinder improved school climate. Smith’s study reaffirms the earlier research of Squires and Kranyik (1995). They found that “A positive school culture may have a significant influence on the academic and social success of the students within schools” (p.16). Moreover, Ohlson (2009) found that “When a school exhibits characteristics of a positive school culture, there are fewer suspensions, increased attendance rates, and increased achievement on standardized test scores” (p.16).

The objective of Smith’s (2008) research was to understand how urban school principals in an urban school district in Michigan perceived their training, experiences, and preparation for leadership in an urban school with a majority African American student population. Findings presented derive from an analysis of data provided by participants. For example, participants gave their perspectives on their careers in urban education, on their leadership practices in the urban setting, on issues and challenges they faced, and on their lived experiences during their training and preparation for urban
school leadership. Based on participant responses to these categories of questions and a review of district policies and procedures, Smith (2008) observed that the Michigan school district used six categories to measure, assess and evaluate principal leadership characteristics:

1. Personal reflection and self-assessment
2. School leadership training
3. Leadership opportunity and visibility
4. Exposure to urban settings and urban research
5. Mentoring
6. On the job experience in an urban school (p.183).

However, of the six categories, Smith found that principals were only assessed on the first three measures. There was no evaluation regarding their ability:

- to minimize the effects of external forces that shape urban students and school staff;
- to address the needs of urban school children; or on their need
- to demonstrated professional and personal commitment to urban education. (p.193).

Based on his findings, Smith recommended that principal preparation for urban school districts should be a continuous process; and that urban principals must have the resources, knowledge, skills and experience to address the multiple needs of the children attending their elementary, middle and high schools.

While the Smith (2008) study aptly framed the problems facing urban schools, it was limited in its ability to assist principals in their daily struggles at the local school
level. One, his was more a policy generating study for districts and governments that made decisions regarding principal preparation and training. Two, in districts, cities, or states where leaders do not take heed to Smith’s recommendations, principals fall victim to their own devices and are without the tools to respond to mandates to improve their schools. Yet, the Smith study was helpful to the QMS study in the sense that it validated the powerful influence that culture has on school performance and it reinforced the nature of the day-to-day challenges that urban principals face.

Scholars often ignore the impact of school culture on school reform. Orme (2009) conducted a case study on the negative outcomes of ignoring school culture. The study evaluated the rejection of a school reform strategy initiated at the level of the district office. The purpose of the study was to inform school administrators about the importance of considering school culture when implementing change. Orme explained that the district leadership wanted to extend the school day in order to give students more instructional time. The intended result was to improve academic performance in class and on standardized assessments. The reform strategy was developed, however, without considering the impact on parents, nor did the district leadership communicate with parents about the change prior to implementation. Thus, the resistance of parents to the lengthening of the school day to allow for more instructional time became a major barrier to the change. According to Orme, the lack of communication conveyed to parents that their values and attitudes as well as the impact of an extended school day on their social constructs were deemed unimportant. Thus, an unintended outcome of the change was a distrust of the local school and district leadership.
In a closer analysis of the district's change effort, Orme (2009) constructed four theories regarding leading school change. First, she defined the *grammar of schooling*, as understanding change as perceived by its stakeholders. This theoretical frame was later referred to by Kylar (2010) as the inherent and implicit rules for bringing about a "real school," Second, when conceptualizing the *four frames of leadership*, Orme pointed to Bolman and Deal (2013) as she viewed change through the structural, political, human resource, and symbolic lenses. Third, in defining *adaptive challenges* she considered the emphasis Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz & Linsky (2002) placed on flexible decision making and on being able to respond to unfamiliar landscapes. Finally, Orme said that *technical change*, is change that does not consider human impact or hidden power dynamics. In employing these four theories on leading school change, Orme found that district leadership handled the change as a technical challenge. Thus, they failed to acknowledge the human dynamic of change and, thereby, underestimated the meaning that parents and teachers applied to the extension of the school day. Ultimately, Orme concluded that poor communication on the part of ineffective leadership made the reform process more challenging.

In addition to the finding that emphasizes the importance of engaging parents in seemingly small changes, the Orme (2009) study showed how the implementation of a single and apparently simple change strategy can deeply affect the culture of a school. For the multi-faceted change intervention at QMS, the Orme study holds out possibilities for simplifying the design and methodology of the QMS as it seeks to explore the significant role school culture played in the school’s reform process.
In his quantitative study of school culture and student achievement, Mitchell (2008) evaluated the relationship between public school culture and performance on third grade reading and math scores. The study took place in the state of Georgia. Data was collected from the Georgia state CRCT test. The intent of the study was to further the knowledge of educational leaders regarding school culture and its effect on student achievement. High stakes testing and leadership accountability were likely reasons for public support of the study. School culture surveys, criterion referenced competency tests, surveys of teachers from 15 participating schools, and third grade reading and math scores on standardized tests constituted the methodology for collecting and disaggregating data. Mitchell found six benchmarks of positive school culture: teacher collaboration, collaborative leadership, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnerships. While five benchmarks indicated a strong correlation, learning partnerships had a moderately strong correlation with student achievement. The Mitchell study had little implication for the QMS study design. Rather than a quantitative study, a qualitative exploration of culture and achievement better supported this study. While his findings suggested connections between student achievement and several educational practices, it did not provide the narrative that might guide principals and teachers in the implementation of effective strategies. Nevertheless, the Mitchell study was useful in that it clearly delineates aspects of the school environment that the school leader should focus on. Four of his six benchmarks—teacher collaboration, collaborative leadership, professional development and unity of purpose—did prove useful in the QMS study.
However, Mosley (2007) conducted a more relevant piece of research for the problem outlined in the QMS study. In his focus group study of educational change agents in a public middle school, he found that the mere use of action research regarding the beliefs, values, and norms of the school resulted in an improvement in school culture. He asserted that the power of shared values, beliefs and attitudes, forms cultural connections that have a powerful impact on school reform. However, the conclusion most germane to this study was Mosley’s recommendation for more research on new ways to enculturate parents, teachers, and students in the process of school improvement. His clear statement of the need for studies that identify ways of engaging teachers, students, and parents in the school reform process underscored the significance of the QMS study. Urban school culture is historically plagued with dysfunction; as evidenced by unqualified teachers who teach out of their licensed subject area, ineffective leadership, disruptive students, disengaged parents, and bureaucratic, unsupportive school districts (Mees, 2008). The Mosley study clearly pointed to the need for research that has potential to generate leadership strategies for principals in an urban context. In addition, it underscored the feasibility of using focus groups a part of the study design of the QMS Study.

**Hip-hop as a vehicle for communication and instruction.** Hip-hop is a term that is loosely used. Educators interested in incorporating hip-hop into their school community must understand what it is or they risk over simplifying the term. Several researchers and historians of the art form have sought to clarify the meaning. Forman & Neil (2004) said that hip-hop, which is often mistaken as rap music, consists of four
major elements: emceeing, dee-jaying, b-boys or break-dancing, and graffiti. They added that hip-hop is more than just music: it is an art form, a culture, and a way of life.

Petchauer (2010) explained that since hip-hop’s inception in the 1970s it has been organized around cultural norms, values, and beliefs of underprivileged Black and Latino youth. Furthermore, Petchauer asserted that academic scholarship in the last 10 years has defined hip-hop as a culture that connects beliefs, values, and identity of youth globally. Moreover, Petchauer stated that from the beginning hip-hop has mirrored a popular belief in the black community that inner-city schools are places of mis-education.

Parker’s (2006) research has a different emphasis as he sought to define the scope of hip-hop. He presented the evolution of hip-hop music from origins in the parks and on street corners to its advancement to radio stations and ultimately to corporate boardrooms as a major marketing tool for companies. Executives from diverse industries use hip-hop as a means to market products to young people. The question, then, is, does hip-hop have the same ability to market a message of academic excellence to urban students?

Only recently have academic scholars seriously researched the social significance of hip-hop for educational change efforts. Smith (2007) is among the first scholarly researchers to explore the use of hip-hop as an educational tool. He viewed the community-based art form as a means to bridge the learning gap and make cultural connections with students of color. In contrast, Gosa’s (2008) study evaluated the anti-schooling themes in hip-hop music and the potential disruptive effect rap has on students. He cautions that its use can lead to an unhealthy school environment. Stovall, (2006) maintained, on the other hand, that getting students who already have anti-schooling attitudes to buy into a message of academic excellence far outweighs potential
negative consequences of the use of hip-hop in the school setting. He further contended that failing to engage the youth culture that is already prevalent in the environment, continues to have a negative effect on attempts at school improvement.

What has happened, unfortunately, is a widespread perception of hip hop as a juvenile musical form that is all about money, violence, and the sexual objectification of women. While there are hip hop lyrics glorifying all three, what constitutes hip-hop culture is much more complicated and nuanced. (Parker, 2006, p.6).

Parker (2006) further explained that many educators do not understand that hip-hop was founded on underlying principles such as justice, equality, peace, love, and work. Parker sums up his discussion of the positive aspects of hip-hop by paraphrasing a rapper and teacher of philosophy who stated, “Rap is what we do; hip hop is what we live.” Parker believed that KRS-One provided a good working definition for differentiating hip-hop and rap music.

Hip-hop influences today’s youth in an undeniable way (Petchauer, 2010). However, there are negative messages in the music that continue to serve as barriers to embracing this popular youth culture. Petchauer explained further that, for African American youth, the music represents the distrust of mainstream societal norms that schools teach and reinforce. Conversely, schools resist embracing hip-hop because of its anti-education messages (Low, 2009). Ironically, hip-hop and public education is historically indirectly linked. According to Kurtis Blow (2013), the first hip-hop, rap artist to sign a major record deal, and the cutting of art and music from the New York City public schools during the 1970s fiscal crisis, spawned mistrust of disadvantaged
youth and gave rise to hip-hop. With the emergence of hip-hop as an educational tool, the deficit of art in many inner schools was restored.

In addition to restoration of art and music in the school setting, Irizarry (2009) stated that embracing hip-hop leads to the development of meaningful relationships between students and teachers, and that this relationship serves as a bridge to standards based education. In addition, Irizarry pointed out the richness and potential benefits of hip-hop for teacher education and professional development efforts. He drew from several sources, including research conducted with a group of urban teachers and with urban youth about hip-hop culture to advance his notion of “Representin” which he defined as a shared sense of identity and responsibility based on membership in a socially constructed community. He considers Representin’ to be a valuable disposition to be developed by teachers that allows for the use of urban youth culture as a “fund of knowledge” in teacher education. “This use of hip-hop as a tool also has the potential to improve teaching practices and to positively influence learning opportunities and outcomes for urban youth of color” (Irizarry, 2009, p.489). Stovall (2006) concurs that hip-hop is a tool that can have a transformational effect on both teachers and students. He says it can assist in helping students develop critical thinking skills. Stovall specifically stated:

As an alternative to situations that are dehumanizing and depersonalized, the infusion of hip-hop culture can provide the context for students to develop a critical lens in approaching subject matter and its relevance to their daily lives. Hip-hop culture, as relevant to the lives of many high school students, can provide a bridge to ideas and tasks that promote critical understanding. (p. 590)
Indeed, the use of hip-hop as a bridge for learning has implication beyond urban youth of color. The composition of the urban segment whose purchasing decisions are either directly or indirectly influenced by inner-city trends or hip-hop culture is made up of approximately 59% Whites, 19% Blacks, 17% Latinos, 4% Asians, and 1% other (Kitwana, 2006). The recent, but limited research in this area indicated that the potential application of hip-hop was far broader than previously perceived by educators.

However, this researcher does not assume that hip-hop alone can be the cause of sweeping school improvement. In fact, one of the underlying assumptions of this study is that hip-hop has great potential as an effective communication and motivational tool to assist the many innovative approaches to school reform. Moreover, it was the researcher’s assumption that transformational leadership, which includes innovative approaches to inspiring followers, are most suited for sustainable school improvement. Clearly, there are gaps in the literature on the effects of the use of hip-hop as an innovative tool. The study of QMS sought to advance the knowledge in this area.

**Chapter Summary**

This review of the literature explored three topics crucial to this study of the impact of transformational leadership in the improvement of school culture. The review specifically covered theories regarding effective leadership styles, as well as research on the influence of school culture on school reform efforts and research, and theories about the power of hip-hop to engage urban youth and their parents in learning venture. In this review of the literature three main points emerged that had implications for the QMS study.
First, the theories of leadership clarified how the various leadership styles—
transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire—are interconnected. While
transformational leadership may dominate in a leader’s style, depending on the situational
context, elements of transactional and laissez-faire can also be present. The knowledge
that a principal may simultaneously employ more than one leadership style does not
change the proposed focus on transformational leadership in this study. However, in an
attempt to capture moments when transactional leadership traits exert greater influence in
the QMS school setting, research questions were reviewed and, where appropriate,
revised.

Second, much is written on how school culture shapes educational reform. Indeed,
this effect is so powerful that it can assist or derail a reform effort. This finding in the
review of the literature reinforced this researcher's assumption that it is critical for
principals to understand their school culture if they are to function as a change agent—
especially in low-performing urban schools. On the other hand, despite the many
findings on the importance of school culture on school reform, little is found in the
literature on the practical application of these theories and findings in urban settings.

Last, there was an emerging body of literature that explored the potential impact
of hip-hop in urban school settings. Hip-hop is an art form that has proved highly
successful in corporate settings. However, its use as a motivational tool and
communication vehicle in urban school settings was largely unexamined. The QMS
study assists in closing the gap in research on hip-hop in school settings. Not only has
this study added to the knowledge of existing findings, it pinpointed practical
applications as it gave voice to a population not usually heard by educational policy makers.

Beyond the three main issues covered, this review of the literature has implications and significance for the QMS study because it simultaneously raised questions as to whether or not factors other than transformational leadership, such as, autonomy and empowerment of the local school principal, had a greater impact on improving school outcomes at the QMS. For this reason, Chapter 3, Research Design and Methodology, discusses the process of focus group protocol with open-ended questions that can surface less explicit influences along with the ones hypothesized like transformational leadership styles and hip-hop as a communication tool. In addition, the focus group generated stakeholder perceptions regarding the educational change that occurred during the study period.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The persistent failing of schools in urban communities demands bold, innovative, even non-traditional initiatives (Fullan, 2003). This study examined a comprehensive educational change effort at the QMS that succeeded, as evidenced by NYSED school report card, and NYCDOE quality review data, when other reforms were failing. The research of this dissertation, called the QMS study, examined the strategies implemented at the Queens Middle School (QMS). By doing so, the study identified effective leadership practices that are adaptable to other low-performing schools in similar communities. To that end, this study examined the impact of QMS’s leader on teacher morale, student behavior, and parent involvement. Specifically, this study found answers to the following questions:

1. What role did the principal play in transforming the school environment?
2. What did the stakeholders (students, teachers and parents) view as practical processes (best practices) that effectively helped students to improve academically, and socially?
3. What attitudes and practices existed during the implementation of reform at QMS?

In order to answer the research questions a qualitative phenomenological study was presented. A qualitative study is an investigation that is systematic and rigorous. Its intent is to present new knowledge or to confirm prior knowledge (Creswell, 2013). This
qualitative research method was most suited to study what occurred at QMS because unlike a quantitative study that may be conducted in a lab or under a “contrived situation,” a qualitative study involves talking to people and/or assessing their behaviors within a specific setting or context (Creswell, 2013, p.185). Since a transformational leader focuses on the relationship between leader and follower (Avolio, 2011; Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), a study method that explored the nature of relationships between leader and follower best provided understandings of how the school exceeded expectations and improved outcomes. Unlike a quantitative method, with its focus on trends and overall success or failure, a qualitative study method offered an opportunity, for not only data collection, but for the interpretation of core values and beliefs of both the participants and the leader. Thus, the impact that leadership practices had on followers and the meaning that followers assigned to the improvements at QMS were more clearly constructed.

In summary, this researcher’s rationale for a qualitative study was two-fold. First, as evidenced in the literature (Avolio, 2013; Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), a qualitative study method best confirmed knowledge about transformational leadership and its impact on school culture. Second, because the QMS study provided insights regarding the application of transformational leadership strategies in an urban school setting, a study method that emphasized the collection of data within a situational context (Creswell, 2013) was best suited.

The process of this qualitative study had two components. First, a focus group of three distinct stakeholders—teachers, students, and parents—assessed the impact of change. Second, this researcher analyzed responses from stakeholders in an attempt to see
if their perceptions of school improvement were aligned with the researcher’s assertions. It is important to note that this researcher is the former principal of QMS. However, unlike quantitative research, a qualitative researcher immerses him/herself into the study and carries with him/herself an inherent bias (Blum, 2006; Mead, 1992).

**Research Context**

The QMS is a large low performing urban school located in a working class low-income neighborhood in New York City. During the beginning of the study period, the student population of the school was 1,463 students with an ethnic composition of 49% African American, 26% Asian (Guyanese), 22% Latino, 2% White, and 1% American Indian (nysed.gov, 2003). The school historically suffered from a high turnover rate of principals, teachers, and staff, as well as from a reputation of being disorderly and unsafe. In fact, the disorganization of the school resulted in the failure of QMS to receive Title I funding for which it was qualified. Consequently, children were not provided a much needed free lunch program. In short, the inconsistency in leadership and teaching personnel resulted in a school culture that can be likened to an emergency room whereas decisions were made in a crisis management mode in an attempt to address:

- a lack of uniformity of rules and policies
- the inconsistent professional development of teachers
- poor student performance on New York State assessments (NYS) that led to the designation by NYS Department of education as a *School In Need of Improvement*
- a high rate of violence and major criminal incidents
- lack of parent involvement
• low morale of teachers
• low parent and community confidence in the school

The attention given to these problems, left little time for implementing proactive change leading to improvement (personal communication, November 6, 2002; nysed.gov, 2003).

With the assignment of a new principal in 2003, the ethnic composition of the approximately 1,450 student population remained the same, but by the end of the study period, QMS went from next to last to the number-one school in the district as evidenced by student performance on the NYS standardized tests in math and English language arts. In addition, the reputation of the school improved as indicated by the NYCDOE Quality Review report (School Progress Report, 2007). There was also a corresponding decline in violent and criminal incidents as shown in QMS’s NYS report data (nysed.gov, 2005; nysed.gov, 2006),

**Research Participants**

Participants of the qualitative phenomenological study were drawn from three groups of stakeholders at QMS: teachers, students, and parents (See Appendencies A & B). As Creswell (2013) states, such a study, examines “the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p.14). Therefore, the QMS study assessed the shared values of these stakeholders about what led to improvement at QMS.

All participants in the QMS study were chosen using purposeful random sampling of “participants that will best help the researcher understand the problems and the research question” (Creswell, 2013, p. 189). Creswell further states that qualitative studies do not necessarily suggest random sampling of larger number of participants. In
the case of qualitative studies, found the sample size of participants can be as small as four to five subjects. Instead of sole random sampling that is typical in identifying participants for quantitative studies, he suggests that such a small pool of participants may be selected with the use of descriptors that define the sample. For example, Miles and Huberman (1994), identified aspects, such as setting, actors (roles), and events as useful in matching participants to the research design.

Consistent with Creswell’s (2013) findings regarding participant selection, this qualitative study involved three focus groups with three or four participants in each. A process of random purposeful selection identified participants for focus groups. In the case of focus groups, setting, actors, and events were the aspects employed to identify participants whose experience best contributed to understandings of leadership practices on teacher morale, student behavior, and parent involvement that were examined in this study. Thus, participants in the focus groups were drawn from QMS as the setting; they were divided according to their roles as teachers, students, or parents; and, each participant were further identified by event (i.e., whether or not they were at QMS before or during the change intervention at the school). The division of participants according to the event provided for a pre- and post-analysis of practices and attitudes once data was collected.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

The type of instrument used for data collection was focus group interviews with QMS stakeholders (see Appendix C). Thus, the purpose was to assess the extent to which their perspectives aligned with the narrative of the QMS. The same set of focus group questions were administered in separate small group interviews of teachers,
students, and parents. The questions were crafted and administered by the researcher. The researcher sought support and guidance from the dissertation committee in crafting of questions and protocols for conducting interviews in keeping with Creswell’s (2013) procedure to limit the bias of the researcher who, in the case of this study, was the QMS principal at the time of the change effort. Because the researcher’s background could color how data is collected (Creswell, 2013), this researcher collaborated with the dissertation committee about how he planned to interpret the data.

Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research by its nature is subjective. In addition, Creswell stated that qualitative research introduces “a range of strategic, ethical and personal issues” (p. 187). He says the researcher should disclose his/her experiences with the research problem, participants, and how experiences may potentially shape the interpretation of data. This researcher was aware of his positionality with stakeholders, and viewed himself as both insider and outsider. The reasons this researcher was an insider are two-fold. First, the leadership practices under scrutiny are the leadership practices of this researcher, second the researcher was a former educator within the NYCDOE. Thus, he may have been subjective in his collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. However, this researcher has not been principal of the QMS School or worked for the NYCDOE since 2007. Thus, he was an outsider, who was removed from having authority over those he was interviewing. In addition, the student/parent groups of stakeholders were not under this researcher’s influence or authority. Chiseri-Stater (2003) and Pillow (2003) stated “reflexivity” is when a researcher scrutinizes him/herself. This researcher was self-conscious and aware of the relationship between the researcher and participants of his/her study. Awareness of positionality and potential bias
on the part of this researcher limited but did not completely eliminate the researcher’s subjectivity.

To insure the reliability of the data collection instruments, this research followed Creswell’s (2013) consistency protocol. First, letters of invitation varied slightly from one stakeholder group to the other, but the invitations were identical for potential participants within each group (see Appendices A and B). Second, the same general questions were asked of each focus group. Third, consistency was maintained in the duration of time allotted for each focus group session. Fourth, consistency was maintained for the time of day each focus group was interviewed. Last, the use of the same auditory recording devices and a checklist to capture observed nuances were used to collect data in each of the sessions. By implementing these generally accepted steps in qualitative studies, the researcher “validated the accuracy of the information collected” (Creswell, 2013, p.197) from the focus group.

**Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

The analysis of focus group data relied on transcripts of vocal recordings and typed notes of detailed observation of the sessions. In interpreting the data collected, this researcher followed two procedures described by Creswell (2013) as basic to qualitative research.

First, unlike with quantitative studies where data is collected, then analyzed and reported the analysis in this qualitative study “proceeded hand and hand with other parts of developing the qualitative study, namely the data collection and the write-up of findings” (Creswell, 2013, p.195). The researcher analyzed data as it was collected. For example, while focus groups and in-depth interviews were ongoing, the voice recordings
were transcribed and the researcher made marginal notes or wrote memos that might have been included in the narrative of the final report. The advantages of this procedure were that the notes identified things that may not have been reflected in the recording (e.g. tension, mood, and participant’s relationship to each other). However, this approach opened the door to potential bias rooted in the researcher's perception of the participants.

Second, because a qualitative case study involves a detailed description of setting and individuals, and produces a richer and density in the transcribed text, not all the data was analyzed. Rather, the research employed a process called “winnow,” in which the researcher desegregates the dense data into salient points. Guest, MacQueen, & Nanny (2012) define “winnow” as including some data and disregarding other data as information is organized into small themes. For the purpose of this study, this researcher included more detailed responses, as data that clarified focus group interview questions. In doing so, this researcher was “looking at data for ideas of participants, tone of information and impression of overall depth, credibility and use of information” Creswell (2013, p.195). Thus, as a qualitative case study, the QMS study analyzed texts and notes of field observations with the intent to tease out recurring themes and issues (Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1994). For example, the researcher might have noted hip-hop or teacher morale as themes or issues repeatedly raised by participants. On the other hand, the researcher may choose to disregard data that overlaps. For example, if a participant talks about PEST when asked about principal strategy and when asked specifically about PEST, the researcher may choose data from one comment and disregard data from the other. Thus, the advantage of this procedure was the researcher’s ability to construct meaningful
themes based on participants’ feedback; however, the disadvantage was the possible misinterpretation of responses or reaction based on researcher’s prior assumption.

Last, once all focus group data was prepared in a text format, as Creswell (2013) recommends, the data was coded in search of themes concerning participants’ core values, attitude, and beliefs about school what specifically led to improved school performance. First, stakeholders were asked questions about the leadership style of the principal. Second, an exploration about stakeholders, school environment, and culture before and after intervention strategies provided data that was coded into themes organized around educational change theory. In the case of the QMS study, the research sought to answer questions regarding the value of parent engagement, increased professional development, teacher support, increased student accountability, school reorganization, and increased extracurricular activities, or the importance of the leadership of the principal to the success of the school. The clear advantage of coding was that it revealed the narrative behind the trends and themes. This researcher understood that the coding of data was time consuming and tedious. However, in order to become more familiar with finding and the construction of themes, this researcher chose to hand code data.

While the findings of this study were reported mainly as a narrative, tables and charts were presented that illustrated the themes within and among focus groups. For example, one figure charted the frequency with which a theme was deemed important to students, and another figure compared and contrasted how the importance a theme, like hip-hop, changes as the discussion moves from teachers to students to parents.
This researcher also recognizes that there were advantages and disadvantages of conducting a qualitative study. In an attempt to construct deeper meaning, the researcher in a qualitative study is involved with the participants, and immerses him/herself in the lives of the participants that he/she is studying. These factors can color how data are interpreted when analyzed (Creswell, 2013). As previously discussed, in an attempt to limit such bias, this researcher did not analyze the data in isolation. Rather, he sought out experts in the field of qualitative research like, including the dissertation committee and chair.

While this researcher could have conducted a quantitative study designed to determine the correlation between leadership and school improvement, the narrative of school change from the QMS stakeholder perspective would have been lost. With the qualitative analysis that digs into the psyche of the participants with probing open-ended questions, the research was able to explore the core beliefs of QMS stakeholders concerning the impact of transformational leadership on teacher morale, student behavior, and parent involvement. By analyzing the responses of teachers, students, and parents to the research questions, the researcher gained a perspective concerning the principal’s leadership, the use of hip-hop, and parent involvement that reinforced or dispelled the current narrative of QMS reform strategies. As a result, the researcher was able to report specific practices to be adapted or pitfalls to avoid for urban school principals who are in constant search of effective leadership strategies.

**Summary**

The methodology organized the plan for the research design into five parts, first by giving a general perspective through the introduction. Therefore, starting with the
restating the problem of urban school failure, and the failure of the traditional approach to school reform, the study of a low performing Queens Middle School (QMS) is introduced. Specifically the innovative approach towards addressing QMS strategies for poor school culture, as indicated by low teacher morale, negative student behavior, and low parent involvement, was explored--by assessing the leadership practices of the newly appointed principal of the QMS. In addition, the general perspective set the context of the theoretical framework of Fullan’s (2003) educational change theory, in which the problem was analyzed. Thus, research questions about leadership style, the use of hip-hop as an innovative tool, and the impact of school culture on teachers, parents, and students were introduced.

Second, an introduction of the context of the study provided a history of factors that deemed QMS a low performing school, demographics of the student, class status of the families of the student, and student population. Third, an introduction of research participants, how they were chosen, what kinds of cohorts were established (e.g. focus group vs. in depth interviews), and who participated in which group addressed reliability and validity in an in-depth manner, thus, forming the basis for justification of how each participant was chosen. Fourth, there was a discussion about instruments used to collect data. There was an explanation concerning detailed processes about interviews with focus groups. In addition, potential questions about researcher bias were addressed. Last, there was an explanation on the researcher’s plan and procedures for analyzing data, for example, specific details regarding the methodology used for coding and the use of technology to assist in the coding process were detailed. Not previously discussed, but included, is the procedure for putting in place a process for maintaining the
confidentiality of transcriptions of focus group interviews data. This process involved keeping transcribed recordings in a secure locked file for two years and then destroying the data. In addition, the advantage and disadvantage of the researcher’s procedures for data analysis were explained. Moreover, to explain the process for which the study was conducted, the researcher explained his justification for conducting a qualitative study over a quantitative study methodology. In so doing, he explained that a qualitative study allowed the researcher to construct deeper meaning through the development of themes and issues that arose from his approach. This researcher believes that his methodology provided the best approach to confirm or deny his previously held assumptions.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This qualitative study investigated the impact of changing leadership in a Queens Middle School (QMS) by documenting and analyzing the perspectives of students, teachers and parents. The study examined perceptions with specific focus on themes that illuminated observable principal behaviors that participants in the study associated with changes at the school.

Consistent with Creswell’s (2013) findings regarding participant selection, this qualitative study involved three focus groups: Teacher Focus Group, Student Focus Group, and Parent Focus Group. Through the process of random purposeful sampling, 15 participants were invited to each focus group. They were purposefully selected because their shared lived experience was instrumental to understanding the phenomena of what had occurred at QMS. Of the 15 randomly sampled to participate in the study, 11 to 12 respondents per group completed the demographic survey (Appendix A). This represented roughly a 90% response rate per group.

Because the researcher was the former principal of QMS, in an attempt to limit bias, the respondent pool was further narrowed through a process of random sampling that resulted in three or four participants per focus group. The smaller sample size of four per focus group is justified by Creswell, (2013) as well as Miles and Huberman, (1994) who found that purposeful sampling can have smaller sample sizes with the use of descriptors. To further limit bias, the recordings of focus group sessions were transcribed by an independent transcriber. Then, the researcher, assisted by a volunteer, reviewed the recordings and the transcribed texts.
The confidentiality of all participants was protected. Teachers were identified in the study as TP1 (2) (3) (4). The demographic data regarding focus group is shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

*Age, Race, Gender of Teacher Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TP1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP4</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were identified as SP1 (2) (3) (4), and the demographic data regarding their focus group is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Age, Race, Gender of Student Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SP1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants of the Parent Focus Group were identified as PP1 (2) (3). It should be noted that only three parents had the time to participate in the study. The other
parents could not participate within the timeframe that the study was being conducted.

The demographic data of the group is illustrated in the table 4.3.

Table 4.3

*Age, Race, Gender of Parent Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PP1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Questions**

The same set of focus group interview questions (see Appendix A) were posed to all three focus groups. They were shaped by the following underlying research questions that guided the QMS study:

1. What role did the principal play in transforming the school environment?
2. What did the stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) view as practical processes (best practices) that effectively helped students to improve academically, and socially?
3. What attitudes and practices existed during the implementation of reform at QMS?

Starting with Research question 1, findings are reported with explanations of how they answered the primary questions that guided this study.

**Research question 1.** What role did the principal play in transforming the school environment? There was consensus among the three focus groups about the two major
findings that answer this question, that is, finding one, all groups reinforced the research narrative assertion that the principal inherited an unhealthy and unsafe school culture at QMS. Finding two, they affirmed the critical role the principal played in transforming the school environment. These findings were determined through a review and analysis of answers to focus group interview questions. To establish the school environment that existed when the new principal arrived, all focus group participants were asked: What was the reputation of school before the principal arrived? The often repeated responses from teachers, students, and parents included the terms unsafe, chaotic, out-of-control, disruptive, no discipline, gang infested, and a bad school. All stakeholder responses aligned in affirming that QMS had a poor reputation as asserted by the researcher, and that the new principal had inherited an unhealthy school environment. These perceptions were verified by external assessments and school archival data.

As a follow up to the finding that the principal inherited an unhealthy and unsafe school environment, all focus groups were asked as an interview question: What role did the principal play in transforming the school environment? Though there was unanimous agreement among all stakeholders that the principal played a critical role in changing the school environment at QMS, they emphasized the importance of strategies differently. For example, of the seven strategies or themes, principal practices were the most important to teachers; the Hip-Hop Project was at the top of the student list, and parents felt that PEST (Parents Empowering Student Today) was the crucial strategy in transforming the school environment. Respondent perspectives clearly supported the finding that the principal played a crucial role in transforming the school environment at QMS. As a matter of fact,
this transformation of the school environment was viewed by focus group participants as foundational to the overall reform effort.

**Research question 2.** What did the stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) view as practical processes that effectively helped students to improve academically, and socially? It was evident from the review of respondent data from the three focus groups that principal practice and strategies were critical to improved social behaviors and academic performance of QMS students. This general finding resulted from answers to the following interview questions: *What strategy, if any, did the principal use to change the climate and tone of the school? How important were the changes in improving student achievements? What did the students view as practical processes that helped students to improve academically and socially? You mentioned PEST; what is that? What does TIME mean to you?* Answers to focus group interview questions such as these led to the identification of eight principal strategies or themes that study participants linked to improved student behaviors and academic performance. The five themes that all stakeholders viewed as important included:

- Transforming unhealthy school culture that was a barrier to school improvement.
- Principal practices and strategies critical to QMS improvement.
- Strategies that helped overcome resistance to change.
- TIME with its emphasis on teacher accountability and professional development.
- The Hip-Hop Project because it engaged students in the learning process.
• PEST as it evolved into parent-community partnerships that increased school safety and improved learning environments.

Theme 1 covered school environment and provided the context in which all the other themes were examined and understood. Thus, theme 1 established that the QMS school culture was unhealthy, the school was low performing, and QMS had a reputation as a chaotic, unsafe school by parents and community members.

In addition to the common themes listed above, students and parents identified three strategies or themes that they viewed as important. Theme 6 surfaced in both student and parent focus groups, theme 7 was exclusive to students, and theme 8 was an unanticipated theme that was unique to parents. Correspondingly, the additional themes were:

• The school uniform policy with its positive effect on student behavior and the learning environment.

• Principal visibility that was critical to improved student social behaviors.

• The positive effect of informed parent advocates on student achievement.

Themes, sub-themes and outliers undergirding the findings associated with answers to question 2 will be discussed more fully in the Data Analysis and Findings section, where specific attention will also be given to transcribed responses from the stakeholders (teachers, students, and parents), as well as to external assessments and other archival data that reinforce or discredit focus groups respondent perceptions. It should be noted that all respondents agreed that principal strategies and practice were crucial to improved student behaviors and academic performance. However, beyond helping to create a positive learning environment, few insights were gained regarding the
direct impact that parent stakeholders had on the academic achievements of own children or QMS students in general.

**Research question 3.** What attitudes and practices existed during the implementation of reform at QMS? Was there resistance from any stakeholders? If so which one? Respondent data confirmed the researcher’s assertion that both resistance and support existed for reform efforts at QMS. This finding regarding question 3 was derived from participant responses to the interview question: *Tell me about resistance, obstacles, and challenges. Did everybody embrace the new reform? How did that process work from your perspective?* An initial resistance to change at QMS was perceived by all three focus groups. In responding to questions associated with question 2, teachers discussed the natural tension that existed between the change agent and the stakeholders. They described the role of overcoming resistance as “tough,” “a fight,” “taking a stand” and not one of “Mr. Popularity.” Ultimately, they described the QMS community as it moved from a posture of resistance to one of embracing change. *(TP1, TP2, TP3, TP4,)*

Though they assigned different importance, the student and parent focus groups reinforced teacher perspectives that resistance to reform was overcome. In embracing change, the latter two groups perceived an enthusiasm in the school community for innovative and non-traditional strategies and practices. This process of change will be discussed more fully in the Data Analysis and Findings section of this chapter. It is sufficient to say here that responses associated with research question 3 affirmed the researcher’s assertion that both resistance and support existed for change at QMS. Furthermore, this finding provided the context for an examination of how the changes in
attitudes occurred, as well as an exploration of what was most effective in principal practices that influenced changes in stakeholder attitudes.

**Data Analysis and Findings**

The qualitative data presented in this section are discussed in terms of patterns, themes, and trends that are supported by direct participant quotes (Creswell, 2013). To amplify findings, a limited number of figures and tables were used that are explained within the context of previous research results outlined in Chapter 2, as well as within the context of QMS archival data such as assessments and reports from the New City Department of Education (NYCDOE) and the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Furthermore, as Yin (2009) recommended, this QMS study employed units of analysis (e.g., Parent-Community Partnership, School Culture, High Interest Curriculum) from which trends were derived. Also, in accord with phenomenological protocols (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), the transcribed texts of each focus group were reviewed in conjunction with the researcher’s field notes of observations.

A common procedure employed in the analysis of data for all focus groups was the use of preliminary codes in the initial review of transcript texts. Throughout the study, a process of hand coding was implemented (Creswell, 2013) in which participant statements were categorized by inductively identifying codes or patterns derived from researcher assumptions based on the review of the literature in Chapter 2. As with Creswell findings (2013), the preliminary codes tables (listed in Appendices D, E, and F) changed as other deductively identified codes emerged directly from an analysis of the three focus group transcript texts. In this fashion, specific themes, sub-themes, and outliers regarding the reform effort at QMS became apparent. Themes were identified
when more than half of participants had similar responses to a question; sub-themes resulted when half of the participants had similar responses to a question; and an outlier emerged when one participant’s response was deemed by the researcher as significant to the study.

Although the three focus groups shared common perceptions of significant changes that led to improvement at QMS, the importance of themes were emphasized differently from one stakeholder group to another. The ranking of themes in Table 4.4 illustrates the order of importance emphasized by each focus group.

It should be noted, though, that theme 1, over-arching theme: *Unhealthy School Culture was a Barrier to School Improvement*, is listed in the table but not ranked because it provides the context in which all the focus groups discussed the improvement that occurred at QMS. The remaining seven themes are listed in Table 4.4 by focus group and in accordance with the importance that participants emphasized—with one representing more and seven lesser importance.

Though it is unranked, because it established the context for needed change at QMS, analysis of the eight major findings of the study began with theme 1. Subsequent to that examination, the other seven themes presented in Table 4.4 will be explored along with sub-themes and outliers that revealed deeper understandings about the school’s change processes and results.
Table 4.4

*Focus Group Themes in Order of Importance for QMS Improvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes to All Focus Groups</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Over Arching Unhealthy School Culture Barrier to School Improvement</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Principal practices and strategies were critical to School Reform</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Resistance to change strategies at QMS was overcome.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Teacher practices and development (TIME) affected QMS student outcomes.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: Hip-Hop (The Hip-Hop Project) engaged students in the learning process at QMS.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 6: Parent-Community Partnerships (PEST) improved school culture and learning.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Parent / Student Themes</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 7: Principal visibility was critical to improved student behavior and academic performance.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 8: School uniforms had a positive effect on student behavior.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme Exclusive to Parent Focus Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 9: Parent involvement and education regarding school policies had a positive effect on the learning environment.</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Over-arching-theme 1: unhealthy school culture was a barrier to school improvement.** A textual analysis of the data revealed that all focus group respondents most frequently described a chaotic and an unsafe environment at QMS as the main barrier to improvement and desired student outcomes. In the case of teachers, three out of four respondents described QMS as having a poor reputation and an unsafe school culture prior to the assignment of the new principal. Frequent turnover in leadership and lack of student accountability caused some staff to fear for their safety. In addition, four out of four respondents thought that the school environment was the reason for poor student outcomes and poor reputation in the community. Lack of consistent leadership, and student accountability also surfaced as reasons that some staff feared for their safety. For example, TP2 stated:

Teachers also felt unsafe. I personally remember being pregnant and it was just very unsafe, roaming through the hallways getting to and from the classrooms or even sometimes being in the classroom with really disruptive children where you yourself did not feel safe in that classroom.

In follow up comments she identified lack of discipline and student accountability as a major reason for poor school environment. TP1 believed that “high turnover rate of principals” left students “out of control” and led to the school’s “poor reputation in the community.”

These teacher assertions are aligned with descriptions by NYCDOE of the leadership as being chaotic prior to the new principal appointment in the fall of that year (Walk through observation report, 2002), and with the New York State Education Department designation of QMS as a School In Need of Improvement (SINI)
Moreover, leadership instability at QMS not only provided insights into the challenge that the new QMS principal faced, but it reaffirmed Smith, (2008) and Jordan’s, (2007) argument that there are high turnover rates among urban school principals that perpetuate instability in urban schools.

As with the teacher focus group, analysis of the student transcript text provided graphic illustrations of the quality of school environment prior to the appointment of the new principal. All four student respondents described QMS as having a poor reputation and an unsafe culture. SP2 asserted, “The school was definitely a disturbance in the neighborhood. After school was over, there was a lot of fights; there was a lot of police activity and the community couldn’t seem to get the children to go home after school was over.” SP4 added “…the school was really upside down: like mad gangs, fighting, pocket knives, a lot of weapons in school.” She concluded, “It was definitely a place that sometimes you were scared to go to because you just didn’t know what to expect.

A review of NYSED’s Violent and Disruptive Incident Report (VADIR) is consistent with both teacher and student perceptions that an environment of intimidation and criminal behavior existed at QMS. Table 4.9 illustrates major incidents that occurred at the school prior to the appointment of the new principal (nysed.gov, 2002).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weapons Possession</th>
<th>Intimidation</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Criminal Mischief</th>
<th>Sexual Offense</th>
<th>Total Major Criminal Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QMS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likewise, parent responses were consistent with archival data (i.e., nysed.gov, 2003; Personal Communication, District Memeomorandum, November 6, 2002) concerning the unhealthy and unsafe climate of the school. Three of three parent respondents found that, prior to the appointment of the new principal, the school environment negatively impacted any efforts to improve QMS performance. However, their greatest focus was on a lack of school leadership. PP1 stated, “There was no community…that existed where the parent involvement took place; and, it was a failing school. It didn’t have a climate conducive to education.” PP2 added:

I know that there was a reputation for lots of fights in the school; it was uncontrolled. There was not much involvement with either the parents or the staff at the school. It was like it was being run by itself. So, it didn’t have the best or safest reputation. There was a lack of staff involvement.

Parent views of the school leadership represented what Avolio (2011) and Bass (1985) would describe as laissez-faire leadership. Also, PP1’s account of QMS as having “no sense of community” was consistent with Orme’s (2009) finding that unhealthy school environment acts as a barrier to school reform.

While responses from the three focus groups do not verify or discredit any data on the broader attempt on the part of NYCDOE to improve low performing school through
Children First reform (McDonald, 2013), the respondent perspectives were supported by local archival data about school environment and its impact on improvement at QMS. This focus on the local setting allowed for detailed data gathering that reinforced, McCarley (2012), Mees, (2008) Mosley, (2007) and Smith’s (2007) assertions of the importance of examining school culture when attempting urban school reform. The analysis of theme 1 conducted such an examination, and by doing so, clearly established a baseline that characterized the QMS environment as chaotic, unsafe, and lacking consistent leadership. These findings clearly describes the environment that the QMS principal was challenged to improve.

**Theme 2: principal practices and strategies were critical to school reform.**

Theme 2 was shaped by responses to interview questions linked to research question 1: *What role did the principal play in transforming the school?* As such, focus group participants responded specifically to the interview question: *What strategy, if any, did the principal use to change the climate and or tone, and how important were the changes in improving student achievement?* An analysis of transcript texts of the three focus groups revealed a general consensus among respondents that principal practices and strategies had a crucial impact on school climate and student achievement.

For the purposes of this study, strategies referred to programs and initiatives implemented by the new principal, and practices were defined as the observable behaviors of the principal. All four teachers, three of four students, and all three parents perceived the role of the principal as important to improvements at QMS. However, as illustrated in Table 4.4, teachers perceived that theme 2 with its emphasis on implementation of innovative strategies and practices led by the principal had the greatest
positive impact on school reform. Students believed that the hip-hop was the most important initiative for change; and, as might be expected, parents thought the implementation of parent initiatives were the most significant in bringing about improvements at QMS.

In all three focus groups, details leading to deeper insights regarding the effectiveness of strategies are embedded in sub-themes. Following are sub-themes common to all focus groups:

- The TIME motto clearly communicated the school vision.
- The PEST initiative involved parents in the improvement efforts.
- School uniforms helped to improve student behavior and learning outcomes.
- Curriculum initiatives (such as the six-week assessments, the pre-nursing and pre-engineering programs) helped to improve students’ academic performance.
- The development of career and college readiness programs motivated student interests in their academic work.
- The development of a Manhood Training initiative contributed to improved student behavior, school climate and school reputation.

Within the teacher focus group, TP1 and TP4 were the most vocal in identifying and explaining why specific principal strategies were effective. They described the principal’s vision for change as clear, innovative and uncompromising. In fact, TP4 said that it was good to have a “motto” that emphasized a clear vision of Teaching, Innovation, Motivation, and Excellence (TIME). He then proceeded to discuss specific programs:
There was a practice assessment about every six weeks [with] a mark-mock of state math and ELA exams. I thought it was a pretty bold move. There were several days where the leader had asked the DOE for some half days that were not scheduled. In order to do those tests, students [went] home a half day and teachers evaluated that [the tests].

TP2 supported TP4’s opinion regarding the rigor of classroom instruction at QMS with the following statement: “We hear all of these terminologies now . . . like Common Core. At the time, it was not in play. [Still], math teachers were asked to use the Impact math book. Talking about rigor, that book is very rigorous.”

In addition to the discussion of academic rigor, comments were made concerning the effect of school uniforms and parent involvement on improved the learning environment at QMS. TP1 said:

One thing that I truly admired and I thought really made a difference with the environment of the school and how the students felt about themselves was the dress code, the uniform…That was one of the major things that I saw that was implemented by the new principal that definitely started to make a change with the students, and with the staff itself… Teachers started to change the way they were dressing; [they] started to model for the children. So, it just brought around a positive change for the school just from the dress code.

Teacher comments about the positive impact of the school uniform policy corresponded with those of parents who agreed that it removed the “distraction of fashion” from the school setting, and said to students, “You’re here to learn.” Students themselves admitted, “I don’t think change could have been involved in that school if we didn’t
change our uniforms.” In effect, the shared perception among all stakeholders regarding the dress code, established a platform for change in the attitudes of students and teachers, and in the climate of the school.

With slight differences in emphasis, other shared perceptions were evident among respondents irrespective of focus group. For instance, all focus groups stressed the importance of curriculum changes. However, teachers emphasized rigor while students emphasized high interest in learning. SP2 graphically highlighted the importance of a high interest, student centered curriculum when he stated:

Like me I was doing budget film group… We had videos going on. We had rap. We had budget committee. We had a lot of activities in the school, you know, that was taking our time away. So, when school was done, we had a lot of after school activities… So, we can stay off the street and be in school doing our work.”

These responses suggested that, within the TIME strategy, most important for students was M for Motivation.

Equally important for students was parent involvement in the daily life of the school. Three out of four student participants in the study talked about the role of the PEST strategy in improving the learning environment. SP3 best captured the student perspective when she commented:

…that was the main issue: The parents weren’t on the same accord as the teachers and the staff. So, they didn’t really have control of the students. I can’t remember the acronym, but I remember it was the force of parents on the premises of the school and they would actually help like direct the kids in the right direction. [They would], like, stick around, make sure nothing happens. So, I know, like,
getting the parents involved was a good strategy because it had everyone on the same page.

Archival data supported student perceptions that strategies and programs initiated by the principal led to increased commitment to schoolwork as expressed by SP2. Also, when parents became partners with teachers as expressed by SP3, the academic performance of students improved. Indeed, there was a correlation between student views and improved student outcomes on the NYSED standardized math and ELA assessments that rose from 15.5% to 53% pass rates in 2003-2006 which was the period of the intervention. In addition, while other schools had marginal gains or dips in student performance on math assessment, QMS experienced an 8% improvement within one year (nysed.gov report card, 2005).

The level of consensus between SP2 and other students regarding the role of parents in improving QMS foreshadowed the emergence of theme 5: which deals specifically with parent and community partnerships later in this chapter. Still, in the discussion of effective principal strategies, parents gave some attention to PEST (Parents Empowering Student Today) prior to shifting their focus to hip-hops ability to engage the student body as a whole in the learning process. For example, PP3 stated, “I think …that he, the principal, found out that it (hip-hop) was the motivating factor for the students to actually…get better grades, do the homework. It was important.” This comment mirrored the students’ emphasis on the M for Motivation in the TIME strategy. It was the idea that SP1 expressed when he asserted that the principal used a “bait and switch tactic” of student engagement.
From the parent perspective, PP3 further elaborated on the importance of the Hip-Hop Project as she added, “So, he was actually able to bring the grades up [by] bringing in hip-hop and the entire show. Students wanted to participate, but they knew the rules.” Thus, consistent with student and teacher views, parents felt that hip-hop was an effective strategy for engaging students in the learning process.

The sixth principal implemented strategy emerged as a sub-theme that asserted that the social and emotional development of young black males at QMS were critical to their academic success. TP3 identified the Manhood Training program as a strategy that was specifically geared to that aim. She believed that the principal had a vision and the program was not simply “a treatment that everyone else tried [to] fit all the other schools. He tried something specific to the students here. So, for example, with the manhood program it wasn’t just about the academics but also about teaching young boys how to become men.”

The Manhood Training sub-theme also surfaced in the student focus group with SP2 acknowledging, “Manhood turned my life around,” and SP3 explaining that “the manhood program prepared you to see a life outside of where you were before.” Expanding the impact of the program beyond the experience of the two student respondents to the teacher perspective, TP4 stated, “…the program proved very effective. Some of the students, even today, are still in contact with me and are in college; and, some have graduated from college.”

Perhaps the most poignant demonstration to the influence of Manhood training and other principal strategies and practices was the apparent impact they had on the decline of violent and criminal incidents (nysed.gov 2015). When students started
dressing for success and engaging in schoolwork and activities, their behavior began to change as shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

*Decline in Major Criminal Incident at QMS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incidents By Year</th>
<th>Weapons Possession</th>
<th>Intimidation</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Criminal Mischief</th>
<th>Sexual Offense</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 is consistent with respondents’ perception that strategies like PEST, TIME, the Hip-Hop Project, Pre-Nursing, Pre-Engineering and Manhood Training led to decreases in violent and criminal incidents in and around the school. The safer, calmer learning environment coincided with increases in the academic achievement of students as evident by performance on standardized assessment tests (See Table 1.1).

Clearly, data from the three focus groups indicated that principal strategies were critical to improvement of school climate and student academic performance.

In addition to principal strategies, all focus groups also highlighted observable behaviors and practices that undergirded the success of effective principal strategies. Specifically, respondents associated the following principal practices with school improvement:

1. He clearly and frequently communicated the vision of the school.
2. He was highly visible inside the school and the community.
3. He had an open-door policy and engaged parents daily.
4. He held students accountable to school rules.

These principal practices were evident in quotes among focus group respondents, as well as in QMS archival data. For example, TP1 stated, “… the new principal coming in was very vocal, very visible. In the morning… he was outside greetings students. I took notice: [he] was just around, not only in the building, but in the neighborhood inviting parents from the community to be a part.” TP4 agreed with TP1 that high visibility and parent engagement were critical practices.

The parents themselves felt a sense of purposeful contribution to school reform efforts. PP1 revealed that parents felt included as partners in QMS improvement processes. She stated, “I felt, as the PTA president, [that] the principal actually had inclusiveness to [get] teachers, parents and ultimately the community involved…in afterschool programs.” In agreeing, PP3 quoted the adage, “it takes a village to raise a child.” These description of the principal’s spoke to his practice of involving all stakeholders in the school’s change effort.

The principal practice most significant to student respondents was his visibility. While they touched on the transactional part of his leadership such as enforcing school rules with saturday detention and the PM School, what stood out was descriptions of the principal as a visible leader. SP1 provided detail information about the level of his visibility:

He was in every aspect of everything. You would see him because, as I said, at times he was annoying. So, you wanted to know, why is he coming to where we’re having fun? Why is he in the lunchroom? Wait, wait, wait, he’s five blocks away from the school; what is he doing here? He was about four or five twin
brothers walking around; we just never met all of them at the same time…

Honestly, he was everywhere you wouldn’t expect a principal to be.

External evaluations of the school were aligned with respondent perceptions that principal visibility, parent engagement, community partnerships and student accountability were crucial to QMS improvements. The NYCDOE School Quality Review Report (2006) stated that “The principal provides strong charismatic leadership, and the parents, teachers and the community greatly respect his vision for the school (p.4).

While respondents reinforced assertions regarding principal visibility and innovative instructional and support programs, data collected on principal strategies and practices did not provide insight into how the school was re-structured to support the programs implemented. For example, implementation of common planning time for teachers within the same department or grade level was not mentioned as a strategy. As evident by TP2’s statement that the “academic program was rigorous,” it was clear that teachers believed that instructional reform and a new way of teaching occurred at QMS, but there was no mention of professional development and little discussion of how teacher practice changed or how the new instructional initiatives affected them as teachers.

Nevertheless, students and parents did provide insights as to how the hip-hop strategy positively engaged students socially and academically. In both groups, how-to strategies surfaced that will be discussed later under theme: Hip-Hop Engaged Students in the Learning Process. However, in discussing principal strategies and practices, students—as did the teachers—failed to comment on ways in which organizational
restructuring changed their daily lives. Thus, this and other organizational changes seemed to have had less an insight than anticipated by the researcher.

As with teachers and students, parents focused on what the principal achieved in terms of parent-community involvement, but did not talk about how he engaged them in supporting particular strategies. There is, however, much discussion on that topic in theme 3: *Resistance to Change at QMS Was Overcome*; few insights were gained regarding the way in which changes in the day-to-day operation directly supported or acted as barriers to the implementation of specific principal strategies and practices. By omission of organizational restructuring at QMS, the transactional nature of the principal’s leadership strategies and practices were minimized.

**Theme 3: Resistance to change strategies at QMS were overcome.** Data analysis and findings of theme 3 were directly linked to research question 3: *What attitudes and practices existed during the implementation of reform at QMS? Was there resistance from any stakeholders?* In responding to interview questions associated with this research question, four out of four teachers acknowledged that resistance to change strategies existed among parents, teachers, students, and even NYCDOE administrators. However, a textural analysis of transcript data indicated that, except for one teacher who included NYCDOE administrators, resistance was perceived as an attitude that existed among parents and students.

It is interesting to note that the ranking of the theme of resistance for teachers was number three in importance, and for students it is number four, but resistance to change was not verbalized as an issue for the parent group. (See Table 4.4.) Instead, they expressed an enthusiasm for change because it meant inclusion in the daily life of the
school in a positive fashion. (See theme 5: *Parent-Community Partnership (PEST)* *Improved School Culture and Student Learning.*) Prior to the principal initiatives to involve parents in school improvement efforts, their contact with the school was mainly centered on the discipline of their children. As a matter of fact, strong feelings about their prior peripheral involvement in the functioning of the school gave rise to a theme that was exclusive to and of primary importance to the parent focus group. (See theme 7: Informed Parent Advocates Help Improve Student Achievement.) Despite parent views about themselves, teachers perceived a resistance on the part of parents and students that stemmed from an unwillingness to conform and, in some cases, because of a lack of understanding of the principal’s innovative approaches to change.

Teachers also had much to say about the principal’s approach to overcoming stakeholder resistance. They thought that he had anticipated resistance, planned for it, and had set in place accountability measures and communication strategies to address it. In describing how resistance was addressed, TP2 referenced the school uniform policy: “...some parents would fight back, saying ‘I don’t want my child to wear shoes, or he or she doesn’t need to wear a tie.’” Then, she explained the “ladder of discipline” for those students who resisted compliance:

That student was taken to the dean or an assistant principal who in turn would get in touch with the parent; and then, if there was still any resistance from the parent, administration would…make sure that everyone was on board and understood the importance of following through with the protocol.

TP2’s account on how the uniform policy was enforced indicated that there was a plan and a process in place to enforce school rules. TP4 added,
Well, at the time I was there, there was an alternative school within the school, and it was a PM school where a student (with infractions) would come in from around 12 noon and they would go until around 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. A very, very nice thing about it was that they were not allowed to interact during this school with the students who were there during a normal school day.

Student perspectives regarding resistance to change were reflective of those expressed by TP2 and TP4. Three of the four student respondents indicated that there was resistance to change strategies at the beginning of the reform period. For instance, SP1, SP2 and SP4 admitted that, at first, they had negative attitudes towards the uniform policy. SP1 said he never “had my uniform one hundred percent.” SP2 followed up, “I would not tuck my shirt in. I would not wear dark blue shirts. I wouldn’t respect it at all.” Finally, SP4 recalled that she said to herself at the time, “There is no way that this is going to happen. I’m going to go to school the first day and nobody is going to be wearing a uniform.” However, they said they soon found out that the principal was ready for them. Consistent with teacher views, students felt that the principal had planned for resistance. SP4 was forthright in stating,

I think that there was a lot of planning that went into implementing the new program. I think there must have been a thought process behind that there may be a lot of resistance to this new plan. I think that there as a lot of planning that went into it, so that there wasn’t any room for resistance.

In pointing out that overcoming resistance to change could not have happened without proper planning, SP4 reinforced Fullan’s (1985) first tenet in his 10-point strategy for educational reform.
In addition to enforcement of school rules, teachers discussed how the principal used “communication” and “engagement” as a means of addressing resistance. TP3 described the principal as “very focused on student issues. He was kind of like ‘I’m going to do whatever it takes. I may rap…and get students involved so that I can educate them holistically.’”

Students expanded TP3’s concept of “engagement” to include aspects of the curriculum. SP3 pointed out how the principal addressed resistance to change by making learning fun. She stated, “I was part of the pre-nursing program, and in addition to that, we also had a pre-engineering program. We had programs like Manhood. These programs weren’t a regular boring curriculum”. When asked why she mentioned those programs as ones used to overcome resistance. She answered, “We wanted to keep up our grades so that we could stay in the pre-nursing class; so that we could stay in the pre-engineering class.” SP2 reinforced her point by commenting, “Like, one of our students [in the pre-nursing program] delivered a baby while he was at home. That was cool. Then he went to Oprah to explain the story.” Student responses like SP3’s suggested that high interest curricula, career and college readiness programs in math and science, and mentoring programs such as Manhood Training indicated that a blend of transactional and transformational leadership approaches (Avolio, 2011; Bass, 1999) helped to overcome student resistance to educational reform at QMS.

The following somewhat lengthy comment by SP1 allowed a deeper insight into student attitudes towards change. It was chosen because of its perspective on why students resist change, as well as on how the principal overcame the resistance:
As one of the students who wasn’t always the best behaved, I can say that it was kind of like you wanted to pull towards it, but then you didn’t because in a sense if you pulled towards it, you was listening. You was letting authority take its course… but there was so much positive going on that students were like okay, if I keep getting in trouble, I’m not going to be able to go to the next event that we have at York College. I’m not going to be able to go on the next trip. You were taken away from the fun. You were 1 out of 10 students that was taken away from the fun.

In this statement, the student also illustrated how balancing the authority role of the principal with offerings of high interest activities helped QMS students to accept school rules that they were initially inclined to rebel against.

While students provided an incredible amount of data regarding their initial resistance to change, teachers were less forthcoming. Though they spoke in detail about their resistance to the use of hip-hop, there were no discussions or findings about teacher attitudes regarding data-driven instruction, other teaching models implemented, changes in schedules, or the general restructuring of the building and administrative duties. To some extent, teachers did discuss the pros and cons of instructional practices. (See the next section, theme 5: Teacher Practices and Development (TIME) Effected QMS Student Outcomes.) However, their discussion regarding resistance to new curricula initiatives did not rise to the level of a theme.

Teachers did not hone in on their resistant behaviors. However, in discussing student resistance, TP2 did make a general comment about staff when she said, “With the resistance, I must add the principal stood his ground…That firm stand he took made a
difference because it showed there was not going to be any swaying. And, it wasn’t just students but for the staff.” Although teachers did not perceive themselves or their colleagues as resisting change efforts, an outlier to theme 3, voiced by SP4, described resistance on the part of NYCDOE administrators:

Well the policymakers within the Department of Education down at the big building—Department of Education or whatever existed at the time—they resisted. I don’t want to say they resisted because it was something personal or whatever. I felt that they resisted because this was something new. Somebody is coming in and they are, you know, like on Star Trek, going where no one has gone before.

In addition to expressing confusion about the identification of the central administration during its restructuring from a board of education to a department of education, TP4 suggested that mid-level managers of the newly formed NYCDOE were threatened by innovation at a time when they were giving principals the charge to innovate. Thus, the principal had little support from the top as he addressed resistance within the QMS community.

No previous data about resistance to change could be found in QMS archival data. Therefore, findings about resistance to change are limited to data gathered in the focus group interviews of this study. Analysis of the respondent transcript texts demonstrated that there was both resistance and enthusiasm for QMS improvement efforts. Still, there were significant findings regarding overcoming resistance to change: First, principal strategies that blended transactional and transformational approaches were effective in swaying student attitudes to support change efforts. Second, an important aspect of
overcoming resistance is well-stated by TP4: “The most important thing about the resistance was that there were more numbers of people for all the changes than those in resistance.” Finally, in reaffirming Fullan’s (1985) first principle that change cannot have happened without proper planning, QMS teachers and students also answered research question 3 as they indicated that there was resistance to change that was overcome during the implementation of reform at the school.

**Theme 4: Teacher practice and development (TIME) affected student outcomes at QMS.** Respondents of all focus groups perceived that teacher practices contributed to improved student outcomes. The four teacher respondents thought all four elements of the TIME (Teaching Innovation, Motivation, Excellent) strategy were significant to their professional development and practice. Three of four students indicated that TIME was a school improvement motto, but they mostly linked the strategy to their motivation for learning rather than to teacher practices. None of the parents discussed TIME as a vehicle for improving teacher practice. Thus, the perceived importance of the role of the teacher varied sharply from one group to the other.

Teachers viewed TIME as a professional development tool that was third in importance as it related to their role in the improvement of student outcomes. Students, on the other hand, saw the teaching aspect of TIME as sixth in importance, while parents’ lack of discussion of TIME in terms of teaching earned a ranking of seventh in importance. (See Table 4.4.) A textual analysis of parent data indicated that they did not recall that the acronym, TIME, stood for Teaching, Innovation, Motivation, Excellence. They saw the motto as a community building tool and as a vehicle to deliver the message
that change was urgently needed at QMS. However, they did not focus on the
instructional implications of the strategy.

Even after they were specifically asked about the meaning of Teaching,
Innovation, Motivation, Excellence, parents focused mainly on the implications of TIME
for students rather than for teachers. PP3 captured the general view of the focus group
when she stated:

It’s time to shine at QMS meant…it’s time to show your brilliance. It’s time to
stand out and…show something positive. It’s time to shine: you are bright; you
are the future; you are to be seen; you are worthy of being seen. Shine your light
not just on yourself but as a reflection of your school, your family, your
community. You can shine because of the support that you’re getting from school.

As an outlier to the majority view of parents, PP1 responded that the message
associated with TIME was not limited to students. It was “for students, teachers, and
parents, anyone in that building—right down to the custodian.” But for this one
exception, parents viewed TIME as a tool that motivated students to excel.

The views of student focus group respondents closely paralleled those of parents.
When asked What does TIME mean to you? their responses captured the personal nature
of the motivating influence of the motto. SP2 responded:

TIME is now to get up and go to work. The bell has rung. The TIME is now; like
not tomorrow, not later, not just give [me] a second. Like right now! Right now!
So, we saw it everywhere. It’s not like we could have just walked away and never
saw it. Like, we heard it on announcements. TIME was now, it’s time to shine,
like at that given time. You get up, shine; you go about your day.
SP1 commented that the TIME motto still motivates him. He said, “To this day when I hear the word ‘time,’ or somebody say, ‘What time is it’? the words [time to shine] goes across my head very quickly.” Though students associated the motto and its TIME and *Tuck that Shirt In* videos with engaging them in school rules and instructional activities, they saw TIME as a broader motivation-for-life tool.

Furthermore, in responding to the two TIME questions, students focused on principal practices rather than teacher practices. The following SP3 comment reflected their general understanding of the implication of the motto for teaching:

TIME was an acronym; it was Teaching Innovative Motivation Excellence. The principal would say, What time is it?” and everyone would say, “Time is now; time to shine…” he targeted teaching, the innovativeness… that’s basically the tool he used to change around the whole school—like that acronym. All the students around the school knew it; they would recognize it.

While students correctly linked the acronym to innovative teaching, they spoke mainly about ways the principal found to communicate a school improvement agenda to the student population.

Consistent with the views of parents and students, teachers also emphasized the motivational aspect of TIME. They said that the strategy was a tool to train teachers on how to more effectively engage students in the learning process. A closer analysis of their transcript text indicated that all four teachers said that the fun aspect of the TIME initiative was central to engaging students as well as in motivating teachers themselves.

Field observation notes indicated that they were enthusiastic and passionate about the fun in learning aspect of TIME. This was evident by the way they interrupted one another:
TP4 stated, “That’s something you don’t want to overlook…the fun aspect.” TP1 said, “Among all the structure and discipline, there was a lot of fun…on both sides—students and staff.” TP3 summed up the discussion of fun in learning by stating, “It was time for rigorous instruction, yea; but there was also a time that we really, really got to enjoy our students and enjoy the staff members and we had that sense of we’re a family. Things started to fall into place.” In fact, teachers stated that the fun-in-learning component of TIME was critical to improved student outcomes.

In addition to motivation, teachers credited the TIME strategy as influencing teacher practices in three other ways. First, teachers viewed the strategy as a vehicle to deliver a message about the urgent need for academic improvement. All four respondents identified TIME as a motto that brought teachers together around a common instructional vision. When asked, What is T-I-M-E? TP1 answered with great excitement, “Oh my gosh! It was teaching, innovation, motivation, excellence—a time to shine!” When asked in a follow up question, What does that mean? She explained, “It was for teachers to get motivated about what they’re doing. It just made the teachers more excited about doing what they love to do.” TP1 add that teacher morale improved, and the other respondents agreed.

Second, teacher respondents perceived that, because of the TIME strategy, teaching practices improved and resulted in standard based, and data-driven approaches to engaging students in the academic work. For example, TP1 commented,

Within the classroom, I actually tied it into the math where I could. If I knew I had a student who was out there, and they loved to perform, I would be okay you
take your skills and make a math (rap) song for me. So we took that and we just tied it in and the kids loved it.

TP2 added:

The curriculum was no joke… At that time my eight-graders on a regular level were working on parameters. [At the time], they were working on relating real life situations…and they were able to bring that to the academics… Academic rigor was definitely there in terms of what was stated before by my colleagues. [We] followed up with the data [while] making sure we that we were working to understand our students.

Though it was from the learner perspective, as students talked about their motivation for learning, they verified that teachers incorporated the TIME strategy into their instructional practices. For example, SP3 said, “To get order in the classroom, you’d say ‘What time is it?’ and then we made rap videos and music videos.” While students did not link these activates to skills development and concepts as the teacher did, their comments supported teacher claims that innovative approaches like TIME were included as part of instructional practices at QMS.

In addition to the correlation of student and teacher views regarding the effective integration of TIME into instructional activities, archival data from NYCDOE School Quality Review (2006) reinforced teacher opinions. The report stated: “There are good examples of innovative curriculum, which increase the engagement of students, and the school has improved significantly over the years” (p. 4). This perspective is further verified by improved student outcomes on standardized ELA and math assessments (See Tables 1.1), and by a B letter grade evaluation, and by bonus awards for year-to-year
improvement (Council of Supervisor & Administration, 2007; NYCDOE.org, 2006; NYCDOE School Quality Review report, 2007).

Finally, in addition to improved curriculum and instructional practices, teachers said that TIME helped to build a sense of community at QMS. This was evident in TP1’s statement: “It just made the school feel more like a family.” Other respondents added that the fun approach to learning improved the classroom environment, their relationships with students, and had a positive effect on teacher morale. When talking about the effect of the TIME motto on the teacher-student relationship, TP2 said, “We’re human and we feel the same way that they feel. We want to see them successful, and not look to us like okay you’re over there and I’m down here.” TP3 concluded the discussion: “…with TIME…a burden lifted…and I kind of fell right into place where I saw this community of individuals who were happy to be there.”

Student views aligned with the community building characteristic of TIME that teachers expressed. As an example, SP3 said that the strategy “really had the whole school on the same accord.” Such statement provided a clear indication that QMS teachers and students bonded together as a community of learners. This energized sense of community reinforced Smith (2007) and Squires and Kranyik (1995) research finding that, “A positive school culture may have a significant influence on the academic and social success of the students within the school” (p.16).

Moreover, teacher respondents implied that TIME’s effect on teacher morale led to improved learning environments and ultimately to improved student outcomes. This perception on the part of teachers was supported by improved student performance data on standardized NYSED assessments from school year 2002-03 to school year 2005-06.
(nysed.gov, 2004; nysed.gov,2005; nysed.gov, 2006; and by the narrative embedded in NYCDOE’s School Quality Review reports. For instance, the 2006 review reported that “The school is continually evaluating its performance, and seeking new ways to improve the learning and progress of student” (p. 4).

**Theme 5: Hip-hop changed the social behaviors of students and engaged them in the learning process.** Theme 5 affirmed research question 2 with unanimous agreement among all stakeholders (teachers, students and parents) that the hip-hop strategy changed the social behaviors of QMS students and effectively engaged them in the learning process. As a theme it is closely associated to TIME because hip-hop was a major tool in the implementation of Teaching, Innovation, Motivation and Excellence. Thus, there were common findings in theme 4 (TIME) and theme 5, (hip-hop).

Respondents said that both strategies: Encountered initial resistance to their use that was overcome, motivated changes in the social and academic behaviors of students that led to improved academic performance, had an impact on the instructional practices of teachers, and led to improved teacher-student relationships that helped to form a community of learners at QMS.

However, in the analysis of the hip-hop theme, deeper insights were gained regarding why and how changes occurred. As with TIME, respondents asserted that the initial resistance to the use of hip-hop was overcome. However, as an outlier to other student responses, SP3 explained that students resisted the incorporation of hip-hop in the school setting because they viewed it as “corny.” The idea of teachers and administrators using hip-hop seemed phony and awkward to students. Her response showed that not all students thought hip-hop was a good idea for QMS.
In similar fashion, as an outlier in the teacher focus group, TP2 spoke at length about her initial reluctance to use hip-hop in the classroom:

I was a bit reluctant because, truth be told, I’ve just always thought hip-hop was negative… it shows or gives to my children and my students—I hate to say it but it’s true—a false sense of hope. They’re driving around with these expensive cars, they’ve got this jewelry, the pants are down… So, I was, like, oh I don’t know about that hip-hop. I don’t think that that’s going to work out. So, I was… oh my God we’re really going to do hip-hop. I don’t know if that’s going to go over too well. I know we’re doing the uniform and I know everything is changing for the better but hmmmm…

TP2’s concern about the negativity promoted in hip-hop changed, when she realized the messages and images in QMS hip-hop were positive. She stated, “I was there with the video and I was there with the children and we all started to rap in terms of the various messages that were being used. So yes, at first I was that way (reluctant).” Her response was included here an important outlier that aligned with the body of research highlighted in the Chapter 2 literature review that asserts that teachers and schools resist the use of hip-hop because of its promotion of messages of gross materialism, misogynistic lyrics, anti-schooling themes and gang lifestyles (Low, 2009; Gosa, 2009; Stovall, 2006).

During the course of the implementation of reform: However, hip-hop was embraced by all stakeholders. As students’ social behaviors began to change for the better, attitudes of resistance were replaced by enthusiastic use of the art form as an
educational tool. The examination of the theme addressed research question 3 as it indicated how attitudes shifted over the span of the reform period.

With the hip-hop strategy, improvements in the social behaviors of students were followed by their increased engagement in the learning process. However, prior to a more detailed discussion of the impact of hip-hop on student academic achievement, it is important to note the distinction between the use of the term *hip-hop* and the *Hip-Hop Project*. The latter refers to a QMS educational project involving the production of three videos written, performed and managed by students. Hip-hop refers to the art form in general and was introduced into the QMS environment with the implementation of the Hip-Hop Project. In a spin-off effect of the project, hip-hop was used for other applications within the school setting.

As a high interest curriculum with high expectations of students, the Hip-Hop Project led to improved social behaviors and academic success of QMS students. For example, SP2 said that Hip-Hop Project videos, *TIME* and *Tuck That Shirt In*, changed his attitude toward school rules and learning. Regarding his shift from disruptive behavior to involvement in learning, he said that the Hip-Hop Project exposed him to new experiences and made him “want to follow school rules.” He continued, “I had so much to do in the school that I was not distracted.” Parents also observed how the use of hip-hop engaged at-risk students. PP1 stated, “I noticed that it had the attention of some of the students that had special needs… Having that curriculum definitely made things easier for them to concentrate.” Her statement was consistent with SP2’s comment that the Hip-Hop Project made him want to follow school rules and to learn.
For students like SP4 motivation to change was found in the rap lyric from the *TIME* video which rhymed: **Teachers – It’s all about the teachers; they teach us/** **Innovation - We innovate; we improving/** **Motivation – We motivate our minds/** **Excellence – We succeed, we hear, we shine/ The TIME is now. It’s TIME to shine at…** (Blake, 2009). His perspective was reinforced by HBO, which touted the *TIME* hip-hop video as a call for school reform that instilled pride in students (Queens Courier, 2006).

The results of hip-hop on instructional practices were achieved by involving teachers in the production of the videos as they linked the activities to NYSED standards. They performed in the videos along with parents, students, the principal and other staff. TP2 stated, “…with the creation of the videos, math was tied in financially with the marketing of it. Also, with the lyrics, it was how you can tie that into history and social studies.” TP1 recalled how hip-hop influenced other innovations in instructional practices. She said,

> It allows you to step out of the box. Because leadership is modeling that (meaning innovation), you know it’s kind of okay. This is the expectation. [It’s like he was saying to teachers], I’m not just telling you to do that, but I’m walking the walk. I’m stepping outside of the box. I’m doing whatever it takes to get the students involved in their education.

TP2 agreed with TP1’s statement and explained that, as the principal modeled certain behaviors for the teachers, she began to do likewise for her students.

Student descriptions of the learning experience coincided with teacher perceptions of the high-interest curriculum at QMS. SP2 described participation in the Hip-Hop Project in the following manner: “I was learning about cameras. I had laptops going
Student and teacher comments were consistent with the Vibe Magazine article that resulted from their reporter’s visit to the school. The article detailed how QMS: …used hip-hop to create a holistic learning experience where students make their own videos and short films. In the process students end up learning production and graphic design, scriptwriting, editing, marketing, and sequencing. Their student videos have been featured on HBO Family and premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival (Vibe Magazine, 2006, p.1).

The Vibe Magazine assertions about student learning are aligned with archival data that documented a steady increase in student performance on standardized assessments (nysed.gov, 2003; nysed.gov, 2004). Clearly, a high interest curriculum supported by hip-hop engaged students in the learning process, and as such, addressed research question 2 by affirming the art form as an effective educational practice that helped students to improve academically.

Another shared finding regarding TIME and the Hip-Hop Project was both strategies led to improved teacher-student relationships that aided in building a community of learners. TP4 stated, “The operative word is connection. In bringing hip-hop and rap into the classroom, it seems like everything just fell into place; there was this whole relaxed atmosphere. This sense of pride [exists] no matter where you go. From room to room, there was this community.” This community of learners described by TP4 was realized by implementing new teacher practices and by engaging the entire village of
stakeholders (parents, staff at all levels as well as a member of the surrounding neighborhood such as residents and merchants) in the educational process.

TP1 provides an example of how the Hip-Hop Project helped to expand the learning community beyond the walls of the school:

I remembered York College and the principal at the time. A lot of the kids went to York College, and whatever talents they had, they were able to perform. I mean the kids just took pride in it. And the parents [said] that’s my child up there on the stage, and as a teacher, that’s my student. It was just as a community. We were just so proud of our students and the work that they did. The red carpet—there was a red carpet. I remember that also… it wasn’t they were just rapping about anything; they were rapping about the different changes that took place within the school.

TP3 described the video productions and premieres as school pride activities. She recalled that, “Staff, students, parents, everyone volunteered their time, even on Saturdays.” Indeed, the premieres at York College required the involvement of safety staff and the police who provided security and directed traffic, and who later became involved in workshops within the school. Maintenance men helped to lay the red carpets and to set up the venue, and neighborhood people came out to enjoy the evening. The “whole village,” supported the children and celebrated their talents.

Beyond the common understandings regarding the impact of TIME and hip-hop on reform at QMS, interview respondents surfaced three additional findings that were unique to hip-hop. First, the Hip-Hop Project motivated teachers to innovate beyond the scope of the project. TP1 captured the spirit of innovation infused into instructional
practices when she commented, “It allows you to step out of the box because you know leadership is modeling that…it’s okay to take risks.” According to field note observations, TP4 was animated as he added, “I mean it makes sense. There are the arts. So, you use dance; you use theatre, singing, all of these other disciplines in the arts.”

Second, as a result of participation in the Hip-Hop Project, parents’ relationships with their children improved. PP2 led the conversation about the effect hip-hop had on parents: “I think it kind of joined us and meshed us together. I mean as parent and student. It worked.” PP3 responded, “And there was more conversation, right?” “Yes,” answered PP2, “and there were lessons between you and your students.” “And if you really think about it,” said PP3, “it was kind of ahead of the time because now you have Tupac being learned at Stanford College.” The conversation about the way hip-hop brought parents and their children together reinforced SP3’s previous statement: “we were all on one accord.” PP2 concluded the conversation by stating,

I think it also made us more relatable to the children because they realized that their parents do enjoy rap; and although it was used for an educational purpose, we could relate to it and the message behind it. So, I think it helped in that sense.

Finally, respondent data indicated that the Hip-Hop Project enhanced students’ self-esteem and was a critical tool in improving the reputation of the school. This was evident in respondent descriptions of how Hip-Hop Project videos engaged cross-sections of the school as well as the larger Queens community. Volunteers from within the school and its surrounding community supported the production of the hip-hop videos. As TP3 expanded her statement, she explained that “Staff, students, parents, everyone volunteered their time even on Saturdays;” and then added, “If there was a
video it would be similar to an actual video that artist actually put together. It wasn’t like we [were] just putting in thirty minutes of time.” In their work with the Hip-Hop project volunteers got to see a different more positive side of QMS.

TP3 further explained that the hip-hop productions were a school pride activity and student respondents agreed. In talking about her interaction with the people involved in the program, SP4 said that the Hip-Hop Project instilled a sense of pride:

Being a part of the project was so influential because it was life changing… It had such a great effect. It’s like someone actually believed in you. One of the positive things that came out of it was…the things being implemented was not about just having a program—a hip-hop program or any other program. The people behind it made sure that you knew that you were more than what you thought you were. That’s why it was so influential…

With increased self-esteem, students became ambassadors of goodwill for QMS. They expressed pride in being part of a project and a school that was respected in communities outside of the school. SP2 stated, “We went to Manhattan. I forgot the name of it (referring to Tribeca Film Festival), but we performed our video. It was like a movie spot.” He added that, as a result, students began to see “education as being smart—educating our brains, expanding our brains.” In reference to the York College premiere, SP4 commented, “No guns; no violence!” He alluded to an evening where masses of people gathered peacefully. However, SP2 shifted the conversation back to pride in educational accomplishments:

At the premiere, they showed the video for the first time, and they had the people that were part of the video come out on the red carpet. Everyone was sharing. I
know they felt good about it. For once they had sat there and wrote something positive. They didn’t write about guns or violence or anything like that.

Such responses from the focus groups indicated that the Hip-Hop Project premieres—at the Tribeca Film Festival and at York College—boosted student pride in themselves and their school, as well as enhanced the reputation of the school.

Furthermore, respondent perceptions of improved school reputation were supported by archival data from local newspapers that praised the use of hip-hop in bringing about an improved school environment. The articles included accolades in rap lyrics and the subsequent videos, TIME and Tuck That Shirt In. Several media outlets such as HBO Family Channel (Queens Courier, 2006) and Vibe Magazine (2006) touted the Hip-Hop Project as a model for other schools. In addition, enhanced positive publicity resulted from the three consecutive years that QMS videos were featured at the Tribeca Film Festival (Vibe Magazine, 2006).

Not only did respondent data reflect that hip-hop engaged students in the learning process, there were unanticipated outcomes such as improved relationships between parents and their children as well as the improved reputation of the school. Moreover, these QMS study findings regarding the use of hip-hop as a tool in educational endeavors reaffirm Irizarry’s (2009) finding that, “This use of hip-hop as a tool has the potential to improve teaching practices and to positively influence learning opportunities for urban youth of color” (p.489).

Specific to the purposes of this study, the examination of hip-hop as an educational tool in the QMS reform effort addressed all three underlying research questions. Regarding research question 1, the hip-hop theme affirmed the role that the
principal played in transforming the school environment as he mentored students and modeled innovation for teachers. In addition, sub-themes linked to an improved school environment like to improve teacher-student, parent-child and school-community relations occurred as a direct result of innovative principal initiatives such as the use of hip-hop. Research question 2 was illuminated by improved student behaviors and academic performance linked to the use of hip-hop at QMS. Finally, insights into research question 3 were gained through textual analysis of data that revealed how the art form aided in overcoming resistance to reform at QMS.

Theme 6: Parents empowering students today (PEST) improved school culture, safety and community relations. Parent initiatives, mainly Parents Empowering Students Today (PEST), improved school tone, safety, and student behavior at QMS. This theme illuminated research question 1: What role did the principal play in transforming the school environment? While only two of four teacher focus group respondents spoke directly to the effect of PEST on school environment, all respondents in their discussion of effective principal strategies (See theme 2). Also, field notes, observations indicated that all respondents perceived the PEST strategy as key to school improvement and safety.

Teachers were asked, “You have mentioned PEST; do you know what that stands for?” All participants of the teacher focus group knew that the acronym, PEST, stood for Parents Empowering Students Today, but only two respondents pointed to the important role the group played in improving the learning environment at QMS and in fostering improved school-community relations. In commenting on the learning environment, TP2 enlarged the definition of PEST when she said, “Well the acronym of PEST was meant
for them (meaning the parents) to literally be a pest to the students; and, it worked. “In describing how PEST improved school-community relations, TP4 gave a lengthy yet the significant response that captured the essence of how the parent group functioned:

As I stated earlier, all of those parents they had radios. They would be out in the morning line up, and they had specific areas that they would patrol while students were coming to school to ensure their safety. Because, as my colleague mentioned earlier, there was a gang problem … The parents would be out there blocks away with a radio; watching the students as they come to school; as they go into the stores to get breakfast; as they cross the street; and. they were in direct communication with the principal, school safety, the dean and everyone. So, that was very important, and they would report anything in the community.

TP2 and TP4 responses indicated that they were well aware of the function of PEST and viewed the involvement of the QMS parent group as positive.

Student respondents also said that PEST had a significant impact in the school as well as the community. A textual analysis indicated that three of four students responded that they respected the PEST parents. SP2 said,

It was important. We had school safeties (security) but, at the same time, another eye was always good to see what was going on around the school. And, it felt so good that a parent took time out to say, “I have free time; let me actually come in and share my time… Yeah, we respected the parents. Why would you disrespect a parent? That could be your mother.

SP1 offered a slightly different perspective on respecting parents when he commented, “Public safety (security) was a little bit different, but knowing this person
(PEST) was a parent of one of your classmates that you were friends with just created a different type of respect.” SP3 added, “…touching on respect, we looked at PEST as they were like the principal—an extra eye. We had respect for the principal and we would give the same respect to PEST that was under his control.” As a matter of fact at QMS, the parent group was informally called the principal’s PEST.

Textual analysis of parent transcript data reinforced teacher and student views of the role PEST played in bringing about an improved school culture at QMS. For example, TP4’s description of PEST is consistent with the one provided by PP3: “The parents were identified with either jackets or T-shirts that indicated who they were. They were at every exit; they were a block or two blocks away making, sure that there were not fighting. Children were being disbursed and going where they should have gone. There was no hanging out.” PP2 stressed that the PEST presence made her feel secure about her child’s safety. She said, “They were there before a fight could break out. So, to me, it meant that someone other than myself was watching my child; was insuring my child’s safety.” The establishment of communication between the school and the surrounding community was confirmed by the parent focus group. PP1 explained that PEST parents would say to community members, “If there’s an issue surrounding the school, let us know so we can take proper actions.”

In addition to positive relationships with students and the community, parent focus group participants thought that the parent-principal relationship generated by PEST was significant in improving the school. PP3 said that the partnership between parents and the principal transcended the “lip service” that she believed principals usually offered to parents. She said, “A lot of principals…say to us as parents, ‘we’re not the
babysitters.’ But, at the same token, when we get involved, a lot of them push back and go, ‘Okay, you’re not staff here.’” She recalled how refreshing the principal-parent partnership was at QMS. Her response along with those of other respondents directly linked the principal to the successful efforts of PEST.

The *School Quality Review* (2006) reported that the relationship between parents and the principal was one of the factors that led to school improvement. This archival data coupled with quotes from transcript texts addressed research question 1 by confirming that the principal played a significant role in transforming the school environment at QMS.

**Theme 7: School uniforms created positive learning environments.** Theme 7 was identified by the student and parent focus groups as being important to the school’s learning environment. However, as illustrated in Table 4.4, the discussion of the school uniform policy did not rise to the level of a theme within the teacher focus group. Instead, the dress code surfaced as a sub-theme in their discussion of principal strategies and practices that resulted in improvement at QMS. As a sub-theme of theme 2 above, two of the four teachers did say that the introduction and enforcement of the school dress code led to an improved learning environment. As indicated earlier TP1 said that the policy “One thing that truly…made a difference with the environment of the school and how the students felt about themselves was the dress code.” In addition, as an outlier to theme 3: Teacher Practices and Development, TP2 described the process of enforcing the uniform as one that involved the parent, the dean the assistant principal, and the principal. Otherwise, teachers voiced few opinions about the impact of the uniform policy on the overall improvement of the QMS environment.
However, a textual analysis of respondent data indicated that all students and all parent respondents deemed that the school uniform had a crucial impact on the learning environment at QMS. Surprisingly, the significance of a theme that had not been asserted by this researcher earned a ranking of third in importance by both groups (see Table 4.4). Students discussed several ways that the uniform policy improved the QMS environment. SP1 responded by highlighting the impact of school uniforms on bullying. He stated, “So I feel like that was a positive thing and the uniform made it so people would get bullied less. [There were] less fights because you couldn’t talk about somebody when you’re wearing the same thing.” (See Table 4.6.)

In a somewhat lengthier comment, SP4 asserted that the enforcement of the uniform policy was the foundation for all of the improvement at QMS:

I don’t think…that so much change could have been involved in that school if we didn’t change our uniforms. There was something about changing the uniforms and dressing a certain way and being able to identify each other…as a part of the change. Had that not been, had everything else been added—you know the PEST, all the positive influences without the uniform I don’t think…would have been as successful.

This thought by SP4 coincided with earlier comments made by TP1. Both teacher and student suggested that the uniform policy was the foundation for all the improvements at QMS. Specifically, the student’s statement, “…being able to identify each other...as part of the change” said that the school uniform policy was the first building block in a new culture at QMS. This was also evident by her constant repetition of the phrase, “It put us on one accord.”
Another sub-theme regarding the dress code emerged when two student respondents revealed that they believed that there was a general dislike on the part of students of the uniform policy. SP3 acknowledged that students initially pushed back on wearing the uniform, but complied when they understood that the smallest infraction would not be tolerated. She said, “…we didn’t want to wear a uniform, but we knew we had to. We knew that if we didn’t wear a tie, we would get detention or if we continued to disrespect the rules we would get PM school.” He concluded his response with, “this hip-hop song (Time) made it cool to wear a uniform.” SP2 was more forceful as he declared outright indignation towards the enforcement of the uniform policy: “I wouldn’t respect it at all. I was like who are you to tell me to wear this. Like, are you my mom? You my dad? That’s how I felt. I was like, you know, this is America.” Regardless of his annoyance, he did not indicate that he refused to comply to the policy.

As an outlier to other perspectives within the group, SP1 admitted, “I don’t think there was a time I actually had my uniform 100% correct, but, now being an adult and not getting a job because you couldn’t dress right…I see where its beneficial almost 10 years since.” His perspective spoke to the long-term effect that the uniform policy had on QMS students.

As with student respondents, parents asserted that the school uniform policy was critical to improvement of the learning environment at QMS. In addition, they believed that the enforcement of the school uniform policy was the most important observable reform practice of the principal. In fact, a textual analysis of parent data revealed that three of three parents credited the implementation and enforcement of the school uniform and dress code policy for positively affecting school tone. PP1 asserted:
For me the biggest difference that that principal made at the time (of the reform) was early on he implemented the uniforms. That was a real eye opener for me because it took the distraction off of fashion, and it meant to me that he meant business for the children. “You’re here to learn. you’re in a school environment,” [was the message conveyed]. He wanted them to take it seriously. So in my eyes that was…demonstration of his sincerity.

PP1’s comments about fashion and distraction are aligned with SP1’s comment, “we all were wearing the same thing.”

From the student perspective, the school uniform reduced bullying as asserted by SP1. However, PP3 expressed the broader perspective of parents when she said, “I want to add the safety point… You were able to identify the children that belong to that school [by their uniforms]… Then he (the principal) made that connection with the police, and they knew those colors, [and would say] let’s call the principal.” When asked to explain what was meant by “those colors,” PP3 said, “…our colors.” PP1, added, “Each grade had a different uniform; it’s a different shirt.” PP3 reiterated, “Yeah, but they knew. People knew in the community that those colors were identified as our school.” PP2 responded, “Absolutely, again it covers safety.”

Archival data indicated that the implementation of the school uniform policy coincided with the drop in incidents of violence in and around the school (see Table 4.6; nysed.gov, 2015). The data strong supported student and parent assertions that the school uniform policy helped to reduce bullying and increase school safety. In addition, the NYCDOE School Quality Review (2006) report further strengthen the assertions of students and parents in stating, “there is a positive climate in the school, resulting in
proactive behavior and improved student commitment to the school” (p.4). This internal NYCDoe assessment is in stark contrast to previous reports from the NYCDoe that stated the school was chaotic (personal communication, November 6, 2002).

In identifying the enforcement of the school uniform policy as a practical process that effectively helped students to improve socially, stakeholders of all three focus groups provided insights regarding research question 2. Respondent data left little doubt that the enforcement of the school uniform policy was viewed by all stakeholders as a best practice leading to improved social behaviors on the part of students.

**Theme 8: Principal visibility was critical to improved student outcome.**

Principal visibility was identified as a theme in the student focus group. While it did not rise to the level of theme in the other two groups, students were unanimous in stressing the importance of the practice. Two teachers mentioned the highly visible principal as contributing to school improvements, but they did so as a sub-theme of theme 2: Principle Practices and Strategies. For example, TP1 identified the visibility of the principal “in and around the school” as an effective school improvement strategy. As she stated earlier, “…the new principal was very vocal and very visible… making sure that the students were aware who the principal was. Not only [was he] in the building [but] in the neighborhood.” TP4 agreed with TP1 that visibility was a critical practice of the QMS principal. Parents, on the other hand, did not discuss the topic of principal visibility. Instead, they emphasized the principal’s engagement of parents in the life of the school. It is a topic that will be covered in the next and last theme.

As illustrated in Table 4.4, principal visibility was definitely a student theme. Within the student focus group, the strategy ranked in importance second to hip-hop and
nearly tied for third with the closely related theme, Principal Practices and Strategies. Student descriptions of principal visibility as a practice were consistent with both transformational and transactional leadership. While respondents described the transactional part of the principal’s approach in terms of his enforcement of school rules like instituting Saturday detention and PM school or the uniform policy, what stood out were their accounts of his concerned about students. SP3 said, “The principal served as like a mentor. …he would have no issue being there for you academically or, even if you had a personal issue, you could go to his office and speak to him.” This effect of visibility described by SP3 is rooted in transformational leadership theory concerning mentorship.

Students characterized the principal’s visibility as an expression of his commitment to students. SP4 described him as “a little bee that would not go away—but in a positive way, meaning he was involved in every aspect of that school.” SP2 was impressed with the principal’s willingness to take risks to check on his students. SP1 agreed and followed up with a detailed depiction of the risks:

He had a “heart”. To even just leave the school property to go like four or five blocks …I’m not secure at four or five blocks…by myself. But…he went out of his way to see if his kids were alright… I don’t want anyone who hears this to think I’m talking about he’s coming to a normal area. He was coming to a rough area, he was coming into the hood parts…where all the older dudes asked us like ‘Why are you all looking at that dude?’ “Oh, that’s our principal.” “Well what’s he doing over here?” … he was coming into the back blocks of Queens where the school was… the roughest parts of Queens.
Student perceptions of the principal as a highly visible leader that influenced their behaviors were supported by archival data. NYCDOE, *School Quality Review* (2006) reported that “The principal provides strong charismatic leadership and parents, teachers, and the community greatly respect his vision for the school” (p.4). The report's description of the principal’s “charismatic leadership” is consistent with research and theory on transformational leadership covered in the literature review in Chapter 2. Furthermore, the finding that visibility of the QMS principal was a practice that was critical to improved student outcomes responded affirmatively to research questions 1 and 2. Respondent data from teacher and student transcripts indicated that the principal did play a significant role in transforming QMS. More specifically, he utilized visibility as a practice that effectively helped students to improve their social and academic behaviors.

**Theme 9: Informed parent advocates help students to achieve.** Theme 9 responded to queries associated with research question 2: *What did the stakeholders (students, teachers and parents) view as practical processes that effectively helped students to improve academically and socially?* Conversations about lack of teacher accountability prior to the arrival of the new principal progressed to a discussion about the importance of parents “knowing” what was happening with their children at school. A textual analysis of parent transcript data revealed that the three parent respondents believed that parents in the school system must be educated and informed advocates for their children. PP1 explained, “Yeah, informed parents, making informed decisions, so you can’t go wrong. Knowing how to deal with your child, if they’re failing or if they’re succeeding, you still want to guide them on the right path.” PP2 expanded on
PP1’s comment with a warning about the negative effects of not being informed. She said, “Well, your child can fall through the cracks if you’re not educated as a parent. You can be told anything. You may not even realize that your child was falling through the cracks.” PP3 offered a personal account of how she became empowered as a parent:

As my three kids were going through school, I knew my rights. I saw how the school was supposed to be. So, when I questioned other principals, there was always this kind of how can I just kind of smooth you over? But I said No! Hold it. This is what’s supposed to happen. Then, they look at you like Okay, I’ll get back to you. So yeah, you have to be knowledgeable…how to deal with the staff. You just have to be knowledgeable as far as information getting out to other parents as well. Also, making sure you know the parents’ rights.

Though PP3 did not say that the QMS principal behaved differently, it was implied when she modified her description by saying the “other principals.”

According to PP3, she started out as an informed parent, then became an advocate for her children eventually she became a parent advocate. This is consistent with demographic data that indicated that PP3 was a member of the PTA at QMS. Field note observations indicated that she was frustrated by what she perceived as a lack of communication between teachers and parents. She stated, “It led to lower academic grades because parents were not informed about the homework, the grading system and so forth.”

Respondent concerns about lack of communication within QMS and the school district prior to the appointment of the new principal were documented in the school’s archival data. For instance, one walk-through observation report (Personal
Communication, District Memorandum, November 6, 2002) indicated, that parents felt that their concerns were not being addressed. In addition, the walk-through report described an issue of lack of parent engagement that was systemic and not just indicative of the QMS culture. In her experience with schools in the NYCDOE, PP3 found that,

Even when you try to talk to someone, it’s very difficult. Sometimes you can go in the office and the secretaries are ready to stand off. I understand that she may be overwhelmed but, at the same token, this is where she work.

However, with the appointment of the new QMS principal, two of three parents described QMS as a more parent friendly environment. PP1 stated that “Parents were very much engaged.” PP3 added, “As a parent, I learned about what was happening not just from my PTA but from other parents.” All three parents expressed enthusiasm regarding their involvement in school activities like afterschool programs, the Hip-Hop premiere and PEST. Though the group perceived the potential impact of informed parent advocates on student learning outcomes, no connection was made between improved parent-principal relations and student academic achievement. Therefore, the theme that the parent group deemed most important failed to answer the query posed by research question 2 regarding practical processes that aided them in helping QMS students to achieve academically.

Nevertheless, the parent focus group discussions did provide insights regarding the importance of informed parent advocacy on behalf of their children. In addition, the respondents highlighted the role of principals in reducing frustrations encountered when seeking information about their children’s academic progress; and, in fostering greater communication between parents and teachers.
Summary of Results

A thorough review and analysis of the impact of the change in leadership at the Queens Middle School (QMS) indicated that new principal initiatives and programs were critical to school reform. Specifically, a comparative analysis of statements of the three focus groups reinforced the researcher’s assertion that three initiatives—Teaching Innovation Motivation Excellence (TIME), Parents Empowering Students Today (PEST), and the Hip-hop Project—were central to improvement of the school culture at QMS.

Though there was consensus on the part of parents, teachers, and students that TIME, PEST, and the Hip-Hop Project contributed to improvement at QMS, each focus group ranked the importance of these strategies differently as indicated in Table 4.4. It is not surprising that each focus group gave the highest ranking to the initiative that specifically targeted them. The more interesting findings involved the reasons the focus groups viewed these initiatives as important to school improvement. For one, teachers saw the TIME initiative as a teacher development tool and as a way to build school community. Parents and students, on the other hand, viewed TIME as a mechanism for building motivation and support for themselves and their community to more fully engage in learning processes and activities at QMS. Two, while each focus group described PEST as a way to improve school safety and community engagement, parents also saw PEST as a way to create a parent friendly school environment. Finally, each focus group viewed the Hip-Hop Project as a way to engage students in the learning process. However, parents and some teachers said the project made them better able to relate to students, while students and other teachers said the project exposed them to
experiential learning that transcended mandated subjects like math, English, science and social studies.

In addition to analyzing the reasons behind Table 4.4 rankings of QMS change initiatives, study results are summarized in terms of the frequency in which programs and initiatives were mentioned by respondents. Table 4.7 captures the number of times respondents linked TIME, PEST, the Hip-Hop Project and a closely related sub-theme, Fun in Learning, to QMS improvement:

Table 4.7

*Frequency Count of Programs with Anticipated QMS Improvement Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Initiatives respondents Identified as Contributing to QMS Improvement</th>
<th>Number of Times Programs are Mentioned by Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>N=16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEST</td>
<td>N=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip-Hop Project</td>
<td>N=11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun in Learning</td>
<td>N=10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N= the number of times programs and initiatives were mentioned by respondents.*

Though it was a sub-theme, Fun in Learning is included in Table 4.7 because it was discussed by respondents within the context of both hip-hop and TIME initiatives, and because it affirmed the researcher’s hypothesis that a high interest curriculum would have a positive influence of student learning outcomes. Teacher and student respondents indicated that fun in learning increased student engagement in the learning process as well as teacher morale.
As an outgrowth of the researcher’s assumptions and questions about the QMS reform effort, stakeholders identified reasons for QMS improvement beyond those that were hypothesized. First among the unanticipated participant responses was that the successful implementation of a school dress code was the most significant strategy impacting school improvement. All stakeholders said that the uniform policy was critical to reform at QMS. Some respondents even asserted that had there not been a dress code all other school improvement initiatives would have failed. The implementation of the dress code also correlated with archival data that show a steady decrease in violent and disruptive incidents in and around the school.

Student support and extra-curricular activities were also identified as significant to the reform effort at QMS. The Manhood Training mentoring class for young males emerged as a key influence on improved student behaviors and learning outcomes; as did career and college readiness program that focused on math and science—specifically, pre-nursing and pre-engineering classes. Table 4.8 provides the frequency count for programs where stakeholder perceptions of importance to student learning were not anticipated by the researcher.
**Table 4.8**

*Frequency Count of Program with Unanticipated QMS Improvement Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Initiatives respondents Identified as Contributing to QMS Improvement</th>
<th>Number of Times Programs are Mentioned throughout Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Uniform Policy</td>
<td>N=31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhood Training Classes</td>
<td>N=8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday Detention / PM School</td>
<td>N=7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuck That Shirt In Rap Song</td>
<td>N=6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre- Nursing</td>
<td>N=5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Engineering</td>
<td>N=4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N= the number of times programs and initiatives were mentioned by respondents.

As illustrated in Table 4.8, the school uniform policy was most frequently referenced by all stakeholders. The fact that the uniform policy was attributed to school improvement twice as many times as the Hip-Hop Project, TIME or PEST, made a good case for the conclusion that the success of the innovative initiatives rested on the QMS dress code policy.

While each focus group emphasized the importance of programs and initiatives implemented by the principal, they attributed school improvement, in part, to the principal’s leadership style. His effective observable behaviors were described as highly visible, accessible (with an open door), a mentor, student-centered, parent friendly,
consistent in enforcing school policies and procedures, and one who modeled innovative practices.

In describing the leadership practices of the principal, the three focus groups also acknowledged that pockets of resistance existed to change strategies that some respondents described as “out of the box.” However, they perceived that the principal sent a clear message to all stakeholders that success of students would not be compromised; that he had a vision and a plan for school improvement; and that he was willing to take risks for the greater good of the vision. Such a posture won general support for innovative initiatives.

In summary, this research study found that a newly appointed urban school leader was successful in implementing innovative strategies that led to overall school improvement and to positive student outcomes. Analysis of focus group discussions and the related code sheets helped to identify specific programs, initiatives and policies that supported school reform effort as well as pointed to potential how-to strategies for implementing changes that are urgently needed in urban schools. In chapter 5, the findings highlighted above are discussed in terms of significance to new school leaders who are functioning in the role of change agent. The next chapter also provides a more in-depth analysis of findings as they relate to theory and research regarding school reform.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

In Chapter 5, findings of the QMS study are examined within the context of the problem statement that defined the need for qualitative research data to illuminate effective models and strategies applicable to low-performing urban schools that lack continuity in leadership and that serve students of color who face a number of social problems. As such, this chapter discusses the extent to which the results analyzed in Chapter 4 fulfill this study’s two-fold purpose of pinpointing what school improvement strategies worked from the perspective of students, teachers, and parents in a low-performing Queens, NY middle school; and of identifying strategies that have potential for new principals who are charged with closing the achievement gap between their inner city students and those of more affluent school districts. More specifically, the implications for educational leadership, decision-making, and reform of urban schools are explored in light of research questions and study objectives that were aimed at identifying:

- principal initiated strategies and practices that are effective in transforming the school environment;
- practical processes that effectively help students to improve academically and socially;
- attitudes that act as barriers to change and strategies to address them; and
- how-to strategies that have potential to assist in raising the performance levels of student in low performance schools.

As indicated in Chapter 4, the objectives of the study were accomplished as indicated in the following findings. The transformation from an unhealthy school climate to a vital learning environment was achieved at QMS with the implementation of effective principal initiated policies, such as the dress code; strategies that engaged all stakeholders, such as TIME and the Hip-Hop Project; as well the establishment of parent-community-school partnerships with the PEST model. The change in school climate and reputation was perceived by focus group participants and verified by routine New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) quality review reports and by statistical data collected by New York State Education Department (NYSED) that showed a steady decrease in violent and disruptive incidents in and around the school. Also, the three major strategies (TIME, the Hip-Hop Project and PEST), asserted by the researcher to contribute to overall school improvement, were affirmed by the stakeholder focus groups and reinforced by outcomes data that documented increases in the academic performance of students as evidenced in NYSED standardized test results.

Primary stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) identified high visibility, modeling of innovative instructional methods, mentorship of students, friendly engagement of parents, and consistent enforcement of school policies and procedures as observable effective QMS principal practices that helped student to improve academically and socially. These changes in student behaviors and achievements were also verified by NYSED data.
Though pockets of resistance remained, attitudes of resistance to change were replaced with a general enthusiasm for innovation—especially once student behaviors and academic performance improved.

In pointing to the school uniform policy and the use of hip-hop in the educational setting, focus group participants identified how-to strategies that they viewed as effective in transforming the unhealthy QMS environment, in engaging students in the learning process, in raising teacher morale, and in enriching instructional practices. They also attributed increased school safety to the involvement of parents in the daily life of the school.

These focus groups perceptions were consistent with previous theories and findings in the literature on urban school reform and, in effect, answer the big questions of how and why QMS improvements occurred.

To understand the QMS study in light of the stated problem and specific objectives that it aimed to achieve, this chapter will examine the potential implication of the findings or themes for urban school leaders, policymakers, education and training programs, and for funders of urban school improvement initiatives. Also explored are implications for further study that add to the body of knowledge on educational leadership and school reform; on innovative instructional practices for teachers; and finally, on engaging people—especially in poor minority communities—whose voices, as asserted by Hilliard (2003) and Kozol (1991), are rarely heard in the shaping of educational policies and practices.
Implications of Findings

The implications of the findings or themes analyzed in Chapter 4 are interpreted using Blum’s (2006) method of comparing and contrasting themes and strategies relative to “what they mean to school leaders and why should society care”? (p. 12). Thus, as suggested by Blum, interpretation of findings will start with the most significant themes that are absent in previous studies and progress to those themes that are covered in the literature whether they have different or similar findings to the ones in the QMS study. In either case, the themes or findings are compared and contrasted with sources in the review of the literature in order to provide a framework for the importance of their application to school improvement efforts. In this manner followed each of the nine themes and findings analyzed in Chapter 4 will be interpreted.

Theme 1—unhealthy school culture is a barrier to school improvement. This is a significant finding that has implications for school leaders and policymakers at all levels. This finding of the QMS study is consistent with literature on the effect of negative school culture on school improvement efforts. For example, Smith (2007) found that unhealthy school culture is a barrier to sustainable school improvement. In addition, he concludes, that the undeniable link of school culture to negative or positive standardized tests results, suggests that the process of school reform should begin with an examination of school culture.

Respondent transcript data in the QMS study reinforced Smith’s findings regarding the impact of school culture on school improvement efforts. The three focus groups of the study described the QMS environment as an unhealthy atmosphere of chaos characterized by four elements: disruptive behaviors and poor academic performance of
students, low morale and lack of accountability of teachers, lack of parental involvement, and poor reputation in the community. By first addressing the school environment and then following up with the implementation of change strategies, QMS successfully transformed the learning environment and dramatically improved student academic outcomes. As evidenced by school archival data, NYSED standardized test results, and the external assessment of the school operations over a three-year period:

- Attendance increased to 94% of the student population, while suspensions and dropouts declined.
- As evident in NYSED standardized test results, the percentage of students performing, on or above grade level in Math rose from 15.5% to 53% and the percentage meeting ELA standards went from 29% to 48%. Based on these results the QMS status as a School In Need of Improvement (SINI) changed to the NYSED designation as a School In Good Academic (SIGAS). In addition, the school ranking moved from next to last to number one in its school district.
- The poor reputation of the school changed to a model of orderliness, academic success and innovation, and it had a waiting list for student admission.

These QMS results reinforced the Smith (2007) findings discussed above, as well as confirmed the Ohlson (2009) research that speculated, “a positive school culture may have a significant influence on the academic and social success of the students within schools,” and “when a school exhibits characteristics of a positive school culture, there
are fewer suspensions, increased attendance rates, and increased achievement on standardized test scores” (p. 16).

Furthermore, data from focus group interviews present critical information about stakeholder perceptions regarding how and why the unhealthy QMS school culture was transformed:

- Teachers emphasized the importance of removal of disruptive students from the classroom setting as a practice that led to improvement. They also indicated that the principal’s plans and strategies showed that he had examined and understood the condition of the school culture. They felt that his knowledge of the school environment proved valuable to the design and implementation of change strategies that were tailored to QMS.

- Students stated that follow-through on the enforcement of school rules, pre-planning for probable rebellion to change efforts, and extra-curricular activities were key to improving the school culture.

- Parents said the creation of a parent-friendly environment characterized by accessibility to the principal and inclusion in school activities was critical to the success of the school improvement efforts. They also stressed the importance of informed parent advocates for the academic success of students.

The kind of unhealthy school environment, inherited by the new QMS principal, persists in urban school districts today. The latest Pew Research Center report indicates that the achievement gap between Black and Latino and their White and Asian counterparts continues to grow as leaders of urban American schools struggle to improve
the environments of low-performing schools (Sparks, 2015). Following nearly three
decades of reform, new approaches and voices are sorely need to be incorporated into the
design and implementation of reform strategies that will transform the learning
environments of urban schools.

QMS teacher, student and parent voices regarding how to transform unhealthy
school cultures are potentially useful to urban school principals and school districts, as
well as for colleges, universities, and other providers of their training and professional
development. The perspectives of these primary stakeholders are consistent with Smith’s
(2008) recommendation that principal preparation for urban school districts should
include a continuous process; and that urban principals must have the resources,
knowledge, skills, and experience to address the needs of the children attending their
elementary, middle, and high schools. An appropriate source of the knowledge and
experience needed for effective school reform can be drawn from the voices of those who
are the intended benefactor of such reforms.

In addition to urban school leaders, QMS findings regarding unhealthy school
environments have implications for government policymakers. NYSED and NYCDOE
efforts at implementing the federal No Child Left Behind (2001) reform failed and
currently there is a move to overhaul the Common Core State Standards Teacher
Appraisal (2008), The QMS study results suggest that these government reform efforts
failed in large part because they attempted to apply new standards without first
addressing unhealthy urban school environments. Their decision-making seemed
uninformed by Fullan’s (1985) first tenet of educational change theory, which is to
develop a plan. Thus, the QMS finding that an unhealthy school environment is a barrier
to learning, reinforced by Fullan’s first tenet of reform, sounds a warning to policymakers
and leaders who design and attempt to implement educational reform prior to assessing
and addressing the health of the learning environment.

Though theme 6—*School uniforms had a positive effect on student behavior and the learning environment*—is an unanticipated finding on the part of the researcher, there are four reasons the dress code policy is one of the first themes to be examined. One, in keeping with Blum’s (2006) method of analyzing implications, the implementation of the school dress code was identified as the most significant strategy contributing to school improvement at QMS. Indeed, it was the foundational strategy on which all other QMS change initiatives rested. Two, the impact of dress codes or uniform policies are not referenced in previous studies of urban educational reform. As such, this finding contributes new knowledge to the body of literature on educational reform in urban settings. Three, dress code policies have implications for local school leaders who, as indicated in theme 1 above, must address the health of the school environment if other reform initiatives are to work. Finally, society should care about this QMS finding because the enforcement of the dress code correlated positively with a decrease in violence, bullying, and police activity not only within the walls of the school but in the surrounding community. Thus, the quality of life of neighborhood residents was improved and the resources of the police department were deployed differently and perhaps more effectively on more serious crimes than disruptive afterschool student behaviors.

Continuing with the findings in the order that they are presented in Chapter 4, theme 2—*Principal practices and strategies were critical to school improvement*—has
implications for new school leaders charged to be change agents, especially in urban school settings. In identifying effective principal strategies, focus group respondents validated the researcher’s earlier assertion that Teaching Innovation Motivation Excellence (TIME), Parents Empowering Students Today (PEST), and the Hip-Hop Project were largely responsible for school improvement. As shown in the following outline, these three primary QMS strategies are also supported by Fullan’s (1985) theory that successful changes strategies need to:

- have a plan- evident by TIME motto and enforcement of school uniform policy;
- investment in local facilitators- evident by human resource support of parents’ (PEST) work in the school and the community;
- allocate resource time and money- evident by the purchase of uniforms for PEST and by redistribution of resources to support the Hip-Hop Project;
- selection of the scope of school projects- evident by the incorporation of the Hip-Hop Project into school curriculum across core academic content subjects;
- gather and review data for capacity of change- evident by the six-week assessment and change of school calendar to give teacher time to desegregate data.

These how-to strategies are important for urban principals or any first time principal seeking insights on how to tackle a myriad of issues concerning school improvement. However, missing from the data collected from the QMS study is
information that demonstrates, as Fullan recommends, ongoing professional development of the school principal.

In addition to the three main principal strategies, focus group respondent data revealed unanticipated findings that contributed to improved student behavior and academic achievement. Among these impactful strategies are the school uniform and dress code policy, already discussed above; extra-curricular activities like career and college readiness programs in science, technology engineering, and mathematics (STEM), pre-nursing and pre-engineering classes; and the Manhood Training mentoring classes for male students (see Table 4.8). These may be useful models for schools looking to enrich the academic and social experiences of their students.

**Theme 3: resistance to change strategies at QMS were overcome.** This is a finding that has implications for school principals and district leaders who are attempting to develop accountability and communication strategies used to overcome barriers to school improvement initiatives, as well as for new principals seeking how-to approaches to reducing resistance to change. For example, should school leaders employ transformational leadership practices; or transactional leadership approaches; or a combination of both leadership styles (Avolio, 2011; Bass 1994). In combining the two leadership practices, the QMS principal was successful in overcoming resistance to change because he:

- had a vision and a plan for school improvement that anticipated resistance to change. As noted above such a plan is consistent with Fullan’s (1985) first tenet of developing a plan.
• clearly communicated that the ultimate goal for change was increased student success through the use of high interest activities such as the TIME motto and video. This stance on the part of the principal reinforces Fullan’s (1994) theory that reform strategies reflect how committed the principal is to the vision and the moral purpose that undergirds his/her reform strategies.

• was consistent in the enforcement of school rules and policies such as the uniform policy. As Bolman and Deal (2013), state leaders must consider human lens when implementing change within the four frames of change context.

• exhibited behaviors that conveyed his willingness to take risks for the greater good of the vision. Collins (2001) would describe this as a level 5 leadership. Whereas the leader places the vision of the organization above his /her personal comfort and Avolio, (2011) characterized this as transformational leadership. In this case, the leader is willing to self-sacrifice for the improvement of the organization.

These how-to strategies identified by QMS stakeholders, emphasize the effectiveness of high interest initiatives in overcoming resistance to reform. For example, regarding the use of hip-hop as a tool for engaging students positively in the life of the school, more than one participant described the strategy as a “bait and switch” method. They said that the principal started with student interests as a means of fostering their ownership of the practices against which they would have ordinarily rebelled.

Because of their close connection through the use of rap, songwriting, filmmaking, dance, and other art forms, theme 4—teacher practices and development
(TIME) effect student outcomes; and theme 5—Hip-Hop engages students in the learning process—are two findings where the implications for educational practice are combined under the heading of high interest curricula. Discreet findings rooted in the two themes have implications for both teaching and learning. Both teachers and students indicated that TIME and the Hip-Hop Project are strategies that motivate teaching and learning, foster improved relationships between teachers and students, build a learning community like “a family” in the school setting, and that increases teacher morale and student self-esteem. In addition, the teachers group indicated that the high-interest curricula motivated them to take risks in developing other innovative lesson plans that linked to NYSED outcomes standards, as well as to use data driven instructional practices such as Six-Week Assessment data.

Finally, QMS parents, teachers, and students said that the use of high interest curricula like TIME and the Hip-Hop Project maintained academic rigor while making learning fun. In fact, based on descriptions provided by the focus group participants, this researcher has defined the fun-in-learning context as one where:

- Curriculum and teaching strategies are engaging, creative, exciting, and enjoyable, while maintaining academically rigorous standard based learning.
- Teachers, as facilitators of learning, are expert in their content area but flexible in allowing students’ cultural experience to enrich the learning process.
- The principal functions as a coach, mentor, and cheerleader who motivates teachers to develop innovative instructional practices.
This concept of *fun-in-learning* has implications for urban school leaders who are looking for ways to create buy-ins to their school reform efforts. The fact that almost every focus group respondents mentioned (See Table 4.8) the impact that fun had on classroom learning reinforces the old adage that teaching can be fun. It is more than testing and accountability.

Other findings embedded in themes 4 and 5 regarding teacher practices and student outcomes correlate with the first four principles in Fullan’s *What’s Worth Fighting For* precepts regarding improved teacher morale and practice:

1. Teachers strong on content and pedagogical knowledge, and who care deeply (have moral purpose) about learning and students are more effective.
2. Teachers who use internal (assessment for learning) and external (assessment of learning) data on an ongoing basis for both improving learning and marking progress are more effective.
3. Teachers who learn from others (again, on an ongoing basis) inside and outside the school are more effective.
4. Teachers who are led by principals and other school leaders who foster the first three qualities are more effective.

What was not collected in the QMS study is data regarding the last two precepts regarding teacher morale:

5. Teachers in districts that focus on developing district-wide cultures that develop and cultivate the previous four elements are more effective.
6. Teachers in state systems that integrate accountability and capacity building while establishing partnerships across the three levels (school and community, district, and state) are more effective (Fullan, 2015, p.1).

Nevertheless, QMS findings about teacher practices and student outcomes have significant implications for local school leaders and teachers as they offer effective models for improving instructional practices and student outcomes. In this era of Race to the Top and Common Core State Standards, teachers and principals’ job security are determined by how effectively students perform on standardized assessments (U.S. Government and Accountability Office, 2013). In addition, principals in urban schools are looking for way in which to improve teacher morale while simultaneously improving teacher practice (Coleman, 1996; Mees, 2008; Mosley, 2007).

The findings of theme 6—parent-community-school partnerships (PEST) improved school culture and learning environment—and theme 9—informed parent advocates help students to achieve academically—are combined for the examination of implications for educational practitioners and policymakers. Though theme 6 was identified as an important strategy by all focus group respondents and theme 9 was identified exclusively by the parent focus group (see Table 4.4), both sets of embedded findings provide important perspectives on the involvement of parents and their communities in the educational reform efforts of schools. Also, both themes poignantly address Blum’s (2006) questions regarding what the themes and strategies mean to school leader and why society should care.

The PEST program was a parent, school, and community partnership that improved the environment both inside and outside of the school. The effectiveness of the
involvement of this group is easily understood in terms of Fullan’s Efficacy, Motivation and Capacity = Assistance and Accountability (EMC=A2) model. The PEST strategy is consistent with the EMC=A2 model in the following ways:

- Efficacy is represented by parents, teachers, and students who valued parents as human resources who volunteered their time to improve school safety.

- Motivation was illustrated by the description of parents as motivators of students to get to school on time and leave the premises after school was over, as well as to conduct themselves respectfully in the community because parents were visible within a five-block radius of the school. In the same manner, parents were motivated by the principal’s willingness to walk the community with them.

- Capacity was expressed when parents were enabled to effectively supervise students because of the school’s purchase of identifiable PEST uniform shirts and jackets, and radio equipment that assisted the group’s communication with each other and with the school administration).

The motivation, capacity, and effectiveness of parents did, as predicted in the EMC=A2, lead to:

- Assistance in the school, aided by PEST in ensuring school safety, as well as in building positive relationships within the community,

- Accountability because students were held responsible for the manner in which they behaved whether they were inside the school or outside in the surrounding the community. of the school. to behave in a manner consistent with school rules.
As a result of the effectiveness of the PEST model, both teachers and student respondents indicated that the QMS environment was more conducive to learning. The most impressive correlation to the work of parents was the consistent decrease in incidents of violence and disruption in and around the school (see Table 4.6).

In addition to the EMC=A2 model, the QMS parent-community-school partnership strategy reinforces Fullan’s (1985) theory that reform has three stories—inside, inside-outside, and outside-in. First, PEST represented the inside story as parents were welcomed inside the school to improve school tone. Reflecting what Fullan calls the internal dynamic of school change, the principal solicited parents to assist with student behavior within the hallways of the school.

Second, the inside-outside story is concerned about outside forces that influence the school’s ability to improve. In the case of QMS, the school’s reputation was adversely affected by student behavior in the community. Thus, community perception of the school affected student enrollment, and low student enrollment resulted in less resources for QMS. However, PEST’s community engagement activities on behalf of the school, improved the school’s reputation and the availability of resources for its internal operations. It is important to note, though, that QMS is zoned a community school. Therefore, the parents whose children attended the school are also community members who have preexisting relationships with their neighbors.

Last, the outside-in story illustrates how external agencies influence school reform. Fullan (2000) contends that the linkage of the three stories is necessary in order for them to influence school reform. Data from all stakeholder focus groups reported that PEST developed positive relationships with civic groups, merchants, and police
organizations on behalf of QMS. This feedback from the focus groups indicates that QMS parent and community engagement strategies were linked in ways that are consistent with the linkage of Fullan’s three stories.

Findings regarding parent involvement within the school and the community are significant for parents who often feel disenfranchised by urban school leaders and districts; for school leaders and district representatives that often struggle to get parents involved in their children’s school—especially at the middle school level, and for policymakers attempting to close the achievement gap between low-performing urban schools and their affluent counterparts. As one teacher respondent in the QMS study stated, high parent involvement leads to high student academic performance outcomes. This perception that parents are important partners in school reform efforts reinforces Orme’s (2009) study that highlighted the danger of making decision and informing parent afterwards. Her conclusion that parents are important in the decision-making process supports the PEST strategy of including parents in the life of the school.

The discussion of parent involvement in decision-making and other roles in the life of the school led to the emergence to theme 9—informed parent advocates help students to achieve academically. Theme 9 findings are the same as theme 6 in validating the importance of parent involvement in the daily life of schools. However, participant assertions are different in two primary ways. One, they passionately present the parent perspective regarding the urgency of parent involvement in the academic life of schools. Though one teacher participant spoke about the impact of parent involvement on the grades of students, she did so in the context of the positive learning environment that parents helped to sustain. Parents, on the other hand, were interested in routine
information regarding their children’s academic performance, and in receiving more information regarding academic planning and policies.

Two, parent focus group respondents were more future oriented in the discussion of their roles within school reform efforts. In responding to the research question that asked about practices that helped QMS students to improve socially and academically, parent respondents did not address past practices at QMS during the reform period. Rather, they spoke in general regarding what is needed now and in the future. Though parent respondents expressed enthusiasm regarding their involvement in school activities like PEST and the Hip-Hop Project, they were unanimously frustrated about general educational practices that they felt do not work. For example, their urban school experience told them:

- Schools are not parent friendly places. Even when parents try to talk to someone, it is difficult. From the secretary to the principal, the staff try to “smooth problems over” and get parents out of the door as quickly as possible. Staff treat parents like Oh, you’re not staff; you don’t belong.

- Teachers are not held accountable to teaching “our children.” They don’t inform parents when the problems are small; and when parents go to the school, the teacher wants to talk only about behavior and not about academic progress or the lack of it.

- Children fall through the cracks because parents are not informed about what is happening or educated about their rights.

Ultimately focus group respondents had the following suggestions for teachers, school leaders and school district leaders:
Parents must be supported and trained on how to obtain information because “informed parents make informed decisions,” that lead to success for students.

Parents need to know their rights so that they can advocate more effectively for school improvement in their neighborhoods.

Greater communication is needed from the local school and district offices.

Though the inclusion of this perspective does not respond directly to the QMS context, it is important for educators working to improve the quality of learning for students in impoverished urban school districts. The parent focus group respondents provided an opportunity to engage the voices of people—especially in poor minority communities—whose voices, as asserted by Hilliard (2000) and Kozol (1991), are rarely heard in the shaping of educational policies and practices. Also, insights gained from parents regarding teacher accountability and communication reinforce the importance of placing well-prepared highly qualified teachers, who are exposed to ongoing professional development, in urban schools (Anderson, 2014; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Owoaje, 2006).

Theme 8—principal visibility was critical to the improvement of student social behaviors and academic performance—is a finding that was shaped by the perspective of student respondents. As such, its application has significance for local school leaders and principals as another voice that is rarely heard in the design and implementation of school improvement initiatives. In describing the highly visible role of the principal, students captured a blend of transactional and the transformational leadership styles. Observable transactional practices were described by students as “annoying,” “in places you would not expect a principal to be,” “enforcing school rules.” These terms were used in the
context of rewards or restrictions from the principal that brought students in line with school expectations. For example, enforcement of the school uniform and dress code policy could result in removal from the regular school program or denial of attendance at a “fun” activity for those students who did not comply. These highly visible practices on the part of the principal are consistent with what defined by Bass (1994) and Avolio (2011) describe as transactional leadership behaviors.

However, student respondents also described the principal as accessible (“you could go to his office and speak to him”); caring (willing to take risks for his students); and a mentor (“who had no issue being there for you academically or if you had a personal issue”). These highly visible practices employed by the principal influenced students to achieve more than what they expected of themselves. Principal behaviors observed by QMS student respondents are characteristics that Avolio (2011) and Bass (1994) term as those of a transformational leader.

While one of the teacher respondents commented on the impact of principal visibility on the learning environment, student respondents unanimously saw his visibility as improving their behavior and their academic performance. The student perspective is reinforced by a NYCDOE report that stated, “The principal provides strong charismatic leadership…” This affirmation of student depictions of the principal is consistent with Bass’ (1999) assertion that a transformational leader inspires follower(s) with charisma, inspirational motivation, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation.

The perspective of QMS student respondents has implications for the training and professional development of school leaders. It is especially important that the student
voice is considered in the education and training of urban principals assigned to poor neighborhoods where students struggle with countless social problems.

Limitations

Among the limitations of the QMS study are the sample size of focus group interview participants, the positionality of the researcher who is the former principal of QMS, and the lack of data regarding similar school leaders’ reform strategy and practices.

Due to limited resources such as funds, access to staff to assist with data collection and transcription, the sample sizes of the focus groups were small in number. For example, the parent focus group consisted of three participants; and the teacher and student groups consisted of four participants each. A greater number of participants might have expanded stakeholders’ feedback in terms of diversity of attitudes and experiences relative to QMS reform strategies and outcomes. However, the smaller sample size generated an enormous amount of raw data to be transcribed and analyzed. To offset other resource constraints, the researcher invested the time resource necessary for the execution of the varied tasks of the study endeavor.

The researcher was the former principal of QMS. While he did not have direct authority over study participants, as former principal he was positioned as both an insider and an outsider. This positionality has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage as an insider allowed him to establish trust and rapport with the participants. Also, it provided a context in which to ask deeper probing follow up questions about the process of change. At the same time, the potential for positive bias from participants was present because he was once an insider. To mitigate this potential for bias, the researcher, in
consultation with the dissertation committee, formulated interview questions for participants that probed about challenges, disagreements, and resistance to the principal’s strategy. Training an outside person to conduct interviews was considered. However, it was decided that the advantage the researcher had, with his knowledge of the context, to ask more in depth follow up questions outweighed the disadvantages.

The QMS study was limited to the examination of intervention models of one low-performing middle school. The narrative of the improvement of QMS deals with the phenomena of the school’s improvement and its ability to outpace similar schools within the same district within a three-year period. Had resources been available, in-depth interviews with principals of similar schools within the QMS district about their strategies and practices would have provided comparable data; and perhaps allowed this researcher to draw conclusions about why QMS improved when similar schools in the district did not improve. Also, such comparisons hold the potential for understanding more direct correlations between specific QMS strategies and their outcomes.

**Recommendations**

After nearly two decades of failed national educational policies, the achievement gap persists between America’s urban schools and their affluent counterparts. The problem demands bold, innovative, even non-traditional initiatives. This dissertation research, called the Queens Middle School (QMS) Study, examined strategies implemented 10 years ago by a transformational leader at a low performing Queens, New York middle school. The study revealed best practices and new educational models that may help today’s urban school leader, as well as policymakers.
Essentially, six central recommendations borne out of the findings of the QMS study:

1. Urban school leaders and policymakers should assess and address school culture.
2. Moral purpose must guide urban school leadership.
3. Transformational leadership approaches should be included in urban school settings.
4. Urban school principals must embrace innovation.
5. Urban school principals must be supported in their roles as community leaders.
6. Principals and teachers should incorporate fun in the learning process.

The following discussion of these recommendations is intended to provide insights into leadership practices for urban school leaders, policymakers and educators.

**Urban school leaders and policymakers should assess and address school culture.** Principals of low-performing schools must have a plan to address negative school culture which acts as a barrier to school improvement. As Mosley (2007) and Orme (2007) state, principals that ignore school culture, do so at their own peril. The urban school principal is challenged by high-stakes standardized tests, the lack of appropriate funding of schools with high percentages of Blacks and Latinos whose family income are below the poverty line, and by the shortages of qualified teachers. Encumbered by the stress to perform under these circumstances, the school leader often fails to acknowledge the socioeconomic conditions of students of color and a negative school culture emerges that adversely effects student outcomes (Lee, 2009). So, if student
performance on standardized test is to improve, it is necessary to examine the political, economic, and human resources that influence the culture of a school (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). This recommendation is as (if not more) important to policymakers and designers of improvement strategies as it is for local school leaders.

**Moral purpose must guide urban school leadership.** Fullan (2003) describes *moral purpose* as deciding *What's Worth Fighting For.* Once the decision is made regarding the worthy commitment, the urban school leaders must be able to communicate to all stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, district supervisors, and the community at large) their vision for reform, the urgency for change, and why the changes that have been identified are “worth fighting for.” Thus, the urban school leader must see him/herself as a missionary. It is not good enough to write a mission statement to satisfy a requirement from the district office. The principal of a low-performing school has to collaboratively develop the mission, communicate the mission, model the mission, and most importantly, believe in the rightness of the mission. It is this kind of authentic leadership that creates buy-ins from stakeholders (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

In pinpointing, “what’s worth fighting for, principals will be able to brainstorm the unique challenges in their school and, therefore, implement change that uniquely addresses their school community. This will allow leaders to avoid one-size-fits-all, flavor-of-the-month reform strategies, and adopt best practices tailored to the needs of their school which are more likely to be successful.

**Transformational leadership approaches should be used in urban schools.** Simple enforcement of rules, policies, and procedures, while important, will not lead to
long-term systemic improvement. In order to change the culture of a school, the principal will have to work towards building buy-ins for reform strategies. Therefore, leaders have to, as stated by Avolio (2011) and Bass (1994), inspire, motivate, and challenge followers to work towards the best interest of students. Thus, mentoring, coaching, caring, and concern are the tools a charismatic leader uses to move followers beyond previously held expectations of their performance. The urban school leader has to see himself or herself as a personal trainer supporting professional growth goals that are agreed upon by leader and follower. It is equally as important that the leader is sincere in supporting the followers in the achievement of organizational goals. Thus, the leader must be what Northouse (2013) describes as authentic in their desire to see each follower succeed. Otherwise, the leader will fail.

**Urban school principals must embrace innovation.** The promotion of innovation is a vital characteristic of transformational leadership. Whether the innovation is produced by the leader or by the follower(s), it is important that the leader supports innovative solutions to challenges. This is especially true in an urban school context where traditional reform approaches have yet to close the achievement gap, or to ensure that all students perform at a minimum competency level (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Innovative approaches employed at QMS are worth examining. For example, to engage parents and students in the learning community, Parents Empowering Student Today (PEST) was developed as a school community watch group designed for safety; and the Hip-Hop Project was use as a means of improving student social and academic behaviors. However, each school has to evaluate the unique culture of their school and base their innovations on student, parent and teacher interests.
The consideration of innovative initiatives reasserts the importance of assessing “what’s worth fighting for,” bold new directions are most often met with resistance. In addition, embracing innovation reasserts the value of examining school culture prior to implementation of new strategies. As a matter of fact, change strategies that flow from an evaluation of school culture are more effective. For example, a school that has a large number of students that attend church might start an afterschool gospel choir as a motivational tool for students; or, the school might establish a school-community partnership program with the local clergy.

Urban school leaders should think outside the box, it will not only become self-affirming to a leader who is usually bogged down with district mandates, it offers opportunities for that leader to increase the morale of stakeholders by actively engaging them in the change process.

**Urban school principals must be supported in their role as community leaders.** Urban school districts need to rethink how they support and evaluate principals of low performing schools who function as change agent. By supporting the role of urban principals as community leader, school districts will benefit from opportunities for local partnerships that can assist in school reform efforts. Also, principals will be better able to address district mandates and targets while simultaneously improving the reputations of their schools within the communities they serve (Jordan, 2007; Lucas, 2001).

Concurrent with the expanded role of the principal, urban school districts should rethink the way they evaluate and support principals of low-performing schools. The majority of today’s urban school districts evaluate principals as instructional leaders
without taking into consideration the important work they do in building positive school-community relationships that address school tone, and engage parents as vital constituents of the learning enterprise. The perceived lack of support, on the part of urban principals, for these crucial community building activities has resulted in a high turnover rate in the principal position. In turn, the lack of consistency in school, as exemplified in the pre-intervention era of the QMS study, has resulted in chaos at many urban schools (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Elliott, 2005; Jordan, 2007; Manasala, 2011; Smith, 2008). Thus, urban school districts need to develop evaluation tools that celebrate and support the work of urban school principals by acknowledging their unique roles in impoverished communities with low-performing schools. In addition, school district leaders’ understanding of the principal as community leader has implications for allocation of resources and for professional development of urban schools leaders.

Finally, advocacy by the principals unions should be geared, in part, towards recognizing change strategies that require community-building activities. Collective bargaining goals should include a matrix that gives credit for community building strategies that lead to school improvement. In addition, universities and principal training programs need to incorporate in their urban school leadership programs modules centered on improving school culture through community building strategies.

**Principals and teachers should incorporate fun in the learning process.** Findings from the focus group participants of the QMS study all touched, at some point, on the motivating quality of having fun while learning. Whether it was the Hip-Hop Project, the TIME initiative, or PEST, respondents stated that they had fun participating and they enjoyed being at QMS. They perceived fun in learning as having a critically
positive impact on teacher morale, student behavior, and parent involvement. The fun aspect of learning and its impact on overall school improvement suggests that principals should strive to create exciting learning environments that generate enthusiastic participation from teachers, students and parents.

In addition to the six recommendations discussed above, suggestions are made regarding additional research in the field of urban education, particularly as it concerns developing and supporting effective leadership.

**Further study is needed that increases the knowledge of urban education.** In an effort to expand the body of knowledge of the field of urban education in ways that support principals committed to improving outcomes for inner city students, recommendations are made:

- To replicate the QMS study by an agency, like the NYCDOE or NYSED, that has the resources to increase the sample size and to do a comparative analysis among all the low-performing schools within a given school district. The intent would be to link specific strategies to specific outcomes.

- To evaluate a cohort of principals with similar schools, strategies and practices in an attempt to segment the leadership approaches most effective in influencing improvement in urban school settings.

- To conduct a more in-depth study of *fun in learning* as both a theory and a strategy for teaching and learning. Specifically, the study would examine the impact of fun in learning on teaching morale, instructional practices and student engagement in the learning process.
• To study the impact of school district leadership approaches on the turnover rate among principals of low-performing urban middle schools. Such a study would attempt to identify the extent to which lack of support contributes to the instability in leadership in urban schools.

• To examine ways to train and develop local school principals as well as district office leaders in manners that lead to innovative changes vitally needed at low-performing schools.

• To codify the elements of an unhealthy school environment and develop an attendant assessment instrument or methodology.

The stress of today’s principals is compounded by the increased risk of job loss. An unintended outcome of the exaggerated emphasis on high stakes testing seems to generate high turnover rates among urban principals that perpetuate instability in urban schools (Jordan, 2007; Smith, 2008). The continuous loss of leaders in schools where there is a need for talented principals has created a problem that has reached a crisis magnitude (Center for Public Education, 2012). This uncertainty and lack of continuity in leadership, underscores the need for qualitative research data that illuminate effective models and strategies applicable to inner city schools with predominant student populations of color (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Manansala, 2011). It is within the context of these pressing needs that the above recommendations are made.

Conclusion

National educational policies designed to improve America’s failing schools have been mainly ineffective. An unintended outcome of the current policies, with exaggerated emphasis on high stakes testing, correlate with a high turnover rate among urban
principals and widespread instability in urban schools (Jordan, 2007; Smith, 2008) This crisis in leadership (Center for Public Education, 2012) underscores the need for qualitative research data that illuminate effective models and strategies applicable to low-performing inner schools. (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Elliott, 2005; Manansala, 2011).

The research of this dissertation, called the Queens Middle School (QMS) Study, examines effective strategies implemented by a newly appointed principal of a low-performing middle school in a poor Queens, New York neighborhood during the period of 2003 to 2007. Demographic data indicates that, of the 1,463 students enrolled in the school, 49% were African American, 26% Asian, 22% Latino, 2% White, and 1% were American Indian; and 68% of the students fell below the poverty line. (nysed.gov, 2006).

QMS had the profile of a failing school. In 2002-03, the year prior to the appointment of the new principal, only 15.5% of QMS students were performing at or above grade level in math and only 29% of students met required standards on the eighth grade English Language Arts (ELA) standardized New York State Education Department (NYSED) tests. These scores resulted in a NYSED designation of QMS as a School In Need of Improvement (SINI), and in a ranking of next to last among the other five middle schools (also SINI) in its district. In addition, to the poor academic performance of its students, QMS was characterized in the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) annual audit as a school with high turnover rates in principals (with three principals in five years), gang violence, and low morale and lack of accountability on the part of teachers (School Quality Review, 2006).

However, tests results and the overall school climate began to improve with the implementation of three innovative models by the new principal. The first strategy,
Teaching Innovation, Motivation, Education (TIME) employs hip-hop as a tool to motivate teachers and students to engage more fully in the learning process. Second, PEST (Parents Empowering Students Today) is a parent-community watch group model that ensures the safety of students in and around the school. Third is the Hip-Hop Project with its production of rap videos that are linked to NYSED academic standards for middle school, as well as its engagement of student buy-ins to compliance with school rules.

Concurrent with the implementation of the TIME, PEST and Hip-Hop Project strategies, and coupled with the enforcement of a school uniform policy, the percentage of QMS students performing on or above grade level in math rose from 15.5% to 53%, and the percentage of students who met ELA standards as evidenced by NYSED standardized test results rose from 29% to 48% in a three-year period. During the same timeframe, the NYSED violent and disruptive incidents report (VADIR) indicated a decline in the number of violent and disruptive incidents in and around the school from 50 to eight per year (nysed.gov, 2015). These improvement results led to the QMS designation by NYSED as a School in Good Academic Standing, (nysed.gov, 2007). Also the school’s ranking moved from next to last to number 1 in its district.

NYCDOE and NYSED outcomes data and VADIR statistics clearly document improvement in QMS student social behaviors and academic performance (School Quality Review Report, 2007; nysed.gov, 2015). However, the quantitative data—collected through ongoing program assessment—does not provide descriptive information regarding the extent to which one intervention strategy might have been more successful than the other; nor does it tease out particularly effective features
embedded within a given strategy; and finally the big question remained, why and how did the improvement occur at QMS. The purpose of the QMS study, then, was to explore the successful improvement efforts in a manner that answers some of the unanswered questions; and in doing so, to identify new educational models and best practices that have potential for today’s urban school leader.

Assumptions that undergird the QMS principal’s approach to reform are consistent with theoretical frames and research findings in a review of the literature regarding urban education and school reform, the effect of leadership styles on the transformation of school environments, and the power of hip-hop as a communication tool to engage students and their parents in the learning process. The researcher’s experience as the former principal of QMS combines with theoretical frames and research findings from the literature on urban school reform, the use of hip-hop in school settings, and leadership styles, to form the assumptions that shape three underlying research questions regarding: one, the principal’s role in transforming the school environment: two, stakeholder perspectives of best principal practices that help students to improve academically and socially; and three, stakeholders attitudes during the implementation of reform at QMS.

Consistent with the intent to present knowledge vitally needed by principals of low-performing inner schools, a qualitative research design was utilized. Unlike a quantitative study that is conducted in a lab or under a “contrived situation,” a qualitative study talks to people and assesses their behaviors within a specific setting or context (Creswell, 2013, p.185). Thus, the QMS study evaluates the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents who were present at the school during the period of reform. A
focus group of each of the three distinct stakeholders is formed to obtain respective stakeholder views about the change that occurred at QMS, as well as to record their perceptions of principal behaviors that effected positive change.

Also, steps were taken to limit the impact of any inherent bias of the former principal as the study researcher. First, to militate against partiality, focus group questions were constructed in consultation with the dissertation committee that probed about challenges, disagreements, and resistance to the principal’s strategies. Second, texts of the audio recordings of interview sessions were produced by an independent transcriber prior to their review by the researcher. Third, the researcher had no authority over the focus group participants though he was positioned as both an outsider and an insider. Recognizing the potential positive bias of an insider, it was decided with the researcher would conduct the focus group interviews. The advantage of an interviewer, with knowledge of the context of the reform effort, to craft probing follow up questions outweighed the disadvantages.

Resulting from the focus group interviews is transcript data that affirms the success of QMS reform initiatives in several ways. First, respondents reinforced the researcher’s assertion that the three major reform initiatives are promising school improvement models for failing schools. TIME, the rap video, capture the vision of the principal and help all stakeholders to buy into the school mission. As a part of the Hip-Hop Project, TIME also became a vehicle for engaging students in their school work as it serves, at the same time, as a model of innovation in instructional practices for teachers. Similarly, the use of hip-hop leads to other innovative practices and to the development of a classroom environment where learning is fun. The fact that all stakeholders stressed
the importance of fun in learning signals to principals and teachers the need to go beyond test preparation to a more holistic experience-based instructional model that takes into account the culture of urban youth.

In addition to insuring safety and order in the QMS school environment, PEST represents a model that generates a parent-friendly environment where students learn and express respect for authority figures, and that acts as a bridge to numerous community-school partnerships through the activity of parents who live in the community. This finding has significant implications for principals who are attempting to transform chaotic school environments and who are trying to change the reputation of the school in the community.

Teachers, parents and students also state other reasons for school improvement. First, the successful implementation and enforcement of a school dress code policy is important because it removes the “distraction of fashion” and allows students to focus on school work; reduces the number of student fights; and increases safety for students who are easily identified by school personnel and parent-community watch groups who can intervene on their behalf. This finding also speaks to the need on the part of principals and other school leaders to address the unhealthy school environment before attempts at implementing other improvement initiatives. In fact, respondents of the QMS study assert that other QMS initiatives would have failed had the school uniform policy not been successful in changing the climate of the school.

Second, specialized programs and extra curricula activities improve the social behavior and academic performance of students. For example, at QMS, the pre-nursing and the pre-engineering program sharpened students’ academic skills and, for fear of not
participating in courses they valued, the extra curricula activities simultaneously influenced compliance to school rules. Likewise, the Manhood Training mentoring workshops for young males of color positively impacted their behavior as it raised self-esteem and caused them to think beyond what they thought was possible for them to achieve. The emphasis on extra curricular and support activities that holistically address the needs of children should be seriously considered by funders of urban school districts and by principals who want to use of the discretionary portion of their budgets for maximum impact on improved student outcomes.

Third, the study reveals certain transformational leadership approaches are particularly effective in engaging stakeholders in change efforts. Innovation and willingness to risk bold new directions, clear and regular communication with followers, and motivation of others beyond what they thought was their potential are qualities exhibited by principals who are successful change agents. Moreover, high visibility of a principal who routinely circulates within the school and in the community reassures stakeholders during turbulent and transitional phases of reform. So does principal accessibility with an “open door policy” to all stakeholders, including members of the community. This forges the sense of “family” necessary to nurture young people. These transformational leadership behaviors are especially important to new principals who are charged with improving low-performing urban schools.

However a deeper analysis of focus group data identified transactional approaches to leadership that underscore the need for a plan that:

- Has a vision and a vehicle for engaging stakeholder buy-ins, e.g. the TIME video.
• Anticipates resistance to change and has a strategy to address it, as an example, the use of hip-hop videos to get students to buy into a school uniform policy;

• Designates a budget for the change project, such as redistribution of funds for the production of three videos in the Hip-Hop Project;

• Invests in local facilitators such as the purchase of shirts, jackets and communication equipment for parents and community PEST members.

• Selects the scope of the reform effort, as evident at QMS by the introduction of hip-hop into the curriculum across core academic content subjects.

These how-to approaches, embedded in Fullan’s (1985) principles for rethinking what works in the change of school climates and practices, are useful for new principals, their trainers, policymakers and funders of urban improvement projects. They also emphasize the ways in which the combination of transactional and transformational leadership styles impact successful reform efforts.

In conclusion, the principal as change agent in an urban context must first address unhealthy environments that act as barriers to school improvement efforts (Mosley, 2007; Orme, 2007). Then, consistent with Fullan’s (2003) principles of reform, the school leader must believe in the rightness of the changes being proposed, communicate his/her vision to all stakeholders and be willing to fight for improved outcomes for students.
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http://www.census.gov/geo/reference/urban-rural.html


Appendix A

Prescreening Questionnaire

Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity.
☐ White
☐ Hispanic or Latino
What country? ________________________
☐ Black or African American
☐ Native American or American Indian
☐ Asian / Pacific Islander
☐ Other ________________________

Which of the following categories were you at 109Q?
☐ Teacher
☐ Parent
☐ Student

What years did you attend, teach or your child(ren) IS109Q?
☐ prior to 2002 to Present
☐ prior to 2002
☐ 2003-2007

Were you a Principal in School District 29 at any year between 2002 and 2007?
☐ Yes or ☐ No
  1. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group or in-depth interview?

  2.

☐ Yes or ☐ No
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am a doctoral student who is in pursuit of a Doctor of Education in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. You are asked to participate in this study because you are teacher, parent or student who was affiliated with a low performing middle school in Queen NY, during major reform effort from 2003-2007. You are also asked to participate if you are or were a principal of a low performing urban middle school there is no penalty for not participating in this study.

Title of the Research Study:

Transformational Leadership: Using the Communication Vehicle of Hip-Hop to Transmit an Agenda of Change in Teacher Morale, Student Behavior and Parent Involvement at a low performing Queens. NY Middle School

Investigator:

Shango Ameer Blake, CEO, T.RU. SK Consultants, an educational consultant company

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the decision-making process, programmatic strategies, and the engagement of multiple stakeholders by a transformational leader engaged in an agenda of change in an urban low-performing middle school.

Participation:

Your participation will involve participating in a focus group discussion based on open-ended questions or completing a face-to-face semi-structured interview. The interview process should take between 60-90 minutes to complete. The interview will take place in the spring of 2015 either on or near the campus of The College of New Rochelle.

Risks:

The level of anticipated risk are minimal, as you may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions.
Benefits:
The benefit to participating in this study is: knowing that you have helped educational leaders examine a leadership style that may have specific implications for teacher morale and for closing the academic achievement gap between students at low and high performing schools.

Compensation:

You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this study.

Audio Recording:

To aid the researcher with the accurate documentation of the participants’ responses, interviews may be recorded using an audio recording device. You have the right to disallow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options:
I consent to audio recording: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Confidentiality:

To ensure confidentiality, each participant will be assigned alphanumeric codes for identification purposes. Consent forms will be protected in a locked safe at the college for five years. Audio-recordings and transcribed data will be kept in a password-protected cloud storage application for five years following the interview.

Participant Rights:

You can decide to be a part of this study or not. Once you start, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions from the study. You have the right to view your responses to questions of the study. You have the right to be informed of the results of the study.

Questions/Comments:

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me by e-mail: blake.shango2gmail.com or by phone at 917-373-7138. For questions about your rights as a study participant, or any concerns or complaints, please contact St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board via e-mail at IRB@sjfc.edu.

Signature and Acknowledgement:

By signing this form, you agree that you understand the nature of the study, the possible risks to you as a participant, and how your identity will be kept confidential. When you sign this form, this means that you are 18 years old or older.
and that you give your permission to volunteer as a participant in the study that is
described in this consent form.
Signature of the participant________________________________ Date

________________________________
Printed name of participant_______________________________ Date

________________________________
Signature of the researcher_______________________________ Date
Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

1. What was the reputation of school before the principal arrived?
2. What was the strategy, if any, did the principal used to change the climate and or the tone of the school, and how important were the changes in improve student achievement? Follow up question:
3. What does the question: What TIME is mean to you? Follow up question: What does the answer of this question mean to you?
4. How did the use hip-hop affect your role as a (teacher, parent, and student)?
5. How would you describe the principal as a school leader?
6. Is there any characteristic about his leadership approach that stands out more than the other does?
7. Were there any instructional strategies that Mr. Blake implemented that you thought were effective? (teacher)
8. What were the strategies implemented by the principal that caused you to be involved? (Parent)
9. What were the strategies implemented by the principal that motivated you to learn? (Students)
Appendix D

Teacher Focus Group Codes

The preliminary codes used in the analysis of teacher respondent data were later used, in some variation, in the initial data analysis of the other two groups.

Table 1 Preliminary School Environment Code Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe School</td>
<td>Perception of school by parents community, teachers and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Reputation</td>
<td>Perception of school as indicated by district memorandum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang</td>
<td>As indicated by student incidents at QMS and district memorandum (nysed.gov (2002))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaotic School Environment</td>
<td>Perception of QMS by district level leadership which noted the school student program changes in late October; contributing to an atmosphere of chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School In need of Improvement (SINI)</td>
<td>Student outcomes on standardized assessment indicate that student did poorly on standardize math and ELA exams. This earned the school the designation of SINI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The initial analysis of Teacher Focus Group data revealed that teacher perceptions about school environment were consistent with assumptions outlined in the preliminary codes listed in Table 1

**Emerging school environment code.** As with Creswell, (2013) findings, the preliminary codes listed in Table 1 changed as other codes emerged directly from an analysis of data from the Teacher Focus Group. Thus, specific teacher statements about the principal's role in transforming the QMS environment were captured through the deductive
codes illustrated in Table 2. Themes appearing in this table are ranked in order of importance, with one representing the most important theme and three the least important.

**Table 2 Deductively Identified School Environment Codes Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teaching Innovation Motivation Excellence (TIME)</td>
<td>Motto developed by principal that respondents said was about improving teacher practice, building a sense of community at QMS, and messaging around the urgency for school improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parent Empowerment Students Today (PEST)</td>
<td>A parent and community partnership founded by principal that improved school environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hip-Hop Project</td>
<td>Identified by respondents as a high interest curriculum created by the principal that engaged students around academic rigorous standard based learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The coding in Table 2 shows that teacher responses reinforced the researcher’s assertions about the significance of three major strategies (TIME, PEST, and the Hip-Hop Project) to improvement at QMS. However, the table does not account for other broader themes that surfaced in the focus such as teacher resistance to principal developed accountability systems, the reorganization of the school structures, or professional development for teachers. Nevertheless, clear findings regarding Research question 1 were
derived from the Teachers Focus Group. Teachers verified that the principal inherited an unhealthy and an unsafe school culture; and that the three major initiatives listed in Table 2 led to improvement at QMS.

Table 3 Preliminary Change Process Codes Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy School Culture</td>
<td>Act as a barrier to school reform (Orme, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Interest Curricula</td>
<td>Are more likely to engage urban students in the learning process (Stovall, 2006; Low, 2009; and Irizarry, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Community Partnership</td>
<td>Are crucial to student outcomes (Love, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Practice</td>
<td>Improves when teacher have greater voice in curriculum planning, and increased access to staff development (Weingarten, 2012; Smith, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement</td>
<td>Occurs when collaborative action is sought from stakeholders—Students, teachers, and parents (Mosely, 2009 and Love, 2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in the analysis of data related to Research question 1, the preliminary codes listed in Table 3 evolved into deductive codes.

**Emerging change process strategy code.** Emerging deductive codes allowed the researcher to identify specific change processes that illuminated Research question 2. The specific themes and definitions are listed in Table 4
Table 4 *Deductively Identified Change Process Code Sheet*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Uniform Dress Code Policy</td>
<td>A key process implemented at QMS identified by teacher respondents as a reason for improvement of school environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal’s Visibility</td>
<td>A process identified by respondents as a reason for improved teacher morale student behavior, and parent involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Community Partnership</td>
<td>A process identified by respondents as a reason for improved school reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and College Readiness Programs</td>
<td>Specifically pre-nursing, pre-engineering, video hip-hop production, and manhood training classes were identified as reason for improved student outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and Student Accountability</td>
<td>Process that improved the educational results at QMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Week Assessments</td>
<td>Process that improved teacher instruction and student outcomes at QMS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While major interventions strategies like TIME, PEST and the Hip-Hop Project had sweeping impacts for positive change at QMS as indicated in findings for Research question 1, findings for Research question 2 indicated that smaller practical steps on the part of the principal, as evidenced in the six practical steps listed in Table 4.5 that teachers perceived as significant in improving the social behaviors and academic performance of students. They also noted themes that led to their own improvement as exemplified in Principal Visibility and the Six Week Assessment themes.
As in the analysis of data related to Research question 1, the preliminary codes listed in Table 5 evolved into deductive codes.

**Emerging change process strategy code.** Emerging deductive codes allowed the researcher to identify specific change processes that illuminated Research question 2. The specific themes and definitions are listed in Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy School Culture</td>
<td>Act as a barrier to school reform (Orme, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Interest Curricula</td>
<td>Are more likely to engage urban students in the learning process (Stovall, 2006; Low, 2009; and Irizarry, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Community Partnership</td>
<td>Are crucial to student outcomes (Love, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Practice</td>
<td>Improves when teacher have greater voice in curriculum planning, and increased access to staff development (Weingarten, 2012; Smith, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement</td>
<td>Occurs when collaborative action is sought from stakeholders-Students, teachers, and parents (Mosely, 2009 and Love, 2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 Deductively Identified Change Process Code Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Uniform Dress Code Policy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and Student Accountability</td>
<td>Process that improved the educational results at QMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Week Assessments</td>
<td>Process that improved teacher instruction and student outcomes at QMS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While major interventions strategies like TIME, PEST and the Hip-Hop Project had sweeping impacts for positive change at QMS as indicated in findings for Research question 1, findings for Research question 2 indicated that smaller practical steps on the part of the principal, as evidenced in the six practical steps listed in Table 6 that teachers perceived as significant in improving the social behaviors and academic performance of students. They also noted themes that led to their own improvement as exemplified in Principal Visibility and the Six Week Assessment themes.

Table 7 Preliminary Attitudes Towards Reform Code Sheet
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>Perceptions which pertain to influence and charismas, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Avolio, 2011; Bass, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional Leadership</td>
<td>Perception which pertains to contingent reward and constructive transaction of leader, management by expectation, and corrective transaction (Avolio, 2011; Bass, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Change</td>
<td>Perception which pertains to continuity of leadership, distribution of leadership, data-driven decision making, parent involvement, high expectation, discipline and order in school environment, and core values of principal (Owaje, 2006; Fullan, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies to Overcome Resistance</td>
<td>Perception which pertain to unionism and opposition to school reform, concentration of unqualified teachers in low performing school, and teacher seniority rules effect to school change (Zhang, 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preliminary codes in Table 7 provided a framework for initial analysis of teacher responses to focus group questions that eventually informed regarding the school reform query of Research question 3. These preliminary codes set the context for emerging deductive codes that allowed for deeper analysis.

**Emerging attitudes towards reform code.** As illustrated in Table 8, the emerging deductive codes derived from analysis of Teacher Focus Group transcript data allowed for specific insights into teacher views and attitudes toward QMS reform strategies.
Table 8 *Deductively Identified Attitudes Towards Reform Code Sheet*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to Innovation</td>
<td>Perceptions that hip-hop should not be used in the school because of negative images, cursing and corny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to Accountability (Transactional Leadership)</td>
<td>Perception that NYC Department of resisted the enforcement of school rule and uniform policies due to parental complaints. Perception that some teachers resisted data-driven instruction program implemented at QMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Change Strategies</td>
<td>Perception that there was support for adoption and enforcement of school uniform policy by teacher respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional and Transformational</td>
<td>Stakeholders viewed perception that hip-hop as an effective tool to engage students and improve teacher practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception that career and college readiness programs had a positive effect on student outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 reinforces narrative assertions that there was both support and resistance to school improvement strategies by stakeholders at QMS. For example, themes in Table 8 confirmed previous research findings regarding the controversy of using hip-hop in school settings (Petchauer, 2010; Gosa, 2009; Smith, 2007; Parker, 2006; and Stovall, 2006). Not only was resistance to hip-hop in the QMS setting highlighted by teachers, but by parents and student as well. While teachers did not comment on their perceptions of how the QMS principal addressed resistance to reform strategies, there was agreement on the part of teachers that the change policies and practices at the school were widely supported by all
stakeholders. Deeper analysis in the summary of findings presented at the end of this chapter provides additional information on how resistance to change was handled.
Appendix E

Student Focus Group Codes

Emerging school environment code. Through the use of preliminary codes, the deductive codes in Table 1.

Table 1 Deductively Identified School Environment Codes Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hip-Hop Project</td>
<td>Identified by respondents as a high interest curriculum created by the principal that engaged students around academic rigorous standard based learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parent Empowerment Students Today (PEST)</td>
<td>A parent and community partnership founded by principal that improved school environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teaching Innovation Motivation Excellence (TIME)</td>
<td>Motto developed by principal that respondents said built a sense of community at QMS Developed a message around the urgency for school improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 illustrates student responses in order of importance. One was the most important and three the least important. While the student themes (Hip-Hop Project, PEST, TIME) remained the same as those of teachers, their ranking and definitions of principal strategies vary. Despite this difference in emphasis, indicated as a core finding that the principal inherited an unhealthy and unsafe environment. In addition, student responses emphasized that the principal played an important role in transforming the school environment to a
positive one. An analysis of student respondent data also reinforced the researcher’s assertion that the principal’s three major strategies were effective transformative initiatives.

The two themes and definitions used in analysis of student data are listed in Table 2 which is an abbreviated version of (Appendix D Table 4).

Table 2 Preliminary Change Process Code Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy School Culture</td>
<td>Act as a barrier to school reform (Orme, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Interest Curricula</td>
<td>Are more likely to engage urban students in the learning process (Stovall, 2006; Low, 2009; and Irizarry, 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emerging change process strategy code. The deductive codes, shown in Table 3, emerged from the initial analysis of student responses that were associated with Research question 2.

Table 3 Deductively Identified Change Process Code Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Uniform Dress Code Policy</td>
<td>A key process implemented at QMS identified by respondents as a reason for improvement of school environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal’s Visibility</td>
<td>A process identified by respondents as a reason for improved student behavior,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Community Partnership</td>
<td>A process identified by respondents as a reason for improved school reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and College Readiness Programs</td>
<td>Specifically pre-nursing, pre-engineering, video hip-hop production, and manhood training classes were identified as reason for improved student outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings regarding student perceptions of the effectiveness of changes strategies implemented by the QMS principal were consistent with those of teachers. Both focus groups indicated that smaller practical steps taken by the principal were significant factors in the improvement of the social and academic behaviors of students.

**Emerging attitudes towards school reform code.** The deductive codes listed in Table 4. followed the established pattern of flowing from preliminary codes as the researcher analyzed student respondent data.

Table 4. *Deductively Identified Attitudes Towards Reform Code Sheet*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to Innovation</td>
<td>Perceptions that hip-hop should not be used in the school because some thought it was corny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to Accountability</td>
<td>Perception that students resisted school uniform policy because it was deprived them of their individuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Change Strategies</td>
<td>Perception that there was support for adoption and enforcement of school uniform policy by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional and Transformational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student focus group viewed perception that hip-hop as an effective tool to engage students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception that career and college readiness programs had a positive effect on student outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As evidenced in Table 4, student perceived that stakeholder support and resistance existed for school improvement strategies at QMS. This finding also reinforced teacher
perceptions. For example, both focus groups ultimately embraced changes that were first met with resistance such as the student uniform policy and the use of hip-hop in the school setting. Also, the early resistance to hip-hop confirms research about the controversy of using hip-hop in school settings (Petchauer, 2010; Gosa, 2009; Smith, 2007; Parker, 2006; and Stovall, 2006). However, an additional finding of this study indicated that resistance can be effectively addressed when properly introduced.
Appendix F

Parent Focus Group Codes

Emerging school environment code. Through the use of preliminary codes shaped by the literature on school environments, deductive codes emerged (see Appendix D, Table 1) that listed specific parent perceptions of the QMS school environment.

Table 1 Deductively Identified School Environment Code Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parent Empowerment Students Today (PEST)</td>
<td>A parent and community partnership founded by principal that improved school environment, which stakeholder respondents deemed as chaotic unsafe and lacked accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hip-Hop Project</td>
<td>Identified by respondents as a high interest curriculum that engaged students in learning Helped parents become more relatable to their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teaching Innovation Motivation Excellence (TIME)</td>
<td>Motto developed by principal that respondents said was about building a sense of community at QMS, and messaging around the urgency for school improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 1, parents confirmed that the principal inherited an unhealthy and unsafe school culture and transformed it into a positive one. They listed and ranked, PEST, the Hip-Hop Project and TIME as the top three significant principal initiatives. When compared to student rankings, parents viewed their involvement in changing the school environment as the most important, while students indicated that the
Hip-Hop Project had the greatest influenced in positively transforming the school culture, and teachers indicated that the TIME instructional initiative was the most effective reform strategy at QMS. In addition to these findings, deductively identified codes regarding the principal’s role in changing the school environment included strategies that dealt with resistance to change. These strategies are discussed in the Data Analysis and Findings section that follows the discussion of the Research Questions.

**Emerging change process code.** A summary of the deductively identified school change codes that emerged from the use of preliminary codes is provided in Table 2

Table 2 *Deductive Change Process Code Sheet*

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Career and College Readiness Programs</td>
<td>Specifically pre-nursing, pre-engineering, video hip-hop production, and manhood training classes were identified as reason for improved student outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and Student Accountability</td>
<td>Process that improved the educational results at QMS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is general congruence among parents, teachers, and students that the smaller practical changes outlined in Table 4.8 had a significant impact on student social behavior and academic performance. Responses on the part of the three focus groups vary as follows:
• Teachers indicated six practical changes that contributed to student improvement: three related to social behavior and three to academic performance.

• Student identified four practical changes that led to their improvement: three involved social behavior and one academic performance. Unlike teachers, they did not identify teacher or student accountability as a factor, nor did they include the six-week assessment as a theme.

• Parents identified five practical changes that contributed to student improvement: three involved social behavior and two academic performance. The six-week assessment did not surface in their discussion of practical changes that led to their improvement.

**Emerging attitudes and practices towards school reform code.** Use of the inductive preliminary codes concerning parent attitudes toward school reform led to the identification of the themes and definitions provided in Table 3.
Table 3 *Deductive Attitude Towards Reform Code Sheet*

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception that career and college readiness programs had a positive effect on student outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to confirming, as illustrated in Table 3, perceptions that both support and resistance to school reform strategies at QMS, provided specific details regarding the pattern of resistance and support. For example, they perceived a strong resistance to the use of hip-hop in school settings that faded as the connection between the project to the curriculum and to the implementation of a student uniform policy became apparent. A deeper analysis of the resistance-support dichotomy of parent and other stakeholders is presented in the summary of findings presented at the end of Chapter 4.