Following is a review of the article *High Performance in High Poverty Schools: 90/90/90/ and Beyond, (2003)* by Douglas B. Reeves

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Since NCLB came into existence in 2001, I have asked the question, how can schools with high poverty, high minority, high violence and other problems ever meet the demands placed on schools by this legislation? Schools with these problems have struggled for a long time with seemingly little hope of improvement. In this article, Douglas B. Reeves shares some very hopeful information about schools with the challenges of poverty and high minority groups who are successful. The information that follows supports the idea that economics does not dictate whether a school is successful or not but effective teachers and administrators are the key.

The first part of this article focuses on the research of “90/90/90” Schools. In the second section the author highlights nine characteristics that he has observed in successful school systems that serve high poverty and high minority populations of students.

The term “90/90/90” was originally coined in 1995 by Douglas B Reeves based on his observations of schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin who had 90% or more of their students eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90% or more of the students were of a ethnic minority group and 90% or more of the students met the district or state academic standards in reading or another area. The original 90/90/90 research was conducted by the Center for Performance Assessment from 1995-1998. The data from more than 130,000 students in grades K-12 in 228 buildings in inner-city urban school, suburban schools and rural schools was analyzed. The researcher s roles were strictly that of journalist and researcher and did not support or promote any particular programs or interventions.

The author reports the research of this study and others in detail in the article. The results of the research on the 90/90/90 Schools identified five common characteristics to all schools:

1. A focus on academic achievement
2. Clear curriculum choices
3. Frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement
4. **An emphasis on nonfiction writing**

5. **Collaborative scoring of student work**

**Focus on Academic Achievement**

The 90/90/90 Schools all had an intense focus on student achievement. Student work and progress were displayed throughout every building. Anyone visiting the schools would get a clear message that academic performance was highly valued. The message of “It’s not how you start here that matters, but how you finish” was evident in the continual assessments and displays of student progress.

**Clear Curriculum Choices**

The curriculums in these schools focused on the core subjects of reading, writing and math and less time on other subjects. The interesting data that was collected noted that even though less time was spent on other subjects, such as science and social studies, students showed significant gains in these areas as well as in the cores areas.

**Frequent Assessment of Student Progress with Multiple Opportunities for improvement**

Weekly monitoring of student progress was common in these schools. Students who scored less than proficient on skills were not given a failing grade but rather were provided with more opportunities for learning and were reassessed. The message sent to the students was that failure was not an option and support was there for them to learn.

**Written Responses in Performance Assessment**

Teachers in the 90/90/90 Schools placed an emphasis on informative writing. The students were required to respond in writing on assessments as well as across the curriculum. A common scoring rubric was used school wide so that students learned what good writing entailed in every subject area. The benefits of the increased writing was the students used “writing to think” and were able to clarify their own thoughts and teachers were able to utilize the students’ writing to gain diagnostic information about their understanding of information.
**External Scoring**

These schools developed common scoring practices and reinforced them by exchanging assignments to grade. The practice of doing this was to eliminate any bias due to a student’s poverty or ethnic group. Teachers were trained to grade using a common set of criteria and they practiced so the reliability of their scoring was increased. They worked out disagreements in scoring based on criteria not upon opinion.

Researchers report that these successful schools did not use a specific program or model but similar techniques were used by effective teachers and administrators. These techniques are replicable and purchasing specific books or materials is not needed.

A critical finding of the 90/90/90 study is the continued success of these schools. The number of these schools has tripled since 1998. After reviewing the “90/90/90” research, Casey Carter’s case studies from the Heritage Foundation (1999), and the Education Trust research, along with others, Douglas Reeves states that it becomes clear that the key element to successful schools does not hinge on poverty levels but the presence of effective quality teaching. The effects of poverty and other demographics can be important however, they do not predict the outcomes of student performance.

In the second part of the article the author lists nine other characteristics that he has observed that show the greatest academic gains in his research with these successful schools:

1. Teacher collaboration
2. Teacher feedback to students
3. Schedule changes to focus on core content
4. Action research and monitoring of progress
5. Aligning teacher assignments with teacher preparation
6. Constructive Data analysis
7. Use of common assessments
8. Valuing every adult in the system
9. Cross-disciplinary integration
The article goes into details describing these characteristics and how schools have implemented them.

The information shared in this research is encouraging. Schools who have been struggling for answers can use these techniques without spending a lot of money on programs. The challenge is to hire effective teachers and administrators who are dedicated to the students and communities in high poverty areas. Educators can make a difference when they use the information available and have a specific focus.

This article can be found at:

http://www.sabine.k12.la.us/online/leadershipacademy/high%20performance%2090%2090%2090%20and%20beyond.pdf