

## Striving for Distinctiveness: A Small Schools Case Study

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### Abstract

By the end of the 2000 academic year, a small school on the south side of Chicago had reached what is referred to as “breakthrough status” in Annenberg Challenge Grant circles. When asked what contributed to the school’s success, teachers did not have clear-cut answers. This case study was launched during the 2000-2001 school year to identify why students in the case school experienced achievement gains when students at other small schools within the host site did not perform as well. This researcher was part of a team of investigators from sociology, research methodology, and curriculum studies. This report represents only a segment of the larger research project and examines the characteristics associated in the literature with conditions for success in small schools. Specifically, this paper addresses the question, “To what extent did the case school achieve distinctiveness as defined by characteristics identified in recent literature about successful small schools?” Findings indicate that the case school exhibited varying degrees of the nine success factors: 1) assessment and standards, 2) autonomy in content, 3) autonomy in context, 4) choice / voluntary involvement of participants, 5) community cohesiveness, 6) appropriate organizational structure and size, 7) parent involvement and commitment, 8) vision / mission driven work, and 9) other ecological factors specific to the site. Implications for further research include examining whether these factors exist in all successful small schools and determining the extent to which each factor contributes to a total effect.