

Providence-St. Mel School: How a School That Works for African American Students Works

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A portrait, using grounded theory qualitative methodologies, was constructed of a K–12 school serving urban, African American students, one producing high achievement. The primary data were observations complemented by questionnaire responses and document analyses. Consistent with conclusions in the effective schooling literature, this school has strong leadership, accountability, academic focus, and orderliness. Other aspects of schooling seemed also to support achievement, many consistent with aspects of teaching and learning emphasized in the educational psychology literature. The theory emerging from this study is that the high achievement in this school is caused by multiple factors, including decidedly psychological ones.

This article is a portrait of a school, one serving urban, African American students, one with graduates who achieve at high levels. The portrait was composed by researchers steeped in educational psychology and its perspectives, working with the school's administration to do so.

One motivation for this study was to begin to fill a gap that was highlighted by Hilliard and Amankwatia (2003). Their major conclusion was that African American students can excel, with the key ingredient being good teaching. Hilliard and Amankwatia also observed, however, that little is known about the schooling that positively affects African Americans. They called for qualitative studies to document just what goes on in classrooms and schools that are very effective with students who do poorly in traditional classrooms and schools. Such work could be the basis for a theory of effective teaching and schooling that subsequently might be tested in quantitative designs. Thus, in this study, we constructed a case study—intending to produce a theory grounded in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)—about how a single school is producing high achievement in African American students.

Of course, there exists substantial work contrasting schools that produce high standardized test scores in places where low scores are the norm. Most such work has involved surveys and observations guided by teaching behavior checklists (for reviews, see Firestone, 1991; Reynolds, Creemers, Stringfield, Teddlie, &

Schaffer, 2002; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000), with consistent findings: Effective schools (a) have strong leaders (e.g., an effective principal), (b) have high expectations for student achievement, (c) emphasize academics, (d) are safe and orderly, and (e) evaluate student progress frequently.

In addition, there is a huge literature documenting that effective classrooms (i.e., ones producing relatively higher test scores) are well-managed classrooms (Emmer, Evertson, & Worsham, 2003; Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2003). A hallmark of such well-managed classrooms is that students spend much time on worthwhile academic tasks (see, e.g., Carroll, 1963).

Bryk and Schneider (2002), after analyzing some effective elementary schools in Chicago, Illinois, offered an interesting new perspective. Relational trust is high among the players in effective schools, including administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Greater trust increases cooperation, which, in turn, increases student achievement. As we reviewed the literature on effective education with minority students, we also encountered Levine and Nidiffer's (1996) recent work on the impact of mentoring in guiding talented minority students to excellent colleges, with this work highlighting the role of interpersonal psychological processes as being critical to the educational success of minority students. We also came upon Knapp and Associates' (1995) research substantiating that curriculum and instruction that demand understanding, in fact, produce better outcomes with minority and other at-risk students than curriculum and instruction focusing on lower order skills. In short, these recent analyses have highlighted psychological factors that can increase educational success in students at risk for educational failure. Even so, these studies are much more the exception than the rule, with most of the work on effective schooling focusing on administrative and organizational issues (i.e., as covered in Firestone, 1991; Reynolds et al., 2002; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Even much of the work on effective classrooms (i.e., virtually all of the work before 1995) is only slightly more psychological, narrowly focused on classroom management issues driven largely by behavioral conceptions of the

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1960s and 1970s rather than modern educational-psychological conceptions.

In contrast, in the investigation of an effective school reported here, we were sensitive to psychological variables that can affect educational outcomes, as we have been in our recent work focusing on individual, effective classrooms (see, e.g., Bogner, Raphael, & Pressley, 2002; Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley, & Vincent, 2003; Knapp & Associates, 1995; Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Pressley, Dolezal, et al., 2003; Pressley, Roehrig, et al., 2003; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Allington, et al., 2001; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1998; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Raphael, Bogner, & Roehrig, 2001; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). In the classroom studies, we documented that effective teachers do a great deal of scaffolding of student learning and use teaching and curricular approaches that enjoy support from experimental or other psychological research, as well as a variety of motivational mechanisms that enjoy substantial empirical support in the educational psychology literature (i.e., more than having high expectations of students; see Pressley & Roehrig, 2003; Pressley, Roehrig, et al., 2003).

In contrast to most of the classical work on effective schools, in this study, we were interested in examining a school that does more than increase standardized test scores, seeking one that produces better life outcomes for graduates than do other schools serving disadvantaged populations. Impressed by the fact that many effective schools are not effective for long (see Reynolds et al., 2002; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993), we also hoped to study a school with a long track record.

Providence-St. Mel School (hereafter, PSM) on Chicago's west side (i.e., in one of the poorest sections of the city) produces extraordinary college admissions and college completion results, with 100% of its high school graduates accepted into 4-year colleges for the past 25 years. Each graduating class now includes a large percentage of students accepted at Tier 1 colleges (e.g., 42% of the class of 2002, 52% of the class of 2003). Most PSM students who begin college, in fact, complete a bachelor's degree (i.e., approximately 72% of PSM graduates go on to graduate from college, compared with a national average of 57.5% of high school graduates who do so). In short, PSM is the type of school we wanted to study.

Our goal was to produce a theory about how this school accomplishes what it accomplishes, anticipating that this would be the first of several case studies examining schools that produce what seem to be extraordinary results for the populations they serve. After several such case studies, it should be possible to conduct thorough cross-case analyses to develop a more general theory of the factors that contribute to the high performances observed in such schools, a theory that could inspire quantitative tests of the hypotheses emerging from the research reported here.

Method

Participants

Students. PSM bills itself on its Web site (<http://www.psm.k12.il.us/>) as "an Independent K through 12 College Preparatory School." In spring 2003, when this portrait was composed, all of the school's 700 students except one, the child of a faculty member, were African American, consistent with the school's enrollment for the past 4 decades. In November

2002, the school submitted to its accreditation agency information about family income levels: Sixty percent of families made less than \$30,000 a year, and 25% made between \$30,000 and \$50,000 a year. Only 5% made more than \$80,000 annually. Approximately two thirds of the school's students lived in single-parent families, with this figure increasing from the lower school (59%) to the middle school (63%) to the high school (77%) level. Approximately 40% of the students received free or reduced-cost lunch, with this figure likely underestimating the level of poverty because some eligible children's families did not complete the required paperwork to receive the federal lunch benefit.

In spring 2003, when this study was conducted, the lower school enrolled 230 students in Grades K–5. The middle school had 90 students in Grades 6–8. The high school included 380 students in Grades 9–12. The lower school is close to a self-contained classroom model, although there is some movement of students between classrooms even at the kindergarten level, and all lower school students go to special classes outside of their homerooms (i.e., art, music, physical education). Students move from class to class the entire day at the middle school and high school levels. The largest classes in the school have about 20 students in them; some classes at the high school level have only 6 to 10 students. The lower school is distributed across the first and second floors of the building. Middle school and high school classes are distributed across the second to fifth floors of the school.

The school is selective in its admissions. First, families, and sometimes the students themselves, seek to enter the school, taking the admissions tests and, in some cases, working to improve student test scores through summer school attendance to gain admissions. Students must score at least at the 25th percentile on an admissions test tapping age/grade-appropriate academic achievement. The school is also selective in its retention. For students to remain in the school, parents must participate, at a minimum, in regular parent conferences, although there are invitations and pressures to be at the school often. Students must perform academically, including taking make-up courses in the summer if they fail during the year. They must also behave according to the school rules, with the possibility of dismissal for frequent or serious misbehavior. Finally, families must meet the tuition obligations. The tuition at the school for the school year 2002–2003 was \$3,750 for the lower school (except kindergarten, which was \$3,400), \$4,000 for the middle school, and \$4,400 for the high school. Approximately 40% of the students paid the full tuition, with the remainder receiving some type of tuition forgiveness, permitted by financial gifts to PSM. Students who received tuition forgiveness did some type of work at the school to earn their support. Typically, they cleaned the school after the school day ended.

The selectivity in retention can be understood by considering retention in the high school. There are students who enter ninth grade but leave before graduation. Thus, the class of 2003 began with 132 students and graduated 71 (53.8% graduation rate), with the graduation rate over the past 5 years being 44.4%. Why do the students leave? For example, according to the school records, for the freshman class in 2002–2003, the academic year when this study was conducted, 52% of the departing students left because of academic difficulties, 18.5% had financial difficulties, 15% moved, and 9% left because of other personal reasons (e.g., preferring a less disciplined environment, wanting to play a varsity sport not offered at PSM). Only 5.5% departed the school because of disciplinary action.

An audit of the main results of the school's standardized testing was carried out for the 3 years preceding this study. This audit confirmed that when national norms were considered, PSM students performed consistently above average on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1981; administered 1999–2000 school year) and the Terra Nova (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 2001; administered in 2000–2001 and in 2001–2002). In the lower school, the mean national percentiles for each grade level ranged from the 47th percentile to the 85th percentile ($M = 62$ nd percentile, $SD = 9.97$). The corresponding range at the middle school was the 64th percentile to the 82nd percentile ($M = 72$ nd percentile, $SD =$

5.89). At the high school, the range was the 50th percentile to the 70th percentile ($M = 62$ nd percentile, $SD = 5.19$). As this study was being carried out, Terra Nova was administered for 2002–2003. At the lower school level, the mean class percentiles were as follows: kindergarten = 90th percentile, Grade 1 = 67th percentile, Grade 2 = 67th percentile, Grade 3 = 72nd percentile, Grade 4 = 60th percentile, and Grade 5 = 70th percentile. The means at middle school were 65th percentile for Grade 6, 57th percentile for Grade 7, and 78th percentile for Grade 8. The mean high school percentiles were as follows: Grade 9 = 61st percentile, Grade 10 = 63rd percentile, Grade 11 = 63rd percentile, and Grade 12 = 66th percentile. The ACT scores typically range in the high teens or low 20s, with the mean ACT score for the class of 2003 being 20.26 ($SD = 6.33$). In short, on average, PSM students scored well above the national average based on all students taking the test (i.e., 50th percentile). In part, the high test scores probably reflect outcomes produced by the school, although they probably also reflect the selection bias to accept and retain students who can benefit from the school.

Faculty. In spring 2003, the 53 faculty members were more racially diverse than the student body, with 21 African Americans teaching at the school and 32 Caucasians doing so. All faculty had bachelor's degrees, 25 also had completed master's degrees, and 4 had earned doctorates. The faculty ranged in age from the early 20s to the 60s and similarly ranged in years of experience from being a first-year to a late-career teacher. The high school faculty was slightly older (i.e., average age about 40, averaging 10 years of teaching) than the middle and lower school teachers (i.e., average age 33, averaging 7 years of teaching). Some individual faculty members were uniquely qualified, compared with most teachers in schools. For example, a practicing attorney taught a high school course on law and government. Also, a former attorney was the rotating substitute teacher. An individual with substantial experience teaching college mathematics taught calculus and some other math courses. In addition, 6 members of the faculty were distinguished by being PSM alumni.

Researchers. The prior perspectives of the researchers varied somewhat. Michael Pressley, the lead author, has been conducting research in schools for 30 years and is steeped in educational psychology as a discipline, with expertise in teaching and learning, especially with respect to reading. Lisa Raphael, the second author, is a graduate student who has studied motivation for 8 years, including publishing several qualitative research studies documenting how primary-level classroom teachers attempt to motivate their students. J. David Gallagher, the third author, also is a graduate student in educational psychology, whose previous research experience has been in special education. Jeanette DiBella, the fourth investigator, is the principal of the school studied, coming to the investigation with 25 years of experience in regular and special education, as well as knowledge about PSM informed by 8 years at the school. DiBella's education includes substantial study of educational psychology, especially psychological interventions that work in special education. Hence, like the three external researchers, DiBella is sensitive to psychological aspects of instruction.

Data Collection and Analysis

This portrait was constructed by using qualitative portraiture methods (see Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) based on the construction of a grounded theory (i.e., a theory supported by converging data from observation, questionnaire responses, and analyses of documents; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Such portraiture recognizes that researchers come to a study with background knowledge that influences their points of view toward the object of study. Thus, the introduction of this article has covered briefly some of the knowledge that we brought to the project, perspectives that we knew would inform us, although we were determined not to permit our previous understandings to be conceptual blinders.

That said, we expected that we probably would observe that PSM is like effective schools documented in the traditional research on effective

schooling (see Firestone, 1991; Reynolds et al., 2002; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000) and classrooms (Emmer et al., 2003; Everson et al., 2003). We also expected, however, to observe some qualities identified in recent studies of effective classrooms, work conducted within our own research group (e.g., Bogner et al., 2002; Dolezal et al., 2003; Knapp & Associates, 1995; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley, Allington, et al., 2001; Pressley, Dolezal, et al., 2003; Pressley, Roehrig, et al., 2003; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1998; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Raphael, et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald, et al., 1998). For example, we anticipated extensive and intensive efforts to motivate students as well as use of diverse teaching strategies. We especially expected extensive scaffolding of students (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) that entails demanding students to become self-regulated learners (Pressley, Dolezal, et al., 2003; Pressley, Roehrig, et al., 2003). We were also primed to look for other qualities based on other recent evaluations of effective schooling, including evidence of relational trust among members of the school community (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), indications of mentoring (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996), and curriculum and instruction intended to foster higher order thinking and teaching for understanding rather than low-level skills acquisition (Knapp & Associates, 1995).

There were checks, however, to assure that our prior knowledge would not drive the conclusions, that the teaching in the school would do so. The most important was that we agreed in advance that no outcome would remain in the study that was doubted by even one of us on the basis of data collected in the study. Such a stringent criterion basically assured that unchecked biases held by any one of us would not prevail.

The three external researchers felt that DiBella's agreeing with the conclusions and confirming that the examples in the report represented well the school's functioning would be powerful evidence of the reliability and validity of the conclusions offered here. In fact, DiBella offered only minor corrections to the conclusions in the draft documents, expressing the opinion that the report generally captured the school accurately and that the specific examples reported were fairly representative of the school and its functioning.

Once the decision was made to do the study, we decided on observation as the primary method, at least in the early stages of the research. We decided that the external researchers would visit the school for whole days, watching classes, with the initial question being "How does PSM so consistently produce high achievement in its graduates?" The observers were to be sensitive to any aspect of the teaching and learning observed that might make an impact on student achievement. The observers identified possible contributing factors as the study was carried out (i.e., data collection and analysis intertwined).

Observations. So what did the external observers note as they observed? From the moment of arrival at the school, they noted artifacts (e.g., bulletin-board displays in the halls, posters announcing upcoming events) and behaviors (e.g., teachers or the principal talking with parents or students). Frequently, the observers would copy down comments made by staff members as close to verbatim as possible. Other times, observers would just summarize an observed conversation.

The observers spent most of their time visiting classes, sometimes for the entire class, sometimes for half of a class. They noted classroom artifacts (e.g., bulletin boards, writing on the chalkboard, book displays, corrected papers in bins, papers distributed to the class) and teaching behaviors, including many verbatim comments. The teacher's demeanor was recorded, whether it was consistent or varied across the observation. As observers watched lessons, they tried to discern the overall structure of the lesson, where it fit into the larger structure of instruction in the class (i.e., a unit starter activity, one lesson of many pertaining to a topic, a wrap-up lesson in anticipation of an accountability measure such as a test or final paper), and discourse patterns (e.g., whether the discussion was classic teacher questioning, a true dialogue involving the teachers and students, or direction giving by the teacher). The responses of students to instruction and the activities of the class were monitored. The observers noticed most

prominently whether the students were engaged during instruction, including whether they were actively thinking in response to the teacher input. There was special noting of any teacher behavior or comment that might be expected to affect engagement (e.g., teacher comments that might be motivating or might undermine motivation).

Most teachers were observed several times. On subsequent visits, the observers noted whether they were seeing more of the same or whether teaching varied from visit to visit. They noted how classroom artifacts changed. Although the observers were interested in consistency across visits to classes, they paid more attention to what was different each visit, what had changed in the class.

As students changed classes, so did the observers, with the observers noting the activities in the hallway, including which teachers interacted with students and how. Again, many verbatim comments were recorded.

When observers attended nonclassroom and special events (e.g., before school in the cafeteria, at lunch in the cafeteria, assemblies), again, they noted as much as they could about the structure of the activity, including who interacted with whom and, especially, how teachers, administrators, and staff interacted with students. They recorded many verbatim comments, including reactions of the various participants to one another.

We emphasize that nothing like a behavior checklist was used in this study. Rather, the observers came to the school attempting to record everything that might affect achievement. Yes, they had some idea of indicators to watch for based on the previous research, but coding was truly open, with categories of observation invented and refined as the study proceeded, consistent with grounded theory approaches (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Researcher Pressley spent 12 full days in the school during spring semester 2003. Researcher Raphael was in the school for 5.5 days. Researcher Gallagher spent 2.5 days in the school. Researcher DiBella served as the principal of the school, performing all of her regular duties as the study proceeded, which included making regular visits to classrooms and participating in most events at the school.

Although the faculty knew when researchers would be in the building in general, they did not know whether a particular classroom would be observed on any given day. Before school started, researchers tried to inform individual faculty members of the desire to observe a class that day, with teacher and researcher usually quickly agreeing on a class hour for the observation. That said, many observations were unannounced, with the researchers showing up just before class, requesting permission to watch the class, which was almost always given. Sometimes the teachers begged off because they felt what was scheduled would not be very interesting to watch—most typically, an exam. Occasionally, however, teachers invited the researchers to come during particular hours because they felt something really interesting would occur in that class (e.g., a special event, such as a reader's theater presentation or a poetry slam). Even so, the teachers did not specially prepare for the researcher visits.

The sense of all of the observers was that classes were conducted as usual when they were in the room. This sense was especially strong because the culture of the school is to have open-door classes. When the researchers simply walked through the school passing classrooms, but watching and listening as they did so, what was occurring in particular classrooms was very similar to what the researchers had watched during visits to those classrooms.

Because researcher Pressley had the most visits, he took the lead in developing categories of experience that might affect the school. These categories were developed beginning the evening of the first visit in February 2003 (i.e., data were coded as they were collected, consistent with grounded theory analytic approaches; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) through observations in late April 2003. A draft of the categories Pressley developed was distributed to the three co-researchers for their input and suggestions in late April. Researcher Raphael, in particular, had been coding independently from her notes, so that her input was expected to be, and was, more complete at this juncture than was the input of Gallagher and

DiBella, both of whom generally agreed with the categories in Pressley's April summary of the data.

Researcher Pressley reflected on and reconsidered categories on the basis of the input received from his fellow researchers and of additional observations in May 2003 (4 days of observations). As he refined the categories and continued to flesh out the general conclusions with teaching examples, Pressley again submitted tentative conclusions to the other three researchers, who provided input and began to add examples they had observed that were consistent with Pressley's conclusions and observations. Researcher Raphael, especially, contributed refinements and additions to the tentative outcomes aired by Pressley. Researcher DiBella's review was not based on research field notes but was informed by her lived immersion in the school, including extensive note and memo generation that is part of her daily routine.

We continued to pass the emerging conclusions back and forth until all of us were satisfied that the results were consistent with our observations and there was agreement that the examples (i.e., quotations, specific observations) were, in fact, representative of the school. In general, as this process continued, there was little disagreement among us.

Questionnaires. In early May 2003, we decided to seek some input from students and teachers using a questionnaire format. Middle school and high school students were asked to respond in writing to the following question, doing so during an English class, with 362 students providing answers to this question:

Please tell us in your own words why PSM is such a good school. Why do so many PSM students end up going to college, especially to good colleges? Say as little or as much as you like. (Your answer will be read by the researchers who have been visiting the school but not by anyone else.)

Teachers were asked to respond to this same open-ended question. After responding to this question, they were also asked to respond to a series of questions pertaining to some of the main factors that we felt were important in producing the school's success. The faculty members were specifically asked to comment on the role of the school's leadership in producing success, the importance of the academic emphasis of the school, the role of the high behavioral expectations, the role of the high academic demands, whether the academic supports matter, and whether the school motivates students sufficiently. The teachers were assured that the school administrators and, in particular, co-researcher DiBella, the school's principal, would not see their individual responses but, rather, would see only the overall conclusions emerging from the questionnaire data, the ones presented in this article.

Twenty-two of 58 faculty responded to the questionnaire. Their responses generally were long, which may account for the low return rate. We also heard from several faculty that the questionnaire was a lot of work at one of the busiest times of the year, as teachers were attending to final exams, grading, and closure of their classrooms.

The student and faculty data were read and analyzed separately, with researchers Raphael and Gallagher reading the student responses and researchers Pressley and Raphael reading the faculty comments. As the pairs of researchers read the responses, they focused on common themes across the responses. In general, each set of two researchers was in strong agreement about the main points made in the student and faculty responses, resolving the small discrepancies through discussion. In the results section that follows, the conclusions based on the questionnaire data are integrated with the results based on the observations.

Document analyses. Throughout the process, the school made available various documents. These included handbooks and summaries of regulations provided to students and staff, summaries of standardized test data, articles written about the school, brochures and other school publications, and letters sent to parents and teachers. Perhaps most useful was the set of documents provided to the North Central accreditation team in November 2002. This included various survey data (of faculty, parents,

alumni, and students), school improvement plans, and a variety of summaries of achievement data.

We emphasize that there is substantial agreement in the conclusions that follow, based on the observations, questionnaire data, and documentary evidence. That is, there is substantial triangulation in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), with convergence across types of data as well as across researchers, with all four of us agreeing with the results that follow.

Results and Discussion

We summarize here the many factors that we feel contribute to the effectiveness of this school in promoting academic achievement. Although PSM has many of the general characteristics of effective schools, we comment on some of those factors less extensively than we could have on the basis of the data (e.g., the school has strong administrative leadership, it is safe and orderly). Instead, we comment more extensively on those features of schooling at PSM that are not highlighted in the traditional effective schooling literature—many of which, though not all, are decidedly psychological—with explicit references to the psychological literature in what follows to make this point emphatically. Even so, we begin by discussing how PSM has high accountability, a factor that is a hallmark of all effective schools. We begin here because accountability was saliently apparent from our first minutes at PSM and during every subsequent minute of contact with the school.

High Accountability

Grades matter saliently at PSM. Even so, consistent with the practice in many schools, grades increase in saliency moving from the primary grades to the middle and later elementary grades and into the middle school (Eccles et al., 1993). Middle school and high school students constantly receive grade reports for classwork and homework, for quizzes and midterm tests, for lab reports and projects, and for each quarter's final exams.

Students earn their grades, with little evidence of grade inflation. In general, at the middle and high school levels, the grade distributions resemble a classic bell curve centered on C or C+. Although more than a quarter of the school made the honor roll in spring 2003 (i.e., had a B average or higher), about 16% of their schoolmates were on academic probation (i.e., their overall grade point average was less than 2.0, or they had two or more Fs). Continuation in the school depends, in part, on grades (i.e., earning grades above 2.0). For students who are marginal (i.e., slightly less than the 2.0 cutoff), summer school at PSM is required, and Saturday tutoring at the school either is required or is strongly recommended.

Both the administration and teachers carefully monitor student progress. Students receive report cards four times a year, followed by a consultation with the parent, with such guardian-teacher conferences mandatory and, thus, almost always with 100% participation. In addition, the principal, in particular, has informal interactions with students whose grades are slipping. In walking with DiBella after the third-quarter grade reports came out, the external observers noted several occasions when she sought out students in the hall or cafeteria to let them know that she was aware their grades had fallen and that she wanted to see improvement ("Your GPA slipped a little this quarter, and we can't have

that"). The principal also offered spontaneous positive comments to a number of students who had good grades.

Much Total Academic Time

Consistent with the psychological literature, PSM provides a great deal of instruction to its students (see, e.g., Brophy, 1987, 1988a, 1988b). Students spend long days in intensive schooling followed by homework, complemented by summer school in some cases.

A long school day. PSM students arrive at the school by 7:45 a.m., which is when the doors open. Every day, the principal or one of the teachers greets students. As students proceed to their homerooms, most teachers are outside their doors to meet them. At 8:00 a.m., there are opening exercises, which include the recitation of the school's mission statement. Classes then begin, with middle and high school students moving to their first-period classes in a generally orderly and quiet fashion. This is the first of eight 50-min periods over the course of the day. The middle school has some double periods (i.e., combining reading and language arts into a double period with the same teacher), but, for the most part, middle and high school students change classes every hour. Their school day is filled with mainstream academic subjects (e.g., at the middle school level—language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science). The other notable movement in the hallway is whole classes of lower school students going to special classes, such as music and art.

In late morning, lunch is served in the cafeteria. The principal and the teachers spend a great deal of time in the cafeteria during lunch, conversing with students about a variety of topics. For instance, lunch is one of the times when DiBella catches up with students to talk about academic concerns in an informal manner (e.g., her notice of a student's grade point average dropping).

After lunch, classes continue until the end of the school day at 3:10 p.m. Often, parents come into the school as students are dismissed, with informal and friendly conversations between parents, faculty, and administrators as the students depart. Again, this is a time when DiBella and the teachers are visibly present to students.

The day also continues for students who choose to partake of the after-school tutoring, which occurs in the cafeteria until 5:00 p.m. (required for students below a 2.0 grade point average). Other students, who have failed to complete homework, may be required to stay after school until the homework is done. For students who have committed a behavioral violation significant enough to merit detention, the detention is served for 1 hr in a room where they are required to sit quietly and do nothing.

Summer school. The summer has special significance. Some students who aspire to attend PSM during the year come to summer school to make up academic deficiencies, whereas other, current students attend to make up classes that were failed during the school year. About 200 students are in the summer school. Of the students who have been successful at the school during the year, many head off for an adventure at a university or in a foreign country. (More information about these Summer Opportunity of a Lifetime [SOAL] experiences is given later.) PSM is a year-round operation, consistent with a general finding in the literature that summer academic experiences support academic achievement, especially remediation experiences for students who need them (see,

e.g., Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001; Cooper, Kelly, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000).

The School Building

PSM is an island on the west side of Chicago, an island that excludes gangs, substance abuse, and other criminal behaviors that are common in the neighborhood around it. This is a place where students can work and learn without having to be concerned about their safety.

In contrast to its surroundings, the five-story school building is in good repair on the outside and is safe and clean on the inside. In fact, the facility is spacious. The school includes an impressive three-classroom technology lab, with students having access to state-of-the-art computers with full Internet capability as well as software that supports instruction. Another very attractive facility is the library, which extends over space equivalent to five classrooms. There is a fairly large collection of books, magazines, and newspapers, along with comfortable seating. The school includes a large auditorium with a balcony. This room is very well used. Frequently, the external researchers noticed rehearsals occurring in this room (e.g., for plays, assemblies). The largest room in the building, however, is the gym, which is located in the upper floors of the school. In spring 2003, when this study was carried out, the gym walls remained decorated with spirit posters and banners from the past basketball season.

Talented and Dedicated People Who Make It Work

Many work together to make PSM function well.

Strong administrative leadership. PSM has strong leadership. The president and founder of the school, Paul J. Adams III, developed the concept of PSM as a college preparatory school for African American students. Adams consistently sends the message in his conversations that the school is intended to be academically demanding, “intended to provide a globally competitive education for its students” (P. J. Adams, personal communication, January 2003). One of his most important decisions is the appointment of a principal.

DiBella, the principal, is the instructional leader of the school. The faculty were very positive about DiBella in their questionnaire responses, emphasizing both her professional development work with young faculty and her “stay out of the way” attitude with faculty who are doing their jobs well already. The positive questionnaire responses were consistent with many positive comments about DiBella offered to the external researchers during their many interactions with the faculty, typically, comments that were not solicited by the researchers but simply offered in passing (e.g., positive comments by teachers about how DiBella had worked with them to improve their classroom management). The external researchers were struck that over the course of the study, they did not hear one negative remark from anyone about the school’s administrators.

DiBella knows her teachers extremely well. In conversations with the external observers, she provided brief profiles of each teacher’s strengths and weaknesses.

DiBella acts quickly when she detects that things are amiss at PSM. For example, when she learned that an algebra class was having great difficulties, she worked with the teacher in charge of

the class to change the delivery of the curriculum so that better outcomes would be obtained in the immediate future. Such day-to-day and week-to-week decision making complements her decisions about the curriculum in the long term. Thus, in deciding on a reading curriculum for the elementary grades, DiBella also made certain that the curriculum was carried out as intended. That meant convincing some teachers who preferred other methods of teaching to get on board with the new approach. The external researchers noted that the new curriculum had been fully implemented in the kindergarten and Grade 1 classes, which was the intent for the 2002–2003 school year. The plan was to put the curriculum in place throughout the rest of the elementary school in the 2003–2004 school year.

DiBella looks to research evidence for guidance in decision making about the school, consistent with her teacher education that emphasized evidence-based teaching. Thus, her efforts to encourage teachers to praise students for specific achievements were informed by her reading of the academic motivation literature, especially the writings of Jere Brophy (e.g., Brophy, 1981). Also, the reading program she selected for the elementary school is one of the most evidence-based programs on the market.

DiBella is also the chief disciplinarian in the school. The most serious behavioral violations come to her attention, and they are attended to quickly. She confronts potentially serious situations head on, before they can get out of control. For example, to send the message that there is no chance of hiding drugs in the school, DiBella has the police canine unit brought into the school unannounced several times a year. At a home basketball game, it became apparent that fans from the opponent school wanted to start a fight during the game. DiBella stopped the game and evacuated the gym.

In addition to the president and principal, the school has directors for the lower, middle, and high schools. These directors are very visible, constantly dropping into classes.

Dedicated and accountable teachers. Many student and faculty responses to the questionnaire included some mention of teacher dedication as important in the success of the school. Thus, students described teachers as “dedicated” and “caring,” consistent with Noddings’s (1984) vision of effective teachers. There were many mentions in the student questionnaire responses of teacher availability to assist students before, during, and after school, consistent with our observations that teachers were available and did provide support before, during, and after the school day—for example, even in the lunch room and on the run between classes. One of the most striking observations of the external researchers, which was consistent with the conclusion that teachers are dedicated, was that most teachers were on task every minute they were with a class, often teaching from the moment students entered the door and continuing to interact with students meaningfully as they departed for their next class. Teachers’ enthusiastic willingness to stay after school and to come to school to do Saturday tutoring was very striking to the external observers. All comments about these after-hours efforts offered to the observers by the faculty were positive, with teachers often suggesting to students that they should come for the supplemental, after-hours instruction.

The teachers know their students well and work with them to achieve goals. After school hours, they take students to activities. For example, the school choirs appeared often in Chicago and surrounding communities. The Lego team and students participat-

ing in the Model U.N. were chaperoned by faculty. The teachers also work with the students for charitable causes. For example, a history teacher in charge of the National Honor Society organized several fund-raisers to support the organization Doctors Without Borders.

The teachers welcome contact with the families of their students. For example, every day, there were lots of positive discussions between teachers and parents in the first-floor corridor as parents came to pick up students at the end of the school day.

A theme that ran through many faculty comments on the survey was that the faculty worked like a team, with each other, the students, the administration, and the parents, consistent with the relational trust identified by Bryk and Schneider (2002) as occurring in effective schools. In particular, the external observers were very struck by the high degree of camaraderie among the faculty, evident in the faculty dining area, as grade-level teams coordinated their days, and at celebratory events.

Consistent with some organizational theoretical perspectives on school improvement (MacIver, Reuman, & Main, 1995), DiBella has put in a vigorous accountability system for teachers, which includes multiple observations each year by the principal; the directors of the lower, middle, and high schools; and the heads of the academic departments at the high school level. These visits are to assess whether a teacher is effective with respect to delivery of the curriculum and classroom management. The external researchers were struck that all members of the faculty whom they observed to be underperforming relative to the school's expectations were not invited to return to the school for the next school year.

Well-behaved students. The behavioral expectations are well known to PSM students, published in the school folder that is distributed to students, as are the potential consequences up to and including expulsion for serious and/or repeated offenses. The students are reminded constantly about these expectations. For example, when the external researchers walked with the principal, she often mentioned minor violations of the dress code to students (e.g., a shirt not tucked into pants). So did teachers. What was striking, however, was that invariably, many warnings were given before there was any official sanction, except when a student committed a serious offense, such as plagiarism. That is, despite the clear rules, PSM is not a punitive environment. Indeed, it is far less punitive than many classrooms the external researchers have encountered in their studies of classrooms over the past decade (see Dolezal et al., 2003).

The external observers noted that formal discipline was fairly rare, confirmed in the information reported to the North Central accreditation team. In that report, PSM detailed that from 1997–2000, only 26% of students had been given detentions for behavioral violations, with most detained for tardiness in arriving at a class. Only 10% of the students each year have more than one infraction. Only about 2% of students each year are punished for serious violations (e.g., fighting, cutting class).

The external observers never observed student behavior that was out of control at PSM. The most serious situation witnessed by the external observers was a girl who refused to work quietly on an assignment and, as a consequence, received a detention. The entire incident lasted only a couple of minutes, with classroom life continuing as usual once the written notice of detention had been served on the student. The external observers agreed that PSM students were much better behaved than students they had ob-

served in other school settings. In their survey responses, many of the teachers attributed the success of the school in part to the discipline policy and the exclusion from the school of students who might be behaviorally disruptive. They noted that it made for a safe environment and one where the focus could be on academics rather than on dealing with misbehavior. In fact, despite the rules, the external observers saw upbeat, happy classrooms and mostly positive interactions between teachers and students.

Families. Families seek out PSM because of its reputation as “The School That Works” (see the school’s Web site at <http://www.psm.k12.il.us/>). As the director of the high school put it, “These kids and their family buy into the notion that minorities can get ahead through education,” a sentiment consistent with a long history of African American confidence in education as a liberating and empowering force (J. Anderson, 1988; Perry, 2003b; Weinberg, 1977). It is also consistent with some data collected during the school’s North Central accreditation review. About 61% of the students reported that they and their parents chose PSM because of its reputation, with 78% also citing the school’s outstanding college preparatory program as a motivation for them attending the school.

Much correspondence goes home with students, reflecting the school’s belief that many PSM parents care deeply about their children’s academic development, want to help, and can cooperate with the school to promote achievement. This is consistent with research documenting how parents of cultural minority students often contribute substantially to their children’s academic development (see, e.g., Compton-Lilly, 2003; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995).

Parents sign off on their student’s agenda, which is a listing of assignments and a recording of recent grades. When students miss homework or do poorly on tests, letters go home from the teachers. There are mandatory parent–teacher conferences when teachers feel they are needed. For especially serious academic deficiencies or behavioral infractions, parents meet with the principal. When parents have difficulties meeting the financial obligations of sending a student to PSM, they meet with Adams, the president and founder of the school.

Parents are often invited to the school to witness their student’s achievements—for example, when a student receives an award at an honors assembly or participates in a class poetry slam. Parents also attend concerts, plays, and other events produced by students at the school, with large crowds at such events. There is the daily mixing of teachers and parents at student pick-up in the afternoon. From time to time, the school hosts special events aimed at parents (e.g., a Saturday afternoon presentation about how parents can support their children’s academic development).

Like many schools serving African American students, PSM is pervaded by a strong spiritual feeling (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Hilliard & Amankwatia, 2003; Irvine & Foster, 1996; Lantieri, 2001). No one can witness the morning prayer, a religion class, or the prayers in assemblies and graduation without the sense that the students and their families take faith very seriously.

That said, school officials are also aware that many families of PSM students have little time for their children, with their energies directed at making enough money to survive. Although a private school puts financial demands on all of its clients, there were definitely some families at PSM who were already overwhelmed

by demands on them, with the additional pressures from PSM too great a burden, resulting in the departure of their children from the school.

Donors. The school attracts more than \$3,000,000 in external support a year, with these funds permitting annual per-pupil expenditures approximately equal to the per-pupil expenditures in the Chicago public school system while allowing for the lowest private school tuition in the greater Chicago area. The donors include individuals and corporations. These funds support everything from capital improvement (e.g., renovation of the building) to scholarships. The external researchers were impressed that often they ran into donors in the school, with it being obvious that the administration kept these individuals informed about the school's needs and how the funds they provided permitted the school to serve students well.

Alumni who have made it. The external researchers also kept running into alumni at the school, from recent graduates now in college to older graduates now in professional school or working in a profession. Several alumni were members of the faculty. Whenever an external researcher encountered a PSM alum, the same story eventually was told to the researcher. It boils down to this: A PSM education provides the full range of knowledge, skills, and know-how that a high school graduate needs to be admitted to and do well in college. The story was always accompanied by anecdotes about how tough PSM had seemed, with the alumni emphatic that the demanding environment prepared them well for college and life.

Instruction Supporting High and Meaningful Academic Achievement

Although academic demands are high, there are many supports to promote student academic achievement (Strage, Tyler, Rohwer, & Thomas, 1987). One of the most salient is that all students have agendas (i.e., planning books) with homework assignments recorded in them. If a student does not complete homework, after-school homework club is required. If a student is absent, work is sent home with the expectation that it will be completed.

One of the ways that the demanding PSM in-class testing regimen (i.e., frequent tests in every class at every level) is made tolerable is that the teachers provide a lot of information about what will be on the tests, a factor that undoubtedly also contributes to student success on tests (see Broekkamp, 2003, for a thorough review). During visits to classrooms, the external observers witnessed many reviews, often driven by review sheets. In some classes, there were quizzes before tests were given, with the quizzes containing similar (or even the same) questions as the eventual exam. Teachers told students to study the review sheets and previous quizzes in preparation for exams. Math teachers urged students to practice exactly the kinds of problems that would be on the test; science teachers told students to practice recalling factual information that would be covered on upcoming tests; social studies teachers urged students to go over and over the review questions assigned in class. Such effort has great potential to pay off at PSM, for most exams are aligned with information considered essential by the teachers, with such information covered in previous reviews and quizzes. In short, there is careful thinking throughout the school about what is essential content, with that represented prominently in study aids and exams.

There also is much written feedback on homework and quizzes and much discussion in classes about what students have done wrong on quizzes and how errors can be corrected. The external observers were impressed by how often teachers went over exams that had been returned, providing students with much information about how to avoid the same errors in the future, consistent with the recommendations in the learning literature about how to do academic feedback so that it is effective (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991). The teachers also worked hard to reduce anxiety about exams, for example, consistently sending the message that students would be ready if they studied the material that was flagged as important. The teachers made certain students knew that their grades were not entirely a function of exam performance. Thus, one external observer watched as a teacher completed the review for an exam by asking the students not to panic, reminding them that if they did do poorly on the test, they could make it up with a project. These efforts make sense in light of what is known about how to treat exam anxiety (Tuncay, 2003).

There is excellent materials support for learning at PSM, including the technology labs and the attractive library, with most students borrowing books from the library. There are also collections of good books in most of the classrooms. Most are dog-eared collections, for students read the books in their classroom libraries. The science classrooms have equipment for demonstrations. The arts also are well supported, with the school owning a large collection of band instruments and plenty of sheet music for both band and chorus. In art class, the students have the supplies they need to create ambitious projects, whether doing charcoal drawings, painting, or sculpting. The art classroom resembles a professional studio.

For students who have substantial academic difficulties, there is after-school tutoring, as well as Saturday tutoring from 9:00 a.m. to noon, all done by the faculty. If a student's difficulties are so severe that she or he fails a course, PSM offers a summer school that permits students to catch up. The summer school enrolls about 200 students on average.

Finally, an important source of support is the students themselves, with the external observers often seeing students providing assistance to one another before school, at lunch, and in the computer lab. Students who had Internet access at night openly discussed with one another the PSM homework chat rooms! There is a huge support network for PSM students when they struggle academically.

In summary, there are many ways that the school provides help for students to learn what they need to learn and to do the tasks that they need to do to succeed at the school. Much of this effort is the direct result of hard work by the faculty, who align instruction, reviews, and exams; provide tutoring; and make certain that students know how to use the technology and library resources available to them.

An emphasis on understanding. In almost every class observed, there was substantial emphasis on understanding rather than low-level learning. The PSM teachers insisted that students be thoughtful, that they process material deeply, with most of this processing occurring in discussions. This is significant because there is a growing literature establishing that there is higher achievement in classrooms where understanding is demanded (e.g., through extensive discussion; see, e.g., Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Knapp & Associates, 1995).

For example, when the kindergarten students studied plants, they read about them, and they grew them, with conversations in class relating the results of their experiences growing plants to the growth of plants as covered in a big book about plant growth that they had previously read and discussed. As kindergarten students did addition problems with manipulatives, the teacher reminded them, "You are going to have to tell how you got the answer."

Similarly, the external observers witnessed students in first grade construct and use concept maps to guide their creative writing. After sounding out a word, Grade 1 students often explained why they were certain the word was being read correctly.

As the Grade 3 students studied states of matter—including melting, evaporation, condensation, and freezing—they also covered conduction and convection of heat. These concepts were illustrated by experiments (e.g., heating water, watching the steam rise, propelling a balloon upward).

As the fourth grade studied body systems, students reflected on many possibilities (e.g., how the excretory system is like the exhaust system of a car, why it makes sense that arteries rather than veins bring blood to the kidneys, what happens if a person loses a kidney). The discussions about the function of the excretory system were lively, with students offering and reflecting on a variety of potential answers as part of constructing their understandings of excretion.

The fifth grade's introduction to legal procedure included a reader's theater production of the trial of Dorothy for the murder of the Wicked Witch of the West. The trial concluded with students having to decide whether Dorothy was innocent or guilty, providing rationales for their decisions. The judge in the case was a real lawyer who, after the play was concluded, conducted a question and answer session with the students about what lawyers do. These same fifth graders performed an interpretive version of *Macbeth* as their class play, constructing an understanding of it during rehearsals, culminating in a production in front of an audience. In sum, in classroom after classroom, elementary students are very actively involved as part of learning, from cooperative discussion to reflections on material covered in text to doing dramatizations that are much more than reading the words of a script.

Even during basal-driven social studies and science lessons, the middle school teachers demand that students think about content at a high level. In class after class, the external observers listened to discussions where teachers demanded not just that students know the facts but that they be able to explain the facts (e.g., "How far is 40 light years from Earth, really?" "Why do we say that looking at galaxies is like looking at ancient history?").

At the high school level, the emphasis on understanding is even more salient. Thus, the external observers watched government classes prepare for a mock trial, with much discussion about why the various players in a trial do what they do. The observers also watched history classes where the discussion focused on distilling pages of text into the most important points that should be remembered—the points that explained the big events of history (e.g., World War I as caused by imperialism, nationalism, militarism, and alliances). The external observers witnessed the current events class preparing for a presentation at a national Model U.N. meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, with the class's goal being to get on the floor the seven most important points that South Africa would want discussed at the meeting. The class hour was consumed with

thoughtful review of everything that had been learned about South Africa. Calculus at PSM is definitely a reflective experience, with the class always discussing various ways that problems can be attacked, explaining alternative approaches, and considering the advantages and disadvantages of one tactic versus another. Upper level high school classes especially resembled college-level seminar classes.

As part of encouraging understandings, external observers noted that PSM teachers often made connections across content areas, including connections to classes they did not teach. Aoko Omwony-Hope, the art teacher, is masterful at this. Thus, before the middle school students drew animals, they learned about their anatomies. When students were covering DNA in science class, they constructed paper sculptures of DNA in the art class. As part of one art class, Omwony-Hope had students do PowerPoint presentations about famous artists, requiring them to research the artist on the Internet and construct the PowerPoints by pasting in images retrieved from the Internet. Students then presented the PowerPoint presentation to the class. In that single hour, teaching integrated history, art, technology, and oral communications. The students were very engaged as they developed their PowerPoints and excited as they presented them. In sum, active learning, so heavily favored in the educational psychological literature, is present everywhere at PSM (see, e.g., Wiske, 1997).

Scaffolding. When curriculum and instruction are demanding, an important mechanism for assuring that learning, achievement, and understanding actually occur is teacher scaffolding of students (Hogan & Pressley, 1997; Rogoff, 1990; Wood et al., 1976). When teachers scaffold, they monitor individual students to determine who needs help. Then, they provide just enough assistance so that the student can make progress on his or her own, allowing the student to do so. The external observers saw such scaffolding often. The result was that students seldom seemed frustrated.

For example, extensive scaffolding occurred during every art class. Omwony-Hope, the art teacher, required students to take on very challenging projects (e.g., colored drawings of animals, clay sculptures of hands and feet). Student success in producing the art demanded was much more the rule than the exception, however. One reason the students were so successful was Omwony-Hope's scaffolded approach. Thus, before the students tried to produce a large drawing of an animal, they practiced copying sketches of animals, which included explicit instruction by the teacher about how to do so. When students had difficulty doing such copying, Omwony-Hope would intervene and provide additional assistance, perhaps even changing the assignment. For example, when most of the middle school students were having problems copying flowers, she reduced the assignment from copying 60 flowers to 20.

When Omwony-Hope sensed the students were ready to move forward, they went to the next step. Thus, after copying many animals, each student decided on a particular animal they wanted to portray in a large drawing. Omwony-Hope had many pictures of animals that students could use as models. All along the way, she moved from student to student, making suggestions as to how to proceed next, explaining to each student just what the student needed to know at the moment (e.g., "You can get the streaked effect in the color by mixing the brown and black slowly like this"), reflecting with each student on some aspect of the project ("Is that really the shade of brown you want?"). Instruction in Omwony-Hope's art class was one minilesson after another.

Part of scaffolding is creating student confidence. Omwony-Hope is masterful at motivating her students to be jazzed about art, to believe they can do it. As she monitored student progress, Omwony-Hope constantly reassured individual students when they lacked confidence in their own work (e.g., “That looks like a rose”; “No, it’s fine”; “What’s giving you difficulty? What I see here is fine”). When a student made good progress, Omwony-Hope would ask the student to walk around the class and show his or her progress to the other students (e.g., “Show the really neat foot you are sculpting”). When Omwony-Hope returned art projects, she reflected on why she liked them to the class. So, when the sculpted hands were returned, she remarked about one, “There is just something very aesthetic about this one, and art is about aesthetics. This one is just very enjoyable to me.” For another, she observed, “This is very believable.” As she passed the work back, she urged students to value their creations, suggesting that if they did not want to keep their sculpture of a hand, they should give it to someone as a present.

Encouragement of self-regulation. An important point with respect to the scaffolding is that the PSM teachers, like effective teachers more generally (see, e.g., Pressley, Dolezal, et al., 2003; Pressley, Roehrig et al., 2003), are determined that students be self-regulated as soon as possible. Thus, the scaffolding is intended to provide just enough support to get the students on track, then working on their own.

Teachers aspire for students to work hard all the time, largely directing themselves. Most warnings given to students involve them not acting in a self-regulated fashion, for example, not doing their work or acting out in class. The teachers made very clear in class after class that students are expected to participate in a polite and enthusiastic manner, do their class work and homework, and be exemplary in their conduct at all times (i.e., obeying school rules even when teachers are not monitoring). PSM teachers often noted when students were behaving in a self-regulated fashion, for example, remarking, “I like the way X is. . . .”

Summary. The academic demands at PSM are very great, beginning with the expectations that every minute of class will be used well and that students will not be spoon-fed but rather encouraged to understand material and take charge of their own learning and achievement. This is possible because the teaching is massively supportive, including lots of monitoring and feedback, most conspicuously through scaffolding of individual students in class as they work at tasks that might be daunting in the absence of support at the start. Teachers clearly signal what must be learned (e.g., through reviews and practice quizzes). There is substantial out-of-class help from teachers (e.g., at tutoring sessions) and classmates (e.g., in the cafeteria in the morning).

Intentional Efforts to Motivate Students

From a psychological perspective, what was most salient to the observers was that PSM as a school and its teachers do much to motivate the students. The school uses virtually every motivation mechanism validated by educational psychologists (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

Positive expectations. In class after class, the external observers witnessed teachers telling students that they could accomplish their academic goals (e.g., be well prepared for the next test, present an outstanding concert). A theme that was prominent in the

teachers’ questionnaire responses was that the faculty expected much of the students, with these expectations going far in making the school successful.

Caring teachers and administrators. There is great pedagogical caring (Noddings, 1984). Thus, the teachers strive to provide opportunities that are consistent with student needs and desires. For example, after the students told the middle school science teacher they wanted to learn more about anatomy, this teacher brought in two medical students to give a presentation. Teachers at PSM listen to their students and value their opinions highly. On several occasions, the teachers thanked the students for helping them to see class material from a new perspective (e.g., “I love learning. Thanks for sharing”).

Perhaps most salient is that students from kindergarten through high school freely talk with teachers about their lives. The external observers heard bits and pieces of many conversations between teachers and students, during which the students related happenings in their lives that were important to them, with teachers listening intently and responding in a friendly manner. The external observers witnessed many very personal relationships between students and faculty that probably motivated students. For example, a math teacher took an interest in one of the best math students, working hard with him to assure he made wise choices with respect to colleges. The high school freshman guidance counselor had strong, personal relationships with many members of the class, with it being clear that many of those students did not want to let this member of the faculty down.

Praise. The external observers observed in classroom after classroom that students were praised for participating, especially for participating well. Almost every page of field notes contains comments about teachers giving positive feedback (e.g., “Very good, you. . . .,” “Excellent work,” and “I like the way you are. . . .”), consistent with the principal’s emphasis on praise, especially praise informing students very clearly what they have done right (see, e.g., Brophy, 1981, 1985).

Positive atmosphere. Praise was just part of the upbeat tone in most classes that were observed. The teachers generally were friendly with their students, often joking with them or reminding them of good times with them (e.g., on field trips, at school picnics and other events).

Work at PSM is anything but drudgery. For example, every week the kindergarten classes met together to sing, read, and listen to stories. The tone was celebratory as students worked on their phonics and understanding of stories that had been read. Often, teachers turned work into games (e.g., bingo requiring students to make change). At the high school, there definitely was a gamelike quality to much of what the students did—for example, preparing to compete against other high schools in the mock trial competition and getting ready for the Model U.N., which involves high school students from across the country. The high school students were absolutely determined to do well in such competitions and prepared hard for these events. (Such events seem to be especially inspiring to urban African American students; Hilliard & Amankwatia, 2003.)

Effort attributions. The message is everywhere at the school that students can control their own academic destinies, in particular, that they can achieve in school by working hard. To use Weiner’s (1979) terms, students are encouraged to attribute their successes to effort and their failures to lack of effort. Forty-one

percent of the student responses to the questionnaire included ways PSM pushed students to achieve excellence (e.g., academic expectations, general beliefs/inspirations, challenges). One student remarked, "Our teachers uplift the spirits of students to help them know that they can do anything if they put their heart, mind, and soul into it."

Over the course of a school day, students hear lots of comments implying that success follows effort, comments like the following: "You are doing a nice job. You all are working so hard this morning." The teachers clearly show they value student efforts by providing opportunities for improvement. In one class, the teacher told the students, "Yesterday's class was not our best effort, but there is plenty of time to make it up." In a reference to the homework, this same teacher noted that the class had not done well on the homework, proclaiming, "Let's get back and improve on it."

The school's mission statement, which is recited every morning, is emphatic that PSM students are capable of achieving by exerting effort:

We believe in the creation of inspired lives produced by the miracle of hard work. We are not frightened by the challenges of reality, but believe that we can change our conception of this world and our place within it. So we work, plan, build and dream—in that order. We believe that one must earn the right to dream. Our talent, discipline and integrity will be our contribution to a new world. Because we believe that we can take this place, this time and this people and make a better place, a better time and a better people. With God's help, we will either find a way or make one!

Cooperative learning. Much cooperative learning was observed. In class after class, teachers had students work in small groups as they wrote reports, created art projects, and attempted to answer challenging questions posed by the teacher, questions that required some discussion to answer. Students cooperated to prepare for big events, such as the Model U.N., presentation of plays, and preparing the yearbook. The students definitely were accustomed to working together, with cooperative learning often observed by the external observers to be very productive, leading to impressive outcomes.

Tangible rewards. The PSM teachers explicitly reinforce appropriate behavior and achievement a great deal. In several classrooms, there were point systems set up as rewards for good behavior, with the points prominently displayed in the room and students aware of prizes associated with accumulating large numbers of points (e.g., extra recess, a pizza party, and so on).

At the middle school, there was a "PRIDE" program, with students earning points through good and attentive behavior. The goal was to earn enough points to be able to attend a picnic at the end of the school year.

Good behavior is acknowledged at the high school level as well. For example, near the end of the school year, there was a poster listing all the students who never had to attend homework club (i.e., after-school sessions to make up missing homework) during the year. In many classrooms, A and A+ papers are displayed on bulletin boards.

The honor roll is prominently placed in many classrooms. In spring 2003, 190 students made the honor roll, with each who did so receiving shares of stock as a reward (i.e., one share for making B honor roll, two for A honor roll, and three for straight-A honor roll). Graduating seniors who keep up their grades during the last

quarter and, thus, make honor roll receive a check (\$50 for B honor roll, \$100 for A honor roll) at the graduation ceremony.

Whenever a PSM student achieves in a really extraordinary way, there is dramatic public notice. Thus, the banner awarded to PSM students for good sportsmanship in Chicago high school athletics hangs prominently on the first floor, just outside the office. When a PSM student won the city playwriting contest, the honor was announced in the next morning's announcements and often after that. In fact, there was a bulletin-board display in the main stairwell that summarized the achievement, with this bulletin board remaining in place for more than a semester.

The school's outstanding standardized test results are summarized in charts, which are posted in every classroom in the building. The posting of test data is definitely positive feedback (i.e., the principal, teachers, and students are all obviously pleased with the overall standardized test scores), although the school also sends the message to teachers and students that even higher scores should be possible. This is consistent with a general feedback strategy that was observed at PSM, with the teacher praising a youngster for accomplishment but immediately indicating a way that students could do even better. Thus, when students received test grades back, teachers would praise B and B+ grades, with that praise then followed by some indication about what the student should do to earn an A grade (e.g., attend optional tutoring sessions after school or on Saturday).

There are some tangible rewards at PSM that are very unique to the school, such as the stocks for making honor roll and the SOAL program, which is a huge incentive for students to work hard so that they can attend the summer experience of their choice. The biggest prizes, however, come at graduation. Donors to the school provide very sizable scholarships for some PSM students to go to college. At the graduation ceremony for the class of 2003, four such scholarships of more than \$150,000 were announced. Another one for \$100,000 was awarded. Two for \$20,000 and three for \$10,000 were conferred, as were a number of other cash awards. In addition, it was made clear during the ceremony that the school's staff had once again worked tirelessly with colleges admitting PSM students to obtain financial aid packages that would permit students to attend college. Graduating from PSM is very rewarding for students.

Community celebrations of achievement. There is continuous celebration of achievement at the school. For example, when the principal announces the honor rolls at the honors assembly, students make an honor-roll walk across the stage, with the entire school applauding enthusiastically. When the straight-A honor roll is announced, thunderous applause continues for a full minute after all of the straight-A honorees make it to the stage to stand with the school administrators. No championship athletic team at any high school gets a more boisterous ovation from its peers!

Smaller achievements also are celebrated, however. Classmates consistently offer congratulations when anyone does well on a test, paper, or project. The external observers saw this in many different classes. Then, there are whole-class achievements. One was the Grade 7 poetry slam. The seventh-grade students spent a great deal of time on poetry, including the writing of it. The slam was a two-period celebration of the students' poetry. All students were at least a little dramatic in their presentations; some were very dramatic. There were posters throughout the school inviting faculty to drop by during the slam, and some faculty did so, as did

some parents. As each student completed a poem, there was applause. The teacher simply beamed with enthusiasm throughout the students' presentations, with it being obvious that she was genuinely proud of what they had accomplished.

PSM students often perform to applause. For example, both choral and orchestral groups have experienced enthusiastic receptions from audiences composed of fellow students, family members, or residents of greater Chicago (i.e., the musical groups perform at events throughout the city). In 2001, the school published a four-color, professional-looking book of poetry and visual art created by PSM students. In a graduation-like ceremony at the end of the year, the kindergarteners celebrated their 90th-percentile performance on the standardized reading test, as well as other accomplishments, during their "Kindergarten Celebration," which was an enthusiastic event where the kindergarten parents acknowledged their children's progress with prolonged clapping.

The greatest applause in the school, however, is given to seniors as they are admitted to college. Thus, in spring 2003, the fact that 52% of the seniors would be attending Tier 1 colleges was announced everywhere, from the school's Web site to letters home to morning announcements to a flyer given every visitor to the school. One external researcher counted five mentions of the Tier 1 admissions percentage during a one-day visit in late April.

The final celebration for PSM students is the graduation, described by one faculty member as "the best Sunday of the year." The 2003 graduation was boisterously loud from beginning to end, punctuated by the crowd of parents, family friends, faculty, and fellow students cheering the many accomplishments of students that were mentioned during the event. As the seniors made their way to the auditorium in regalia, the noise level heightened to deafening. The faculty, also in regalia, met the seniors outside the auditorium and cheered them on, much as fans at a football game cheer players coming out of the tunnel. Cheering by families began as the students entered the auditorium, marching in to a version of "Pomp and Circumstance" that was prefaced by the "Theme From 'Rocky'." Throughout the ceremony, whenever a student achievement was announced, there was loud cheering, with the loudest coming from PSM class of 2003 classmates and other PSM students attending the graduation, who made it very clear that they were celebrating each other's success. As one benefactor remarked while walking out of the auditorium at the conclusion of the graduation, "Before encountering PSM, I've never seen this kind of enthusiastic demonstration at a school except for an athletic event." Neither had researcher Pressley, who was in attendance.

Encouraging constructive possible selves. PSM urges students to construct healthy visions about what they might become, healthy possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Thus, the kindergarten teachers and the principal sometimes referred to the kindergarten students as the class of 2015. The message was clear: "You are going to graduate from high school." More than that, however, throughout their time at PSM, students are constantly reminded that this is a college preparatory school. One of the fifth-grade teachers referred to her students as doctors, sending the message that they someday will be physicians, professors, or other accomplished professionals. At the high school level, there is more talk of college and increasing input about how to get into college and how to think like college students. For example, in one high school science class, the teacher praised the students for their

collegelike thinking as they reviewed for a test, "Now we are talking college chemistry. That's a really good question."

The students are reminded often that all of PSM's graduates for the past quarter century have been admitted to college, that the goal of the school is to get students into top-tier colleges and universities, that PSM students will be successful college students. As one PSM alum, a young attorney, remarked to several current students, "I could deal with college after the pressure at St. Mel's, where I learned time management and how to deal with major homework. In fact, my first year in college, I coasted." Such individuals make very concrete for current PSM students that success in college is possible for a PSM graduate.

In fact, PSM students encounter many African American professionals at PSM. First, they see African Americans as some of their teachers, including the PSM graduates who are members of the faculty. In addition, there are the African American authors, politicians, and television celebrities who think enough of the school to visit or make a visible contribution.

In class discussions, teachers point out the value of class material in relationship to future opportunities. For example, a high school math teacher told the students, "You learn mathematics to solve problems. These are the people in this world that make all the money. They are problem solvers." Likewise, a middle school teacher communicated the importance of speaking skills to an upcoming class presentation by telling the students, "If you were on an interview and minced your words . . . it undermines your confidence and you might not get the job." After a student expressed his hopes of playing professional basketball, a different middle school teacher told him, "The people that make money after they play on the court have that MBA. You cheat yourself if you don't have that degree." The message was clear and repeated: "You can, you should, and you will attain higher education."

The external researchers concluded that PSM students definitely have "effort optimism." That is, they believe that their efforts at school will pay off eventually with jobs, in contrast to many African American teens who lack such optimism (see, e.g., Ogbu, 1994). PSM students have healthy possible selves.

Encouraging students to avoid negative possible selves. The positive possible selves encouraged at PSM contrast with the actual selves of many who live on the west side of Chicago. As PSM students come to school, they pass such people every day, permitting students to experience the reality of very negative lives that might be their lives if not for the education they are receiving. That is, they get to see potential negative possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), futures to avoid at all cost.

Adams, in particular, is emphatic that students have to get "the welfare mentality" out of their minds (P. J. Adams, personal communication, January 2003). Thus, he tells students they should not depend on affirmative action but, rather, should work hard and be so good that "your qualifications demand that you receive a job" (P. J. Adams, personal communication, January 2003). This philosophy of earning one's way permeates PSM, with Adams often commenting that African Americans need to develop self-respect, which comes through hard work and legitimate achievement. Thus, although the teachers are encouraged to provide specific praise to students, several of the teachers made clear in their questionnaire responses that praise was earned at PSM. As

one teacher stated, students do not get anything here because “it is owed” to them.

Developing informed pride about African American heritage and life. The school continually sends the message that people of African and African American heritage have achieved great things. For example, in the first-floor corridor, there is a display, “O, Write My Name: American Portraits of Harlem Heroes,” which is a collection of striking black and white photos with brief biographies of individuals such as Paul Robeson, Bessie Smith, Richard Wright, W. E. B. Dubois, Marian Anderson, and Joe Louis, among others. In addition, there are pictures and biographies of many prominent African Americans in a number of classrooms in the building.

Martin Luther King Day 2003 was special at PSM compared with other high schools in Chicago. PSM students were in school that day, consistent with Paul Adam’s belief that King would have wanted it that way. There was an assembly that provided a celebration of King’s life and offered students an opportunity to reflect on civil rights and King’s contribution to American life.

Students read a great deal of literature about African and African American life. The external observers saw lessons on Chinua Achebe’s (1995) *Things Fall Apart*, L. H. Anderson’s (2000) *Fever 1793* (which includes an African American protagonist), Ann Cameron’s (2001) *Gloria’s Way* (which has an African American girl as the main character), H. G. Robinet’s (2001) *Children of the Fire* (which features an African American protagonist), Richard Wright’s (1998) *Black Boy*, and W. D. Myers’s (1996) *The Glory Field* (which portrays the lives of members of an African American family from 1753 to 1994). The external observers witnessed many discussions around such literature, discussions that often connected to students’ lives as African Americans. One kindergarten class, for example, partnered with their second-grade reading buddies to celebrate Black History Month. Posters outside the kindergarten class proudly exhibited the 5–6 lines of writing about Rosa Parks that the class had composed as a group.

The school library includes a number of titles pertaining to, written by, and written about African Americans. There is always a display of books in the library that connect with the African American experience. A particularly notable book on display was J. G. Basker’s (2002) *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems About Slavery, 1660–1810*. The book clearly had been well used, explained in part by the fact that the editor, J. G. Basker, had presented an assembly at the school. Assemblies at PSM, in fact, often depict African American life through art. For example, the external observers watched a play presented to the middle school students, *We Built This Nation, Too*. The play depicted African American women who have made significant contributions to American life (e.g., C. J. Walker and Harriet Tubman).

The fine arts teachers also make African American connections. For example, students in the choruses heard and thought about music that is important in African American history, with the choruses including gospel in their repertoire. This permitted the choral conductor to provide some connection to important African American composers (e.g., Horace Clarence Boyer). The chorus also sang works that somehow incorporated African American experience (e.g., a musical version of Langston Hughes’s poem “In Time of Silver Rain”). Much of the student-produced visual art reflected African and African American experience.

Summary. PSM administrators and teachers go to great lengths to motivate students. The message is everywhere that achievement in class today and in life tomorrow depends on effort.

Administrators, teachers, and other students explicitly reward achievement in a number of ways, from positive comments in passing to raucous celebrations of honors performance to large scholarships. An especially important understanding that is developed in students is that Blacks have made huge contributions to the country and the world, making clear that the world is waiting for the generation of African American students now in school and that efforts to learn what needs to be learned to participate fully in the larger society will pay off.

In short, PSM is determined to shape positive racial identities in students (see, e.g., Perry, 2003a; Tatum, 1997), including the understanding that educational achievement results in greater freedom and power (Perry, 2003a) and that being educated and achieving in school is not “acting White,” as some Blacks believe (see, e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; for commentary, see Harpalani, 2002). There is an important meta-message in the complete integration of African American experience and achievement in the larger curriculum: African American stories, music, and art are part of the stories, music, and art of America and the world.

Extensive Test Preparation

At PSM, standardized test scores are important, beginning with admission to the school. So is standardized test preparation, again beginning with admission to the school. For those who fail to achieve at the 25th percentile on the standardized admissions test, there is a 4-week course on test taking that is offered on Saturdays. Those students who manage to attain only a minimum admissions score (i.e., 25th to 35th percentiles) are required to attend summer school in preparation for fall enrollment.

The administration and faculty of the school are very aware that inner-city students often do not do well on standardized tests. They are also aware that high performance on such tests can go far in increasing the odds that a student will be admitted to a very good college. Their response is similar to that of many educators of groups at risk for poor test performance: They are explicitly teaching their students the test-taking skills they perceive the students need, including formal test-preparation courses aimed at preparing students for specific standardized tests (Chaleff & Toranzo, 2000; Firestone et al., 2002; Kulik, Bangert-Drowns, & Kulik, 1984; Kulik, Kulik, & Bangert, 1984; Messick & Jungeblut, 1981; Rothschild, 1990; Sesnowitz, Bernhardt, & Knain, 1982).

Preparation for teacher-made tests. As part of the preparation for standardized test taking, there are teacher-constructed, objective tests in every subject area (including the arts and physical education) at every grade level. Such testing begins in kindergarten, although there is a playfulness to the testing in kindergarten. For example, the kindergarten teachers gave huge hints as the students took their tests (e.g., “I think there could be more than two answers to the question about what plants need to grow”). In contrast, by the end of first grade, some of the exams really are like standardized tests with multiple-choice questions requiring completion of bubbles corresponding to answers. When Grade 1 students take their end of quarter tests, they do so seated row by row, and everyone really is quiet, looking only at their own paper. When Grade 1 students ask for help with items, the Grade 1

teachers give no hints, simply commenting that the teacher cannot help during a test.

By the middle elementary grades, the teachers emphasize that the students need to study to prepare for tests but that if they study hard, they can do well. Moreover, although the external observers saw no enforcement if kindergarten students talked or glanced at another paper during an exam, there was definite enforcement of such standards by the middle elementary grades. Furthermore, by middle school, the emphasis on exams is not just an end of the quarter event. At the middle school and high school levels, there was hardly a class period observed when exam performance and preparation were not mentioned, with frequent reflection on the importance of test grades. Thus, one week before a final exam, one teacher had each student write in her or his notebook the following: "As of today, my grade in science is _____. I realize that this represents 2/3 of my grade. Friday's final exam will be 1/3 of my fourth-quarter grade." Then, the teacher quietly gave each student her or his grade to fill in the blank, and as he did so, he gave a little pep talk about what their final grades could be if they did well on the final. This was followed by putting the class distribution of grades on the board, noting that a student with a B+ is just missing an A, making the point that the final exam could easily pull the grade up to an A or leave it in the B range. The teacher then reminded the students in the class about the after-school and Saturday tutoring and told them that he expected to see every one of them attend at least one of the tutoring sessions. These students heard comparable messages about the importance of studying for tests and for finals, in particular, in every one of their classes.

By high school, exams are very challenging, matching the demanding curricula the students experience. Thus, the students in biology took exams requiring subtle distinctions between biological concepts. The math tests definitely were not easy, typically filled with problems that were challenging to or impossible for most of the students just a few days before the exam.

Many of the in-class exams are multiple choice, requiring the same general test-taking skills as standardized tests. As middle school and high school teachers go over exams, often they point out similarities between the course exams and standardized tests. For example, the biology teacher put a question on a test that was similar to a previous quiz question but changed subtly so that the answer was different on the test compared with the quiz. The teacher used the occasion to make the point that test questions must be read carefully, that subtle differences can matter greatly. When the calculus teacher was covering a particular type of problem, he pointed out to the class that this type of problem always showed up on a math achievement test the class would be taking near the end of the year. That said, preparation for standardized testing went well beyond opportunistic coaching permitted by class tests.

Preparation for standardized tests. In addition to the admissions coaching, there is a one-semester test-preparation course at the sophomore and junior levels, which uses commercial test preparation materials (e.g., Princeton Review). For a \$50 fee, the school also offers an 18-hour preparation course for the ACT, which is over and above the 3-week course experience given to seniors as part of the regular curriculum that prepares them for the ACT and the SAT.

The most salient standardized test in the school is the Terra Nova evaluation. Everyone is aware when this testing approaches

(mid-spring), with references made to it in morning announcements, on bulletin boards, and in letters to parents. Teachers know that the summary data for their classes will be posted in many places, from outside the office to published reports distributed to parents and others interested in the school to the bulletin boards in their own classrooms. For senior students, the Terra Nova is especially important because graduation depends on passing at a 12th-grade level. For 8th graders to participate in the middle school graduation, they must achieve at a minimum 8th-grade level on the Terra Nova.

The teachers definitely make the students aware of the seriousness of this test as they prepare their students for it. Thus, the external observers witnessed a second-grade teacher going over Terra Nova practice questions with her students, concluding the exercise with a promise to do more such practice test questions the next day. She also had the students take home the practice questions to show their parents how the students were preparing for the test.

The most consistently salient teaching behavior intended to prepare students for standardized exams, however, pertained to vocabulary. The principal had made a point that vocabulary performances on standardized tests taken by the students were problematic and, thus, urged all teachers to emphasize vocabulary. The external observers noticed that the faculty followed through, with teachers at every grade level and in every subject area seeming to teach vocabulary at every opportunity. In many classes, whenever unfamiliar words were encountered, they were defined. Vocabulary was a centerpiece of review sheets, quizzes, and exams.

The school's monitoring of the test data is also very thorough so as to diagnose changes in instruction that should occur (e.g., the emphasis on vocabulary in response to low test performance on vocabulary). In fact, the North Central accreditation visit report included a great deal of commentary about actions taken by the school in light of analyses of the standardized test data. It noted that the administration and faculty spent a great deal of time thinking about the implications of standardized test data for their curricular planning.

At a more personal level, the principal often talks with individual students about their standardized test scores. For example, one morning, as the principal greeted students at the door, a middle grades elementary student came up to the principal and asked, "Have you seen my test scores yet?" In fact, the principal was well aware of the student's scores, entering into a brief discussion about how pleased she was with the student's reading score but how she wanted the student to work hard to bring the math score up. Such conversations are common for this principal, who seems to know in detail the test scores of every class and every student in the school and is determined to get everybody's test scores up—by urging individual students to try hard, setting a priority for teachers to prepare students for standardized tests, and directing students who are especially challenged by tests to special resources that might improve their test-taking skills (i.e., the test-preparation opportunities).

Mentoring College Admissions

Long before senior year, PSM students receive very concrete information about colleges, consistent with Levine and Nidiffer's (1996) finding that such mentoring is essential for many minority

students if they are to find their way to excellent colleges. Thus, there is much talk about college and specific colleges in the school, even in the lower school, with it not unusual for fourth and fifth graders to be joking about going to Harvard. Such talk continues in the middle school years. Once in high school, students take an annual May trip to local colleges. Students in Grades 9, 10, and 11 depart the school in a fleet of buses, each bus bound for one or two local colleges, including those as far off as Kalamazoo College and Purdue, which are several hours away from west Chicago. The college trip is intended to get students thinking concretely about postsecondary schools they might attend. There are also Saturday trips to colleges during the year, such as a February bus trip to the University of Wisconsin. A major thrust of the fall semester of senior year is completing five applications to colleges. PSM makes certain that every senior knows how to apply for college (and financial aid) and does so.

As acceptances come in, the school studies each student's situation carefully, with particular sensitivity to whether financial aid is sufficient. When it is not, PSM officials do what they can to make the case to the target college, with PSM having good person-to-person relationships with a number of colleges that receive its students. Then there are the special cases, for example, a young woman whose parents refused to complete financial aid forms, making university-based assistance impossible. In that situation, the leadership of the school worked quietly with a private donor to secure a scholarship for the student.

Special Events Supporting Academic Achievement

Every event and activity at PSM seem to support academics in some way, but there are also truly special events, such as assemblies to host outside cultural experiences (e.g., plays). From time to time, there are field trips to sample local cultural opportunities, from museums to unique faith institutions in the Chicago area (e.g., a trip to the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois).

PSM students participate in many plays, concerts, and athletic events. Such events are showcases, for PSM students are renowned for their accomplishments in the arts and athletics. Thus, the alumni basketball game near the end of the year reminds all that there have been a number of former PSM students who have gone on to play college basketball.

A very energizing activity is the SOAL summer program, intended to transport PSM students to learning environments they would not otherwise experience. There are a variety of SOAL camping experiences available, as well as wilderness excursions across the nation, from North Carolina Outward Bound to Santa Catalina Island, California, and abroad (e.g., Mexico). Students can visit and live in a number of foreign countries through the American Field Service program. Some students attend high-quality arts programs (e.g., Interlochen), and others take advantage of academic programs at a number of excellent universities, again distributed across the nation, from Brown to Stanford. Through a gift from a donor to the school, some of the very best students at PSM attend the Oxbridge Academic Program in England, which is operated at Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

Concluding Comments

The appendix summarizes the many factors that seem to us potentially to be contributing to the success of PSM as an institu-

tion that produces high achievement in students. First, as detailed in the appendix, PSM shares characteristics with other effective educational settings, as documented in the effective schools literature (e.g., Reynolds et al., 2002; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000): It has strong leadership. There are high expectations for student achievement and an emphasis on academics. The school is safe and orderly, despite its placement in a neighborhood that is neither. Students are evaluated regularly. Individual classrooms are well managed, with students spending most of their time on academic tasks.

A main motivation for this research, however, was the belief that we might spot some factors encouraging achievement that have not surfaced in the traditional school effectiveness literature, including some psychological factors. That occurred. Thus, second, the school has some characteristics that have been identified in recent research on classroom/school effectiveness, much of which was conducted within our research group. That is, PSM's dedicated teachers scaffold a great deal as they emphasize that students understand what they are learning. The administrators and teachers do much to motivate students, using mechanisms that have been validated in the educational psychology literature, and they encourage students to be self-regulated learners. There is great relational trust between the members of the school community. Mentoring of the students is salient.

Third, we identified some characteristics that have not been covered, or have not been identified prominently, in the previous school/teaching effectiveness literature. These features can be subdivided into unique human resources and other resources.

1. The most impressive human resource in the school is the students, who have been selected and then have done well in the PSM environment, meeting both behavioral and academic expectations. These hardworking students are impressive in many ways, including that they help one another with academics. They are taught by teachers who produce results and are held accountable for doing so. In addition to the students' own families, who provide financial and psychological support to the students, there is a larger PSM family of financial donors and supportive alumni who contribute what they can, including inspiration.

2. The other resources in part represent money spent well and in part represent smart instructional decision making. On the money spent well side, the school has a well-maintained physical plant that is filled with great facilities supporting a wide range of student learning. The school also develops and provides support for enrichment activities that touch many of its students, for example, the SOAL experience. With respect to instructional decision making, teachers make smart decisions about how to support their students' learning and accountability preparation, providing study guides and critical information about upcoming tests (including standardized tests and college admissions tests) as well as good feedback. The very long school day with supplementary instruction available before and after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer provides many learning and relearning opportunities, especially when one considers that just about every minute of the school day during the regular academic year is filled with teaching and learning.

Students are willing to work such long hours for years in part because of motivation that is uniquely intense at PSM: The motivational elements that seem unique to PSM include exceptionally boisterous and certain celebration of academic successes. The

school also does much to make certain students know that there is a bright future for them if they work hard and that they can contribute in the future in ways that will be applauded, consistent with an African American heritage of distinguished contributions to American life and the world. The school emphasizes that it is possible to avoid negative future selves, lifestyles that typify many denizens of west Chicago whom PSM students see daily during their commutes to and from school.

As a concluding reflection on factors in the appendix, the theory that emerges about this effective school is that many elements potentially contribute to its effectiveness, more than have been considered in the classic research on effective schools. On the one hand, it may be that these elements were present in the schools studied previously but went undetected. On the other hand, it may be that only a few of the elements in the appendix are really causing PSM to be effective. The research approach used here does not permit us to assess either possibility. What we do emphasize is that every element in the appendix seemed to be doing some good for at least some students in the eyes of the observers (e.g., instructional resources cited in the appendix all were being used with apparent benefit to the students, the motivating instruction seemed to have an effect in that students definitely had a can-do attitude with a very high proportion of the students transparently trying every day in every class). So, for the time being—until additional case studies of effective schools can be conducted using grounded theory methods that are as sensitive as those used here—our working hypothesis is that an effective school requires many different groups of individuals (i.e., students, parents, administrators, faculty, staff, alumni, donors) working cooperatively, substantial capital (i.e., a good building, sources of revenue), policies strongly supportive of high achievement (e.g., teacher accountability, strong academic emphasis), and instruction that makes sense on the basis of what is known through research about producing achievement. PSM has all of that, and now, it is time to find out if other effective schools do so, too.

Are there school- and classroom-level characteristics? An anonymous reviewer for the *Journal of Educational Psychology* suggested that one way to organize the results might be by characteristics at the school and classroom levels. Rather than doing that, we emphasize that everything that happens at the school does seem, in fact, to flow from a conceptualization at the top of the school. The administration expects a strong academic focus, a safe and orderly school, intensive instruction in every class with complete coverage of the set curriculum, and excellent classroom management as part of an overall motivating environment. A staff has been hired that can and wants to deliver such instruction or, at a minimum, wants to learn how to deliver such instruction. (We heard several stories of teachers who came to the school and learned much from DiBella about how to teach as expected at PSM.)

The administration has also worked with teachers to create a common vision of the school, one that definitely plays out in every classroom. So, rather than there being school-level and classroom-level characteristics, there, in fact, is a clear sense that this school is largely about excellence in the classroom, with that playing out as intense, academic, scaffolded teaching and learning across the school, in every class. To give one example, the school officials want the place to be motivating, and everywhere the observers turned, they saw teachers attempting to motivate students. As a

second example, the administration wants students to be prepared for standardized testing, with preparation for that occurring everywhere in the school. Quite striking to the observers was that the teachers seemed very much on board with respect to these expectations, with the PSM faculty quite convinced that the school's approach worked with "our kids," a phrase heard often. As one teacher remarked, "You either love the PSM approach or hate it." Clearly, the teachers who choose to stay love it, and they translate the school's policies and philosophies as completely as possible into their classrooms.

Potential concerns about PSM. The same anonymous reviewer requested that we talk about potential shortcomings of the school. There are only three that came up often in the minds of the external researchers. The first is that there are many, many reminders given across the day to nudge students to adhere to the school rules. An interpretation we offered of this above is that the school gives many warnings before really punishing a student. We think that this interpretation is accurate, but the many warnings often made the place seem more consequences oriented than it really is. As experienced school watchers, the external observers all agree that PSM's students were behaving the way that most teachers wish their students would behave! PSM students are very, very well-behaved students. So, one potential direction for improvement would be to reduce the constant commenting to students about small rule infractions.

A second concern is that perhaps the academic focus is a little too intense. That theme came through in comments on some student and teacher questionnaires. We feel it is a point worth reflecting on. However, as we mention that, we note that one of the reasons the place is so academic is that many, many of the students we observed seemed really into the academics. The school recruits and retains students who seem to want such academic intensity. Moreover, it definitely recruits faculty who love interacting academically with the students, although we could not help but note that they seemed to love not just their academic interaction but their every interaction with the students, from those on the playground to the SOAL trips to serving as chaperones to various events in Chicago. One possibility is that the calls for less academic intensity in the student questionnaire responses are calls for more of the enrichment activities, which are not as academically intense, although they definitely are learning experiences. During these events, students and faculty, who seem to enjoy each other's company, get to spend time together outside the classroom.

A third concern of ours is that 50% of the students who depart the school do so for academic reasons, with some questionnaire responses raising the possibility that more academic support should be provided for students who struggle the most at PSM. The external researchers could not come to a conclusion about this issue but urged PSM school-based officials to reflect additionally on it as well as on a related issue. Several faculty members commented that they felt most students who quit the school transferred to area public schools and did well, perhaps in part because of the discipline they learned at PSM. We feel that it would be worthwhile to find out more certainly what does happen to those who leave the school and to determine whether PSM might have positive impacts even for those who spend only a few years there and do not graduate from the school.

The anonymous reviewer, however, felt there might be other concerns, raising the possibility, for example, that the classroom

praise might sometimes be dysfunctional. Of course, that is always a possibility with praise if it is delivered noncontingently, given simply to set a positive tone in the class (see, e.g., Brophy, 1981). In fact, that is not what the external observers saw; rather, praise was delivered as informative feedback, perhaps reflecting that the principal was very well informed about Brophy's positions on praise and emphasized his perspectives about how to use it well when she did professional development with her staff. In fact, there were a number of times that DiBella reminded the external researchers of her admiration for Brophy's analyses and her emphases on those analyses as she coached faculty to interact constructively and informatively with students.

The external observers were actually surprised that they did not have more critical reactions to the school, for they definitely have had such reactions to other schools where they have conducted research. The external observers left with a strong impression that PSM is a place where much that is positive goes on, a building filled with students and faculty who feel good about the school for the most part.

Limits of the research design. We emphasize, however, that with respect to individual variables in the appendix and discussed throughout this article, this research team is not inclined to make much of any one of them on the basis of the data collected in this study. Frankly, a grounded theory analysis logically does not provide much information about the potency of individual variables. Thus, the variables in the appendix ended up there because we could see some positive impact in PSM students thanks to each of them. Whether that impact is so great as to be detectable in a formal quantitative analysis is impossible to know from the data on hand. Whether the impacts we perceived might be entirely due to additional variables that we did not detect also is impossible to assess with the methodology used here. So, a potential criticism of the approach we used, which is intended to capture as many variables as possible that may be operative to promote achievement in educational settings, is that grounded theory portraiture is not very conducive to detailed understanding of any of the individual variables that are included in the resulting model. That many of the variables cited in the appendix are supported in more analytical studies in the educational and psychological literatures (as cited throughout this article) boosts confidence that they should be included in a grounded theory about why the school works. That said, the precedent literature on each variable provides no guarantee that any of these variables actually has an individual impact at PSM or evenly actively contributes to the interaction that is the total educational impact of the school.

How might future researchers increase certainty about which of the appendix elements are essential to producing highly effective schools that serve African American students? By performing more analyses like the present one—in every type of school that produces high achievement in African American students, especially African Americans who would be at high risk for underperforming in other settings. Once a number of schools have been analyzed, there can be cross-case analyses to determine elements that seem essential for effective schooling (i.e., that are present in all schools that produce high achievement with African American students) and others that vary from school to school. Then, it would make sense to determine if such schooling can be replicated in more settings.

There is reason to believe that there are at least some existing schools producing very high achievement in inner-city African American students, ones that could be studied. On the basis of much less formal analyses than those conducted in this case study, Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2002; see also Meier, 1995, and Wagner, 2002) described schools that produce high achievement with African American K–12 students (also detailed at http://www.kipp.org/KIPP_schools/). Their descriptions are consistent with much of what we observed at PSM.

In addition, as we worked on this project, we also became aware that there now exists a cottage industry of advisement about how to increase achievement in Black students, with a growing library of compendiums summarizing the various perspectives (see, e.g., Hale, 2001; Majors, 2001), including entire volumes summarizing impressive research projects (e.g., Hrabowski, Maton, Greene, & Greif, 2002; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998). A theme in all of these volumes, which is consistent with the perspective emerging from the work reported here, is that producing high achievement involves aligning many elements, many of which are present at extremely high levels at PSM (see the appendix).

We hope that this study serves as an invitation to other educational psychologists to work to illuminate the nature of effective schools serving minority students. Analyses conducted by a wide range of educational psychologists with divergent understandings are desirable, for psychologists with perspectives different from ours might spot factors working in schools that we overlooked at PSM. Multiple case studies by a variety of researchers are essential if there is to be hope of constructing the complete understandings required to stimulate development of many more such institutions and appraisal of the impact of such institutions as they are being created and once they are established.

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Appendix

Characteristics of Providence-St. Mel School That Potentially Account, at Least in Part, for High Student Achievement

Characteristics Consistent With Effective Schools/Classrooms in Traditional Effective Schools/Classrooms Research

- Strong administrative leadership.
- High expectations for student achievement.
- Emphasis on academics.
- Safe and orderly environment.
- Frequent evaluation of student progress.
- Excellent classroom management in most classrooms, resulting in/including a high proportion of academic time on task.

Characteristics Consistent With Hallmarks of Effective Education Identified in More Recent Research

- Dedicated teachers.
- Much teacher scaffolding, encouraging student self-regulation as much as the child will do.
- Curriculum and instruction emphasizing understanding.
- Mentoring, especially with regard to college admissions.
- Intentional, massive, and frequent attempts to motivate students, including use of the following mechanisms: positive expectations, visible care by teachers and administrators, praise of specific accomplishments, generally positive atmosphere, encouragement of effort attributions, cooperative learning experiences, tangible rewards for achievements.

Relational trust between administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Characteristics Not Anticipated on the Basis of Previous Effective Schools/Classrooms Research (But Often Sensible on the Basis of Other Research Literature)

Human Resources

Selective recruitment/retention of students, with the school weeding out students who are not using the opportunity well in favor of students who will (i.e., weeding out misbehaving students, students not meeting academic standards).

- Students who help one another with academics.
- Accountable teachers, who do produce academic results.
- Strong family–school connections.
- Donors.
- Visibly supportive, successful alumni.

Other Supports

An attractive school building loaded with resources to support academic pursuits.

Many extracurricular and curricular-enrichment activities, almost all of which are academically oriented or intended to increase commitment to academic pursuits.

Teachers who provide strong instructional supports for academic achievement (e.g., study guides, test expectations made apparent, informative feedback on homework and before exams).

Extensive test preparation, emphasizing standardized test preparation.

Much total academic time: A very long functional school day/week, including before-school-hours to after-school-hours interactions and tutoring, good use of almost every minute of every class hour, and summer school for students who need it.

Motivational mechanisms not often encountered in schools: extreme community celebrations of academic achievements, encouragement of a possible self as college graduate and successful professional, discouragement of negative possible selves, development of informed pride in African American heritage and life.

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