LIFE Prep charter school

Case study

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Prepared by:
Caryn Mohr, Amanda Petersen, Dan Mueller

451 Lexington Parkway North | Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700 | www.wilderresearch.org

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Acknowledgments

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The following Wilder Research staff made important contributions to this study:

Mark Anton
Walker Bosch
Jackie Campeau
Marilyn Conrad
Phil Cooper
Amanda Eggers
Heather Johnson
Dan Swanson
Lue Thao

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Summary

> ***L**earning **I**n a **F**amily **E**nvironment empowers students to create their own path.*
> *—From LIFE Prep mission statement*

LIFE Prep is a prekindergarten through eighth-grade charter school located on the east side of St. Paul. The school focuses on providing a family environment where students feel safe to grow and learn, high expectations for all students to succeed, and individualized attention based on each student's needs and learning style. Three-quarters of LIFE Prep students are students of color (75%), and most are low-income (87%).

The school is authorized by Concordia University in St. Paul. Prior to August 2013, the school was called Concordia Creative Learning Academy.

During the 2012-13 school year, Wilder Research conducted a case study of LIFE Prep to identify core components of the school's model, key success factors, and areas for future refinement. The study was funded by the Saint Paul Foundation. From the outset, LIFE Prep committed to making the results publicly available so that others can learn from its model and experiences.

Study design

Wilder Research used a case study design to identify and understand LIFE Prep's model, success factors, and areas for refinement. Case studies are characterized by their in-depth, comprehensive approach to understanding a complex phenomenon in its context. Several data-collection methods were used:

- **Interviews**. Phone and in-person interviews were conducted with 14 staff and community stakeholders familiar with the school, as well as the school's new executive director.
- **Focus groups**. Two parent focus groups were conducted at the school, as well as one student focus group with fifth- through eighth-grade students.
- **Observations**. Four classroom observations were conducted at the prekindergarten, kindergarten, second-grade, and fourth-grade levels.
- **Staff survey**. In May 2013, Wilder Research conducted an online survey of LIFE Prep staff. A total of 47 of the school's 60 staff completed the survey, for a response rate of 78 percent.

- **Document review**. Pertinent background documents were reviewed, including the school's annual report, Concordia University's most recent renewal report, and a school quality review conducted by Cambridge Education.

- **Literature review**. Wilder Research conducted a literature review to explore the extent to which components of LIFE Prep's model and its success factors relate to the research base on "high-poverty, high-performing" schools.

- **Analysis of academic data**. To explore and document student outcomes, Wilder Research compiled and analyzed available student achievement data from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) and Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP). At the time of the report, MCA data were available through spring 2012 and NWEA MAP data through spring 2013.

Researchers used triangulation of sources across interviews, focus groups, observations, and the staff survey to answer primary research questions. Interview, focus group, and observation notes were systematically coded and analyzed to identify key themes. Themes presented throughout this report reflect those most frequently mentioned by the research participants. Findings from the literature review and analysis of academic achievement data provide context to the primary data collection.

Key findings

School environment

One of the predominant themes to emerge from our qualitative analysis of interview, focus group, and observation data was LIFE Prep's warm, welcoming environment. Staff and students describe the school social environment as "like a family." Given the extent to which it was raised in the data collection, the school's nurturing environment is an important lens through which to consider other study findings. Research literature suggests that high-poverty, high-performing schools create a school environment that is conducive to student learning. Making children feel comfortable at school increases their confidence and supports their learning capabilities.

Research on high-poverty, high-performing schools also suggests that characteristics commonly associated with these schools are most effective when they operate as a holistic system. Qualitative data gathered through the course of this study suggest that school culture may be the underlying thread unifying core components of LIFE Prep's model, motivating staff and students and facilitating focused attention on learning time and individual student needs.

> *The by-product from this family part has been academics. [The] family atmosphere has led to academic achievement.—Interview respondent*

Success factors

School- and classroom-level success factors were identified based on survey results and themes most frequently expressed during the qualitative data collection (see Figures 8 and 9). Success factors identified at the overall school level include the following:

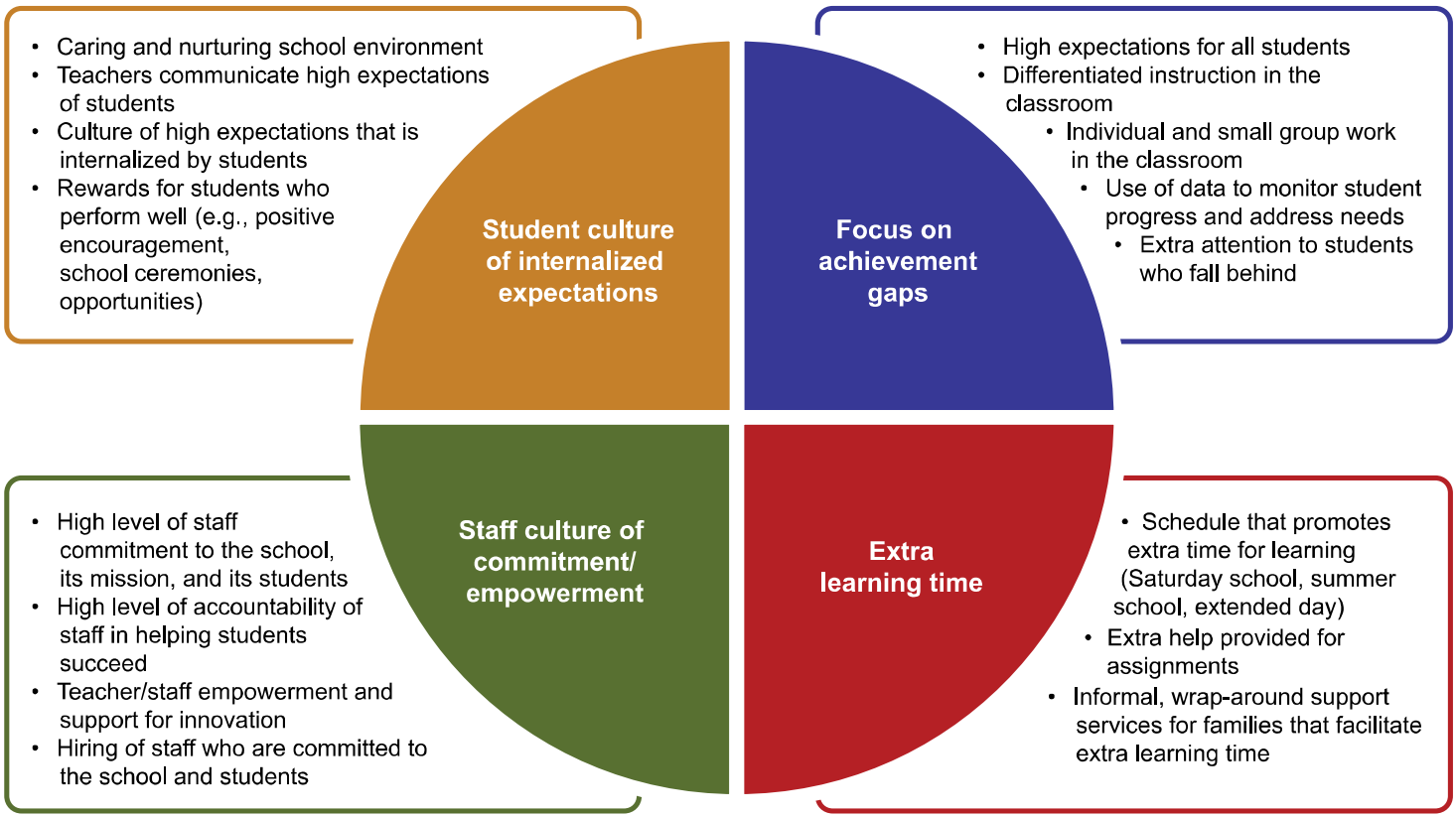
- Providing a caring and nurturing school environment as a foundation for students' learning
- Instilling a high level of staff commitment to the school, its mission, and its students
- Promoting a high level of accountability among staff in helping students succeed, combined with a culture of teacher and staff empowerment
- Structuring the schedule to facilitate extra time for learning
- Differentiating instruction based on an individual student's needs, including the use of Individual Learning Plans to establish goals
- Offering rewards for student accomplishments
- Providing a smaller student-to-teacher ratio
- Encouraging high levels of student engagement

At the classroom level, these factors involve the frequent use of student data to identify students who are behind and advanced. Instruction is differentiated through ability-level grouping, group work in stations, independent work, and other strategies. Teachers also frequently assign homework and make use of technology such as computers and iPads. Student progress is frequently communicated to students themselves, and one-to-one help is provided for students needing extra attention. Teachers also maintain a high level of communication with parents, including frequent phone calls, emails, and text messages, in addition to conferences and other more formal means of communication. Based on the survey results and qualitative data collection, Figure 6 in the report presents a classroom framework that can serve as a guideline for success factors and values consistent with LIFE Prep's model.

Core components of model

Core components of LIFE Prep's model were identified based on attributes characterized as "good" or "excellent" at LIFE Prep by more than three-quarters of staff responding to the survey, as well as those cited most frequently in the qualitative data collection (interviews, focus groups, observations). Distinctive attributes of the model are grouped into four higher-level components: focus on achievement gaps, extra learning time, student culture of internalized expectations, and staff culture of commitment/empowerment. Readers are encouraged to consider the interplay between these four components and the school's family culture. Figure 1 depicts the school's model.

1. Core components of LIFE Prep's model



Literature on high-poverty, high-performing schools

LIFE Prep's model shares a number of the characteristics commonly cited in the research literature of high-performing, high-poverty schools. The school upholds a culture of high expectations for all students, and uses student-level data to understand and address needs. A longer calendar year and school day are offered to provide extended learning time. LIFE Prep focuses on achievement gaps, and provides individualized attention to low-

performing students. Teachers also maintain a very high level of parent engagement through frequent individual communications with parents. Beyond these shared characteristics, it is the internalization of high expectations among students and staff that seems to set LIFE Prep apart.

While this cannot be proven definitively, it may be that the school's family environment factors into students' internalization of expectations, willingness to spend more time at school, teachers' commitment to addressing individual student needs, and teachers' responsiveness to parents. LIFE Prep seems to have effectively promoted students' internalization of expectations, and cultivated a culture in which teachers are genuinely committed to the mission of the school and its students.

Areas for refinement

In addition to identifying core components of the model and success factors, LIFE Prep requested that Wilder Research assist in the identification of any areas in which the school could refine or strengthen its model moving forward. Interview respondents, focus group participants, and survey participants were asked to provide specific feedback on potential refinements. Potential areas for refinement are discussed in depth in the report, and include greater attention to challenging advanced students, given the relatively high proportion of students with "low growth" who were proficient in math and reading; more curriculum standardization within the culture of teacher empowerment, particularly in math; potential curriculum and program expansion in some areas; greater uniformity in discipline practices; attention to strengthening the middle school program and before and after care; and making more extensive use of student Individual Learning Plans.

Data use

Both the qualitative data collection and survey results indicate LIFE Prep does well with using student data to differentiate instruction. LIFE Prep uses the quarterly Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) assessment to monitor student progress during the year. A majority of the teachers and paraprofessionals surveyed (70%) also indicated they use data from smaller lessons or unit-level assessments between the quarterly NWEA assessments for purposes of monitoring student progress and differentiating instruction. Still, it seems there may be room for greater use of this more granular-level data. A majority of teachers and paraprofessionals (57%) indicated they think students would benefit from more frequent data use.

LIFE Prep also requested that Wilder Research analyze student academic data to identify useful comparisons for the school to monitor and to explore additional ways of reporting that may facilitate a more in-depth understanding of students' academic performance and

areas of strength and need. To this end, a detailed, technical analysis of academic results is provided in the final section of the report.

Reflection

LIFE Prep has experienced dramatic changes since its founding in 1998, including moving from its original location in a strip mall, substantially growing its enrollment, and garnering local media attention as a "beating the odds" school for its performance on the state's standardized reading and math tests. The 2012-13 school year was a transitional year for LIFE Prep, with the hiring of a new executive director in spring 2013 and launch of the school's new name and revised mission and vision statements in August. Looking ahead, LIFE Prep plans to expand and add a high school program and is in the process of designing plans for a new, larger facility.

LIFE Prep requested that Wilder Research assist the school in identifying core components of its model and success factors to help the school stay true to its core principles and program components as it grows. Given the extent of staff involvement in the data collection for this study, staff may appreciate the open sharing and discussion of results, particularly detailed survey results provided in the report Appendix. The school may also wish to consider current goals and strategic priorities in the context of study findings, including where attention might best be focused. For example, staff can consider which potential areas for refinement are most important in the short-term and key priorities before expanding to additional grades.

We hope the report can provide a useful tool to LIFE Prep at a key juncture in its history, providing insights into areas of strength to carry forward and potential areas for refinement. We also hope the study may provide useful insights to others in the education and charter school communities. LIFE Prep should be applauded for its upfront commitment to openly sharing results. If charter schools are to promote educational innovation, their practices must be explored, documented, and shared.

Introduction

LIFE Prep is a prekindergarten through eighth-grade charter school located on the east side of St. Paul in the Phalen neighborhood. The school focuses on providing a family environment where students feel safe to grow and learn, high expectations for all students to succeed, and individualized attention based on each student's needs and learning style. During the 2012-13 school year, Wilder Research conducted a case study of LIFE Prep to identify core components of the school's model, key success factors, and areas for future refinement.

Mission

In August 2013, the school changed its name from Concordia Creative Learning Academy to LIFE Prep, and updated its mission and vision statements. "LIFE" is an acronym for Learning in a Family Environment. The school's mission and vision for its students uphold growth from a safe and positive environment, personal empowerment, overcoming adversity, and hard work.

History

LIFE Prep has experienced dramatic changes since its founding in 1998. The school moved from its original location in a strip mall to its current larger neighborhood site with a small playground and brightly colored classrooms. The school also added a prekindergarten program as well as a summer program extending the school year to a year-round schedule. LIFE Prep also incorporated a foundation to support its students' needs. Looking ahead, the school plans to expand and add a high school program in the future, and is in the process of designing plans for a new, larger facility.

Mission:

LIFE Prep puts students first. Our success in closing the achievement gap comes from a commitment to academic accomplishment through the delivery of a rigorous curriculum.

The inclusive multicultural community is a safe place to learn and overcome adversity.

Learning **I**n a **F**amily **E**nvironment empowers students to **create their own path**.

Vision:

LIFE Prep ignites a desire to achieve and inspires students' hope for a bright future.

Students develop self-confidence through their accomplishments and are empowered to pursue their dreams.

We provide encouragement and a foundation for perseverance; preparing students to thrive as individuals on a successful life path.

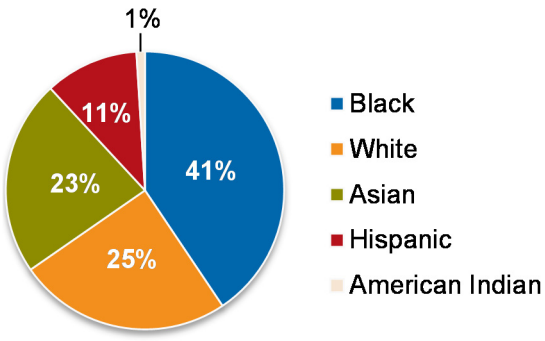
Over the course of LIFE Prep's history, enrollment has increased substantially, and the school's performance on the state's standardized reading and math tests has garnered local media attention. In 2010, the Minnesota Academic Excellence Foundation recognized LIFE Prep with a School Spotlight Award for excellence in academic achievement. The same year, LIFE Prep was one of two schools in the state recognized as a leader in closing the achievement gap by the Minnesota Business Partnership's Minnesota Future Award. The school also made the Minneapolis *StarTribune* newspaper's lists of schools "beating the odds" with a high-poverty population in both reading and math in 2011, topping the list in reading. Only 10 Twin Cities metro-area schools appeared on each list. Charter School Partners, a nonprofit focused on supporting and expanding high-quality charter schools in Minnesota, has also recognized LIFE Prep as a "beating the odds" school.

Student population

In 2012-13, 360 students in grades K-8 attended LIFE Prep. The majority of students come from St. Paul and surrounding suburbs. LIFE Prep serves a predominantly low-income and racially diverse student population.

Three-quarters of LIFE Prep students are students of color (75%), compared to just over a quarter of students statewide (26%), based on 2012 data available from the Minnesota Department of Education. Black students represent the largest racial/ethnic group at LIFE Prep (41%), followed by white (25%), Asian (23%), Hispanic (11%), and American Indian (1%) (Figure 2).

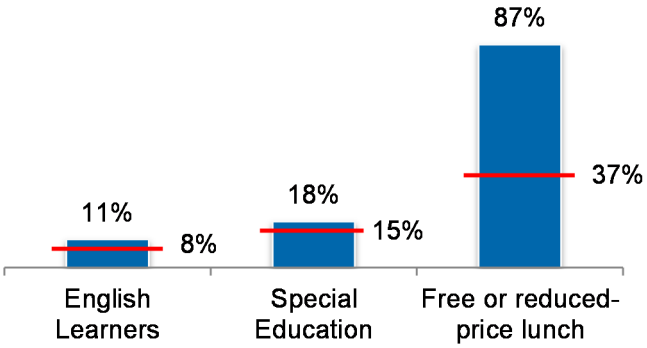
2. LIFE Prep student race/ethnicity, 2012 (N=306)



Source: *Minnesota Department of Education*

Most LIFE Prep students are low-income (87%), compared to 37 percent of students statewide. Eighteen percent of LIFE Prep students receive Special Education services, and 11 percent are English Learners (Figure 3).

3. LIFE Prep student race/ethnicity, 2012 (N=306)



Note: *For comparison, red bars reflect proportions for the State of Minnesota overall.*

Source: *Minnesota Department of Education*

School calendar and services

LIFE Prep offers extended hours, with the building open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for before and after care programming. The regular school day runs from 9 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. After-school tutoring and Saturday school are also available to all students. The core academic year runs from Labor Day to Memorial Day, and an optional summer school program extends the academic calendar. In summer 2013, Learning Year (i.e., summer school) classes took place for four weeks from 9 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.

In addition to the prekindergarten program, the school offers music, art, and physical education every day. Tutoring is provided by Minnesota Reading Corps tutors and students from the University of Wisconsin – River Falls. Additional programs and services have been made possible by grants received by LIFE Prep's foundation, such as awards funding environmental education and a partnership with SteppingStone Theatre.

Study purpose and context

In fall 2011, LIFE Prep staff contacted Wilder Research because they were interested in an independent study that would objectively assess key factors in the school's successes with students which should be retained as the school expands. Staff also wanted insights into any areas where the school could continue to improve. Wilder Research proposed a case study design to provide an in-depth understanding of the school's model, success factors, and areas for future refinement. LIFE Prep secured funding from the Saint Paul

Foundation to cover the costs of the study. From the outset, LIFE Prep committed to making the results of the study publicly available so that others could learn from its model and experiences.

Over the course of the study, LIFE Prep experienced a change in leadership. Wilder Research began its data collection in fall 2012, shortly after the school's former director departed. Data collection spanned the 2012-13 school year. During most of this time, the school was led by interim directors also serving in other roles at LIFE Prep as the school searched for a new director. In spring 2013, Michael Elke was hired as LIFE Prep's new executive director. During this time of transition, the study proceeded based on the original research design and plan, described in depth in the following section on Research Methods.

Contents of this report

Key study findings are presented in the body of the report, organized around the primary research questions. The report is ordered into the following sections:

- Research methods
- School environment
- Core components of model
- Connections to research literature
- Success factors
- Data use
- Refinements
- Academic performance

Supplemental data and research are provided in the Appendix, including complete results of a school staff survey conducted as part of the study; supplemental academic data; and a more in-depth write-up of research literature on high-poverty, high-performing schools.

Research methods

Wilder Research conducted its study of LIFE Prep during the 2012-13 school year, using a case study approach. Three primary researchers worked on the study. Research goals and methods are presented below.

Study goals

Wilder Research's case study of LIFE Prep aimed to identify:

- Key components in LIFE Prep's model and key success factors
- Potential areas for future refinement

The intent is that identification of these factors will assist LIFE Prep and others in learning from and building upon the school's experiences, and serve as a guide for LIFE Prep in staying true to its model as the school grows and moves into a new facility.

Research questions

The study addressed the following primary research questions:

1. What is LIFE Prep's school environment, including its students, families, staff, leadership, governance, school culture, and physical environment? What are the academic, cultural, and support-service needs of LIFE Prep's students and families?
2. What are the core components of LIFE Prep's model? How are they implemented, and what considerations affect their implementation?
3. Which elements of LIFE Prep's model are supported by research on high-poverty, high-performing schools, and which represent innovations unique to LIFE Prep?
4. What are the school's "success factors" at the school and classroom levels which appear to have contributed to LIFE Prep's positive student achievement results?
5. In what ways can LIFE Prep advance its use of assessment data to monitor and support instruction and learning?
6. Are there any areas where LIFE Prep might consider refinement of its model at this time?
7. How are LIFE Prep students performing academically, overall and within subgroups of students? Based on available data, how does LIFE Prep student performance compare to that of students at other schools with similar demographics as well as to national norms?

Study design

Wilder Research used a case study approach to identify and understand LIFE Prep's model, success factors, and areas for refinement. Case studies are characterized by their in-depth, comprehensive approach to understanding a complex phenomenon in its context. Through their in-depth explorations of individual phenomena, case studies make important contributions to the broader research base. Charter schools are, by design, intended to promote innovation. Expanding educational options and promoting educational innovation were driving forces of the charter school movement. By exploring individual charter schools and shining the spotlight on their context and methods, researchers and educators can learn from their innovations.

Data collection

The study incorporated a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to address the primary research questions. In combination, the qualitative and quantitative research data are intended to provide a rich understanding of the school's model, including intangible factors, as well as a grounding in pertinent data and literature. The following data-collection methods were used.

Interviews

Wilder Research conducted interviews with 14 staff and community stakeholders familiar with the school. Participants included the school's two interim directors (also employed as the dean of students and director of finance), the school liaison from Concordia University, the board chair, four teachers, a Special Education teacher, a paraprofessional, the building operations director, the receptionist, and two individuals affiliated with Charter School Partners. Several interviewees currently serve on the board or have done so in the past.

Interviews were conducted in two rounds, beginning with an initial round of interviews with six individuals able to provide an overview of the school. Initial interviewees were asked to recommend additional interview sources. A second round of interviews was then conducted asking more detailed questions and in some cases questions tailored to the interviewee's area of expertise (e.g., curriculum, Special Education, data use). All interviews were conducted based on structured interview protocols developed by Wilder Research and approved by LIFE Prep. Some took place in person at Wilder Research or LIFE Prep, and others over the phone. In addition to these structured interviews, in spring 2013 researchers also met with LIFE Prep's new executive director to learn about his priorities for the school.

Focus groups

In spring 2013, Wilder Research facilitated two parent focus groups and one student focus group at LIFE Prep. Again, Wilder Research developed structured protocols which were approved by LIFE Prep. Focus group participants were asked about the school's strengths, weaknesses, and core services.

A total of eight parents and seven students participated in the groups. The student group took place during the school day and included two eighth-graders, three seventh-graders, and two fifth-graders. There were four male and three female students, and participants reflected racial/ethnic diversity. Parent groups were offered in the morning and evening, and parents were offered their choice of a $20 gift card to Target or Walmart as an incentive for participating. LIFE Prep staff were not present during the parent focus groups, and parents were assured that they would not be identified in the reporting of results. Research staff requested that one LIFE Prep staff person be present during the student focus group.

Observations

Wilder Research conducted four classroom observations to observe and document the school in operation. Classrooms were observed at the prekindergarten, kindergarten, second-grade, and fourth-grade levels. In each case, the researcher used a structured observation protocol designed to address the primary research questions. The researcher observed each classroom for an hour, taking notes on the activities observed, classroom environment and culture, practices that seemed to work well, and potential areas for refinement.

Staff survey

In May 2013, Wilder Research conducted an online survey of LIFE Prep staff. The survey instrument was developed specifically for this study to supplement the qualitative data collection and assist with answering primary research questions. LIFE Prep provided Wilder Research with a complete list of staff email addresses for distributing the survey. A total of 47 of the school's 60 staff completed the survey, for a response rate of 78 percent. Survey respondents were told that results would be anonymous and encouraged to provide honest answers. Survey data were collected, processed, and analyzed by Wilder Research. Survey results are summarized throughout the report, and complete results are provided in the Appendix.

Document review

Research staff requested pertinent documents from LIFE Prep for review, including the school's annual report, Concordia University's most recent renewal report, and a school

quality review conducted by Cambridge Education as part of the services available through Charter School Partners. These documents provided helpful background information and additional external perspectives on the school's strengths and areas for refinement.

Literature review

A number of studies have explored characteristics of schools that are "beating the odds" or achieving success with a high-poverty population. These schools are often referred to as "high-poverty, high-performing" schools in the research literature. Wilder Research conducted a literature review to explore the extent to which components of LIFE Prep's model and its success factors relate to this research base. Literature searches were performed by Wilder Research staff librarians, and research staff reviewed the literature to synthesize common characteristics of high-poverty, high-performing schools. Results of the literature review are summarized in the Connections to Research Literature section, and presented in full in the report Appendix.

Student academic data

To explore and document student outcomes, Wilder Research compiled and analyzed available student achievement data from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) and Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP). At the time of the report, MCA data were available through spring 2012 and NWEA MAP data through spring 2013.

LIFE Prep students' achievement and growth were compared to that of schools with similar demographics and the state overall (MCA), as well as to national norms and targets predictive of proficiency on MCA reading and math tests (NWEA MAP). Results are presented in the Academic Performance section, and supplemental data tables provided in the Appendix. The write-up of academic results is detailed and technical, with the intent of identifying and explaining comparisons and additional analyses that may be instructive for LIFE Prep staff to consider and carry into the future.

Data analysis

Researchers used triangulation of sources across interviews, focus groups, observations, and the staff survey to answer primary research questions. Interview, focus group, and observation notes were systematically coded and analyzed to identify key themes. Responses to open-ended survey questions were similarly coded and analyzed. In both cases, a master code book was developed detailing the themes expressed. Themes presented throughout this report reflect those most frequently mentioned by the research participants. Findings from the literature review and analysis of academic achievement data are used to provide important context to the primary data collection.

Study limitations

Researchers' role in conducting this study focused on the study goals and questions outlined in this section. Assessing compliance with charter school rules and regulations was outside the scope of this study and researchers' responsibility and training. The study also cannot directly attribute student results to specific components of LIFE Prep's model. The case study approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of the school rooted in the observations and experiences of those most familiar with it. While efforts were made to incorporate external perspectives and triangulate findings across data-collection methods, findings should not be confused with an outcomes-oriented study using an experimental or quasi-experimental design.

School environment

> ***Study question 1***. *What is LIFE Prep's school environment, including its students, families, staff, leadership, governance, school culture, and physical environment? What are the academic, cultural, and support-service needs of LIFE Prep's students and families?*

Interview and focus group respondents were asked to describe LIFE Prep's student and family needs, school environment, and culture. Researchers also documented their own observations of the school's physical and social environment during the classroom observations conducted as part of this study. Finally, information on LIFE Prep's governance structure is provided based on staffing information available from the school.

Student and family needs

Asked about needs facing LIFE Prep families and students, interview and focus group participants described the importance of more school time. LIFE Prep addresses this need by offering before and after care, Saturday school, and summer school. These programs provide extra learning time for students who may be behind, as well as a child care service for parents who are working. Respondents described the importance of this extra help from teachers and tutors for LIFE Prep's student population.

> *I really like the tutoring she gets from River Falls students, after school, and at Saturday School to get in additional reading and math.—Parent focus group participant*

Given the low-income population, some students may have limited exposure outside of school to fine arts and hands-on, experiential learning opportunities. Parents participating in the focus groups also expressed appreciation for those types of opportunities offered by LIFE Prep. Basic needs such as transportation are also an issue for some families, and LIFE Prep provides van service for Special Education and homeless students. LIFE Prep also provides free breakfast, lunch, and snacks. According to school staff, many students may also face difficult situations at home or lack stability, and value the safety, positive relationships, and expectations they experience at school for those reasons.

> *I have noticed in the past couple of years that they're increasing visits to [places like the] art museum and children's theater for fine arts experiences. I think that's great. It helps make them more well-rounded, exposing them to activities that a majority of students wouldn't have [the] opportunity to experience.—Parent focus group participant*
>
> *When we were first introduced to the school, one thing that [we] asked about was transportation. They are willing to work around our route. Having small children at that time [made that important]. Having [them] pick that child up in front of the door, and drop them off in front of the house—that was actually a reason why we chose LIFE Prep, too.—Parent focus group participant*

> *Teachers have high expectations of students even though they might not have a good home life. We don't give them excuses to fail even though they might not have a great life. We teach them not [to blame] anyone or anything else.—Interview respondent*

Staff, leadership, and governance

LIFE Prep is authorized by Concordia University in St. Paul. The school has a 12-member board, including 6 teachers, 3 parents, the school's executive director, the operations specialist (also a parent), and a representative of the authorizer. Executive Director Michael Elke serves as the school's principal and leader. Sixty staff were employed at the school at the time of this report, including the following:

- Classroom teachers (24)
- Paraprofessionals (21)
- Special education teachers (3)
- Administrative assistant (1)
- Lunch staff (1)
- Maintenance manager (1)
- Social worker (1)
- Minnesota Reading Corps staff providing tutoring in the school (2)
- Building operations director (1)
- Executive director of LIFE Prep foundation (1)
- Finance assistant (1)
- Director of finance (1)
- Dean of students (1)
- Executive director (1)

Social environment

Warm, welcoming environment

One of the predominant themes to emerge from our qualitative analysis of interview, focus group, and observation data was LIFE Prep's warm, welcoming environment. Staff and students describe the school social environment as "like a family." In their time at

LIFE Prep, researchers working on this study frequently observed students going up to teachers, administrators, and even the researchers themselves to share their work. LIFE Prep's new executive director also observed that in his experience, LIFE Prep's environment including the extent of access to teachers sets the school apart.

There are different aspects of this welcoming environment, and specific observations offered by staff and students included the following:

- Teachers are caring (e.g., noticing when students need help, encouraging students, praising accomplishments)
- Teachers are accessible and responsive to students and parents
- Teachers try to engage students if they are having a bad day, sad, or feeling left out
- Staff provide families with assistance during times of crisis (e.g., allowing students to stay at the school during a blizzard or if locked out of their house)
- Students/teachers have a culture of accepting differences
- Teachers and students eat lunch together
- More experienced students take new students under their wings
- Teachers greet students and parents in the hallways
- Students share work and accomplishments with all levels of staff, including bringing it to administrators' offices
- An open-door policy encourages parents and family members to observe and volunteer in classrooms
- Happiness, energy, and enthusiasm are observed in hallways and classrooms

> *The teachers, they'll talk to you. Like if you're having trouble with something, they'll give examples and stuff like that.—Student focus group participant*
>
> *This school's environment is really good, because the first day I came here, I knew everybody. There's no way that no one will come up to you. Everyone will come up to you and ask if you want to be friends/hang out. They'll be nice to you.—Student focus group participant*

High expectations

Within this nurturing environment is a culture of high expectations for all students. Students are expected to achieve to their potential and use their time wisely. Teachers also communicate the expectation that students will be successful in high school and college, after they leave LIFE Prep. One interview respondent described the school as having masterfully combined providing a caring, nurturing environment in which students feel safe with the toughness of high expectations. As discussed later in the report, it may be that this combination contributes to students' internalization of high expectations.

> *My teachers have high expectations for me. Everyone in the building does. That's been communicated to me since I started going here in second grade. I saw that the teachers, they were with you on the things that you need help with.—Student focus group participant*
>
> *When I first came to LIFE Prep, I was so far behind. I had teachers helping me behind me, pushing me. Since then, I know I still have some teachers I go to if I need any help. —Student focus group participant*
>
> *My teacher, she has high expectations for me, too. If I get a low grade on my test or accelerated math, she'll tell me that's not the kind of [grades/scores] that I usually get. I mostly get As/Bs on a test, and if I get a D, she'll tell me to re-do it because she thinks I can do better, and I push myself to get higher grades.—Student focus group participant*

Low student-to-staff ratio

LIFE Prep aspires to provide a low student-to-staff ratio. According to executive director Michael Elke, the school aims for small class sizes with a ratio of 11 students to 1 staff. Paraprofessionals are placed in classrooms to help provide a low ratio and to facilitate the differentiated instruction and individualized student attention that are key aspects of LIFE Prep's model. A culture valuing small class sizes and a low student-to-staff ratio also emerged as a theme in the qualitative data collection.

> *The class sizes are really small. In big classes, kids get distracted a bit more easily. With the small classes, they do lots of group [work], and [it] lets you interact with people you wouldn't normally interact with and helps you understand things a little better. [You] get different perspectives from everyone. If you don't get what the teacher is telling you, you can learn other ways of how to do it. —Student focus group participant*
>
> *The expectation [is] that he [participates] in class. He didn't get an opportunity to not participate. If he did step back, they had somebody who could take that extra time and bring him back to the class. That contributed to his ability [to] succeed academically. —Parent focus group participant*

Uniform policy

LIFE Prep has a uniform policy for all students. Students must wear a royal blue or black top and black or khaki bottoms. More specific uniform requirements are provided on the school's website. The intent of the uniform policy is to help keep the focus on learning. According to school administrative staff, the uniform policy has helped with discipline by reducing distractions.

Physical environment

Walking around LIFE Prep, one notices brightly colored hallways and classrooms painted with primary colors. Multi-colored lockers match the bright paint on the walls. Student work is displayed in hallways and classrooms. Though space is tight in the current location, classrooms and hallways were intentionally painted and decorated to provide a cheerful environment.

In some ways, the caring, nurturing social environment and culture of high expectations seem to be supported by the physical environment. In one classroom observed for this study, the researcher observed that on a wall was a posting of students who received high grades on assignments for reading and math. One comment for a student who received a "B" grade was, "I know you must have worked really hard on this!" Tests were also displayed on the wall to celebrate good scores, and marked with encouraging words. Researchers also observed a large supply of books and instructional posters.

Core components of model

> ***Study question 2**. What are the core components of LIFE Prep's model? How are they implemented, and what considerations affect their implementation?*

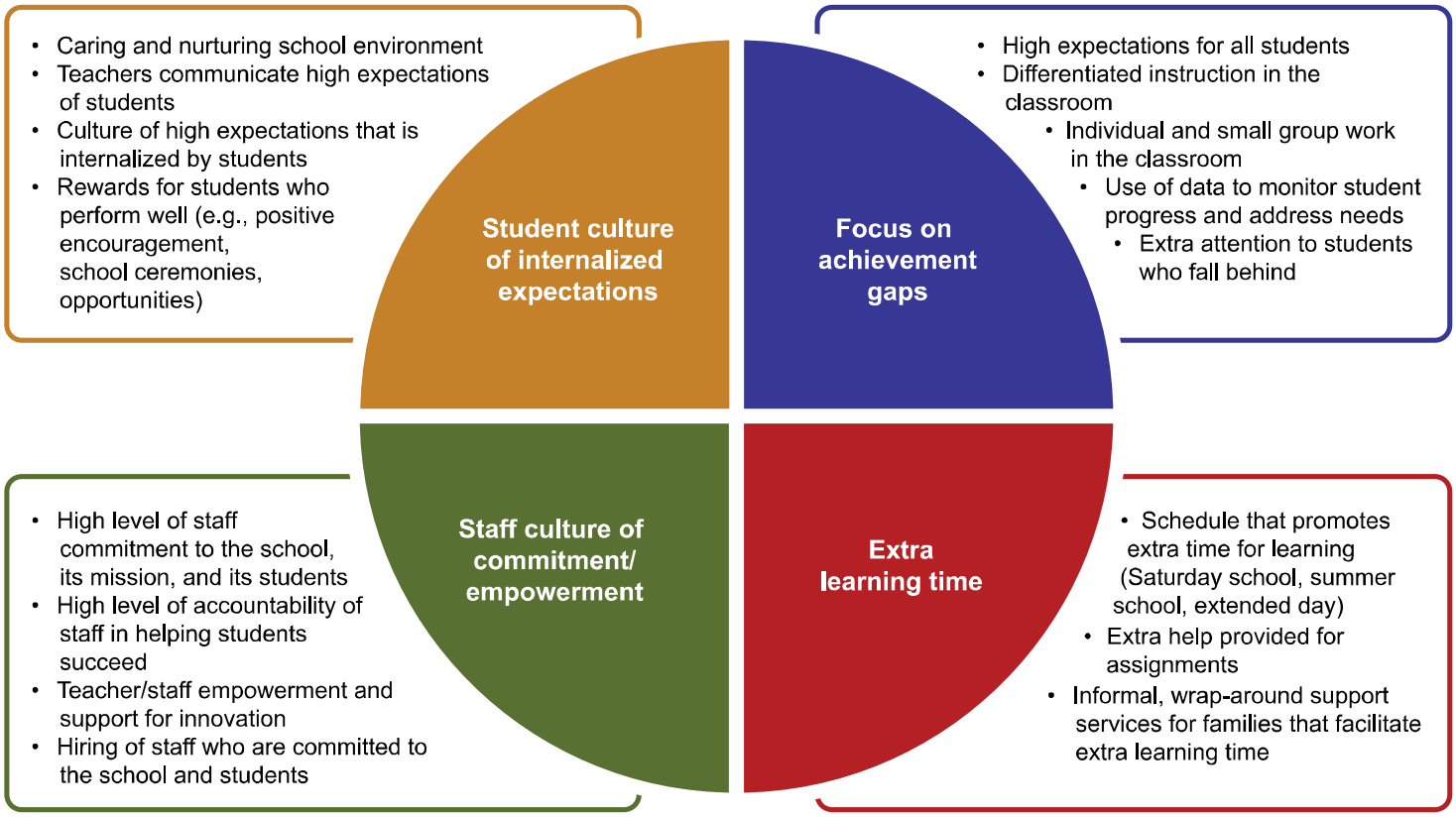
Study question 2 is intended to provide a guide for holding LIFE Prep true to its mission and model. Based on the qualitative and survey data collection, the study identified core school-wide components of LIFE Prep's model as well as a classroom framework that can serve as a guide at the individual classroom level.

Overall school model

Core components of LIFE Prep's model were identified based on attributes characterized as "good" or "excellent" at LIFE Prep by more than three-quarters of staff responding to the survey (Figure A3), as well as those cited most frequently in the qualitative data collection. Distinctive attributes of the model are grouped into four higher-level components: focus on achievement gaps, extra learning time, student culture of internalized expectations, and staff culture of commitment/empowerment.

Components and their more distinctive attributes are depicted in Figure 4 and described below. Readers are encouraged to consider the extent to which these components and attributes support each other. As articulated in the literature review in the following section, characteristics commonly associated with high-poverty, high-performing schools prove most effective when the strategies and practices overlap, functioning as a holistic system of operation within the school.

4. Core components of LIFE Prep's model



Focus on achievement gaps

Many LIFE Prep policies and practices are designed to address achievement gaps facing low-income students and students of color. These include high expectations for all students, differentiated instruction in the classroom including individual and small group work, and use of data to monitor student progress and address needs. Most staff rated LIFE Prep as "good" or "excellent" at differentiated instruction in the classroom (83%) and, as part of this, individual and small group work in the classroom (85%) (Figure A3). LIFE Prep's use of achievement data to analyze individual student performance and provide support where needed was also cited as a strength in the Cambridge Education school quality review (Knowles, 2011).

Students who fall behind receive one-to-one help from teachers, paraprofessionals, and tutors offering services in the school. Paraprofessionals provide in-classroom tutoring. The school also participates in the Minnesota Reading Corps program and partners with the University of Wisconsin – River Falls to provide additional tutoring. Tutoring takes place in one-on-one pullout sessions during the regular school day as well as during after care.

Other key components of the model depicted in Figure 4 also address achievement gaps by providing extra time for learning, promoting students' internalization of expectations, and supporting a culture in which staff are committed to their students' success.

> *Giving different learning options and capitalizing on strengths of kids instead of just one method [is a strength]. A lot of our kids struggle with the side of that, or say, 'this book is boring to me.' But if we give them an iPad with the same book, they're more excited about that.—Interview respondent*
>
> *LIFE Prep has the ability to set high expectations for the kids and staff and hold them to it. There was a high level of expectations and a high level of accountability to meet those expectations, and that was genuine.—Interview respondent*

Extra learning time

Research literature reviewed in the following section suggests that high-performing, high-poverty schools commonly reorganize time, space, and transitions to complement learning in purposeful ways, such as by extending the school day. LIFE Prep's schedule promotes extra time for learning through an extended day and extended school year facilitated by before and after care, Saturday school, and summer school. In many cases, these opportunities also provide a service to families who may need care for their children while they are working. During 2012-13, approximately 125 students attended Saturday school and 90 attended after care. Classroom teachers also provide extra help for assignments. The school also uses strategies to minimize "down time" during the day, such as Recess Readers during which students can stay in and practice reading.

Most staff rated LIFE Prep as "good" or "excellent" at providing extra time for learning (85%) and providing informal, wrap-around support services (77%) (Figure A3). In the qualitative data collection, teachers, staff, and students cited individual examples of informal services such as assisting students and families with basic needs, taking students out to dinner, and going to students' homes for parent-teacher conferences. These informal services may support students' learning and attendance at school.

> *Students get to come to Saturday school if they want. There are 22 kids in my class, and half come to school on Saturday. I've never told anyone they have to come, but they want to come.—Interview respondent*

Student culture of internalized expectations

Literature on "beating the odds" schools frequently discusses the importance of high expectations for all students. LIFE Prep shares this tenet and, based on the data collection, seems to have effectively promoted students' internalization of these expectations. Seventy-nine percent of staff said LIFE Prep is "good" or "excellent" at

creating a culture of high expectations that is internalized by LIFE Prep students. Nearly all staff (91%) rated LIFE Prep as "good" or "excellent" at providing a caring and nurturing school environment (Figure A3). Cambridge Education's May 2011 quality review report on LIFE Prep (Knowles, 2011) also identified the school's culture of high expectations as a strength:

> *The school has developed a strong culture of high expectations across all aspects of achievement, in which students are valued highly. Nurturing relationships support student learning and create an environment in which students are confident participants.*

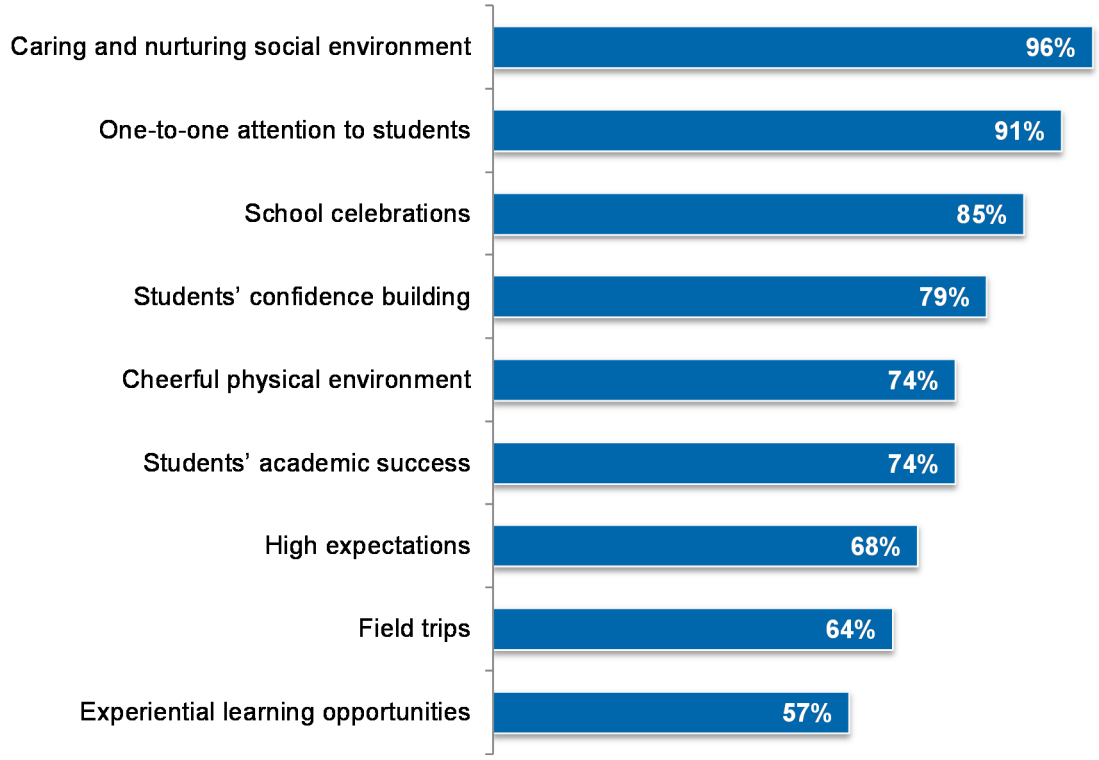
The school prides itself on providing a caring and nurturing "family" environment. As described in the complete presentation of the literature review in the Appendix, research literature suggests that high-poverty, high-performing schools create a school environment that is conducive to student learning. Making children feel comfortable at school increases their confidence and supports their learning capabilities (see Appendix). It may be that LIFE Prep students want to do well and believe they can do well because people who they see as important, caring figures in their lives at school believe in and have high expectations of them. This cannot be verified by the data collected, but it seems that perhaps the family environment plays into students feeling supported in their efforts and wanting to do well for those who care about them. Rewards are also offered for students who do well, including positive encouragement, recognition in school ceremonies, and special opportunities for students who perform exceptionally well. Most staff rated LIFE Prep as "good" or "excellent" at offering rewards for students who perform well (83%) (Figure A3).

> *My teachers have high expectations for me, everyone in the building does. That's been communicated to me since I started going here in second grade. I saw that the teachers, they were with you on the things that you need help with.—Student focus group participant*
>
> *A warm, welcoming environment—that is very important to my son. Every day, there's someone at the door to greet him. I would walk him to class, and so many people said good morning to him and that was important to him.—Parent focus group participant*
>
> *I think it's a very welcoming and inviting environment for parents/grandparents, and also my children express how much they love – not only like but love – their school. —Parent focus group participant*

Learning about the factors staff feel contribute to student happiness at LIFE Prep may shed further light on what, specifically, may contribute to students' engagement in school and internalization of expectations. LIFE Prep staff were presented with a list of factors and asked to indicate those they think contribute to students' happiness at the school. Almost all staff indicated the school's caring and nurturing social environment and one-to-one attention to students contribute to student happiness at LIFE Prep (Figure 5).

5. LIFE Prep student happiness index (N=47)

What factors do you feel contribute to student happiness at LIFE Prep?



Note. *LIFE Prep staff were asked to indicate all that apply. Results are also presented in Figure A28.*

Staff culture of commitment/empowerment

Hiring and retaining staff who are committed to the school and its students goes hand-in-hand with promoting a caring and nurturing environment for students. A staff culture of empowerment and commitment to the school also emerged as its own distinctive component, however. Nearly all staff (94%) said LIFE Prep was "good" or "excellent" at creating a high level of staff commitment to the school, its mission, and its students. Most rated LIFE Prep "good" or "excellent" at creating a culture of teacher and staff empowerment and independence (83%), and having staff with a high level of accountability in helping students succeed (83%) (Figure A3). Cambridge Education's school quality review of LIFE Prep (Knowles, 2011) also recognized staff empowerment as a school strength:

> *Staff are empowered to take responsibility, be innovative and be creative in their teaching, and respond by demonstrating a strong commitment to the school, its mission, and values. Teachers participate fully in the opportunities provided for collaborative working, especially for planning.*

LIFE Prep's staff culture of commitment and empowerment appears to be a function of several factors. One factor appears to be the hiring of staff who are committed to the school, its mission, and students. While they are at LIFE Prep, teachers are encouraged to have a degree of autonomy in their classrooms to use the methods they find most effective or try new, innovative methods. With this freedom comes accountability for student success. The school closely analyzes student assessment data to understand progress and address needs. LIFE Prep also participates in the state's Q Comp teacher performance system. Students' growth scores are broken down at a classroom level and shared with teachers. Whether students are at grade level and meeting expected growth factors into teachers' evaluations, raises, and contract negotiations.

> *The level of commitment that staff has is something that is really rare to see, and it is very impressive the amount of work and time they spend at that school.—Interview respondent*
>
> *When it comes down to … factors responsible for success, the commitment, dedication of teachers with regard to their students [is] first and foremost.—Interview respondent*
>
> *It is in the hiring process for one. We take great care in finding staff members for the school who are willing to go above and beyond in their lives for students at LIFE Prep.—Interview respondent*
>
> *I think the biggest factor is staff commitment to their students and the school. At foremost, they always put students first and you always have a student-centered environment. They put kids' needs ahead of anything else. This is unlike anywhere I've been.—Interview respondent*

LIFE Prep's new executive director observed that the culture of teacher empowerment may have suffered to some extent in the transition between directors, but this has traditionally been a hallmark of the school.

Classroom framework

Teacher empowerment and autonomy are frequently cited attributes of LIFE Prep. Within this culture, the school also recognized a need for consistency of core practices and requested a framework that could serve as a guide across classrooms. Responses suggest there may be some support for greater consistency; 83 percent of staff said there are areas in which they would like to see greater consistency in classroom practices or school policies at LIFE Prep.

Key classroom ingredients were identified through qualitative analysis of interview, focus group, and observation data, as well as results from open-ended survey questions. Information was gathered on core classroom success factors, classroom management practices that should be used in every elementary and middle school classroom, and areas in which staff would like to see greater consistency. These ingredients reflect attributes that currently characterize LIFE Prep as well as attributes which are aspirational and emerged as important through the data collection.

Figure 6 presents the classroom framework identified through the course of this study. The framework can help LIFE Prep stay true to its model moving forward, and facilitate greater consistency across classrooms. Beyond practices raised in the course of this study, staff should also consider adding other aspirational qualities suggested by outside sources to promote across classrooms. For example, Cambridge Education's school quality review advised a framework for instruction in all grades that includes development of higher-order thinking skills and accountable talk. The report also advised greater use in classrooms of informal strategies to assess students' understanding (Knowles, 2011). These may represent additional important practices to support.

6. LIFE Prep classroom framework

Small class sizes

- Low teacher-student ratio

Differentiated instruction

- Focus on individual student needs
- Use of different instructional methods to meet different student needs (e.g., small groups, whole class work, individualized attention)
- Challenging advanced students

Extra help for students who need it

- Teacher makes sure students understand assignments
- One-to-one help from teacher/paraprofessional for students who fall behind
- Use of tutors for students who fall behind

Student engagement

- Teacher uses techniques to engage students
- Students demonstrate engagement in activities

Parent engagement

- Teacher frequently communicates student progress/needs to parents
- Parents have opportunities to be engaged in their children's school learning (e.g., conferences, special events)

Consistent discipline/behavior management

- Understanding of consistent school-wide behavior expectations and behavior management practices
- Implementation of consistent school-wide discipline practices

Positive reinforcement for accomplishments

- Acknowledgement of and praise for accomplishments

Values consistent with school mission

- Building character/promoting values consistent with the school's mission (e.g., owning your success)

Effective use of technology

- Where appropriate and available, use of technology such as computers and iPads as part of student learning
- Assumes teachers are trained on learning applications of the technology

Connections to research literature

> ***Study question 3**. Which elements of LIFE Prep's model are supported by research on high-poverty, high-performing schools, and which represent innovations unique to LIFE Prep?*

Wilder Research conducted a literature review to understand the extent to which LIFE Prep's model intersects with research on characteristics of schools that are high-achieving or "beating the odds" given expectations for the population they serve. The review emphasized research on characteristics of schools succeeding with minority or low-income populations.

We found considerable overlap between characteristics identified in the literature review and the core components of LIFE Prep's model. Characteristics of high-poverty, high-performing schools are briefly summarized here, and areas of overlap with LIFE Prep's model are discussed. A detailed write-up of the characteristics identified in the literature appears in the report Appendix.

Background

The adverse effects of poverty on student and school performance are well documented. Studies show that schools with high concentrations of low-income students typically score lower on standardized tests than schools with students from economically advantaged and well-resourced backgrounds. Students at high-poverty schools face a set of challenges associated with school underperformance, such as high teacher and student turnover, high student mobility, limited parent engagement, inexperienced teachers and poor quality teaching, and low expectations. However, there are a growing number of schools with low-income student bodies that challenge these trends. These schools often perform at or above the state averages on standardized tests and have become known as "high-poverty, high-performing" schools. These schools have also been characterized as "beating the odds" or "high-achieving."

High-poverty, high-performing schools have gained substantial interest from policymakers and education researchers in recent years. As a result, a sizable body of literature has emerged that outlines common characteristics associated with these schools. These characteristics reflect strategies and practices generally accepted to be effective and which have been widely implemented in high-poverty, high-performing schools.

Characteristics of high-poverty, high-performing schools

Several lists of characteristics defining high-poverty, high-performing schools exist, but the set of characteristics identified by Barr and Parrett (2007) surfaced frequently in the literature review as the baseline characteristics needed to understand high-poverty, high-performing schools.

Some of the characteristics also encompass district-level attributes applicable only to traditional public schools. Figure 7 briefly summarizes the characteristics of high-poverty, high-performing schools identified by Barr and Parrett, plus an additional characteristic identified by Shannon and Bylsma (2007). These characteristics are explored in greater detail in the full literature review in the Appendix, and their presence in LIFE Prep's model is discussed at the end of this section.

These characteristics prove most effective when the strategies and practices overlap, functioning as a holistic system of operation within the school. Most studies reviewed did not specify the number of characteristics that will lead a high-poverty school to become a high-performing school, but almost every study suggested that the implementation of one or two of these characteristics would not be enough to become a high-performing school. Further, the local contexts of the neighborhood and school should inform the implementation of the practices and strategies within each of the characteristics in order for them to be effective.

7. Characteristics of high-poverty, high-performing schools[a]

Characteristic	Description
Ensure effective district and school leadership	Despite challenges facing high-poverty schools, school leadership effectively navigate relationships with students, parents, teachers, staff, district administration, and the broader community, and implement a vision that is meaningful to staff and students.
Align, monitor, and manage the curriculum	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are linked. Curriculum is informed by standards, assessments are used to track student progress on the curriculum, and teachers find effective instructional techniques to support curriculum goals.
High levels of collaboration and communication	Teachers work together regularly to learn from each other and improve their practice. This collaboration may include developing and aligning curriculum, observing each other's classrooms, peer-modeling of instructional techniques, sharing knowledge and best practices, and using student data to inform practice.
Engage parents, communities, and schools to work as partners	Schools develop mechanisms to effectively engage and sustain trust with parents, often overcoming structural obstacles to parent participation such as sporadic work schedules, transportation barriers, and limited knowledge of how to support children academically.
Understand and hold high expectations for low-income, culturally diverse students	Children are viewed as individuals and emphasized as the top priority. High achievement standards are set for all children, and everything at the school revolves around individual students' success.
Target low-performing students and schools, starting with reading	Students from low-income backgrounds tend to score lower on reading tests, and these schools employ strategies to emphasize reading as a major academic priority.
Create a culture of data and assessment literacy	Schools understand how to interpret and act on student progress data, and integrate data into all aspects of decision-making.
Build and sustain instructional capacity	At times overcoming challenges of high teacher turnover and inexperienced teachers, these schools use strategies to support and cultivate highly qualified teachers. Examples include mentoring and support for differentiated instruction.
Reorganize time, space, and transitions	Time, space, and transitions are reorganized to complement learning in purposeful ways, such as by extending the school day or reconfiguring the classroom layout to create an environment conducive to learning.

[a] *All characteristics are from Barr & Parrett (2007) except "high levels of collaboration and communication," which was added from Shannon & Bylsma (2007).*

Note: *A detailed description of each component is provided in the Appendix.*

Additional characteristics

We chose to focus our literature review on research supporting the eight characteristics identified by Barr and Parrett due to their prevalence in the literature, plus one additional characteristic from the list reported by Shannon and Bylsma (i.e., high levels of collaboration and communication). The list reported by Shannon and Bylsma from the Washington state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction identified nine characteristics of schools with students achieving at higher levels than might be predicted based on their demographic characteristics. These nine characteristics were originally identified in 2001 based on a review of more than

20 studies, and were revisited and validated by an expert review in 2006. There is considerable overlap among the characteristics identified in the Washington review and those of Barr and Parrett, and the Washington review again found that schools succeeding with these students typically exhibited several of the characteristics. The nine characteristics identified in the Washington review follow (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007):

- A clear and shared focus
- High standards and expectations for all students
- Effective school leadership
- High levels of collaboration and communication
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards
- Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
- Focused professional development
- A supportive learning environment
- High levels of family and community involvement

Connections between LIFE Prep's model and research literature

LIFE Prep's model shares a number of the characteristics commonly cited in the research literature of high-performing, high-poverty schools. The literature suggests that high-poverty, high-performing schools create a school environment that is conducive to student learning, and LIFE Prep's nurturing environment emerged as a hallmark of the school. The school also upholds a culture of high expectations for all students, and uses student-level data to understand and address needs. A longer calendar year and school day are offered to provide extended learning time. LIFE Prep also focuses on achievement gaps, and provides individualized attention to low-performing students. While there may be more room for parents' involvement in formal events and opportunities at the school, as discussed later, teachers maintain a very high level of parent engagement through frequent individual communications with parents.

The research literature found that characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools are most effective when they operate as a holistic system. Qualitative data gathered through the course of this study suggest that school culture may be the underlying thread unifying these characteristics at LIFE Prep. While this cannot be proven definitively, it may be that the school's family environment factors into students' internalization of expectations, willingness

to spend more time at school, teachers' commitment to addressing individual student needs, and teachers' responsiveness to parents. It is one thing to communicate high expectations to students, but LIFE Prep seems to have effectively promoted the internalization of those expectations. Likewise, beyond establishing teacher expectations, the school seems to have effectively cultivated a culture in which teachers are genuinely committed to the mission of the school and its students. LIFE Prep shares a number of characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools, but it is the internalization of these factors among students and staff that seems to set LIFE Prep apart. It should be noted that past leadership likely played a key role in shaping LIFE Prep's culture, although school leadership is not a primary focus of this study due to the transition that occurred during its course.

Success factors

> ***Study question 4***. *What are the school's "success factors" at the school and classroom levels which appear to have contributed to LIFE Prep's positive student achievement results?*

LIFE Prep's model and success factors are intertwined. Success factors are the hallmarks of the school that shape its identity and comprise the practices that define its model. Success factors are also called out separately here to highlight those practices staff should take pride in, and that should be carried forward as the school relocates and expands.

Success factors were identified based on survey results and qualitative data analysis, reflecting characteristics of LIFE Prep most frequently raised or rated highly by respondents as areas in which the school has performed well. Based on the case study design, we cannot attribute student outcomes to these factors; however, the factors presented here reflect areas in which those close to the school feel the school has had the greatest success.

School-level success factors

> *We have monthly assemblies to reward students. We also have special activities for students at the top of the class such as horseback riding and trips to the waterpark. That motivates the students to do well.—Interview respondent*

Figure 8 identifies school success factors based on areas in which most staff (more than 80%) rated LIFE Prep as "good" or "excellent," and most-frequently cited success factors in the qualitative data collection. Detailed survey results on which these factors are based are presented in the Appendix. To a large extent, the core components of LIFE Prep's model presented in Figure 4 reflect the school's success factors.

8. School-level success factors

LIFE Prep SUCCESS FACTORS: School level

❍	High level of staff commitment to the school, its mission, and its students
❍	Caring and nurturing school environment
❍	Extra time for learning (extended day, extended year, Saturday school)
❍	Differentiated instruction
❍	High level of accountability of staff in helping students succeed
❍	Teacher/staff empowerment and independence

8. School-level success factors (continued)

LIFE Prep SUCCESS FACTORS: School level

❍	Rewards for student accomplishments (positive encouragement, school ceremonies, special opportunities)
❍	Use of Individual Learning Plans to set goals for individual students and differentiate instruction
❍	Smaller student-to-teacher ratio
❍	High level of student engagement

Classroom-level success factors

> *Lowest-performing kids by far benefited from the focus on small groups and multiple adults in the classroom.—Interview respondent*
>
> *We do conferences three times per year—other schools typically do conferences twice per year.—Interview respondent*

Figure 9 identifies classroom success factors based on classroom teachers' and paraprofessionals' responses to the survey as well as analysis of success factors raised during the qualitative data collection. Factors reflect core classroom components with the highest percentage of teachers and paraprofessionals indicating they "strongly agree" that component exists in their classroom, as well as qualitative analysis of open-ended survey questions asking what curricular and instructional practices, strategies for differentiating instruction, and student interventions they find most effective (Figures A40, A43, A48, and A50). Based on themes expressed during the qualitative data collection, teachers' self-reported uses of student data were also examined, as well as their practices for communicating with students and parents (Figures A34, A47, and A52).

Classroom success factors presented here are more distinctive than the school-level success factors and core components of the model. The purpose of this list is not to universally endorse these factors, but to reflect practices that are relatively widespread and perceived by LIFE Prep teaching staff as effective.

9. Classroom-level success factors

LIFE Prep SUCCESS FACTORS: Classroom level

❍	**Positive reinforcement**. Use of positive reinforcement to encourage student learning and behaviors.
❍	**Differentiated instruction**. Use of differentiated instruction methods every day, including ability-level grouping, students completing group work in stations, students working independently, and other strategies
❍	**Help for students falling behind**. One-to-one help for students needing extra attention.
❍	**Frequent homework**. Assigning homework every night for students.
❍	**Data use**. Use of student data to identify students who are advanced and behind, to differentiate instruction, and in lesson planning and curriculum planning.
❍	**Student engagement**. Students are engaged in activities, and teachers use strategies such as asking questions to engage students.
❍	**Parent communication**. Frequent communication with parents (phone calls, e-mail, text messaging, conferences three times per year, and other forms of communication).
❍	**Student communication**. Frequent communication of student progress to students themselves.
❍	**Use of technology**. Frequent use of technology (computers, iPads) in student learning.

Sharing successful practices

The staff survey included questions asking about effective ways of sharing successful practices. Staff responses to these questions may be helpful in considering ways to share and discuss the information highlighted in this report. Asked to indicate what they see as effective ways of sharing successful practices with other teachers and staff at LIFE Prep, staff most frequently indicated grade-level staff meetings (85%), followed by one-on-one conversations with other staff (77%), professional development sessions (74%), and all-school staff meetings (60%) (Figure A32). Asked in a follow-up question for any recommendations for how successful practices could be better shared across teachers and staff at LIFE Prep, staff offered several ideas including staff development, regular meetings, and constructive feedback from each other and paying attention to others' ideas (Figure A33).

LIFE Prep's new executive director also expressed that he intends to place more emphasis on professional learning communities (PLCs) to foster teacher collaboration and share practices. This practice is supported by the literature review conducted for this study. As described in the complete presentation of the literature review in the Appendix, often teacher collaboration in high-performing schools takes the form of PLCs. PLCs focus on improving student learning through teachers working together, learning from each other, and helping each other improve teaching practices.

Data use

> ***Study question 5**. In what ways can LIFE Prep advance its use of assessment data to monitor and support instruction and learning?*

Many high-performing, high-poverty schools make decisions informed by data, and work to create, implement, and utilize data systems to develop student work plans and evaluate student progress. As described in the complete presentation of the literature review in the Appendix, research shows that these schools carefully select assessment tools that match their school's mission, and use assessments that provide data that can be directly translated into teacher action. Many of the successful schools use assessments and data weekly to monitor student progress. The frequency of using data does not supersede data utility, but data is most effective when it is used as a part of a continual process of student evaluation (see Appendix).

The figures provided in the Academic Performance section of the report provide some new ways of looking at LIFE Prep student data, and templates for continuing to track these data over time. The qualitative data collection and staff survey also included questions asking for feedback on any ways LIFE Prep can advance its use of student assessment data.

Types of data use

Major assessment tools

Both the qualitative data collection and survey results indicate LIFE Prep staff is doing well with using student data to differentiate instruction. As described previously, LIFE Prep uses the quarterly NWEA MAP assessment to monitor student progress during the year. Teachers and paraprofessionals completing the survey were asked several questions about their use of data. Most indicated they use data to identify students who are advanced (83%), identify students who are behind (83%), and group students for differentiated instruction (77%). A majority indicated they use data in lesson planning (67%), and half indicated they use data in curriculum planning (50%) (Figure A52).

> *I think that's our strong point is analyzing data. If we had more time we could sit down and do [a] better job of mapping out (every few weeks). Using assessment data is our stronger point—that's how we found out what student's needs are and what they are missing. I look at their data and make decisions based on that. I know other teachers do that as well. —Interview respondent*

> *Like they found middle school science and social studies kids weren't doing well there and it looked like the curricula was interesting but it wasn't supporting the testing/scores. They looked at that and they re-did the curriculum for science and social studies as well. —Interview respondent*

Lesson or unit-level assessments

A majority of teachers and paraprofessionals (70%) indicated they use data from smaller lessons or unit-level assessments between the quarterly NWEA assessments for purposes of monitoring student progress and differentiating instruction (Figure A53). Still, it seems there may be room for greater use of this more granular-level data. Most teachers and paraprofessionals indicated they look at data monthly or more often (83%), but 17 percent said they look at it only in preparation for conferences (Figure A55). A majority of teachers and paraprofessionals (57%) indicated they think students would benefit from more frequent data use (Figure A58).

> *Making it better involves defining priorities for them to get better at granular-level data use, and professional development for teachers in house from a better use of that granular data. They need to have someone who develops a teacher observation rubric and protocol that is specific to LIFE Prep that they find valuable but also contains solid teacher instructional practices that they want to see in the school, and actually do observations and give teachers feedback and talk about those results.*
> *—Interview respondent*

Teacher support for working with data

Almost half of LIFE Prep teachers and paraprofessionals indicated they are "very comfortable" using student data, and an additional 43 percent indicated they are "somewhat comfortable" (Figure A56). Although there seems to be a fairly high level of comfort, teaching staff indicated they might like to receive more support for and assistance with working with student-level data. Asked if they feel there is enough support offered at LIFE Prep to assist teachers and staff in developing their skills for working with student-level data, 33 percent of teachers and paraprofessionals indicated "yes," 47 percent indicated "somewhat," and the remainder (20%) indicated "no" (Figure A57). Providing more time for professional development around data also emerged as a theme in the qualitative data collection.

Teaching staff also offered some practical suggestions for ways more frequent data analysis could be incorporated into their schedule. Respondents most frequently indicated this could be done during professional development hours (57%), during another specified set-aside time period for teachers (53%), and during weekly grade-level meetings (47%) (Figure A59).

A friend of mine works at another charter school. Their school day is really long. Every Friday at their school is a half-day, and they use that time for professional development and data analysis. I think that's helpful to have that structured time. Here, you're supposed to do it in your off-time. Maybe [LIFE Prep] could benefit from a more structured environment. [The] administrator team could be there, and we could look at all the scores, and [have] structured time set aside to do that.—Interview respondent

Refinements

> ***Study question 6**. Are there any areas where LIFE Prep might consider refinement of its model at this time?*

In addition to identifying core components of the model and success factors, LIFE Prep requested that Wilder Research assist in the identification of any areas in which the school could refine or strengthen its model moving forward. Interview respondents, focus group participants, and survey participants were asked to provide specific feedback on potential refinements. Their input was synthesized into the following areas for LIFE Prep's consideration, described below:

- Challenging gifted students
- Curriculum standardization
- Curriculum/program expansion
- Uniformity in discipline practices
- Middle school program
- More formal parent involvement
- School-wide parent communication
- Strengthening before/after care
- Cultural competency
- Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)
- Improvements to lunches/building

Challenging advanced students

LIFE Prep has historically been focused on the achievement gap, and achieved notable successes with underprivileged populations. However, as found in the later Academic Achievement section, the relatively high proportion of students with "low growth" who were proficient in math and reading suggests that there may be a need to challenge higher-performing students more at LIFE Prep. This theme also emerged in the qualitative data collection, with feedback suggesting a need to now turn more attention to challenging advanced

students while maintaining the focus on those who fall behind. A number of interview and focus group participants expressed a need to support and encourage students who are accelerated. Asked in what ways they challenge the advanced students in their classroom, 79 percent of teachers and paraprofessionals indicated they provide more difficult lessons and activities, followed by other less frequently used practices (Figure A49). Teachers may need more support and expectations around challenging advanced students, and strategies for doing so.

Curriculum standardization

The empowerment and freedom to innovate afforded to LIFE Prep teachers seem to factor into the staff's culture of commitment to the school and its students. Data suggest it may be beneficial to consider greater standardization in some areas, however. Asked whether there should be a more standardized curriculum at LIFE Prep, 45 percent of staff indicated "yes" (Figure A4). In a follow-up question asking them to explain their answer, staff suggesting more standardization most frequently indicated that it would provide more consistency as students move through grades. There would be greater understanding of what students already know and potentially less overlap in instruction. Some also noted that it could create better training opportunities for new staff. Asked separately how important it is for LIFE Prep to implement a school-wide guided curriculum for math, 66 percent of staff indicated "very important" and an additional 13 percent indicated "somewhat important" (Figure A7). Greater standardization may also help address some inconsistency in academic performance results across grade levels (see Academic Performance section).

This issue should be addressed carefully, however. Although a fairly high percentage indicated a need for more standardization, a majority (55%) indicated they did not see a need. Those staff most frequently commented that teachers should have the freedom to use what works for them, and that teachers need to be able to cater to student needs and different learning styles (Figure A4). Still, it seems notable that two-thirds of staff indicated that implementing a school-wide guided curriculum for math is "very" important.

> *This summer we've spiraled up [into the higher grades] from kindergarten for [the] math program. [Teachers have] a curriculum so we can create a common language, and [it] still [allows] teacher flexibility.—Interview respondent*

Curriculum/program expansion

LIFE Prep's focus has been on closing achievement gaps. In addition to considering areas that may benefit from increased standardization, there also appears to be some support for expanding the focus beyond the core subjects of reading and math. Asked how important it is that LIFE Prep implement school-wide science and social studies curricula, more than three-

quarters of staff indicated each was either "somewhat" or "very important" (Figures A5 and A6). In a separate question, a majority of staff (61%) indicated that increasing science instruction is an important priority for LIFE Prep in considering possible future program enhancements (Figure A21). Academic data presented in the report support this need, with very few LIFE Prep students demonstrating proficiency in science.

A majority of staff (61%) also indicated that offering more sports or team-centered opportunities is an important future priority to consider, and 48 percent indicated that incorporating more fine arts opportunities is an important possible future program enhancement (Figure A21). A couple of students in the student focus group also mentioned more sports when asked to describe any ways LIFE Prep could be better.

Uniformity in discipline practices

Discipline policies emerged as an area for refinement in both the qualitative data collection and staff survey. Asked whether there are any areas in which they would like to see greater consistency in classroom practices or school policies at LIFE Prep, most staff (83%) indicated "yes." Explaining their responses in a follow-up question, staff most frequently cited discipline as the area in which they would like to see greater consistency, followed by behavior management and expectations (Figure A15). Further, asked to what extent they agree that LIFE Prep has effective discipline policies, 38 percent of staff indicated they "disagree" and 13 percent said they "strongly disagree" (Figure A18). Almost all staff (94%) indicated they "agree" or "strongly agree" that LIFE Prep would benefit from more uniformity in disciplinary actions (Figure A19). LIFE Prep's new executive director also expressed the importance of fostering more consistency in discipline practices.

> *I believe that we should have a school-wide discipline policy that we can tailor for our specific grade level and classroom but not deviate too far from the school-wide policy.*
> *—Survey respondent*
>
> *We need to have clear-cut expectations for both behavior and academic achievement. I feel they should be drafted, posted, and presented in every classroom so that students and parents are aware of them. I also feel that whatever those expectations are should be talked about from time to time and not just glossed over at the beginning of every year.*
> *—Survey respondent*

Efforts to examine discipline practices should address bullying as well. Only 30 percent of staff indicated there is a school-wide protocol in place to address bullying, with the rest indicating "no" or "don't know" (Figure A20). Concordia University's 2011 renewal report for LIFE Prep advised a school-wide effort to eliminate bullying, including student, staff, and parent education on bullying and what it entails.

Middle school program

Concordia University's spring 2011 renewal report for LIFE Prep expressed the expectation that weaker academic scores in the middle school grades would be addressed. Student turnover in the middle school program poses a challenge, and the report stated the importance of addressing this issue if it is a key factor in disparities in academic scores between the elementary and middle school levels. LIFE Prep's new executive director also emphasized the importance of strengthening the middle school program, and mentioned strategies he is exploring such as Response to Intervention and additional programming in early years to provide a stronger foundation (e.g., Minnesota Math Corps).

It seems important to focus attention on ways to strengthen the middle school program given these perceptions, as well as similar informal observations offered by staff in the course of the study. Student academic results paint a somewhat more nuanced picture, however. Results vary by grade level and between reading and math, and it is difficult to make a blanket statement about elementary vs. middle school based strictly on these data. In general, academic data suggest a need to focus on how much growth students are making, which varies by subject and grade (see Academic Performance section).

More formal parent involvement

LIFE Prep teachers appear to maintain frequent communication with and make themselves highly accessible to parents. However, a need for more formal parent involvement in the school was expressed in the interviews and focus groups. Respondents described interest in having more parents participate on the school board, holding more parent meetings, asking parents to get involved at the school, and establishing a parent-teacher organization (PTO). Nearing the end of our data collection for this study, a PTO was launched at the school. According to LIFE Prep's director, the PTO has been successful in this early stage and provides parents with a greater sense of ownership as stakeholders, allowing them to play a role in the school's governance. Survey respondents also indicated that improving parent communication, addressed below, may be one way of increasing parent involvement (Figure A38).

School-wide parent communication

Although one-to-one teacher-parent communication appears to be strong at LIFE Prep, there may be ways to improve school-wide parent communications. In the focus groups, a few parents suggested ways to strengthen school-wide communications, such as making sure email lists are up-to-date, directly notifying parents of non-uniform days, providing information on who to contact for various issues, and providing updates on changes taking place at the school. Following up on this feedback, the survey asked staff to identify ways

communication with parents could be improved at LIFE Prep on a school-wide basis. Respondents most frequently indicated notification further in advance of special events (71%), electronic calendars on the school website for special events (56%), and better email distribution lists (44%) (Figure A36).

Strengthening before/after care

Most staff agreed or strongly agreed that Saturday school and summer school help increase students' academic achievement (87% and 96%, respectively) (Figures A23 and A24). A smaller percentage of staff (44%) agreed or strongly agreed that before and after care helps increase students' academic achievement (Figure A25). Asked to share any additional thoughts about Saturday school, summer school, and before and after care, staff most frequently indicated that they should be more academically based (Figure A26).

Survey respondents noted that before and after care provides an important service to parents, and a couple noted a concern with wearing students out if it felt too much like school. However, feedback suggests that before and after care specifically may warrant attention to ways in which the program could be more structured and improved.

> *I like summer school. Many of the kids wouldn't have anywhere to go or might be left at home alone. Having summer school gives them something to do during the day in a safe place, and they can continue their learning at the same time. I don't think before/after care helps academics, but it is something that shouldn't go away. Parents have to work early sometimes and they may live in an area that doesn't get bus service, so they need to get their child to school in time for them to go to work.—Survey respondent*
>
> *I think before and aftercare need to be more structured to prevent problems with student behavior. —Survey respondent*
>
> *Aftercare could serve the students better by having organized tutoring or some sort of structured games.—Survey respondent*
>
> *I think there should be a more structured schedule for before and after care. Students seem to roam around the hallways and bother teachers before and after school. Students are also given too much freedom, and of course some won't use that time to work on their homework if basketball and outside time are options.—Survey respondent*

Cultural competency

Asked how well they think LIFE Prep employs culturally competent policies and practices, 36 percent of staff indicated "very well" and 57 percent "somewhat well" (Figure A29). This did not emerge as a major area of concern, but may be an area to build on in the future. Asked to suggest ways LIFE Prep could increase cultural awareness and cultural competency among teachers and staff, several staff suggested cultural development classes, workshops, or trainings, or more field trips and events celebrating culture and differences. Additional

suggestions offered by staff are summarized in Figure A31. Asked specifically about implementing an English Learner/English as a Second Language program, 59 percent of staff indicated that implementing such a program should be a high priority for LIFE Prep, and 37 percent indicated it should be somewhat of a priority (Figure A30).

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

LIFE Prep uses Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) to establish and monitor progress toward goals at the individual student level. Almost half of the survey respondents (47%) indicated they are a staff person who uses ILPs for students (Figure A8). These staff were asked a series of questions about the frequency and ways in which they use ILPs. All of these staff indicated they use ILPs to set goals for individual students. Most (82%) indicated they use ILPs to build student instructional groups. A majority of these staff also indicated they use ILPs for daily lesson planning (73%), setting goals for their classroom (68%), and curriculum planning (59%) (Figure A11).

Feedback from the parent focus groups indicated there may be room to use ILPs more extensively than they are currently being used. A few parents indicated they were not familiar with their student's ILP. Asked how frequently they share students' progress on their ILPs, most survey respondents who use ILPs indicated that they use them to share progress with parents at conferences only (86%), with the remainder indicating they use them to share progress with parents monthly or more (14%) (Figures A9 and A10). Cambridge Education's school quality review also advised "sharpening goal setting so that students have a more precise understanding of their short-term goals and the actions they need to take to achieve them" (Knowles, 2011).

> *LIFE Prep should make ILPs more visible to parents. Parents should be involved in what those plans are.—Interview respondent*
>
> *My son is in seventh grade; we've been here since second grade. I saw the ILP for the first time this year. … [I] think it's an excellent tool. I like how it's written as far as how the plan is, and how my son was going to achieve things and what the teachers were going to do. — Parent focus group participant*
>
> *I don't have a clear description of what [an] individual learning plan looks like. … I don't know how it's helpful.—Parent focus group participant*

LIFE Prep's new director indicated he would like to place more focus on ILPs. For example, he sees potential to use them to more specifically help students prepare for their future and transition when they graduate from LIFE Prep. He would like to build partnerships with high schools attended by LIFE Prep students to develop goals that will prepare students for that transition, and possibly build in connections to registrars and counselors at schools they may attend.

Improvements to lunches/building

Students participating in the student focus group were asked for ideas to make LIFE Prep better. Several students said they would like to have better school lunches. Among the students in the focus group, this seemed to be an important issue.

> *Lunch – I think the lunch here is not so good. We have beans every day, and no one wants to eat it and kids will be hungry because the food is not good except pizza and chicken patties. After lunch I have to ask my teacher for some food – like a Poptart or Nutrigrain bar.—Student focus group participant*

A couple of students and a couple of staff also noted in the qualitative data collection that a bigger school building is needed. LIFE Prep is in the process of renovating a new, larger location for the school. A couple of parents in the parent focus group also noted that the school is not as clean as it had been in the past or that student work on the walls needs to be changed more frequently.

Academic performance

> ***Study question 7***. *How are LIFE Prep students performing academically, overall and within subgroups of students? Based on available data, how does LIFE Prep student performance compare to that of students at other schools with similar demographics as well as to national norms?*

This section reports LIFE Prep student outcomes, including proficiency and growth, based on Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) and Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) data. As previously noted, overall LIFE Prep's use of data appeared to be a strength. Nevertheless, the school felt there was room for improvement and requested that Wilder Research identify potential comparisons and explore additional ways of reporting that may facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the school's academic performance and areas of strength and need. To this end, the Academic Performance section of the report provides a detailed, technical analysis of results, including separate sections for MCA and NWEA MAP data. Supplemental data tables are provided in the Appendix and referenced throughout the section.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments

This section provides information on how LIFE Prep students have performed recently on the MCA in reading, math, and science. It includes information on student proficiency, growth, and achievement gaps. LIFE Prep's MCA performance is compared to other east-side schools in St. Paul that serve similar student populations. Comparisons are also made between LIFE Prep and the St. Paul school district, the Minneapolis school district, and Minnesota overall. LIFE Prep's results on Minnesota's Multiple Measurement Ratings (MMR) are described. All the data reported in this section are from the Minnesota Department of Education.

Reading

Figure 10 indicates the percent of LIFE Prep students who were proficient in MCA II reading in 2010, 2011, and 2012 for all students tested. Results are also reported separately by race/ethnicity groups, enrollment in LIFE Prep on October 1, English Learners, eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, Special Education, and by grade (grades 3-8). Overall, 77 percent of students were proficient in reading in 2010. The percentage proficient rose to 80 percent in 2011 and decreased to 70 percent in 2012. Those students who were enrolled in LIFE Prep on October 1st and tested at LIFE Prep the following spring (an indicator of stability) had proficiency rates almost the same as all students (one percentage point higher in 2012).

Achievement gaps by race/ethnicity or income (based on free or reduced price lunch eligibility) were small in 2010 and 2011. However, in 2012, black students' proficiency dropped 18 percentage points from the previous year to 59 percent, while white students' proficiency increased by five percentage points to 87 percent, creating a 28 percentage point gap. Other gaps by race/ethnicity and income tended to increase in 2012 but were smaller. The proficiency of English Learners also decreased sharply from 2011 to 2012, from 93 percent to 57 percent. The proficiency of Special Education students in reading fluctuated during the three-year period.

Results by grade indicated that students in grades 3 and 4 tended to have higher proficiency rates in reading than students in grades 5-8 during the three-year period. In 2012, 3rd and 4th graders had proficiency rates of 81 and 84 percent, respectively, while 5th to 8th graders had rates between 53 and 68 percent. There was a large decrease from 2010 to 2012 in the proficiency rate of 5th graders (from 96 percent to 53 percent). However, the proficiency rate of 8th-grade students increased from 38 percent in 2010 to 63 percent in 2012.

10. MCA-II READING results: Percent of students meeting or exceeding standards (i.e., percent proficient)

Student characteristics	2010 Percent (N[a])	2011 Percent (N[a])	2012 Percent (N[a])
All students assessed	77% (132)	80% (137)	70% (137)
Enrolled Oct. 1	77% (122)	80% (132)	71% (132)
American Indian	[b]	[b]	[b]
Black, not Hispanic	78% (55)	77% (65)	59% (61)
Asian	79% (19)	84% (19)	72% (29)
Hispanic	72% (18)	90% (19)	77% (17)
White, not Hispanic	77% (39)	82% (33)	87% (30)
English Learner	68% (25)	93% (15)	57% (14)
Eligible for free or reduced price lunch	76% (111)	79% (121)	66% (112)
Special Education	49% (33)	74% (23)	43% (28)
Grade 3	100% (22)	93% (30)	81% (32)
Grade 4	82% (33)	96% (22)	84% (31)
Grade 5	96% (24)	87% (30)	53% (17)
Grade 6	59% (22)	73% (26)	68% (22)
Grade 7	67% (15)	47% (17)	53% (19)
Grade 8	38% (16)	67% (12)	63% (16)

[a] *Number of students assessed.*

[b] *Data unavailable (insufficient number of students).*

Figure 11 indicates the percent of students making expected growth in reading during each of the last three years, spring to spring (2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012), for LIFE Prep and Minnesota overall. Results show that 66 percent of LIFE Prep students made expected growth in 2009-2010, 55 percent made expected growth in 2010-2011, and 58 percent did so in 2011-2012. This compares to 65, 67, and 67 percent in these three school years, respectively, for Minnesota. Hence, LIFE Prep was just above the state rate in 2009-2010 but fell below it in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

"Expected growth" refers to students being "on track" for success. For students who tested proficient in the spring of one year, this means that they made medium or high growth in the subsequent year based on their test results the next spring. Making at least medium growth ensures that these students will not fall back into the "not proficient" category. For students testing not proficient, expected growth is defined as making high growth in the subsequent year. By doing this, the student will either become proficient by the following spring or make substantial progress toward proficiency such that the student will be proficient within four years if growth continues at a similar rate. Students need to remain at the school during the school year between the two testing points to be included in the school's growth analyses. This usually reduces the numbers of students included in the analysis.

Percentages making expected growth in reading are also shown by each grade (4 through 8) for each of the three years. It appears that the decrease in the percent of LIFE Prep 5th graders proficient in reading seen in Figure 10 may be related to the decrease in 5th graders making expected growth in reading during these years (dropped from 85% to 40%). In 2012, LIFE Prep 4th graders were most likely to make expected growth (70%).

11. Students making expected growth in MCA-II READING by year and grade

Student characteristics		Percent of students making expected growth[a] 2009 - 2010 Percent (N[b])	2010 - 2011 Percent (N[b])	2011 - 2012 Percent (N[b])
All Grades[c]	LIFE Prep	66% (86)	55% (96)	58% (97)
	Minnesota	65%	67%	67%
Grade 4	LIFE Prep	60% (20)	58% (19)	70% (27)
	Minnesota	67%	71%	70%
Grade 5	LIFE Prep	85% (20)	64% (28)	40% (15)
	Minnesota	66%	72%	69%
Grade 6	LIFE Prep	61% (18)	52% (23)	60% (20)
	Minnesota	72%	73%	71%
Grade 7	LIFE Prep	69% (13)	56% (16)	58% (19)
	Minnesota	62%	65%	67%
Grade 8	LIFE Prep	53% (15)	30% (10)	50% (16)
	Minnesota	63%	63%	68%

[a] *Based on current information these students are "on track" for success. That is, they are expected to either remain or become proficient. This includes students who were proficient at the previous assessment and made medium or high growth in the subsequent year, and students who were not proficient at the previous assessment and made high growth in the subsequent year.*

[b] *Number of students assessed.*

[c] *Includes grades 4-8 for LIFE Prep, and grades 4-8 and 10 for Minnesota.*

More detailed analyses of reading growth in the 2011-2012 year are provided in Figure 12, indicating the numbers and percentages of LIFE Prep students who had low, medium, and high growth for students who were proficient in spring 2011 and for students who were not proficient in spring 2011. Percentages sum to 100 percent across the proficient and not proficient categories. These analyses show that a fairly large number of proficient students had low growth which indicates that these students may have dropped to not proficient in spring 2012 or were in danger of doing so in the future. Note especially that 60 percent of 5th grade students who were proficient in spring 2011 had low growth in the subsequent year. Again, this result may help explain the drop in the proficiency rate seen in 5th grade in 2012. Also, the number of non-proficient students making high growth is fairly small, indicating that few non-proficient students became proficient in the 2011-2012 year. Hence, it appears that the low growth of many proficient students and the lack of high growth among most non-proficient students contributed to the overall decrease in reading proficiency seen at LIFE Prep in 2012.

12. Students having low, medium, and high growth by proficiency level: MCA-II READING

		Growth from spring 2011 to spring 2012						
		Proficient in spring 2011			Not proficient in spring 2011			
Student characteristics		**Low**	**Medium**	**High**	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**	**Total**
All grades	Percent	30%	32%	21%	5%	7%	5%	100%
	Number	29	31	20	5	7	5	97
Grade 4	Percent	22%	30%	37%	4%	4%	4%	100%
	Number	6	8	10	1	1	1	27
Grade 5	Percent	60%	33%	7%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Number	9	5	1	0	0	0	15
Grade 6	Percent	30%	50%	10%	0%	10%	0%	100%
	Number	6	10	2	0	2	0	20
Grade 7	Percent	26%	21%	26%	5%	11%	11%	100%
	Number	5	4	5	1	2	2	19
Grade 8	Percent	19%	25%	12%	19%	12%	12%	100%
	Number	3	4	2	3	2	2	16

Math

Figure 13 shows the percent of LIFE Prep students proficient in MCA III math in 2011 and 2012 for all students tested and by student characteristics and grade in school. Only two years are shown because the math test changed from the MCA II to the MCA III beginning in spring 2011. Overall the percent of students proficient in math stayed about the same from 2011 to 2012 (63% and 62%, respectively). Those students who were enrolled in LIFE Prep on October 1, 2012, and tested at LIFE Prep the following spring had proficiency rates just slightly higher than all students (just two percentage points higher in 2012, 64% vs. 62%).

There was little evidence of traditional achievement gaps by race/ethnicity among LIFE Prep students in 2011. Asian and Hispanic students had higher rates of proficiency than white students and the rate for black students was the same as that for white students. Those eligible for free or reduced price lunch had a proficiency rate slightly below that for all students (61% and 63%, respectively). In 2012, the proficiency rate for white students increased sharply while the rates for blacks and Hispanics dropped, resulting in large gaps. The gap by income (based on eligibility for free and reduced price lunch) also appeared to increase slightly.

Math proficiency rates varied by grade and across the two years. Proficiency dropped in 3rd grade and 5th grade between 2011 and 2012 (by 31 and 28 percentage points, respectively) but increased in grades 6 and 8 (by 38 and 19 percentage points, respectively). Proficiency rates stayed about the same in grades 4 and 7. In 2012, 4th graders had the highest rate of proficiency (84%) and 5th graders had the lowest rate (35%).

13. MCA-III MATH results: Percent meeting or exceeding standards (i.e., percent proficient)

Student characteristics	2011 Percent (N[a])	2012 Percent (N[a])
All students assessed	63% (139)	62% (137)
Enrolled Oct. 1	63% (134)	64% (132)
American Indian	[b]	[b]
Black, not Hispanic	58% (67)	46% (61)
Asian	79% (19)	76% (29)
Hispanic	68% (19)	59% (17)
White, not Hispanic	58% (33)	83% (30)
English Learner	80% (15)	64% (14)
Eligible for free or reduced price lunch	61% (123)	59% (112)
Special Education	50% (24)	32% (28)
Grade 3	90% (30)	59% (32)
Grade 4	83% (23)	84% (31)
Grade 5	63% (30)	35% (17)
Grade 6	35% (26)	73% (22)
Grade 7	53% (17)	53% (19)
Grade 8	31% (13)	50% (16)

[a] *Number of students assessed.*

[b] *Data unavailable (insufficient number of students).*

Because the MCA III math test began in spring 2011, Figure 14 only shows growth for the 2011-2012 year (spring 2011 to spring 2012) for LIFE Prep students and all Minnesota students. Overall, 55 percent of LIFE Prep students made expected growth during that year compared to 61 percent of Minnesota students. Results by grade indicate that LIFE Prep 6th graders were most likely to make expected growth (75%) while 5th graders were least likely to make expected growth (27%). The results for 5th graders are consistent with the low proficiency rates for this grade in 2012 noted above.

14. Students making expected growth in MCA-III MATH by year and grade

Student characteristics		Percent of students making expected growth[a] 2011 - 2012 Percent (N[b])
All Grades[c]	LIFE Prep	55% (96)
	Minnesota	61%
Grade 4	LIFE Prep	63% (27)
	Minnesota	64%
Grade 5	LIFE Prep	27% (15)
	Minnesota	65%
Grade 6	LIFE Prep	75% (20)
	Minnesota	60%
Grade 7	LIFE Prep	56% (18)
	Minnesota	60%
Grade 8	LIFE Prep	44% (16)
	Minnesota	60%

[a] *Based on current information these students are "on track" for success. That is, they are expected to either remain or become proficient. This includes students who were proficient at the previous assessment and made medium or high growth in the subsequent year, and students who were not proficient at the previous assessment and made high growth in the subsequent year.*

[b] *Number of students assessed.*

[c] *Includes grades 4-8 for LIFE Prep, and grades 4-8 and grade 11 for Minnesota.*

Figure 15 shows more detailed analyses of growth in the 2011-2012 year, indicating the numbers and percentages of LIFE Prep students who had low, medium, and high growth for students who were proficient in spring 2011 and for students who were not proficient in spring 2011. Percentages sum to 100 percent across the proficient and not proficient categories. Similar to reading, these analyses show that quite large numbers of proficient students had low growth which indicates that these students may have dropped to not proficient in spring 2012 or were in danger of doing so in the future, and again, an especially high percentage of 5th graders had low growth. Overall, 26 of 59 (44%) LIFE Prep students who were proficient in spring 2011 had low growth in the subsequent year. However, on a positive note, the majority of students not proficient in math in spring 2011 had high growth (20 of 37, or 54%), putting them on track to be proficient in math in 2012 or later.

The relatively high proportion of students with "low growth" who were proficient in math and reading suggests that there may be a need to challenge higher-performing students more at LIFE Prep. These data can be taken into consideration in the recommendation to consider

additional ways of challenging advanced students, which is discussed in the Refinements section of the report.

15. Students having low, medium, and high growth by proficiency level: MCA-III MATH

		Growth from spring 2011 to spring 2012						
		Proficient in spring 2011			Not proficient in spring 2011			
Student characteristics		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	Total
All grades	Percent	27%	20%	15%	4%	13%	21%	100%
	Number	26	19	14	4	13	20	96
Grade 4	Percent	22%	30%	26%	4%	11%	7%	100%
	Number	6	8	7	1	3	2	27
Grade 5	Percent	67%	7%	0%	7%	0%	20%	100%
	Number	10	1	0	1	0	3	15
Grade 6	Percent	10%	25%	20%	0%	15%	30%	100%
	Number	2	5	4	0	3	6	20
Grade 7	Percent	28%	6%	6%	6%	11%	44%	100%
	Number	5	1	1	1	2	8	18
Grade 8	Percent	19%	25%	13%	6%	31%	67%	100%
	Number	3	4	2	1	5	1	16

Science

Very few LIFE Prep students were proficient in science, based on the MCA tests given to 5th and 8th graders. Overall in 2012, 6 percent of students taking the MCA III science tests were proficient. This included 13 percent of 8th graders achieving proficiency and none of the 5th graders. School staff are exploring ways to address this concern. Additionally, as shown in Figure A5, most school staff responding to the survey expressed that it is "somewhat" or "very" important that the school implement a school-wide science curriculum.

Summary

In spring 2012, 70 percent of LIFE Prep 3rd through 8th graders were proficient in MCA reading and 62 percent were proficient in MCA math. Reading proficiency decreased somewhat from the previous two years and math proficiency remained about the same as the previous year. Achievement gaps by race/ethnicity emerged in 2012, especially between white and black students in reading proficiency, and white students and both black and Hispanic students in math. Proficiency levels varied widely by grade for both reading and math. The overall percentages of students making expected growth in MCA reading and

math from spring 2011 to spring 2012 were 58 percent and 55 percent, respectively, below the overall statewide percentages in these two subjects. Quite large percentages of LIFE Prep students who were proficient in reading and math in spring of 2011 made low growth in the subsequent year, putting them in danger of becoming non-proficient. This result suggests that there may be a need to challenge higher-performing students more at LIFE Prep.

Comparisons to other schools, school districts, and the state

To better gauge student performance at LIFE Prep, we thought it would be informative to compare LIFE Prep MCA results with those of schools in the same geographic area of St. Paul that serve students with similar characteristics. We identified four schools on the east-side of St. Paul that serve student populations quite similar to LIFE Prep – one charter school and three St. Paul district schools. These schools are Community of Peace Academy charter school (PreK-12), Dayton's Bluff Elementary (preK-5 as of 2012-13, preK-6 previously), Eastern Heights (preK-5 as of 2012-13, preK-6 previously), and Hazel Park Preparatory Academy (preK-7 beginning in 2011-12).

Figure 16 shows the characteristics of LIFE Prep students and the students at the four east-side comparison schools. Characteristics compared include race/ethnicity and proportions of students who are English Learners, eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and receiving Special Education services. Generally, the comparison schools are quite similar to LIFE Prep in the proportions of students who are American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, black, and white. The biggest difference is at Community of Peace Academy where there is a higher proportion of Asian students and lower proportions of black and white students compared to LIFE Prep. With regard to English Learners, comparison schools have higher proportions than LIFE Prep (27%-34% vs. 11%), yet lower proportions than that for the St. Paul school district overall (36%). LIFE Prep and the comparison schools are very closely matched on the percentages of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (87% vs. 83%-95%). LIFE Prep and comparison schools are also similar on the percentages of students receiving Special Education Services (18% vs. 14%-21%).

16. Student characteristics by school: East-side of St. Paul schools with similar student demographics (October 1, 2012)

	School									
	LIFE Prep		Community of Peace Academy		Dayton's Bluff		Eastern Heights		Hazel Park Preparatory Academy	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
All students	306	100%	729	100%	415	100%	386	100%	588	100%
Race/Ethnicity										
American Indian	3	1%	5	1%	11	3%	6	2%	14	2%
Asian	69	23%	360	49%	89	21%	93	24%	136	23%
Hispanic	34	11%	139	19%	66	16%	59	15%	71	12%
Black, not Hispanic	125	41%	149	20%	193	47%	144	37%	273	46%
White, not Hispanic	75	24%	76	10%	56	13%	84	22%	94	16%
English Learner	34	11%	213	29%	111	27%	133	34%	191	32%
Eligible for free or reduced price lunch	265	87%	608	83%	395	95%	334	87%	507	86%
Special Education	54	18%	104	14%	74	18%	80	21%	85	14%

Figure 17 compares the characteristics of students in the St. Paul and Minneapolis school districts, and statewide, with those of LIFE Prep students. The St. Paul district and LIFE Prep are fairly similar in student characteristics; there aren't any large differences in percentages except for English Learners (11% at LIFE Prep and 36% in the district). The St. Paul district has a somewhat higher percentage of Asians and a somewhat lower percentage of blacks than LIFE Prep. Also the district has a somewhat lower percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch than LIFE Prep (73% vs. 87%).

The racial/ethnic distribution of students in the Minneapolis district differs somewhat from LIFE Prep; the largest difference is in the percentage of Asian students (8% vs. 23%). The Minneapolis district has a somewhat higher percentage of English Learners than LIFE Prep and a lower percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

The racial/ethnic characteristics of students statewide and the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch differ greatly from LIFE Prep. Students of color account for 26 percent of the students statewide compared to 76 percent at LIFE Prep, and 37 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch statewide compared to 87 percent at LIFE Prep, a 50 percentage point difference in each case.

17. Student characteristics: LIFE Prep compared with Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts, and Minnesota (October 1, 2012)

Student characteristics	LIFE Prep	St. Paul Public Schools	Minneapolis Public Schools	State of MN
Race/ethnicity				
American Indian	1%	2%	5%	2%
Asian	23%	31%	8%	7%
Hispanic	11%	14%	17%	7%
Black, not Hispanic	41%	29%	36%	10%
White, not Hispanic	24%	24%	35%	74%
English Learner	11%	36%	23%	8%
Eligible for free or reduced price lunch	87%	73%	65%	37%
Special Education	18%	18%	19%	15%

Overall comparisons of MCA reading and math results

Figure 18 indicates the overall percentages of students scoring proficient in MCA II reading and MCA III math for LIFE Prep and the comparison schools, districts, and state. Results are shown for 2010, 2011, and 2012 for reading and 2011 and 2012 for math (only two years are shown for math because a new math test, MCA III, started in 2011). Turning to reading, the percent of students proficient was higher at LIFE Prep than at the comparison schools and districts in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Compared to the state, LIFE Prep students had a higher rate of proficiency in 2010 and 2011 (5 percentage points higher) but not in 2012 (6 percentage points lower). This change was mainly due to a 10 percentage point decrease in LIFE Prep students' reading proficiency from 2011 to 2012.

In math, similar to reading, the percent of students proficient was higher at LIFE Prep than at the comparison schools and districts in 2011 and 2012. LIFE Prep students' proficiency rate was higher than that for students statewide in 2011 but not in 2012. The statewide proficiency rate increased by 7 percentage points from 2011 to 2012 while LIFE Prep's proficiency rate decreased by 1 percentage point (Figure 18).

18. Trends in MCA results for reading and math: Comparisons to schools, districts, and the state

	Percent proficient				
	MCA-II reading			MCA-III math	
	2010	2011	2012	2011	2012
Schools					
LIFE Prep[a]	77%	80%	70%	63%	62%
Community of Peace Academy[a]	49%	53%	54%	38%	43%
Dayton's Bluff Elementary School[b]	69%	59%	62%	48%	46%
Eastern Heights Elementary School[b]	53%	53%	57%	43%	49%
Hazel Park Preparatory Academy[c]	[e]	[e]	50%	[e]	28%
Districts					
St. Paul Public Schools[d]	52%	56%	57%	43%	44%
Minneapolis Public Schools[d]	52%	56%	57%	37%	41%
State					
Minnesota[d]	72%	75%	76%	58%	65%

[a] *Includes MCA results for grades 3-8.*

[b] *Includes MCA results for grades 3-6.*

[c] *Includes MCA results for grades 3-7.*

[d] *Includes MCA reading results for grades 3-8 and 10, and MCA math results for grades 3-8.*

[e] *Hazel Park Preparatory Academy began in the 2011-2012 school year.*

Detailed comparisons of MCA reading results

Figure 19 shows 2012 MCA II reading results by student characteristics for LIFE Prep and the four comparison schools. For most of the comparisons, LIFE Prep students have higher rates of proficiency than all four comparison schools. This is the case for the following categories of student characteristics: Asian, Hispanic, black, white, eligible for free or reduced price lunch, Special Education, and grades 3, 4, 6, and 8. The proficiency percentage for English Learners at LIFE Prep is tied for the highest percentage across the schools with Dayton's Bluff (57%). A higher rate of proficiency than at LIFE Prep was only found at comparison schools for grades 5 and 7.

19. Comparison of LIFE Prep results for MCA-II Reading with other East-side of St. Paul Schools (2012)

	Percent proficient				
Student characteristics	**LIFE Prep (Pre-K – 8)**	**Community of Peace Academy (Pre-K – 12)**	**Dayton's Bluff (Pre-K – 6)**	**Eastern Heights (Pre-K – 6)**	**Hazel Park Preparatory Academy (Pre-K – 7)**
All students	70%	54%	62%	57%	50%
Race/ethnicity					
American Indian	[a]	[a]	[a]	[a]	[a]
Asian	72%	58%	65%	66%	55%
Hispanic	77%	43%	63%	61%	39%
Black, not Hispanic	59%	45%	55%	47%	45%
White, not Hispanic	87%	74%	81%	65%	59%
English Learner	57%	31%	57%	56%	40%
Eligible for free or reduced price lunch	66%	50%	60%	58%	46%
Special Education	43%	27%	31%	39%	16%
Grade 3	81%	45%	53%	68%	70%
Grade 4	84%	63%	56%	45%	38%
Grade 5	53%	55%	73%	58%	38%
Grade 6	68%	46%	64%	61%	58%
Grade 7	53%	61%	[b]	[b]	30%
Grade 8	63%	54%	[b]	[b]	[b]

[a] *Too few students to report results.*

[b] *Not applicable, grade not offered.*

We turn next to the comparison of LIFE Prep 2012 reading results with the St. Paul and Minneapolis school districts and with the state of Minnesota. Figure 20 indicates proficiency rates by student characteristics for these comparisons. LIFE Prep has higher proficiency rates than the two school districts and the state for the following categories of student characteristics: Asian, Hispanic, black, English Learner, eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, grade 3, and grade 4. LIFE Prep and the Minneapolis district are tied for the highest proficiency rate for white students (87%) among the comparisons made. For Special Education, LIFE Prep is almost tied with the state for the highest proficiency rate (43% and 44%, respectively) among the comparisons made. LIFE Prep students in grades 6 and 8 have higher proficiency rates than their counterparts in the St. Paul and Minneapolis school districts, but not statewide. LIFE Prep students in grades 5 and 7 were either similar to or lower in proficiency rates compared to the two districts and the state.

20. Comparison of LIFE Prep results for MCA-II Reading with Minneapolis and St. Paul School districts, and Minnesota[a] (2012)

		Percent proficient		
Student characteristics	**LIFE Prep**	**St. Paul Public Schools**	**Minneapolis Public Schools**	**State of MN**
All students	70%	57%	57%	76%
Race/ethnicity				
American Indian	[b]	51%	42%	56%
Asian	72%	48%	53%	67%
Hispanic	77%	54%	40%	54%
Black, not Hispanic	59%	46%	41%	53%
White, not Hispanic	87%	85%	87%	83%
English Learner	57%	39%	28%	38%
Eligible for free or reduced price lunch	66%	47%	41%	60%
Special Education	43%	27%	23%	44%
Grade 3	81%	63%	64%	80%
Grade 4	84%	54%	54%	75%
Grade 5	53%	62%	60%	79%
Grade 6	68%	61%	57%	76%
Grade 7	53%	52%	53%	71%
Grade 8	63%	51%	56%	72%

[a] *Except for grade-specific results, LIFE Prep results include grades 3-8 while results for the Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts, and Minnesota, include grades 3-8 and 10.*

[b] *Too few students to report results.*

Detailed comparisons of MCA math results

MCA III math results in 2012 by student characteristics are shown in Figure 21 for LIFE Prep and the four comparison schools. Similar to reading, LIFE Prep students have higher rates of proficiency than all four of the other schools for most comparisons. This occurs for the following categories of student characteristics: Asian, black, white, English Learner, eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and grades 3, 4, and 6. LIFE Prep and Community of Peace Academy were tied for the highest proficiency rate for 7th grade (53%). The proficiency rates for LIFE Prep's Hispanic and Special Education students in math were just below those of the schools with the highest rates (1-2 percentage points). A substantially higher rate of proficiency than at LIFE Prep was only found at comparison schools for grades 5 and 8.

21. Comparison of LIFE Prep results for MCA-III Math with other East-side of St. Paul Schools (2012)

	Percent proficient				
Student characteristics	LIFE Prep (Pre-K – 8)	Community of Peace Academy (Pre-K – 12)	Dayton's Bluff (Pre-K – 6)	Eastern Heights (Pre-K – 6)	Hazel Park Preparatory Academy (Pre-K – 7)
All students	62%	43%	46%	49%	28%
Race/ethnicity					
American Indian	[a]	[a]	[a]	[a]	[a]
Asian	76%	55%	49%	56%	40%
Hispanic	59%	28%	40%	61%	26%
Black, not Hispanic	46%	26%	39%	34%	18%
White, not Hispanic	83%	40%	69%	58%	40%
English Learner	64%	33%	45%	49%	26%
Eligible for free or reduced price lunch	59%	41%	44%	47%	26%
Special Education	32%	10%	34%	33%	13%
Grade 3	59%	37%	47%	54%	49%
Grade 4	84%	39%	30%	44%	27%
Grade 5	35%	22%	70%	47%	19%
Grade 6	73%	29%	35%	50%	27%
Grade 7	53%	53%	[b]	[b]	5%
Grade 8	50%	64%	[b]	[b]	[b]

[a] *Too few students to report results.*

[b] *Not applicable, grade not offered.*

Figure 22 indicates the proficiency rates in 2012 MCA math by students' characteristics for LIFE Prep, the St. Paul and Minneapolis school districts, and the state. LIFE Prep has higher proficiency rates than the two school districts and the state for the following categories of student characteristics: Asian, Hispanic, black, white, English Learner, eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, grade 4, and grade 6. In addition, LIFE Prep has higher proficiency rates than the two districts, but not the state, for Special Education students and students in grades 3, 7, and 8. The only comparison in which LIFE Prep students do not have a higher proficiency rate than students in the two districts is 5th grade.

22. Comparison of LIFE Prep results for MCA-III Math with Minneapolis and St. Paul School districts, and Minnesota[a] (2012)

	Percent proficient			
Student characteristics	**LIFE Prep**	**St. Paul Public Schools**	**Minneapolis Public Schools**	**State of MN**
All students	62%	44%	41%	65%
Race/ethnicity				
American Indian	[b]	29%	20%	41%
Asian	76%	43%	45%	62%
Hispanic	59%	35%	28%	41%
Black, not Hispanic	46%	26%	20%	36%
White, not Hispanic	83%	71%	72%	73%
English Learner	64%	33%	20%	33%
Eligible for free or reduced price lunch	59%	33%	23%	47%
Special Education	32%	20%	16%	37%
Grade 3	59%	51%	52%	76%
Grade 4	84%	50%	45%	73%
Grade 5	35%	41%	36%	62%
Grade 6	73%	40%	38%	60%
Grade 7	53%	39%	35%	59%
Grade 8	50%	37%	39%	62%

[a] *Grades 3-8.*

[b] *Too few students to report results.*

Multiple Measurement Ratings

As part of Minnesota receiving waivers with regard to the federal *No Child Left Behind* law, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) developed the Multiple Measurement Ratings (MMR) system. Public schools statewide (district and charter schools) received an initial MMR based on student achievement results in 2010 and 2011, and a subsequent MMR based on 2012 results. The rating is used to determine "priority" and "reward" schools statewide. The MMR is a combination of ratings for student proficiency, growth, achievement gap reduction, and high school graduation. The first three ratings are based on MCA reading and math results. Because LIFE Prep does not offer high school grades, its MMR is based on the first three rating domains only (proficiency, growth, and achievement gap reduction).

Each year it is possible to obtain a maximum of 25 points in each of the three rating domains applicable to LIFE Prep, for a maximum MMR of 75 points. Because the initial rating calculated by MDE was based on two years, a maximum of 150 points was possible. LIFE Prep received 95.99 points of the 150 points possible in 2010 and 2011 combined (55.97 points in 2010 and 40.02 points in 2011), for an initial MMR of 63.99 percent (95.99 divided by 150). In 2012, LIFE Prep received 12.87 points out of 75 possible points for an MMR of 17.16 percent. These ratings are explained below based on the points received in the proficiency, growth, and achievement gap reduction domains.

Proficiency

Proficiency was measured by the proportion of student subgroups that made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on MCA scores in reading and math. For a school to make AYP for a subgroup, that subgroup needed to have an MCA proficiency percentage above the statewide percentage for the subgroup. In calculating a school's overall percentage of subgroups making AYP, subgroups were weighted according to size, giving greater relative weight to smaller subgroups. The student subgroups included are American Indian; Asian; Hispanic; Black, not Hispanic; White, not Hispanic; English Learner; eligible for free or reduced price lunch; and Special Education. The weighted proportion of LIFE Prep subgroups that met the target (i.e., had a proficiency percentage greater than the statewide percentage for the subgroup) was .79 in 2010, 1.00 (all subgroups met target) in 2011, and .89 in 2012. (Note that Figures 20 and 22 show that in 2012 LIFE Prep students exceeded statewide percentages proficient in reading and math for most AYP subgroups.) The school then receives a percentile rank within its school type ("elementary school" for LIFE Prep) for its overall weighted percentage of subgroups making AYP. LIFE Prep received a percentile rank of 47.2 percent in 2010, 99.9 percent in 2011, and 37.2 percent in 2012. This percentage is then multiplied by 25 (the total possible points) to obtain the points the school receives. Based on this calculation, LIFE Prep received 11.79 points out of 25 possible points in proficiency in

2010, 24.99 points in 2011, and 9.30 in 2012. The points for 2010 and 2011 were summed to obtain the points to calculate the initial MMR (based on 2010 and 2011 combined).

Growth

Growth is measured by the degree to which students in a school are making expected growth during a year (spring to spring, based on MCA scores in reading and math). A student's expected growth is determined by where the student is with regard to proficiency at the beginning of the year, as explained earlier. Students who are proficient need to make less growth in the subsequent year to maintain proficiency (moderate or higher growth) while students who are not proficient need to make more growth (high growth) to become proficient. Hence, non-proficient students have higher growth expectations than proficient students. Each school is given a percentile rank based on how well its students have made expected growth in the past year compared to other schools of its type. LIFE Prep received a percentile rank of 83.1 percent in 2010, 17.3 percent in 2011, and 7.7 percent in 2012. As in the proficiency domain, this percentage is multiplied by 25 (the total possible points) to obtain the total points the school receives. Based on this calculation, LIFE Prep received 20.76 points in growth in 2010, 4.32 points in 2011, and 1.93 in 2012. Note from Figure 11 that LIFE Prep was just above the statewide percentage of students making expected growth in reading in 2010 (by 1 percentage point) but fell below the state percentage in both 2011 (by 12 percentage points) and 2012 (by 9 percentage points). In math, LIFE Prep was below the statewide percentage in 2012 by 6 percentage points (Figure 14), and also below it in 2010 (by 4 percentage points) and 2011 (by 3 percentage points).

Achievement gap reduction

The achievement gap reduction measurement is focused on the following seven groups: American Indian; Asian; Black, not Hispanic; Hispanic; English Learner; eligible for free or reduced price lunch; and Special Education. Schools receive a score based on average student growth in these subgroups compared to statewide average student growth in higher-performing subgroups. That is, American Indian, Asian, Black, and Hispanic students at the school are each compared to white students statewide; students eligible for free or reduced price lunch at the school are compared to those who are ineligible statewide; English Learners at the school are compared to non-English learners statewide; and Special Education students at the school are compared to non-Special Education students statewide. Achievement gap (or growth gap) decreases or increases at a school are based on whether average growth of students in lower-performing groups at the school is faster or slower than that of students statewide in higher-performing groups. At LIFE Prep the growth of lower-performing groups compared to higher-performing groups statewide was faster to a large degree in 2010, slower to a small degree in 2011, and slower to a large degree in 2012. As a result, LIFE Prep's percentile rank compared to other schools of its type was 93.6 percent in

2010, 42.8 percent in 2011, and 6.5 percent in 2012. Each of these percentages is then multiplied by 25 to obtain the points for the achievement gap reduction domain – 23.41 points in 2010, 10.71 points in 2011, and 1.64 points in 2012. Although not indicating growth, Figures 10 and 13 show quite large achievement gaps emerging in reading and math in 2012 among race/ethnic groups (e.g., between white and black students).

Summary

Summing the points across the three domains of MMR for each year provides the total points reported earlier – 55.97 points in 2010 (accounting for rounding error), 40.02 points in 2011, and 12.87 points in 2012. Hence, the number of MMR points LIFE Prep received declined sharply over the three years. This decline was especially notable in the areas of growth and achievement gap (or growth gap) reduction. While the points earned for proficiency decreased in 2012, proficiency performance across student subgroups was still strong in 2012, higher than statewide in most subgroups. These results indicate a need for increased attention to student growth in reading and math skills, especially among low-income students, students of color, English Learners, and Special Education students. This includes both stronger growth among proficient students in reading and math to maintain proficiency, and stronger growth among non-proficient students to reach proficiency.

Measures of Academic Progress

In this section LIFE Prep students' results are presented for the Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments in reading and math during the 2012-13 school year. MAP was administered to LIFE Prep students in all grades (kindergarten through 8th grade) three times (in the fall, winter, and spring). The MAP results were analyzed using scale scores (RIT scores). Students' MAP performance was interpreted using RIT score norms based on a 2011 representative national sample provided by the Northwest Evaluation Association (MAP norms). In addition, RIT score targets predictive of proficiency on the MCA reading and math tests were used to interpret results (grades 3-8 only), based on research conducted during 2010-11 by the St. Paul Public Schools on students in the district (SPPS targets). Results of students' growth from fall of 2012 to spring 2013 in MAP reading and math is also presented. Finally, we tested the relationship of attendance to growth in MAP scores.

Student performance in fall, winter and spring

Reading

Figure 23 indicates the percent of LIFE Prep students with MAP reading scores at or above the MAP norms in fall, winter, and spring of 2012-13 for each grade. Scores at the norm can be

interpreted as having reading skills at grade level. For example, in the fall of kindergarten 30 percent of the students had reading skills at or above the MAP norm, or at grade level or above. By spring, the percent at grade level or above had increased to 57 percent. In all grades, except 6th and 7th, the percent of students at grade level in reading increased at least slightly from fall to spring based on MAP norms. Overall, across all the grades, the percent of students at grade level was 47 percent in the fall, 49 percent in the winter, and 57 percent in the spring based on MAP norms. Second grade had the highest percent at or above grade level in reading in the spring (67%) while 6th grade had the lowest percent (7%).

We also examined the percent of students who were on target to achieve proficiency on the MCA reading test in the spring, based on the MAP score targets developed by the St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) for grades 3 through 8. The SPPS target scores in reading were somewhat lower than the MAP norms for grades 3 through 6, and about the same for grades 7 and 8 (Figure 23). As a result, based on the SPPS targets, a higher percent of 3rd to 6th graders were at grade level or above in spring 2013 than we saw using MAP norms. Overall, across grades 3 through 8, 64 percent of the students met the SPPS targets in the fall, 61 percent in the winter, and 63 percent in the spring. The average scores of LIFE Prep students on MAP reading in the fall, winter, and spring in each grade, along with the MAP norms and SPPS targets, are shown in Figure A63.

23. LIFE Prep students' RIT scores at or above MAP norms[a] and SPPS targets[b] in 2012-13: READING

Grade		Percent of students whose RIT score is at or above MAP norms/SPPS targets		
		Fall	Winter	Spring
Kindergarten (N=69)	At/above MAP norm	30%	23%	57%
1st grade (N=61)	At/above MAP norm	49%	43%	57%
2nd grade (N=42)	At/above MAP norm	55%	76%	67%
3rd grade (N=38)	At/above MAP norm	53%	68%	61%
	At/above SPPS target	63%	76%	76%
4th grade (N=37)	At/above MAP norm	57%	54%	65%
	At/above SPPS target	70%	62%	70%
5th grade (N=33)	At/above MAP norm	61%	61%	64%
	At/above SPPS target	79%	67%	82%
6th grade (N=14)	At/above MAP norm	14%	43%	7%
	At/above SPPS target	50%	43%	21%
7th grade (N=21)	At/above MAP norm	52%	48%	38%
	At/above SPPS target	57%	48%	38%
8th grade (N=18)	At/above MAP norm	44%	44%	50%
	At/above SPPS target	44%	44%	50%
Total	At/above MAP norm (grades K-8)	47%	49%	57%
	At/above SPPS target (grades 3-8)	64%	61%	63%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

An analysis of how far ahead or behind students were in their reading skills in spring 2013 was conducted for grades 2 to 7 based on MAP norms. Results are shown in Figure 24. To be ahead one or more years, students' scores in the spring needed to be at or above the MAP norms for the spring of the next grade. Similarly, to be behind one or more years in the spring, students' scores needed to be at or below the MAP norms for the spring of the previous grade. Overall, for grades 2-7, results showed that 32 percent of the students were ahead one or more years in reading skills, 24 percent were at grade level to less than one year ahead, 19 percent were behind less than one year, and 24 percent were behind one year or more (including 9% who were behind two or more years). Results varied considerably by grade. For example, 46 percent of 4th graders were ahead one or more years compared to 0 percent of 6th graders. Or, only 7 percent of 2nd graders were behind one or more years

compared to 71 percent of 6th graders. Results using SPPS targets aren't reported given the narrow grade range available for this analysis.

24. LIFE Prep students at or above grade level and behind grade level based on MAP norms[a]: READING, Spring 2013

		Percentage of students:			
Grade	**Number assessed**	**1+ years ahead**	**At grade level to less than 1 year above**	**Less than 1 year behind**	**1+ years behind**
2nd grade	42	31%	36%	26%	7%
3rd grade	38	32%	29%	26%	13%
4th grade	37	46%	19%	8%	27%
5th grade	33	39%	24%	18%	18%
6th grade	14	0%	7%	21%	71%
7th grade	21	24%	14%	10%	52%
Total	185	32%	24%	19%	24%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

For comparison purposes, we also analyzed how far ahead or behind students were in their reading skills in fall 2012. Compared to spring, a smaller proportion of students were ahead one or more years, 32 percent in the spring and 19 percent in the fall (Figure A64).

We examined the proportions scoring at grade level or above in reading in spring 2013 by student characteristics, using MAP norms and SPPS targets (Figure 25). There was very little difference in the percent of females and males at grade level or above using MAP norms or SPPS targets. For racial/ethnic groups, the highest percent at grade level or above was among white students. Differences were small among English Learner students and non-English Learner students. (Note: SPPS targets were higher for English Learner students in reading for all grades than for non-English Learner students.) Lower percentages of Special Education students scored at grade level compared to other students.

25. Percent of students at or above grade level by student characteristics in Spring 2013: READING

Student characteristics		MAP norms[a] (grades K-8) Number assessed	MAP norms[a] (grades K-8) Percent at or above norm	SPPS targets[b] (grades 3-8) Number assessed	SPPS targets[b] (grades 3-8) Percent at or above target
Gender	Female	176	57%	83	63%
	Male	157	56%	78	64%
Race/ethnicity	Asian	80	58%	34	62%
	Black	137	50%	72	56%
	Hispanic	36	56%	18	67%
	White	77	66%	35	77%
	American Indian	3	–[d]	2	–[d]
Limited English Proficiency[c]	Yes	27	59%	14	57%
	No	306	56%	147	64%
Special Education	Yes	47	36%	28	39%
	No	286	60%	133	68%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

[c] *The SPPS targets for Limited English Proficiency students are higher than for other students in reading (grades 3-8) and for math in grades 7 and 8.*

[d] *Too few students to report results.*

Math

Turning to MAP math results, Figure 26 indicates the percent of students who scored at or above MAP norms and SPPS targets in fall, winter, and spring (i.e., students scoring at or above grade level based on the two methods). Overall, across grades, results indicated that the percent of students at grade level in math based on MAP norms increased from fall to spring – 44 percent of the students were at grade level in the fall, 49 percent in the winter, and 65 percent in the spring. In kindergarten, the percent at grade level rose from 18 percent in the fall to 77 percent in the spring. The percent at grade level in the spring varied from a high of 83 percent in 2nd grade to a low of 40 percent in 6th grade. The lowest grades (K-2) had the highest percentages of students at grade level.

The SPPS targets for math were higher than the MAP norms for grades 5 through 8. As a result, the percent of students at grade level or above in math in the spring based on these targets was lower than that based on the MAP norms. Overall, only 36 percent of 3rd through 8th graders met the targets in the spring (compared to the 65 percent who were at grade level

in the spring based on MAP norms). Across the grades, the percent meeting the targets varied from a high of 55 percent in 3rd grade to a low of 0 percent in 6th grade. The percent meeting targets was lower in the upper grades, especially grades 5 to 8. The average scores of LIFE Prep students on MAP math in the fall, winter, and spring in each grade, along with the MAP norms and SPPS targets, are shown in Figure A65.

26. LIFE Prep students' RIT scores at or above MAP norms[a] and SPPS targets[b] in 2012-13: MATH

		Percent of students whose RIT score is at or above MAP norms/SPPS targets		
Grade		**Fall**	**Winter**	**Spring**
Kindergarten (N=68)	At/above MAP norm	18%	28%	77%
1st grade (N=62)	At/above MAP norm	47%	57%	69%
2nd grade (N=41)	At/above MAP norm	63%	63%	83%
3rd grade (N=38)	At/above MAP norm	53%	61%	55%
	At/above SPPS target	53%	71%	55%
4th grade (N=36)	At/above MAP norm	44%	56%	64%
	At/above SPPS target	47%	58%	50%
5th grade (N=36)	At/above MAP norm	56%	47%	53%
	At/above SPPS target	19%	28%	25%
6th grade (N=15)	At/above MAP norm	27%	33%	40%
	At/above SPPS target	0%	7%	0%
7th grade (N=19)	At/above MAP norm	58%	42%	42%
	At/above SPPS target	21%	32%	26%
8th grade (N=18)	At/above MAP norm	56%	50%	50%
	At/above SPPS target	22%	33%	28%
Total	At/above MAP norm (grades K-8)	44%	49%	65%
	At/above SPPS target (grades 3-8)	32%	44%	36%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Math for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

Similar to the analysis done for reading, Figure 27 indicates how far ahead or behind students were in their math skills in spring 2013 in grades 2 to 7 based on MAP norms. (Results using SPPS targets aren't reported given the narrow grade range available for this analysis.) Overall, results showed that 28 percent of the students were ahead one or more years in math

skills, 32 percent were at grade level to less than one year ahead, 22 percent were behind less than one year, and 18 percent were behind one year or more (including 8% who were behind two or more years). Comparisons to the fall of 2012 indicated that a smaller proportion of students were ahead one or more years than in the spring of 2013, 16 percent and 28 percent, respectively (Figure A66).

Again, results varied by grade. The most unusual results were in 7th grade where math skills differed greatly among the students. Forty-two percent of students were one or more years ahead and 42 percent were behind one or more years, including 32 percent behind two or more years.

27. LIFE Prep students at or above grade level and behind grade level based on MAP norms[a]: MATH, Spring 2013

		Percentage of students:			
Grade	Number assessed	1+ years ahead	At grade level to less than 1 year above	Less than 1 year behind	1+ years behind
2nd grade	41	29%	54%	15%	2%
3rd grade	38	21%	34%	32%	13%
4th grade	36	28%	36%	17%	19%
5th grade	36	33%	19%	31%	17%
6th grade	15	7%	33%	20%	40%
7th grade	19	42%	0%	16%	42%
Total	185	28%	32%	22%	18%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

Figure 28 indicates the percentages scoring at grade level or above in math in spring 2013 by student characteristics, using MAP norms and SPPS targets. Males were slightly more likely to score at grade level or above based on MAP norms or SPPS targets. For race/ ethnicity, blacks were less likely to score at grade level or above compared to the other groups. English Learner students were somewhat more likely to score at grade level or above than non-English Learner students based on MAP norms, but the two groups were equally likely to do so using SPPS targets. (Note: SPPS targets were higher for English Learner students in math for grades 7 and 8 than for non-English Learner students.) Lower percentages of Special Education students scored at grade level compared to other students.

28. Percent of students at or above grade level by student characteristics in Spring 2013: MATH

Student characteristics		MAP norms[a] (grades K-8) Number assessed	MAP norms[a] (grades K-8) Percent at or above norm	SPPS targets[b] (grades 3-8) Number assessed	SPPS targets[b] (grades 3-8) Percent at or above target
Gender	Female	176	61%	84	32%
	Male	157	68%	78	40%
Race/ethnicity	Asian	80	74%	35	43%
	Black	137	53%	74	24%
	Hispanic	35	69%	17	35%
	White	78	72%	34	50%
	American Indian	3	[d]	2	[d]
Limited English Proficiency[c]	Yes	27	78%	14	36%
	No	306	63%	148	36%
Special Education	Yes	44	39%	26	19%
	No	289	69%	136	39%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Math for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

[c] *The SPPS targets for Limited English Proficiency students are higher than for other students in reading (grades 3-8) and for math in grades 7 and 8.*

[d] *Too few students to report results.*

Student growth from fall to spring

Growth in MAP reading and math was assessed from fall of 2012 to spring of 2013. The amount of growth students made was calculated by subtracting their fall RIT score from their spring RIT score. LIFE Prep students' growth is compared to MAP norms and SPPS targets to interpret the results – e.g., whether students are making one year's growth, or more or less than that. Results reported include average student growth, growth with reference to a year's growth (Did the student make less than one year's growth, 1-2 years, or 2 or more years?), growth of students below and at or above grade level in the fall, growth by student characteristics, and movement of students from below grade level to at or above grade level and vice versa from fall to spring. We also examined the potential relationship between attendance and student growth.

Reading

First, we examined LIFE Prep students' average (mean) reading growth from fall to spring within each grade and compared it to expectations based on MAP norms and SPPS targets (Figure 29). For example, results showed that kindergarten students averaged 20 RIT points of reading growth from fall of 2012 to spring of 2013, exceeding the expectation of 12 points based on MAP norms. In third grade, LIFE Prep students averaged 14 points of growth, again exceeding the expectation based on MAP norms (9 points) and the expectation based on SPPS targets as well (10 points). Overall, LIFE Prep students' averages exceeded expectations based on MAP norms and SPPS targets from kindergarten through 4th grade and 8th grade. In 5th, 6th, and 7th grades, average growth of LIFE Prep students either was the same or lower than expectations. Expectations for the number of points of growth were higher in earlier grades than later grades.

29. Average growth from fall to spring in the 2012-13 school year by grade: READING

		Growth in RIT score from fall to spring (number of points)[a]		
Grade	Number assessed	Mean growth for LIFE Prep students	MAP norms[b]	SPPS targets[c]
Kindergarten	69	20	12	–
1st grade	61	17	16	–
2nd grade	42	15	13	–
3rd grade	38	14	9	10
4th grade	37	8	6	7
5th grade	33	5	5	6
6th grade	14	1	3	5
7th grade	21	3	3	4
8th grade	18	5	3	2

[a] *Calculated by subtracting the student's fall RIT score from the spring RIT score.*

[b] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[c] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13 (grades 3-8 only).*

Figure 30 indicates the percent of students making less than one year's growth in reading, one year to less than two years of growth, and two years or more of growth for each grade, based on MAP norms (grades K-7) and SPPS targets (grades 3-7). One year's growth refers to expected growth from fall to spring based on MAP norms and SPPS targets. Two years growth refers to expected growth from fall of the current grade to spring of the next grade based on MAP norms and SPPS targets. Results indicate that 88 percent of LIFE Prep kindergartners made at least one year of growth – 81 percent were in the category of one year's growth to less than two years and 7 percent were in the category of two or more years' growth, while 12 percent were in the category of less than one year's growth, based on MAP norms. The majority of students made at least one year's growth in reading, based on MAP norms in grades kindergarten through 5th grades. In grades 6 and 7, fewer than half of the students (43%) made a year's growth or more based on MAP norms. This pattern of results was similar using SPPS targets, with the exception of 5th grade where only 42 percent of students made a year's growth or more. Overall, using MAP norms (grades K-7), 35 percent of the students made less than one year's growth, 48 percent made one year to less than two years of growth, and 18 percent made two or more years' growth. Overall results using SPPS targets (grades 3-7) were 46, 31 and 23 percent, respectively.

30. Amount of student growth by grade from fall to spring in the 2012-13 school year: READING

		Percent of students making:		
Grade	**Based on:**	**Less than 1 year's growth**	**1 year's growth to less than 2 years**	**2 or more year's growth**
Kindergarten (N=69)	MAP norms[a]	12%	81%	7%
1st grade (N=61)	MAP norms[a]	44%	51%	5%
2nd grade (N=42)	MAP norms[a]	33%	55%	12%
3rd grade (N=38)	MAP norms[a]	29%	34%	37%
	SPPS targets[b]	32%	42%	26%
4th grade (N=37)	MAP norms[a]	38%	32%	30%
	SPPS targets[b]	38%	24%	38%
5th grade (N=33)	MAP norms[a]	46%	27%	27%
	SPPS targets[b]	58%	33%	9%
6th grade (N=14)	MAP norms[a]	57%	21%	21%
	SPPS targets[b]	64%	29%	7%
7th grade (N=21)	MAP norms[a]	57%	14%	29%
	SPPS targets[b]	57%	19%	24%
Total (N=315)	MAP norms[a] (grades K-7)	35%	48%	18%
Total (N=143)	SPPS[b] (grades 3-7)	46%	31%	23%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

We also examined the growth students made by whether they were at/above grade level vs. below grade level in the fall. Figure 31 shows the results of this analysis by grade based on MAP norms, including both growth in categories and average (mean) growth. At every grade level, those below grade level in the fall had higher average growth than those at or above grade level. Overall (grades K-7) for those students below grade level in the fall, 25 percent made less than one year's growth, 51 percent made one year to less the two years of growth, and 24 percent made two or more years' growth. Comparable figures for students at or above grade level in the fall were 46, 43, and 11 percent, respectively.

31. Growth by whether student at or above MAP norm[a] in fall 2012 or below it: READING

			Percentage of students making:			
Grade	**Student's fall score compared to MAP norm**	**Number assessed**	**Less than 1 year's growth**	**1 year's growth to less than 2 years**	**2 or more year's growth**	**Mean growth**
Kindergarten	At/above	21	14%	81%	5%	19
	Below	48	10%	81%	8%	20
1st grade	At/above	30	50%	50%	0%	15
	Below	31	39%	52%	10%	18
2nd grade	At/above	23	39%	57%	4%	13
	Below	19	26%	53%	21%	18
3rd grade	At/above	20	50%	40%	10%	8
	Below	18	6%	28%	67%	20
4th grade	At/above	21	48%	29%	24%	7
	Below	16	25%	38%	38%	10
5th grade	At/above	20	55%	25%	20%	4
	Below	13	31%	31%	38%	7
6th grade	At/above	2	100%	0%	0%	-10
	Below	12	50%	25%	25%	3
7th grade	At/above	11	73%	0%	27%	2
	Below	10	40%	30%	30%	5
8th grade	At/above	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	1
	Below	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	7
Total	At/above	148	46%	43%	11%	10
Total	Below	167	25%	51%	24%	15

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *Norms not available beyond 8th grade to permit calculation of growth expectations beyond 8th grade.*

The pattern was similar using SPPS targets (Figure 32). Average growth was higher for the below grade level group than for the at/above grade level group for every grade available (grades 3-8). Overall (grades 3 through 7), for those students below grade level in the fall, 27 percent made less than one year's growth, 31 percent made one year to less the two years of growth, and 42 percent made two or more years' growth. Comparable figures for students at or above grade level in the fall were 56, 30, and 14 percent, respectively.

32. Growth by whether student at or above SPPS target[a] in fall 2012 or below it: READING

Grade	Student's fall score compared to SPPS target	Number assessed	Percentage of students making: Less than 1 year's growth	1 year's growth to less than 2 years	2 or more year's growth	Mean growth
3rd grade	At/above	24	46%	46%	8%	8
	Below	14	7%	36%	57%	9
4th grade	At/above	26	42%	27%	31%	5
	Below	11	27%	18%	55%	10
5th grade	At/above	26	61%	35%	4%	6
	Below	7	43%	29%	29%	9
6th grade	At/above	7	86%	14%	0%	6
	Below	7	43%	43%	14%	7
7th grade	At/above	12	75%	8%	17%	6
	Below	9	33%	33%	33%	10
Total	At/above	95	56%	30%	14%	7
	Below	48	27%	31%	42%	11

[a] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

We examined the percentages making one year's growth or more in reading by student characteristics, using MAP norms and SPPS targets (Figure 33). Overall, the percentage making a year's growth or more did not differ greatly across student characteristics. The percent making one year's growth or more differed little across gender and race/ethnicity categories based on MAP norms. When SPPS targets were used, Hispanic students were more likely to make a year's growth or more than students of other races/ethnicities (75% vs. 47-56%). However, this was based on only 12 Hispanic students, and consequently, just 2-3 students would make a big difference in percentages in this group. English Learner and Special Education students were somewhat less likely to make a year's growth or more compared to non-English Learner and non-Special Education students, respectively (10-12 percentage point differences) , based on MAP norms. These differences narrowed when SPPS targets were used.

33. Percent of students making one year's growth or more (fall 2012 to spring 2013) by student characteristics: READING

Student characteristics		MAP norms[a] (grades K-8) Number assessed	MAP norms[a] (grades K-8) Percent making 1 year's growth or more	SPPS targets[b] (grades 3-8) Number assessed	SPPS targets[b] (grades 3-8) Percent making 1 year's growth or more
Gender	Female	165	65%	72	53%
	Male	150	66%	71	55%
Race/ethnicity	Asian	76	64%	30	47%
	Black	132	64%	67	52%
	Hispanic	30	70%	12	75%
	White	74	68%	32	56%
	American Indian	3	[d]	2	[d]
Limited English Proficiency[c]	Yes	25	56%	12	50%
	No	290	66%	131	54%
Special Education	Yes	42	55%	23	48%
	No	273	67%	120	55%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

[c] *The SPPS targets for Limited English Proficiency students are higher than for other students in reading (grades 3-8) and for math in grades 7 and 8 (based on research on the relationship of MAP scores to MCA proficiency scores among SPPS students).*

[d] *Too few students to report results*

Finally, we examined the percent of students in each of the following categories based on students fall and spring reading scores: at/above grade level in fall and spring, below in fall and at/above in spring, at/above in fall and below in spring, and below grade level in both fall and spring (Figure 34). Overall, based on MAP norms (grades K-8), 40 percent of students stayed at/above grade level in fall and spring, 16 percent rose from below to at/above grade level, 7 percent dropped from at/above grade level to below, and 37 percent remained below grade level in fall and spring. These figures based on SPPS targets (grades 3-8) were 55, 9, 9, and 27 percent. The percentages of students in each of the four categories varied widely by grade. For example, based on MAP norms, 28 percent of kindergartners rose from below grade level in the fall to at or above grade level in the spring, while 5 percent did so in the 7th grade. Or, 52 percent of 5th graders were at/above grade level in both fall and spring compared to 0 percent of 6th graders.

34. Student change from fall 2012 to spring 2013 in being below or at/above grade level: READING

Grade	Based on:	At/above grade level fall & spring	Change from fall to spring: Fall below & spring at/above grade level	Fall at/above & spring below grade level	Below grade level fall & spring
Kindergarten (N=69)	MAP norms[a]	29%	28%	1%	42%
1st grade (N=61)	MAP norms[a]	46%	12%	3%	39%
2nd grade (N=42)	MAP norms[a]	45%	21%	10%	24%
3rd grade (N=38)	MAP norms[a]	45%	16%	8%	32%
	SPPS targets[b]	58%	18%	5%	18%
4th grade (N=37)	MAP norms[a]	51%	14%	5%	30%
	SPPS targets[b]	65%	5%	5%	24%
5th grade (N=33)	MAP norms[a]	52%	12%	9%	27%
	SPPS targets[b]	76%	6%	3%	15%
6th grade (N=14)	MAP norms[a]	0%	7%	14%	79%
	SPPS targets[b]	21%	0%	29%	50%
7th grade (N=21)	MAP norms[a]	33%	5%	19%	43%
	SPPS targets[b]	33%	5%	24%	38%
8th grade (N=18)	MAP norms[a]	39%	11%	6%	44%
	SPPS targets[b]	39%	11%	6%	44%
Total (N=333)	MAP norms[a] (grades K-8)	40%	16%	7%	37%
Total (N=161)	SPPS[b] (grades 3-8)	55%	9%	9%	27%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

Math

Average (mean growth) for LIFE Prep students in math from fall to spring within each grade is shown in Figure 35 along with growth expectations based on MAP norms and SPPS targets. The number of RIT points of growth expected decreases substantially in later grades. This pattern was very pronounced for LIFE Prep students. Their average number of points of growth decreased steadily by grade, from 27 points in kindergarten to 2 points in 8th grade. The average growth of LIFE Prep kindergartners in math far exceeded expectations (27 points vs. 12 points). LIFE Prep students' average growth also exceeded expectations for growth based on MAP norms in grades 1 through 6. Average growth of LIFE Prep students

in grades 7 and 8 was slightly below expectations based on MAP norms. Using SPPS targets, LIFE Prep students' growth exceeded expectations in grades 3 and 4, met expectations in grades 6 and 7, and was below expectations in grades 5 and 8. Growth expectations were higher for SPPS targets than for MAP norms in grades 4-6 (by 2 to 5 points) while expectations based on MAP norms were higher than SPPS targets for grades 7 and 8 (by one point in each grade).

35. Growth from fall to spring in the 2012-13 school year by grade: MATH

		Growth in RIT score from fall to spring (number of points)[a]		
Grade	Number assessed	Mean growth for LIFE Prep students	MAP norms[b]	SPPS targets[c]
Kindergarten	68	27	12	–
1st grade	62	20	16	–
2nd grade	41	17	12	–
3rd grade	38	13	12	12
4th grade	36	13	8	11
5th grade	36	11	8	13
6th grade	15	8	6	8
7th grade	19	4	5	4
8th grade	18	2	4	3

[a] *Calculated by subtracting the student's fall RIT score from the spring RIT score.*

[b] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[c] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Math for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13 (grades 3-8 only).*

Figure 36 indicates the percent of students making less than one year's growth in math, one year to less than two years of growth, and two years or more of growth for each grade, based on MAP norms (grades K-7) and SPPS targets (grades 3-7). The majority of students in grades K-2 and 4-6 (61-93%) made at least one year's growth using MAP norms. Using SPPS norms, the majority of students in only one grade (4th grade) made at least one year's growth. Overall, using MAP norms (grades K-7), 28 percent of the students made less than one year's growth in math, 52 percent made one year to less than two years of growth, and 20 percent made two or more years' growth. Overall results using SPPS targets (grades 3-7) were 54, 29, and 17 percent, respectively. Again, the amount of growth students made, with reference to expectations, varied widely by grade. The most unusual growth distribution may have been 6th grade based on SPPS targets – 53 percent of the students made less than one year's growth and the rest of the students (47%) made two or more years' growth.

36. Amount of student growth by grade: MATH

Grade	Based on:	Percent of students making: Less than 1 year's growth	1 year's growth to less than 2 years	2 or more years' growth
Kindergarten (N=68)	MAP norms[a]	7%	81%	12%
1st grade (N=62)	MAP norms[a]	34%	50%	16%
2nd grade (N=41)	MAP norms[a]	17%	68%	15%
3rd grade (N=38)	MAP norms[a]	53%	32%	16%
	SPPS targets[b]	53%	32%	16%
4th grade (N=36)	MAP norms[a]	22%	47%	31%
	SPPS targets[b]	42%	56%	3%
5th grade (N=36)	MAP norms[a]	39%	31%	31%
	SPPS targets[b]	69%	19%	11%
6th grade (N=15)	MAP norms[a]	27%	47%	27%
	SPPS targets[b]	53%	0%	47%
7th grade (N=19)	MAP norms[a]	53%	10%	37%
	SPPS targets[b]	53%	16%	32%
Total (N=315)	MAP norms[a] (grades K-7)	28%	52%	20%
Total (N=144)	SPPS[b] (grades 3-7)	54%	29%	17%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Math for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

Similar to reading, we analyzed the growth students made in math by whether they were at/above grade level vs. below grade level in the fall. Figure 37 shows the results of this analysis by grade based on MAP norms, including both growth in categories and average (mean) growth. In grades kindergarten through 4 and grade 6, those below grade level in the fall had higher average growth in math than those at or above grade level. This pattern was reversed in grades 5, 7 and 8. Overall (grades K-7) for those students below grade level in the fall, 23 percent made less than one year's growth in math, 51 percent made one year to less than two years of growth, and 26 percent made two or more years' growth. Comparable figures for students at or above grade level in the fall were 36, 52, and 12 percent, respectively.

37. Growth by whether student at or above MAP norm[a] in fall 2012 or below it: MATH

Grade	Student's fall score compared to MAP norm	Number assessed	Percentage of students making: Less than 1 year's growth	1 year's growth to less than 2 years	2 or more years' growth	Mean growth
Kindergarten	At/above	12	17%	75%	8%	23
	Below	56	5%	82%	13%	27
1st grade	At/above	29	38%	59%	3%	18
	Below	33	30%	42%	27%	22
2nd grade	At/above	26	23%	69%	8%	15
	Below	15	7%	67%	27%	19
3rd grade	At/above	20	75%	25%	0%	11
	Below	18	28%	39%	33%	16
4th grade	At/above	16	19%	69%	12%	12
	Below	20	25%	30%	45%	14
5th grade	At/above	20	25%	40%	35%	12
	Below	16	56%	19%	25%	9
6th grade	At/above	4	25%	50%	25%	8
	Below	11	27%	46%	27%	9
7th grade	At/above	11	55%	18%	27%	5
	Below	8	50%	0%	50%	4
8th grade	At/above	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	4
	Below	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	-1
Total	At/above	138	36%	52%	12%	13
	Below	177	23%	51%	26%	18

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *Norms not available beyond 8th grade to permit calculation of growth expectations beyond 8th grade.*

The pattern using SPPS targets was similar in that overall those students below grade level in math in the fall tended to show more growth than those at or above grade level (Figure 38). Average growth was higher for the below grade level group than for the at/above grade level group in grades 3-5, but not grades 7 and 8. For growth categories too (grades 3-7 included), results tended to favor students below grade level, although growth relative to expectations was lower using SPPS targets than MAP norms. Overall, for those students below grade level in the fall, 51 percent made less than one year's growth, 25 percent made one year to less than two years of growth, and 24 percent made two or more years' growth. Comparable figures for students at or above grade level in the fall were 60, 38, and 2 percent, respectively.

38. Growth by whether student at or above SPPS target[a] in fall 2012 or below it: MATH

			Percentage of students making:			
Grade	Student's fall score compared to SPPS target	Number assessed	Less than 1 year's growth	1 year's growth to less than 2 years	2 or more year's growth	Mean growth
3rd grade	At/above	20	75%	25%	0%	11
	Below	18	28%	39%	33%	16
4th grade	At/above	17	41%	59%	0%	11
	Below	19	42%	53%	5%	14
5th grade	At/above	7	71%	29%	0%	8
	Below	29	69%	17%	14%	11
6th grade	At/above	0	–	–	–	–
	Below	15	53%	0%	47%	8
7th grade	At/above	4	50%	25%	25%	6
	Below	15	53%	13%	33%	4
8th grade	At/above	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	9
	Below	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	0
Total	At/above	48	60%	38%	2%	10
	Below	96	51%	25%	24%	10

[a] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Math for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

[b] *Targets not available beyond 8th grade to permit calculation of growth expectations beyond 8th grade.*

Figure 39 indicates the percentages making one year's growth or more in math by student characteristics, using MAP norms and SPPS targets. There are no large differences in the percentages making a year's growth or more across student characteristics categories, and the small differences that do appear are inconsistent between MAP norms and SPPS targets.

39. Percent of students making one year's growth or more (fall 2012 to spring 2013) by student characteristics: MATH

		MAP norms[a] (grades K-8)		SPPS targets[b] (grades 3-8)	
Student characteristics		**Number assessed**	**Percent making 1 year's growth or more**	**Number assessed**	**Percent making 1 year's growth or more**
Gender	Female	165	73%	73	47%
	Male	150	71%	71	45%
Race/ethnicity	Asian	76	79%	31	55%
	Black	132	67%	69	41%
	Hispanic	29	66%	11	55%
	White	75	76%	31	45%
	American Indian	3	[d]	2	[d]
Limited English Proficiency[c]	Yes	25	64%	12	58%
	No	290	72%	132	45%
Special Education	Yes	39	67%	21	38%
	No	276	72%	123	47%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

[c] *The SPPS targets for Limited English Proficiency students are higher than for other students in reading (grades 3-8) and for math in grades 7 and 8 (based on research on the relationship of MAP scores to MCA proficiency scores among SPPS students).*

[d] *Too few students to report results*

Figure 40 shows the percent of students in each of the following categories based on students' fall and spring math scores: at/above grade level in fall and spring, below in fall and at/above in spring, at/above in fall and below in spring, and below grade level in both fall and spring. Overall, based on MAP norms (grades K-8), 40 percent of students stayed at/above grade level in fall and spring, 25 percent rose from below to at/above grade level, 4 percent dropped from at/above grade level to below, and 31 percent remained below grade level in fall and spring. The percentages based on SPPS targets (grades 3-8) were 26, 9, 6, and 59 percent. The large differences in results based on MAP norms vs. SPPS targets are due to SPPS targets being considerably higher than MAP norms in grades 5 to 8. Again,

results varied widely by grade. For example, based on MAP norms, 62 percent of kindergartners rose from below grade level in the fall to at or above grade level in the spring, while 0 percent did so in the 7th grade. Or, 63 percent of 2nd graders were above grade level in both fall and spring compared to 20 percent of 6th graders.

40. Student change from fall 2012 to spring 2013 in being below or at/above grade level: MATH

			Change from fall to spring:		
Grade	**Based on:**	**At/above grade level fall & spring**	**Fall below & spring above grade level**	**Fall at/above & spring below grade level**	**Below grade level fall & spring**
Kindergarten (N=68)	MAP norms[a]	15%	62%	3%	21%
1st grade (N=62)	MAP norms[a]	45%	24%	2%	29%
2nd grade (N=41)	MAP norms[a]	63%	20%	0%	17%
3rd grade (N=38)	MAP norms[a]	45%	10%	8%	37%
	SPPS targets[b]	45%	10%	8%	37%
4th grade (N=36)	MAP norms[a]	44%	19%	0%	36%
	SPPS targets[b]	36%	14%	11%	39%
5th grade (N=36)	MAP norms[a]	47%	6%	8%	39%
	SPPS targets[b]	14%	11%	6%	69%
6th grade (N=15)	MAP norms[a]	20%	20%	7%	53%
	SPPS targets[b]	0%	0%	0%	100%
7th grade (N=19)	MAP norms[a]	42%	0%	16%	42%
	SPPS targets[b]	21%	5%	0%	74%
8th grade (N=18)	MAP norms[a]	44%	6%	11%	39%
	SPPS targets[b]	22%	6%	0%	72%
Total (N=333)	MAP norms[a] (grades K-8)	40%	25%	4%	31%
Total (N=162)	SPPS[b] (grades 3-8)	26%	9%	6%	59%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

Attendance and academic growth

We tested for the presence of a relationship between attendance (i.e., days absent) and growth in reading and math. Only students enrolled in the school all or almost all of the 2012-13 school year (152 days or more) were included in the analysis. Figure 41 indicates the average (mean) days absent by student characteristics and grade level. Overall, on average, students were absent 7-8 days (mean of 7.6 days) during the school year. Asian and black students tended to have fewer days absent than white and Hispanic students. On average, 4th graders had the fewest days absent while kindergartners and 6th graders had the most days absent.

41. Days absent in the 2012-13 school year by student characteristics and grade[a]

Student characteristics		Number of students	Days absent: Mean	Days absent: Standard deviation
Gender	Female	115	7.5	6.2
	Male	106	7.8	7.0
Race/ethnicity	Asian	29	6.1	5.7
	Black	108	6.6	5.9
	Hispanic	28	10.5	7.1
	White	54	8.9	7.3
	American Indian[b]	2	[b]	[b]
Limited English Proficiency		16	7.2	5.4
Special Education		30	7.1	7.1
Grade	Kindergarten	41	10.8	7.8
	Grade 1	43	7.8	6.2
	Grade 2	26	5.3	4.7
	Grade 3	26	8.1	5.5
	Grade 4	26	4.9	5.1
	Grade 5	23	5.9	5.8
	Grade 6	9	10.7	8.9
	Grade 7	15	5.8	6.5
	Grade 8	12	9.8	6.2
Total		221	7.6	6.5

[a] *Includes only students enrolled 152 or more days during the 2012-13 school year.*

[b] *Too few students to report.*

We analyzed the potential relationship between days absent and reading and math growth from fall to spring in several different ways (i.e., using average days absent, categories of days absent, and regression analysis). We found no consistent relationship between days absent and growth in either reading or math. Figure 42 shows average (mean) growth for students absent 0-10 days vs. 11 or more days by grade and overall. Overall, 25 percent of the students were absent 11 or more days. Results show no clear and consistent relationship between days absent and growth for either reading or math.

42. Growth by attendance

		Average (mean) growths from fall 2012 to spring 2013			
		Reading		Math	
Grade	Number of students	Absent 0 – 10 days	Absent 11+ days	Absent 0 – 10 days	Absent 11+ days
Kindergarten	41	17	22	26	28
1	43	18	16	21	21
2	26	16	13	17	16
3	26	18	10	13	11
4	26	8	9	12	16
5	23	4	8	11	9
6	9	8	-2	8	6
7	15	3	-5	5	-6
8	12	4	7	-2	-1
Total	221	12	13	15	17

Summary

Overall MAP performance

MAP results indicated that 57 percent of LIFE Prep students were at grade level or above in reading in spring 2013 based on MAP norms. Using SPPS targets (grades 3-8 only), 63 percent were at grade level in reading. More detailed analysis based on MAP norms indicated the following: 32 percent of the students in grades 2-7 were one or more years ahead in reading skills in spring 2013, 24 percent were at grade level to less than one year ahead, 19 percent were behind less than one year, and 24 percent were behind one or more years. Furthermore, 16 percent of the students moved from below grade level to at or above grade level in reading from fall to spring.

Turning to math performance, 65 percent of LIFE Prep students were at grade level or above in math in spring 2013 based on MAP norms. Using SPPS targets, 36 percent were at grade

level in math in the spring (SPPS targets which were designed to be predictive of MCA proficiency were considerably higher than MAP norms in grades 5-8). More detailed analysis based on MAP norms indicated that 28 percent of the students in grades 2-7 were one or more years ahead in math skills in the spring, 32 percent were at grade level to less than one year ahead, 22 percent were behind less than one year, and 18 percent were behind one or more years. Twenty-five percent of the students moved from below grade level to at or above grade level in math from fall to spring.

Individual grade level results often differed considerably from the overall MAP performance results. Also, analysis of results by student characteristics indicated that black students tended to score lower in math than students in other racial/ethnic groups and Special Education students scored lower in reading and math than other students.

Growth from fall to spring

Growth was assessed by calculating the change in MAP scores from fall 2012 to spring 2013. LIFE Prep students' growth in reading exceeded expectations in grades K-4 and 8 based on both MAP norms and SPPS targets. Students' growth in grades 5-7 was the same or lower than expectations based on MAP norms and SPPS targets. Additional analyses in grades K-7 based on MAP norms indicated that 35 percent of LIFE Prep students made less than one year's growth in reading, 48 percent made one year to less than two years of growth, and 18 percent made two or more years' growth. Results for grades 3-7 based on SPPS targets indicated somewhat less growth in reading for LIFE Prep students. Students below grade level in reading in the fall had higher growth during the school year than students at or above grade level in the fall.

For math, LIFE Prep students' growth exceeded expectations in grades K-6 and was below expectations in grades 7 and 8 based on MAP norms. Using SPPS targets in grades 3-8, students' math growth exceeded expectations in grades 3 and 4 and was the same or below expectations in grades 5-8. Additional analyses in grades K-7 based on MAP norms indicated that 28 percent of LIFE Prep students made less than one year's growth in math, 52 percent made one year to less than two years of growth, and 20 percent made two or more years' growth. Results for grades 3-7 based on SPPS targets indicated considerably less growth in math for LIFE Prep students. Students below grade level in math in the fall had higher growth during the school year than students at or above grade level in the fall, except in higher grades (especially 7th and 8th grades).

Again, individual grade level results often differed considerably from the overall MAP growth results. Differences in growth by student characteristics tended to be small for both reading and math. Finally, no clear and consistent relationship was found between student attendance (days absent) and growth for either reading or math.

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Appendix

Survey results

All respondents

A1. Position at LIFE Prep (N=47)

Are you a…	
Classroom teacher	19 (40%)
Paraprofessional	11 (23%)
Special Education teacher	4 (9%)
Administrator	4 (9%)
Staff	8 (17%)
Parent	1 (2%)
Volunteer	1 (2%)
Other	1 (2%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. One person indicated in "Other" that they are a Reading Corps tutor.*

A2. Length of employment at LIFE Prep (N=47)

How long have you worked at or volunteered for LIFE Prep?	
Less than 1 year	6 (13%)
1-2 years	12 (26%)
3-4 years	15 (32%)
5 years or more	14 (30%)

A3. Components of LIFE Prep's model (N=47)

Please rate how LIFE Prep is performing on each of the following components.	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor	Don't know
A culture of high expectations that is internalized by LIFE Prep students.	8 (17%)	29 (62%)	6 (13%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
High level of accountability of students for their own progress.	10 (21%)	20 (43%)	8 (17%)	8 (17%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
High level of accountability of staff in helping students succeed.	19 (40%)	20 (43%)	7 (15%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
A caring and nurturing school environment.	37 (79%)	6 (13%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Strong Special Education program.	5 (11%)	20 (43%)	11 (23%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	6 (13%)
Informal, wrap-around support services.	14 (30%)	22 (47%)	4 (9%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)	4 (9%)
Teacher/staff empowerment and independence.	21 (45%)	18 (38%)	4 (9%)	4 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Individual and small group work in the classroom.	25 (53%)	15 (32%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
Differentiated instruction in the classroom.	17 (36%)	22 (47%)	4 (9%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
High level of staff commitment to the school, its mission, and its students.	23 (49%)	21 (45%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Rewards such as positive encouragement, school ceremonies, and opportunities for students who perform exceptionally well.	27 (57%)	12 (26%)	3 (6%)	4 (9%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Extra time for learning (extended school year, Saturday school, extended school day).	31 (66%)	9 (19%)	4 (9%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

A4. Standardized curriculum (N=47)

Do you think there should be a more standardized curriculum at LIFE Prep?	
Yes	21 (45%)
No	26 (55%)
Open-ended question: Why or why not?[a,b]	
Teacher should have the freedom to use what works for them.	9 (19%)
Teachers need to be able to cater to student needs and different learning styles.	8 (17%)
Would provide stability as they move through grades/know what they have already learned/lack of overlap.	8 (17%)
We do well with the curriculum we have.	5 (11%)
Would provide more consistency/accountability.	5 (11%)
Would create better training opportunities for new staff.	4 (9%)
Curriculum/standards are good, but teachers need to be able to creatively interpret those standards into lessons.	3 (6%)
Specific classes have curriculum needs.	3 (6%)
Other	6 (13%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

A5. Science curriculum (N=47)

How important is it that LIFE Prep implement a school-wide science curriculum?	
Very important	21 (45%)
Somewhat important	18 (38%)
Not important	5 (11%)
Don't know	3 (6%)

A6. Social studies curriculum (N=47)

How important is it that LIFE Prep implement a school-wide social studies curriculum?	
Very important	18 (38%)
Somewhat important	21 (45%)
Not important	5 (11%)
Don't know	3 (6%)

A7. Math curriculum (N=47)

How important is it that LIFE Prep implement a school-wide guided curriculum for math (similar to the reading curriculum in place currently)?	
Very important	31 (66%)
Somewhat important	6 (13%)
Not important	6 (13%)
Don't know	4 (9%)

A8. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) (N=47)

Are you a staff person who uses Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for students?	
Yes	22 (47%)
No	25 (53%)

A9. Sharing progress on ILPs with parents (N=22)

How often do you share students' progress on their ILPs with parents?	
Monthly or more	3 (14%)
At conferences only (3 times per year)	19 (86%)
Yearly	0 (0%)
I don't share this information with parents	0 (0%)

Note. *Question asked of only those indicating "yes" they use ILPs for students.*

A10. Sharing progress on ILPs with students (N=22)

How often do you share students' progress on their ILPs with students?	
Monthly or more	6 (27%)
At conferences only (3 times per year)	14 (64%)
Yearly	1 (5%)
I don't share this information with students	1 (5%)

Note. *Question asked of only those indicating "yes" they use ILPs for students.*

A11. Use of ILPs (N=22)

In what ways do you use student ILPs?	
Building/choosing student instructional groups	18 (82%)
Daily lesson planning	16 (73%)
Curriculum planning	13 (59%)
Setting goals for your classroom	15 (68%)
Setting goals for individual students	22 (100%)
Other	0 (0%)

Note. *Question asked of only those indicating "yes" they use ILPs for students. Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply.*

A12. Helpfulness of ILPs (N=22)

How helpful are ILPs for…	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Slightly helpful	Not helpful at all	Don't use for this task
Building groups	10 (45%)	7 (32%)	2 (9%)	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)
Daily lesson planning	7 (32%)	9 (41%)	3 (14%)	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)
Curriculum planning	3 (14%)	11 (50%)	4 (18%)	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	2 (9%)
Setting goals for your classroom	5 (23%)	11 (50%)	3 (14%)	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)
Setting goals for individual students	13 (59%)	7 (32%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)

Note. *Question asked of only those indicating "yes" they use ILPs for students.*

A13. Other uses of ILPs (N=22)

Do you use student ILPs in any other way?	
Yes	4 (18%)
No	18 (82%)

Note. *Question asked of only those indicating "yes" they use ILPs for students.*

A14. Support for teacher creativity/innovation (N=46)

To what extent do you feel teachers are supported in their ability to be creative and innovative in their teaching methods and strategies?	
Very supported	35 (76%)
Somewhat supported	11 (24%)
Not at all supported	0 (0%)

A15. Consistency of classroom practices (N=47)

Are there any areas in which you would like to see greater consistency in classroom practices or school policies at LIFE Prep?	
Yes	39 (83%)
No	8 (17%)
Open-ended question: In what areas would you like to see greater consistency?[a,b] (N=39)	
Discipline	18 (46%)
Behavior management/expectations	10 (26%)
Student behavior (hallways, lunchroom, bus, recess)	4 (10%)
Planning/classroom management/strategy	4 (10%)
English language program/ELL teacher	3 (8%)
Uniforms	3 (8%)
Respect for adults	2 (5%)
Grading	2 (5%)
Scheduling	2 (5%)
Math	2 (5%)
Reading	2 (5%)
Other	13 (33%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

A16. Elementary classroom practices (N=26)

What instructional and classroom management practices do you think should be used in every elementary classroom at LIFE Prep?[a,b]	
Classroom management	5 (19%)
Behavior management (school wide)	4 (15%)
Praising and acknowledging accomplishments/positive reinforcement	4 (15%)
Building character/values	4 (15%)
Small work groups	4 (15%)
Focus on individual needs/differentiated instruction	4 (15%)
Discipline	3 (12%)
Get students' attention/more responsive	3 (12%)
Reading	3 (12%)
Behavior management (classroom level)	2 (8%)

A16. Elementary classroom practices (N=26) continued

What instructional and classroom management practices do you think should be used in every elementary classroom at LIFE Prep?[a,b]	
Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS)	2 (8%)
Posted rules	2 (8%)
Communication to parents	2 (8%)
Consistent schedule	2 (8%)
Allow for teacher's own style, but still have structure	2 (8%)
Writing	2 (8%)
Math	2 (8%)
Other	7 (27%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

A17. Middle school classroom practices (N=23)

What instructional and classroom management practices do you think should be used in every middle school classroom at LIFE Prep?[a,b]	
Discipline	5 (22%)
Behavior management (school wide)	4 (17%)
Classroom management	4 (17%)
Expectations for academic achievement	3 (13%)
Behavior management (classroom level)	2 (9%)
Respect for adults	2 (9%)
Praising and acknowledging accomplishments/positive reinforcement	2 (9%)
Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS)	2 (9%)
Focus on individual needs/differentiated instruction	2 (9%)
Structured activities/keep students occupied	2 (9%)
Allow for teacher's own style, but still have structure	2 (9%)
Other	5 (22%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

A18. Discipline policies (N=45)

To what extent do you agree that LIFE Prep has effective discipline policies?	
Strongly agree	1 (2%)
Agree	21 (47%)
Disagree	17 (38%)
Strongly disagree	6 (13%)

A19. Uniformity in disciplinary actions (N=47)

To what extent do you agree that LIFE Prep would benefit from more uniformity in disciplinary actions?	
Strongly agree	27 (57%)
Agree	17 (36%)
Disagree	3 (6%)
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)

A20. Protocol to address bullying (N=47)

Is there a school-wide protocol in place to address bullying?	
Yes	14 (30%)
No	17 (36%)
Don't know	16 (34%)

A21. Program enhancements (N=44)

LIFE Prep's current focus is on closing the achievement gap. In considering possible future program enhancements, what do you see as the most important priorities for LIFE Prep?	
Offering a formal gifted and talented program	18 (41%)
Increasing science instruction	27 (61%)
Offering more sports or team-centered opportunities	27 (61%)
Incorporating more fine arts opportunities	21 (48%)
Other	12 (27%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply.*

A22. Other program enhancements (N=12)

Please specify other program enhancements that are important priorities?[a,b]	
English language program/ELL	4 (33%)
Math	3 (25%)
Title I	2 (17%)
Reading	2 (17%)
Other	7 (58%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

A23. Saturday school (N=45)

To what extent do you agree that Saturday school helps increase students' academic achievement?	
Strongly agree	12 (27%)
Agree	27 (60%)
Disagree	5 (11%)
Strongly disagree	1 (2%)

A24. Summer school (N=46)

To what extent do you agree that summer school helps increase students' academic achievement?	
Strongly agree	31 (67%)
Agree	13 (28%)
Disagree	2 (4%)
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)

A25. Before and aftercare (N=39)

To what extent do you agree that before and aftercare helps increase students' academic achievement?	
Strongly agree	3 (8%)
Agree	14 (36%)
Disagree	18 (46%)
Strongly disagree	4 (10%)

A26. Additional thoughts about Saturday school, summer school, and before and after care (N=24)

Do you have any additional thoughts or suggestions related to Saturday school, summer school, or before and after care?[a,b]	
Should be more academic-based	11 (46%)
Good program/good for students	8 (33%)
Provides academic help (homework and tutoring)	4 (17%)
Programs need more structure	3 (13%)
None	3 (13%)
Provides social skill building/chance to be with other kids	2 (8%)
Helps parents (childcare) but not necessarily the kids/too much school	2 (8%)
Other	9 (38%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

A27. Student satisfaction (N=46)

To what extent do you agree that, overall, students are happy to be at LIFE Prep?	
Strongly agree	25 (54%)
Agree	19 (41%)
Disagree	2 (4%)
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)

A28. Factors in student satisfaction (N=47)

What factors do you feel contribute to student happiness at LIFE Prep?	
Students' academic success	35 (74%)
Students' confidence building	37 (79%)
Experiential learning opportunities	27 (57%)
Field trips	30 (64%)
High expectations	32 (68%)
School celebrations	40 (85%)
One-to-one attention to students	43 (91%)
Cheerful physical environment	35 (74%)
Caring and nurturing social environment	45 (96%)
Other	1 (2%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply.*

A29. Culturally competent policies and practices (N=42)

How well do you believe LIFE Prep employs culturally competent policies and practices?	
Very well	15 (36%)
Somewhat well	24 (57%)
Not well at all	3 (7%)

A30. ELL/ESL program (N=41)

To what extent should LIFE Prep prioritize implementing an ELL/ESL program?	
It should be a high priority.	24 (59%)
It should be somewhat of a priority.	15 (37%)
It should not be a priority at this time.	2 (5%)

A31. Ways to increase cultural competency (N=29)

In what, if any, ways can LIFE Prep increase cultural awareness and cultural competency among teachers and staff?[a,b]	
Cultural development classes/workshops/trainings	13 (45%)
More field trips and events celebrating culture and differences (guest speakers)	7 (24%)
More time with families/families share with teachers and class	4 (14%)
More cultural diversity in staff, ELL teacher, and leaders	4 (14%)
More acceptance/knowledge of other languages	2 (7%)
No opinion	2 (7%)
Other	3 (10%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

A32. Sharing successful practices (N=47)

What do you see as effective ways of sharing successful practices with other teachers and staff at LIFE Prep?	
All-school staff meetings	28 (60%)
Grade-level staff meetings	40 (85%)
Professional development sessions	35 (74%)
One-on-one conversations with other staff	36 (77%)
Other	3 (6%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Respondents indicating "other" suggested going to trainings, trips away from the school, and multi-grade meetings.*

A33. Recommendations for sharing successful practices (N=27)

Do you have any recommendations for how successful practices can be better shared across teachers and staff at LIFE Prep?[a,b]	
Staff development (workshops/seminars/trainings)	7 (26%)
Regular meetings	5 (19%)
Constructive feedback from each other/pay attention to others' ideas	4 (15%)
No opinion	4 (15%)
Allow time to observe others teach	2 (7%)
Grade and/or cross grade-level planning meetings	2 (7%)
No, we do a good job of this already	2 (7%)
Other	1 (4%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

A34. Individual communication with parents (N=44)

In your experience, what communication methods are most effective for individual communications with parents?	
Individual email	40 (91%)
Email from a listserv	18 (41%)
Text messaging	29 (66%)
Phone calls	41 (93%)
Newsletters/fliers	19 (43%)
Paper sent home with students	16 (36%)
Verbal communication with students	7 (16%)
Other	0 (0%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply.*

A35. School-wide communication with parents (N=44)

In your experience, what communication methods are most effective for school-wide communications with parents?	
Individual email	14 (32%)
Email from a listserv	35 (80%)
Text messaging	8 (18%)
Phone calls	14 (32%)
Newsletters/fliers	31 (70%)
Paper sent home with students	26 (59%)
Verbal communication with students	7 (16%)
Other	1 (2%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply.*

A36. Improvements to school-wide communication with parents (N=41)

What are some ways communication with parents could be improved at LIFE Prep on a school-wide basis?	
Better email distribution lists	18 (44%)
Electronic calendars on the school website for special events	23 (56%)
Fliers that are distributed school-wide to students	6 (15%)
Notification further in advance of special events	29 (71%)
Other	5 (12%)
Communication does not need to be improved.	2 (5%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Asked a follow-up question about other ways communication with parents could be improved on a school-wide basis, two respondents indicated social media (Facebook/Twitter), one suggested finding out their preferred contact method, one indicated user-friendly school website, one indicated more frequent updates of contact information, and one indicated that parents need to read what is sent to them.*

A37. Parent involvement (N=47)

How are parents encouraged to become involved at LIFE Prep?	
Asked to volunteer at the school	38 (81%)
Invitations to school-wide events	47 (100%)
Invitations to classroom events	41 (87%)
Invitations to lunch with students	23 (49%)
Open-door classroom policy	43 (91%)
Invitations to attend board meetings	34 (72%)
Invitations to serve on the board	23 (49%)
Asked to join the new parent-teacher organization (PTO)	42 (89%)
Other	1 (2%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply.*

A38. Ideas for increasing parent involvement (N=21)

What ideas do you have for increasing parent involvement?[a,b]	
Improve communication/earlier communication	5 (24%)
Strengthen PTO	4 (19%)
None/no opinion	4 (19%)
Get parents involved in school activities after school (family fun nights)	3 (14%)
Better volunteer program	3 (14%)
Get parents involved in school activities during the day	2 (10%)
None, family involvement is high	2 (10%)
Other	3 (14%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Teachers/paraprofessionals only

A39. Grade level served by teachers/paraprofessionals (N=30)

What grade level do you teach or work in?	
PreK	4 (13%)
Kindergarten	7 (23%)
Grade 1	4 (13%)
Grade 2	3 (10%)
Grade 3	3 (10%)
Grade 4	3 (10%)
Grade 5	2 (7%)
Grade 6	5 (17%)
Grade 7	4 (13%)
Grade 8	4 (13%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A40. Classroom core components (N=27-30)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Students in my classroom work independently at least once a day.	23 (77%)	7 (23%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Students complete group work in stations at least once a day.	22 (73%)	5 (17%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
Students use technology (such as computers and iPads) as part of their learning at least once a day.	18 (60%)	7 (23%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)
I use differentiated instruction methods at least once per day.	20 (67%)	9 (30%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
I use positive reinforcement to encourage student learning and behaviors.	24 (80%)	6 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
I use rewards to encourage positive student behavior and learning.	14 (47%)	14 (47%)	2 (7%)	0 (0%)
The students in my classroom are able to work independently on assignments with little direction from me.	9 (30%)	12 (40%)	7 (23%)	2 (7%)
There is a clear policy for discipline in my classroom.	10 (33%)	15 (50%)	5 (17%)	0 (0%)
The students in my classroom help to manage each other's behavior and learning.	9 (30%)	12 (40%)	6 (20%)	3 (10%)
I assign homework every night for students.	20 (71%)	5 (18%)	3 (11%)	0 (0%)
There is an established curriculum that I am expected to follow.	4 (14%)	8 (29%)	13 (46%)	3 (11%)
There are specific instructional practices that I am expected to follow.	9 (32%)	6 (21%)	11 (39%)	2 (7%)
I have curricular and instructional autonomy within my classroom.	10 (37%)	15 (56%)	2 (7%)	0 (0%)

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A41. Curricula used in classroom (classroom teachers only) (N=19)

We would like to take a thorough inventory of curriculum used at LIFE Prep. Please indicate everything you are using in your classroom(s).	
Accelerated math	8 (42%)
Cathy Collins Block vocabulary	4 (21%)
Harcourt math	3 (16%)
HSP math	4 (21%)
Houghton Mifflin leveled readers	10 (53%)
Saxon math	7 (37%)
Scott Foresman for spelling, grammar, and reading	3 (16%)
Study Island	10 (53%)
Teacher-created math	16 (84%)
Teacher-created reading	16 (84%)
Teacher-created science	12 (63%)
Teacher-created vocabulary	12 (63%)
Other(s)	4 (21%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a classroom teacher (i.e., excludes paraprofessionals to provide an unduplicated count). Those indicating "other" listed teacher-created writing, FOSS science kits, Everyday Math, and Holt McDougal (1 respondent each).*

A42. Assessments used in classroom (classroom teachers only) (N=19)

We would also like to take a thorough inventory of all assessments used at LIFE Prep. Please indicate everything you are utilizing in your classroom(s).	
Cathy Collins vocabulary assessments	4 (21%)
Comprehension quizzes	9 (47%)
DIBELS	10 (53%)
DOLCH sight words	10 (53%)
Harcourt math assessments	5 (26%)
MCA	8 (42%)
NWEA	16 (84%)
Progress monitoring	7 (37%)
Q-comp assessment	19 (100%)
Project assessments	9 (47%)
Reading A-Z running records	5 (26%)
Spelling tests (weekly)	11 (58%)

A42. Assessments used in classroom (classroom teachers only) (N=19) continued

We would also like to take a thorough inventory of all assessments used at LIFE Prep. Please indicate everything you are utilizing in your classroom(s).	
Teacher-created math assessments	15 (79%)
Teacher-created reading assessments	14 (74%)
Teacher-created science assessments	3 (16%)
Teacher-created vocabulary assessments	10 (53%)
Other(s)	4 (21%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a classroom teacher (i.e., excludes paraprofessionals to provide an unduplicated count). Those indicating "other" listed Saxon math assessments (2 respondents), Houghton-Mifflin reading assessments (1 respondent), Reading Corps assessment (1 respondent), and Holt math assessments (1 respondent).*

A43. Successful curricular/instructional practices (N=27)

What curricular/instructional practices have been most successful for you in your classroom?[a,b]	
Small group/differentiated instruction	5 (19%)
None/Not applicable	4 (15%)
Hands-on activities	3 (11%)
Games/fun activities	3 (11%)
Saxon math	3 (11%)
Experiential learning/field trips	2 (7%)
Other	8 (30%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A44. Ways of communicating student progress to parents (N=30)

In what ways do you communicate student progress to parents?	
Email	19 (63%)
Phone call	23 (77%)
Parent/teacher conferences	26 (87%)
Notes sent home with student	15 (50%)
Other	2 (7%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A45. Frequency of communicating student progress to parents (N=30)

How often do you communicate student progress to parents?	
Weekly or more	6 (20%)
Monthly	10 (33%)
At conferences (3 times per year)	14 (47%)

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A46. Ways of communicating student progress to students (N=30)

In what ways do you communicate student progress to the students themselves?	
Student conference with teacher/parent	19 (63%)
On assignments	20 (67%)
Report cards	11 (37%)
During group assignments	20 (67%)
During one-on-one instruction	26 (87%)
Other	2 (7%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A47. Frequency of communicating student progress to students (N=30)

How often do you communicate student progress to the students themselves?	
Weekly or more	23 (77%)
Monthly	6 (20%)
Around conferences (3 times per year)	1 (3%)

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A48. Strategies for differentiating instruction (N=28)

What strategies do you use to differentiate instruction that work well?[a,b]	
Ability/level grouping	14 (50%)
Stations	3 (11%)
Sending students up to higher classes/advanced work	3 (11%)
Individual lessons	3 (11%)
Differentiated homework	3 (11%)
Paraprofessionals/aides to help those who need more	3 (11%)
None/not applicable	3 (11%)
Use of computers/iPads	2 (7%)
Clubs	2 (7%)
Using assessments to find gaps	2 (7%)
Other	6 (21%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A49. Challenging advanced students (N=29)

In what ways do you challenge the advanced students in your classroom?[a,b]	
More difficult lessons/activities	23 (79%)
More challenging homework	6 (21%)
Have them help other students	5 (17%)
None/not applicable	4 (14%)
Special classroom jobs/leaders	3 (10%)
Send them to higher-grade classes	2 (7%)
Advanced clubs	2 (7%)
Strategic/rigorous thinking activities	2 (7%)
Other	2 (7%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A50. Interventions for students needing extra attention (N=29)

What interventions do you find work well for helping students who need extra attention?[a,b]	
One-on-one help	18 (62%)
Small groups	6 (21%)
Have tutors work with them	4 (14%)
Saturday school	3 (10%)
Give them breaks from academics	3 (10%)
Positive reinforcement	3 (10%)
Back to basics/core skills	2 (7%)
Have other classmates work with them	2 (7%)
Have paraprofessionals work with them	2 (7%)
Give them goals	2 (7%)
Reading Corps	2 (7%)
None/not applicable	2 (7%)
Other	4 (14%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A51. Ideas for improving practices for students needing extra attention (N=26)

Are there ways you think LIFE Prep's practices for intervening with students requiring extra attention could be improved?[a,b]	
No/not applicable	10 (38%)
More educational assistants/paraprofessionals/staff (to give more one-on-one attention to those who need it)	7 (27%)
Early interventions	3 (12%)
More parent involvement	2 (8%)
Title I program	2 (8%)
Other	5 (19%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A52. Use of student data (N=30)

In what ways do you use student data?	
Lesson planning	20 (67%)
Curriculum planning	15 (50%)
Grouping students for differentiated instruction	23 (77%)
Identifying students who are advanced	25 (83%)
Identifying students who are behind	25 (83%)
Preparing for MCAs	8 (27%)
Other	0 (0%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A53. Use of lesson or unit-level assessments (N=30)

Do you use data from smaller lessons or unit-level assessments between the quarterly NWEA assessments for purposes of monitoring student progress and differentiating instruction?	
Yes	21 (70%)
No	9 (30%)

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A54. Types of assessments and lesson plans (N=19)

What types of assessments and lesson plans do you use?[a,b]	
Informal assessment	7 (37%)
Teacher created	5 (26%)
Daily plans	5 (26%)
Formal assessments	4 (21%)
NWEA	3 (16%)
Weekly plans	2 (11%)
One-on-one work	2 (11%)
DIBELs	2 (11%)
Other assessments/tools	2 (11%)
None/not applicable	2 (11%)
Other	3 (16%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A55. Frequency of data use (N=30)

How often do you look at student data?	
Daily	4 (13%)
Weekly or biweekly	9 (30%)
Monthly	12 (40%)
In preparation for conferences (3 times per year)	5 (17%)

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A56. Comfort with data (N=30)

How comfortable are you with using student data?	
Very comfortable	14 (47%)
Somewhat comfortable	23 (43%)
Not at all comfortable	3 (10%)

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A57. Support for data use (N=30)

Do you feel as if there is enough support offered at LIFE Prep to assist teachers and staff in developing their skills for working with student-level data?	
Yes	10 (33%)
Somewhat	14 (47%)
No	6 (20%)

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A58. Impact on students of more frequent data use (N=30)

Do you think students would benefit from more frequent data use?	
Yes	17 (57%)
No	13 (43%)

Open-ended question: Please explain your answer?[a,b] (N=21)	
Better plan differentiated instruction	7 (33%)
Identify needs of students	5 (24%)
If the students/parents can see how they are improving it encourages them	3 (14%)
Data can become more important than working with the student/takes time that is taken away from teaching	3 (14%)
Need more time to understand it/the more we can use the better we can interpret it	3 (14%)
No	3 (14%)
Other	1 (5%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A59. Ways of incorporating data analysis (N=30)

In what ways could more frequent data analysis be incorporated into your schedule?	
During weekly all-school meetings	3 (10%)
During weekly grade-level meetings	14 (47%)
During professional development hours	17 (57%)
During another specified, set-aside time period for teachers	16 (53%)
Other	0 (0%)
More frequent data analysis cannot be incorporated into my schedule.	2 (7%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A60. Extra support for working with student data (N=20)

What types of extra support would you like to increase your knowledge of working with student data?[a,b]	
None/not applicable	8 (40%)
Any (unspecified)	4 (20%)
Cluster and grade-level meetings	3 (15%)
Other	5 (25%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

A61. Disciplinary procedures (N=30)

What types of disciplinary procedures/actions do you use in your classroom?	
Verbal warning	29 (97%)
Name on the board	10 (33%)
Time out	15 (50%)
One-on-one student/teacher conferences	21 (70%)
Demerits	13 (43%)
Lunch and lecture	12 (40%)
Other	6 (20%)

Note. *Respondents were asked to indicate all that apply. Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional. Those indicating they use "other" types of disciplinary procedures/actions indicated buddy room (2 respondents), phone call home (2 respondents), time with another teacher (1 respondent), take away privileges (1 respondent), extra homework (1 respondent), lose recess time (1 respondent), counsel over lunch (1 respondent), and other (1 respondent).*

A62. Bullying (N=29)

In what ways do you handle bullying in your classroom?[a,b]	
Speak with them individually/talk about treating others with respect	14 (48%)
Get parents involved	9 (31%)
Involve higher-level staff at school	8 (28%)
Discuss it in class with students	8 (28%)
No excuses/not acceptable/zero tolerance	7 (24%)
Reinforce positive behavior/character building	3 (10%)
Consequences/discipline/suspension	3 (10%)
Address immediately	3 (10%)
Other	2 (7%)

[a] *Response themes developed by Wilder Research based on LIFE Prep staff responses.*

[b] *Responses could be placed in multiple themes, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*

Note. *Percentages are based on staff who indicated they are a teacher or paraprofessional.*

Supplemental academic data

A63. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) RIT score for 2012-13: READING

		RIT Score		
Grade		**Fall**	**Winter**	**Spring**
Kindergarten (N=69):	LIFE Prep mean	137	145	156
	MAP norms[a]	143	151	155
1st grade (N=61):	LIFE Prep mean	158	168	175
	MAP norms[a]	160	170	176
2nd grade (N=42):	LIFE Prep mean	177	188	193
	MAP norms[a]	176	183	189
3rd grade (N=38):	LIFE Prep mean	187	198	201
	MAP norms[a]	190	195	199
	SPPS targets[b]	184	190	194
4th grade (N=37):	LIFE Prep mean	200	204	208
	MAP norms[a]	200	203	206
	SPPS targets[b]	196	199	203
5th grade (N=33):	LIFE Prep mean	208	210	213
	MAP norms[a]	207	210	212
	SPPS targets[b]	201	204	207
6th grade (N=14):	LIFE Prep mean	208	210	208
	MAP norms[a]	213	214	216
	SPPS targets[b]	209	211	214
7th grade (N=21):	LIFE Prep mean	213	216	216
	MAP norms[a]	217	218	220
	SPPS targets[b]	216	218	220
8th grade (N=18):	LIFE Prep mean	216	219	220
	MAP norms[a]	220	221	223
	SPPS targets[b]	221	222	223

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

A64. LIFE Prep students at or above grade level and behind grade level based on MAP norms[a] READING, Fall 2012

		Percentage of students:			
Grade	**Number assessed**	**1+ years ahead**	**At grade level to less than 1 year above**	**Less than 1 year behind**	**1+ years behind**
2nd grade	42	10%	45%	43%	2%
3rd grade	38	16%	37%	26%	21%
4th grade	37	27%	30%	24%	19%
5th grade	33	27%	33%	18%	21%
6th grade	14	14%	0%	43%	43%
7th grade	21	24%	29%	10%	38%
Total	185	19%	33%	28%	20%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

A65. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) RIT score for 2012-13: MATH

Grade		Mean RIT Score Fall	Winter	Spring
Kindergarten (N=68):	LIFE Prep mean	135	147	162
	MAP norms[a]	144	151	156
1st grade (N=62):	LIFE Prep mean	160	172	180
	MAP norms[a]	163	172	179
2nd grade (N=41):	LIFE Prep mean	182	189	198
	MAP norms[a]	179	186	191
3rd grade (N=38):	LIFE Prep mean	191	200	204
	MAP norms[a]	192	199	204
	SPPS targets[b]	192	197	204
4th grade (N=36):	LIFE Prep mean	202	210	215
	MAP norms[a]	204	209	212
	SPPS targets[b]	203	207	214
5th grade (N=36):	LIFE Prep mean	212	217	223
	MAP norms[a]	213	218	221
	SPPS targets[b]	217	222	230
6th grade (N=15):	LIFE Prep mean	213	216	221
	MAP norms[a]	220	223	226
	SPPS targets[b]	229	233	237
7th grade (N=19):	LIFE Prep mean	223	226	228
	MAP norms[a]	226	229	231
	SPPS targets[b]	235	236	239
8th grade (N=18):	LIFE Prep mean	228	232	230
	MAP norms[a]	230	233	234
	SPPS targets[b]	241	242	244

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

[b] *RIT score targets developed through research by the St. Paul Public Schools to predict proficiency on the MCA II Reading for all students for 2011-12 and 2012-13.*

A66. LIFE Prep students at or above grade level and behind grade level based on MAP norms[a] Math, Fall 2012

		Percentage of students:			
Grade	**Number assessed**	**1+ years ahead**	**At grade level to less than 1 year above**	**Less than 1 year behind**	**1+ years behind**
2nd grade	41	15%	49%	37%	0%
3rd grade	38	11%	42%	29%	18%
4th grade	36	19%	25%	36%	19%
5th grade	36	14%	42%	28%	17%
6th grade	15	0%	27%	33%	40%
7th grade	19	42%	16%	10%	32%
Total	185	16%	36%	30%	17%

[a] *2011 norms for RIT scores, Northwest Evaluation Association*

Literature review

Following is a more detailed presentation of the literature review conducted for this study and summarized in the body of the report.

Wilder Research conducted a literature review to understand the extent to which LIFE Prep's model intersects with research on characteristics of schools that are high-achieving or "beating the odds" given expectations for the population they serve. The review emphasized research on characteristics of schools succeeding with minority or low-income populations.

Background

The adverse effects of poverty on student and school performance are well documented. Studies show that schools with high concentrations of low-income students typically score lower on standardized tests than schools with students from economically advantaged and well-resourced backgrounds. Students at high-poverty schools face a set of challenges associated with school underperformance, such as high teacher and student turnover, high student mobility, limited parent engagement, inexperienced teachers and poor quality teaching, and low expectations. However, there are a growing number of schools with low-income student bodies that challenge these trends. These schools often perform at or above the state averages on standardized tests and have become known as "high-poverty, high-performing" schools. These schools have also been characterized as "beating the odds" or "high-achieving."

High-poverty, high-performing schools have gained substantial interest from policymakers and education researchers in recent years. As a result, a sizable body of literature has emerged that outlines common characteristics associated with these schools. These characteristics reflect strategies and practices generally accepted to be effective and which have been widely implemented in high-poverty, high-performing schools.

What is a high-poverty, high-performing school?

The studies reviewed did not yield a singular, established definition of a high-poverty, high-performing school. In fact, very few studies precisely defined the meaning of both "high-poverty" and "high-performing." The following 90/90/90 formula setting a clear and high bar offers an exception (Reeves, 2003):

- More than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch
- More than 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities

- More than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards, according to independently conducted tests of academic achievement

Many numeric thresholds have been set to define "high-poverty" schools, such as the percentage of students whose households live below the poverty threshold or the percentage of students enrolled in free or reduced lunch. In most studies, a school is defined as high-poverty when more than 50 percent of students attending the school come from low-income houses, measured by the percentage of children receiving free or reduced school lunches (Carter, 2000; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002).

While studies typically defined "high-poverty," they were less likely to tightly define "high-performing." Nevertheless, most studies characterize "high-performing" as schools scoring at or above the state average on standardized assessments. Because standards vary by state, this definition varies across state lines (Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004; McGee, 2004; Picucci et al., 2002; Reeves, 2003).

Characteristics of high-poverty, high-performing schools

Several lists of characteristics defining high-poverty, high-performing schools exist, but the set of characteristics identified by Barr and Parrett (2007) surfaced frequently in the literature review as the baseline characteristics needed to understand high-poverty, high-performing schools. Some of the characteristics also encompass district-level attributes applicable to traditional public schools. As identified by Barr and Parrett, high-poverty, high-performing schools include the following characteristics, with one additional characteristic added from Shannon and Bylsma (2007), as indicated:

- Ensure effective district and school leadership
- Align, monitor, and manage the curriculum
- High levels of collaboration and communication (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007)
- Engage parents, communities, and schools to work as partners
- Understand and hold high expectations for children
- Target low-performing students and schools, starting with reading
- Create a culture of data and assessment literacy
- Build and sustain instructional capacity
- Reorganize time, space, and transitions

These characteristics prove most effective when the strategies and practices overlap, functioning as a holistic system of operation within the school. Most studies did not specify a number of characteristics that will lead a high-poverty school to become a high-performing school, but almost every study suggested that the implementation of one or two of these characteristics would not be enough to become a high-performing school. Further, the local contexts of the neighborhood and school should inform the implementation of the practices and strategies within each of the characteristics in order for them to be effective. Descriptions of the individual characteristics follow.

Ensure effective district and school leadership

Every school needs their leadership to effectively navigate relationships with students, parents, teachers, staff, school district administration, and the broader community. At high-poverty schools, leadership needs to not only manage these relationships, but do so in the face of substantial challenges such as disengaged parents, high teacher and student turnover, and financial constraints (Carter, 2000; Heck & Moriyama, 2010; Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpshman, 2005; Loeb, 2003). Effective school leaders also put forward a vision that is meaningful to staff and students, employ innovative decision-making models, and cultivate a school culture that is relevant to all students. Following are descriptions of specific practices and strategies employed by leadership in high-poverty, high-performing schools.

Leadership develops and implements a vision believed by students and teachers. School administrators lead the school toward a vision that does not allow students and teachers to become entrenched in expectations of high-poverty schools as low-scoring, troubled, and underperforming. These school leaders succeed in encouraging students and teachers to see success in school and life as their ultimate outcome (Anderson & Pellicer, 1998; Curry, Pacha, & Baker, 2007; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Izumi, 2002)**.**

Leadership encourages and practices collaboration with school staff of all levels. Though approaches to shared decision-making differ among individual school leaders, successful school administrators include staff in making key decisions regarding school matters such as curriculum and instruction (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Kannapel et al., 2005; Strand, 2010; Parker, Grenville & Flessa, 2011; Williams et al., 2005). Rather than a top-down structure, decisions are often made using a horizontal model in which teachers, support staff, and administrators share responsibility for determining how the school functions. Additionally, school leaders often have open-door policies making them accessible to staff. They are also intimately involved in the school's daily operations, and are consequently aware of student and teacher performance across grade levels (Carter, 2000; Reeves, 2003).

School leadership possesses qualities that engage students, parents, and staff. Key qualities of effective school leaders have been identified. As articulated by Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009, p. 2),

> *Regardless of the leadership label, there are universal characteristics that commonly surface when considering qualities of effective leaders: sense of vision, ability to set goals and plan, personal charisma, strong communication skills (particularly verbal and negotiation abilities), strong sense of self and personal convictions, relationship and empathy skills, and the ability to motivate and influence others. It is this last virtue, the ability to activate others to follow, which actually defines leadership itself.*

School leadership understands the role of the school district. In traditional public schools, the district's role varies from school to school. At some schools, the district plays a minimal role in school functions, while at other schools the district serves as a watchdog (Kannapel et al., 2005; Levine & Lezotte, n.d.). However, in almost all instances the school's administrative leadership maintains a working relationship with the district administration and accountability office, evidenced by the district supporting the leadership's decisions. High-poverty schools can falter when districts do not understand the particular needs of these schools. School leadership needs to communicate and work with the district to meet the school's needs, such as increased funding for Special Education or support to maintain extracurricular activities (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Cole-Henderson, 2000).

Align, monitor, and manage the curriculum

Classroom curriculum sets the trajectory for the school year and defines the methods by which students learn and teachers teach. High-performing, high-poverty schools effectively align, monitor, and manage the curriculum by engaging in the following practices.

Curriculum is aligned with assessment. High-performing schools dedicate the time and resources to align, track, and implement a curriculum that is meaningful and effective for positive school performance. However, many schools lack the discipline to meaningfully use assessments as a tool that informs the shape of the school curriculum. A curriculum that parallels established assessment standards ensures that students are taught the material needed to be successful at their grade level (Kannapel et al., 2005; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Barth et al., 1999). Teachers have a stronger foundation to work from when mechanisms are in place at the school level to evaluate student performance on a set of metrics, and then find immediate resources and support to tailor the curriculum. Kannapel and Clements' (Kannapel et al., 2005, p. 14) research explains that

> *…curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be the central focus and must be addressed simultaneously, coherently, systematically, and intentionally if the school is to reach high levels of achievement among all students.*

Teachers find effective instructional techniques to support curriculum goals and student outcomes. There are different techniques and approaches to teaching that support student learning, and the specific practices used can vary within each approach. Generally, in direct instruction students are taught at their instructional level and often placed in homogenous level groups to enhance learning. This is a track system that emphasizes cohort learning and achievement (Heck & Moriyama, 2010; Ross et al., 2004; Thompson, 2006). In differentiated instruction, individual students' needs are considered and attended to, curriculum is tailored to the individual needs, and teachers work directly with students to craft a plan that leads to school success (Thompson, 2006; Thompson, 2004). In experiential instruction, the collective, real-world experience of the class is used as the driving factor to learn (Thompson, 2006).

Teachers work across grade levels and curriculum areas to support each other. At many high-achieving schools, individual teachers' development areas are identified and supported by other teachers who have strengths in those areas. These teachers work collaboratively to develop curriculum and understand the level at which they must teach to prepare students to enter the next grade. This often means that teachers work with teachers across all grade levels, helping individual teachers understand their role within their profession and at the specific school. In accepting their professional role in student success and failure, teachers should receive support in the form of professional development opportunities and be challenged to contribute expertise in their areas of strength (Chenoweth, 2009; Clarke, 2005; Kannapel et al., 2005; Ragland, Clubine, Constable, & Smith, 2002).

Standards inform curriculum, instruction, and student and teacher assessments. Studies indicated that high-performing, high-poverty schools use standards extensively. These schools and their teachers use state standards to design curriculum and instruction, assess student work, and evaluate teacher performance (Barth et al., 1999).

High levels of collaboration and communication

A number of studies have identified collaboration or collegiality among school staff (principals, teachers, and support staff) as a key feature of the culture of high performing schools serving disadvantaged students (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007), including recent studies (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Parker, Grenville & Flessa, 2011). Staff in these schools trust and respect each other and work together effectively to improve students' learning. Some characteristics of this culture were touched on above – principals sharing leadership and decision-making with other staff; teachers working collaboratively to develop curriculum and supporting each other in implementing it. This section focuses primarily on collaboration among teachers.

Characteristics of the culture of schools that have strong teacher collaboration include a shared leadership approach by the principal or administrators where teachers have an important role in decision-making. The vision and goals of the school are shared by teachers and other staff, and there is a commitment to working together to achieve them. There is a sense of collective responsibility for students' success in the school. Collegiality and collaboration are or become the norm; teachers don't work in isolation; open, thoughtful discussion of classroom practice is commonplace. Teachers see the connection between collaboration and improving their practice and derive professional satisfaction from working together (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Parker et al., 2011; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

Features of a collaboration among teachers. Often teacher collaboration in high-performing schools takes the form of professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs focus on improving student learning through teachers working together, learning from each other, and helping each other improve teaching practices. Activities may include observing each other's classroom practices and engaging in feedback and reflection on these, peer-modeling of instructional techniques, sharing knowledge or best practices, and mentoring. Teachers may work in PLCs to review, discuss, and determine the implications of student academic data for their practice. Teachers may also work together to align curriculum with standards, and align curriculum across classrooms and grades. Collaboration may foster team teaching among those with overlapping content (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Parker et al., 2011; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

Structure and practices that support and sustain a collaborative culture. Structural elements that can help foster and sustain teacher collaboration include the following (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; Shannon and Bylsma, 2007):

- Using common teacher planning time for collaboration
- Setting aside regularly scheduled times for professional development that promotes collaboration (e.g., study groups, groups to work with student data)
- Setting up teacher task groups for special projects

Teachers must have the opportunity to work together for a sustained period of time so that they can get to know each other and get beyond their differences to form productive, trusting relationships. Principals can help to promote collaboration through making it an explicit expectation, modeling it, and rewarding those who engage in effective collaboration (Shannon and Bylsma, 2007). Taking candidates' collaboration or teamwork interests, commitment, and skills into account in teacher hiring decisions can also be helpful (Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012).

Engage parents, communities, and schools to work as partners

Research illustrates that high-poverty schools are challenged by limited parent engagement with the school and in their children's education (Anderson & Pellicer, 1998; Barr & Parrett, 2007; Trimble, 2002). Structural elements often limit opportunities for these parents to take part in their child's education. Barriers include sporadic work schedules, lack of transportation, and limited knowledge about supporting children academically (Russell, 2010). High-poverty, high-performing schools have developed mechanisms to effectively engage and sustain trust with parents. Parent engagement in the school can also translate into broader community support for the school and the perception of the school as a trusted partner in supporting children (Gordon, 2010; Parker et al., 2011).

Schools meet parents where they are. As described above, some parents face constraints related to challenging work schedules, language barriers, lack of transportation, and other factors that pose barriers to participating in their child's school. Successful schools have found ways to close the accessibility gap for parents by incorporating support mechanisms to facilitate and foster a strong parent-school relationship. For example, an all-Latino, Spanish-speaking school described in the literature provided parent-run bilingual councils so parents who spoke a language other than English could feel comfortable discussing school issues. A council representative served as a parent-school liaison to represent the views of those who could not communicate directly with the school due to language barriers (Carter, 2000; Jesse et al., 2004).

> *Teachers and administration work with families to establish the home as a center for learning.*

In high-poverty, high-performing schools, teachers and school principals strongly believe that learning cannot be confined within school walls. Learning must occur at school, in the community, and most importantly at home. In a summary of findings about high-poverty, high performing schools, the Center for Public Education provides evidence that these schools find ways to involve parents, and treat parents as partners in their children's learning (Center for Public Education, 2005; Carter, 2000; Barth et al., 1999). Many schools have worked hard to shift the attitudes of parents and students about learning at home through interactions at home visits, parent-teacher conferences, school events, and in the classroom. At many of the successful schools, teachers provided take-home resources to help parents better support children's learning. Examples of take-home resources included free books, worksheets, and summer enrichment materials (Carter, 2000).

Schools institute accountability at all levels. At high-performing schools, all adults involved in students' lives are held accountable to high standards. Barth et al. (1999) have shown the positive effects for high-poverty, high-performing schools that share the responsibility for student success among teachers, staff, and administrators. Reeves (2003) argues that a

child's school success is also significantly influenced by their out-of-school time, and that accountability should start before the children arrive at school. For example, parents are held accountable if their child does not complete the material sent home. A direct, honest parent-teacher relationship is important for the communication of both positive and negative news about a child's performance. Trustworthy relationships between school and home also prevent parents from feeling blamed for the child's shortcomings.

Understand and hold high expectations for low-income, culturally diverse students

Schools focus on children first and as individuals. While curriculum, school leadership, and relationships with parents are important factors to a school's success, everything at these schools revolves around the success of individual children. Research shows that high-poverty, high-performing schools have emphasized the children as the top priority and find practices that view children as individuals (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Fenzel & Monteith, 2008; Izumi, 2002; McGee, 2004). For example, a low-income urban elementary school on the East Coast focuses on individual students at three levels: immediate personal attention, testing, and basic skills. The school aims to identify the individual student need and find a way to help the student gain the particular skill that is productive to their learning (Carter, 2000).

Schools create a safe and comfortable environment supportive of learning. The literature suggests that high-poverty, high-performing schools create a school environment that is conducive to student learning, where the cultures of the student body are respected and embedded into the fabric of the school. At a number of all-black schools, an Afro-centric curriculum is used as a centerpiece to student learning because students are able to hear about and see people who look like them and reflect their experiences. At schools composed of large immigrant populations, the languages, customs, and cuisines of their home culture are integrated as a way to build a sense of familiarity from home within the school. Making children feel comfortable at school increases their confidence and supports their learning capabilities (Carter, 2000; Snipes & Casserly, 2004; Center for Public Education, 2005).

Schools and administrators believe all children can succeed now and in the future. Teachers and administrators at these schools frequently tell students that they are succeeding and will continue to succeed. These adults provide positive reinforcements and incentives for good school performance. Additionally, in many high-performing, high-poverty schools students are encouraged to think about college, careers, and extracurricular activities and how to pursue related goals (Ali & Jerald, 2001; Barr & Parrett, 2007; Barth et al., 1999).

Schools set high achievement standards for all children. High-poverty, high-performing schools push the limits by setting the highest expectations for their students. Some schools expect students to perform at least one grade level higher than their current grade, and the school crafts its curriculum accordingly. Other schools aim for 100 percent of students to pass standardized tests (Reeves, 2003). Teachers and school administrators frequently communicate these expectations to the students, and reward students who achieve or exceed these expectations (D'Agostino & Borman, 1998; Elias & Haynes, 2008; Hagelskamp & DiStasi, 2012; McDonald, Ross, Bol, & McSparrin-Gallagher, 2007; Muñoz & Dossett, 2004; Reeves, 2003).

Target low-performing students and schools, starting with reading

Reading is a basic and important competency for all young students to master. Research shows that students from low-income backgrounds tend to score lower on reading tests and consistently fall behind grade level in reading (Chenoweth, 2009; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Elias & Haynes, 2008; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000). Many students from low-income backgrounds lack out-of-school support structures that encourage reading, which contributes to their falling behind in reading achievement especially during the summer when students are not enrolled in school (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996). Several studies identify reading as one of the most important academic focus areas within high-poverty, high-performing schools (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Picucci et al., 2002; Reeves, 2003). A number of practices and strategies are employed in high-poverty, high-performing schools to emphasize reading as a major academic priority, such as the following.

Schools set a target threshold for students to read. This practice reflects a belief that if a child cannot read, then it is very difficult to succeed in school because the ability to read crosses all subject areas and classes. At a predominantly Latino elementary and middle school with more than 75 percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch, reading was placed as the school's first priority. The school enforced consequences in the early grades if students needed to improve their basic literacy skills. While some would argue against the practice, at this particular school students who could not read at the end of kindergarten were held back to give them an extra year to learn and acquire reading skills before first grade (Carter, 2000; Reeves, 2003).

Time in elective classes is reduced to increase time dedicated to reading. A strong emphasis on placing reading first is a driving key characteristic at a high-poverty, urban elementary school on the West Coast. The school sets aside 1.5 hours of reading per day for students. Physical education and other topics are limited in order to focus on reading comprehension. While this approach has been criticized for limiting the creativity of students by not offering classes such as art, or encouraging inactivity by not offering

physical education, this school believes that this sacrifice is what it takes to keep children at or above grade level in reading (Carter, 2000). Other schools increase instructional time not only in reading but also in math (Barth et al., 1999; Goddard et al., 2000).

Create a culture of data and assessment literacy

Many high-performing, high-poverty schools make decisions informed by data, and work to create, implement, and utilize data systems to develop student work plans and evaluate student progress. A challenge in using data is to find ways to make the data suit the school's purposes, which requires understanding the data and knowing how to follow up with direct, meaningful action. Research shows that these schools carefully select assessment tools that match their school's mission, and use assessments that provide data that can be directly translated into teacher action. A number of the schools have effectively acculturated the use of data into the functioning of their school in ways that are deeply embedded and accepted by teachers and administrators (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011; Borman, 2002; Byrne & Gallagher, 2004; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001). A number of practices and strategies are employed in high-poverty, high-performing schools that accept and utilize data and assessments, such as the following.

Data is integrated into all aspects of decision-making. Schools need to develop data reporting templates that best meet their needs. This means that the type of data collected varies significantly from school to school. If schools want to learn about progress in reading, then there are multiple ways to evaluate this progress, which may require data from multiple sources. For example, in Reeves' study (2003, p. 12) of 90/90/90 schools, "Successful schools included an intensive focus on student data from multiple sources, and specifically focused on cohort data. They were less interested in comparing last year's fourth grade class to this year's fourth grade class … and more interested in comparing the same student to the same student." Data must be understood for its utility to take action in the school, not simply as a means for reporting figures in an annual report. Additionally, many of the successful schools use assessments and data weekly to monitor student progress (Kannapel et al., 2005). The frequency of using data does not supersede data utility, but data is most effective when it is used as a part of a continual process of student evaluation.

Student progress is systematically monitored, and data are used to provide supports. At an all-African-American, high-poverty school in New York City, teachers begin the school year by assessing students' core academic competencies. Students are then grouped according to their assessment performance and placed into a tracking system within each classroom. While students enter at different stages at the beginning of the school year, the goal is to have all students merged into one performance group by the end of the year. In order to achieve a single group by the end of the school year, specific outcome data for

each student is continually collected and evaluated throughout the year. Based on the data, individual plans are created and periodically adjusted to ensure student achievement. Targeted instruction for individual students is often made through streamlined, data-driven decision-making (Barth et al., 1999; Carter, 2000).

Build and sustain instructional capacity

Many high-poverty schools are challenged by high teacher turnover and inexperienced teachers. Successful schools often deal with these circumstances by creating mechanisms within their school to build and sustain the instructional capacity of teaching staff. Ascher and Fruchter (2001) have shown that classrooms with highly qualified teachers enable students to succeed. A number of studies suggest that it is crucial to prioritize teacher development and supports, and to build teachers' capacity as instructors in order to bring success to a high-performing school (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007; Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2000). A number of practices and strategies are used in these schools to support and cultivate highly qualified teachers, such as the following.

Master teachers mentor junior staff and model teaching practices. Carter (2000) argues that master teachers bring out the best in a faculty. Overcoming inadequate teacher training "is perhaps the single greatest accomplishment of high-performing, high-poverty schools" (Carter, 2000, p. 18). For example, at one school described in the literature, team teaching is central to teacher mentoring. The master teacher helps train less experienced teachers. As another example, an all-black school with an Afro-centric curriculum uses the "Marcus Garvey method" where teachers teach beyond their own skill set in order to build their capacity (Carter, 2000).

Continual assessment of students facilitates individualized instruction. Teachers must be provided with the time and tools to continually assess students, determine student needs, and create meaningful work plans for the students to acquire and then sustain high levels of school achievement (Anderson & Pellicer, 1998; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Kannapel et al., 2005). Many of the studies suggest that one teaching style is not necessarily more effective than another, but rather that teachers should adapt to multiple teaching approaches in order to meet the learning needs of as many students as possible. This focus on individualized instruction and students as the center of learning is commonly known as differentiated instruction (Rock, Gregg, Ellis, & Gable, 2008).

Teaching is high-quality. An emerging strand in the literature on low-performing schools argues that the problem in these schools is not poverty, but poor teaching quality (Haycock & Chenoweth, 2005). While many would argue against Haycock's thesis that poor teaching quality is the primary factor for underachievement at high-poverty schools, a number of studies show that teacher quality does matter (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Merseth et al.,

n.d.; Taylor et al., 2000). In these studies, teacher quality factors include experience, advanced degrees and training, professional development opportunities, and effective instructional skills.

Reorganize time, space, and transitions

The reorganization of time, space, and transitions has been a common practice at high- and low-performing schools, with mixed results (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Williams et al., 2005; Zadavasky, 2009). Schools have often extended the school day by two hours to increase instructional time, incorporated double class periods into the schedule to place emphasis on single subjects such as math or reading, or reconfigured the classroom layout to create an environment conducive to learning. These factors have often been identified as secondary factors that make a difference in students' performance. These adjustments are often a byproduct of a broader systemic change to focus on certain aspects of learning. Schools and students do not suddenly perform better simply because the day has been extended by two hours or the school requires double class periods. Instead, adding time must be done in a manner that is purposeful and supported by evidence. For example, research shows that a double dosage of reading and math in consecutive class periods can lead to improved school performance (Ragland et al., 2002; Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). The literature suggests that time, space, and transitions need to be reorganized based on sound evidence in order for schools to experience effective change.