Recently, because of increased concern over students' test scores, educators have placed more emphasis on professional development as a means of bringing about changes in our nation's classrooms. In the spring of 2001, for example, the Texas A&M Regents' Initiative for Excellence held a two-day Teachers' Forum to examine such issues. One of the major themes resulting from discussions among the participants at this Forum, dealt with the evaluation of the effectiveness of professional development in the schools. Those teachers and administrators who were present, suggested that multiple measures of gains in student learning would be needed for this purpose (Litton, Conoley, Mehta, Guffey & Hopkins, 2001). In other words, accountability should be at the core of the evaluation process in determining effectiveness of professional development. At the same time, student data can provide a useful tool when establishing priorities for professional development programs.

It was further noted at this Forum that the results from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) are made available to schools so that they might be used for both planning and program evaluation. Obviously, TAAS scores are not multiple measures of achievement, but they do provide some objective measure of students' gains.

In keeping with the above discussion, in this study, the TAAS was chosen as a measure of student learning. However, rather than merely evaluating professional development in this way, it was decided to use the results somewhat differently. Professional development programs were examined in schools showing substantial gains in student performance on the TAAS in order to pinpoint best practices. TAAS results have been previously used in this fashion by the Texas Education Agency in a study to determine best remediation practices (Texas Education Agency, 2001). Representatives from schools whose scores had significantly improved on the TAAS were asked to identify teaching strategies that had been found to be most effective in their remediation practices. Modeling thinking processes, involving parents, and integrating subject areas were just some of the many strategies that were identified by this group of teachers.

Based on this notion, it would seem appropriate then to reflect on the type of professional development carried out in schools that have shown substantial improvement in TAAS scores over the past year in order to provide some guidelines for best practices in professional development. It would be particularly relevant to examine practices at schools in low socioeconomic areas with a high percentage of minority students, since such schools have been less successful in meeting accountability standards (Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan, & Foley, 2001). What professional development practices at these schools may have contributed to improved student achievement as measured by the TAAS? These results might then aid in formulating recommendations for professional development, appropriate for schools with large numbers of low-performing students.