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The Impact of Poverty on Elementary Academic Achievement in One Rural Elementary School in Missouri

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by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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Abstract

The impact of poverty on one rural elementary school's student achievement was measured based on formative and summative assessment data. Student assessment data were examined to determine if strong relationships can be linked between students living in poverty and academic achievement. Additionally, parental perceptions were addressed as to whether or not parents are engaged in their child's education, and if so, does this engagement impact student achievement. The topic was chosen for the relevancy of determining students' instructional needs and how best to move the elementary in a positive direction academically. The socio-economic levels of families in the area studied are unlikely to change for the better; however, the level of student academic achievement can change for the better. Presently, elementary schools with high poverty rates and high academic achievement do exist, as described in specific detail in this paper. The data from this study indicated some students currently living in poverty are capable of achieving on a high academic level. The data from this study also showed all students who performed below proficiency within the research sample were also living in poverty. This quantitative study involved examination of how students living in poverty and students not living in poverty achieved academically. Details are provided on how schools with high numbers of students living in poverty can be academically successful.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Located in southern Missouri, near the Arkansas border, sits a rural elementary school; hereafter designated as Elementary School A, which is the focus of the entire community. Great-grandparents and grandparents of current students were once students of this school themselves. Much has changed in elementary education from the time Elementary School A first opened. Today, this school educates students in preschool through sixth grade with one teacher per grade level in each of the eight classrooms. The total student population changes very little from year to year. Currently, the approximate enrolment for Elementary School A is 160 students.

Elementary School A was founded in the late 1950s as a one-room school house and educated students of most ages. In 1964, the school and its community could no longer financially support the school. As a result of the financial burdens, Elementary School A became a part of a much larger school district. However, students were not required to leave Elementary School A until reaching middle school age. The option to continue to serve elementary-age students in Elementary School A by the larger district assisted in developing a strong educational relationship between the two communities. The students, then and now, continue to attend kindergarten through sixth grades at Elementary School A. Fifty years later, the small school is still the heartbeat of its community and continues to serve many of the same families as in previous generations.

This chapter includes information addressing specific details about poverty in this area and in schools in general. Additionally, details pertaining specifically to this elementary school will provide information about student achievement and how it relates to poverty. Student populations will be discussed, along with details regarding situational

and generational poverty and its impact on academic achievement. Findings relevant to poverty will be instrumental to this research project.

Additional topics considered in this chapter include, but are not limited to, levels of academic achievement on standardized tests, the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), and the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP), by students in grades four, five, and six over the past three school years. The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) data indicate students' reading levels as compared to their respective grade levels in school, while the MAP data address students' academic levels in the area of Communication Arts (CA) and Mathematics (MA).

Background of the Study

Over the past several years, it has been assumed by many that public schools are failing (SerVaas, 2011). Often-times, standardized tests are the only indicator used by the public when deciding whether or not a school is successful (SerVaas, 2011). To say these data are not powerful would be wrong. In some states, standardized test scores along with legislative mandates are used as a means to reduce workforces and close underperforming schools (SerVaas, 2011). While poor instructional quality has been attributed to low student performance, a closer examination may reveal situational and generational poverty as the greater cause of student failure in America (SerVaas, 2011).

Initially, public schools were established to help alleviate the discrepancies in education (SerVaas, 2011). Every child would be given the opportunity to attain a free public education (SerVaas, 2011). The difficult question becomes, "Has education reduced poverty or has poverty reduced the opportunity for education?" Historically, education has been viewed as essential for personal growth in a person's life (SerVaas,

2011). Even when only the wealthy were allowed to attend schools, those living in poverty were still expected to educate their children to the best of their ability (SerVaas, 2011). Shockingly, many years ago in some states, if poor families did not educate the children appropriately the children were removed from the home and given to another family (SerVaas, 2011). Families who did not educate their children properly were viewed as a threat to society and the nation (SerVaas, 2011).

Today, schools still need the assistance of parents to appropriately educate children. There must be parental involvement in the educational process regardless of whether the family lives in poverty or not (SerVaas, 2011). The threat to close schools with high-poverty numbers and low achievement data is misguided; schools need to be improved, not closed (SerVaas, 2011) . This does not mean important issues cannot be addressed, but it does mean consideration should be given to the fact not all schools educate students of similar demographics. For schools to be successful and overcome difficult circumstances such as poverty there must be a sustained effort among schools, churches, parents, communities, charities, employees, and all levels of government to ensure every student is provided the opportunity to learn and grow (SerVaas, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

The inequalities created through child poverty prompted the examination of multiple data to determine whether poverty creates a discrepancy in academic performance in a rural elementary school in southern Missouri. Inequalities such as hunger, safety, or clothing may contribute to students' level of anxiety and impede their ability to learn (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). The study was framed by the concept there exists characteristics of generational poverty, which impact all aspects of child development.

Statement of the Problem

Poverty does impact and affect educational outcomes (Hernandez, 2011). For this study, the researcher examined the correlation between students living in poverty and academic achievement levels attained on two formative metrics, the SRI and MAP grade-level assessments. Additionally, the researcher compared student achievement data and the correlation of parental survey data for students living in poverty and those not living in poverty.

One out of every five children lives in poverty (Hernandez, 2011). Since the year 2000, the United States alone has seen the number of children living in poverty increase by four million ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). With these staggering statistics, it is imperative to monitor the progress of students' academic achievement levels. Students living in poverty are not achieving on a regular basis to a comparable academic level of those not living in poverty (Hernandez, 2011). Children living in poverty have a higher rate of absenteeism and a lower rate of academic achievement (Hernandez, 2011). For example, of third-grade students never living in poverty and, reading on the appropriate grade level, only 2% failed to graduate from high school within the proper time frame ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Conversely, of third grade students living in poverty and, not reading on the appropriate grade level, 26% failed to graduate ever ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Poverty does impact and affect educational outcomes (Hernandez, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this project was to examine the correlation between generational poverty and student achievement at the elementary level as measured by performance on

standardized tests. These tests, which are both formative and summative, included the SRI and MAP grade-level assessments. The grade levels considered included grades four, five, and six. Associational research was conducted to study the relationship between poverty and student achievement. Data from this study will be used to develop a shared plan of action to address identifiable gaps in learning associated with poverty. Additionally, the researcher, a principal at Elementary School A, will use these findings to inform policy decisions which influence students and parents of poverty.

Research questions and hypotheses. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level assessments for grades four, five, and six?

$H1_0$: There is no relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level assessments for grades four, five, and six.

2. What is the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)?

$H2_0$: There is no relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

3. What are the learning and achievement gaps between students living in poverty and students not living in poverty?

4. What perception do parents of students in grades four, five, and six at Elementary School A have regarding student learning and teacher communication?

Definitions of Key Terms

Annual Performance Report (APR). The APR is a report presenting a detailed assessment of performance against annual targets set by the state (MODESE, 2014).

Associational research. Associational research involves the researcher looking for relationships having predictive and/or explanatory power (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Examples include correlational and causal-comparative studies (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Convenient sample. A convenient is a sample that is easily accessed (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). The MAP is an annual set of standardized tests taken by students in Missouri in grades three through eight (MODESE, 2015).

Pearson product-moment coefficient (Pearson *r*). The Pearson product-moment coefficient, or Pearson *r*, is an index of correlation suitable when the data represent either interval or ratio scales; it takes into relation each pair of scores and produces a coefficient between 0.00 and either $\pm$ 1.00 (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Poverty. Poverty is defined as a single adult with a single child making less than $15,030 annually ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011).

Purposive sampling. A purposive sample is a sample that is chosen based on prior information that will provide the appropriate data for the research (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Qualitative data. Qualitative data is produced as a result of research that is conducted to study natural phenomena in all their complexity (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Quantitative data. Quantitative data are different in degree or amount along a continuum from less to more (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). The Scholastic Reading Inventory, or SRI, is defined as a research-based assessment of reading comprehension skills for students (Scholastic, 2015).

Validity. Validity is the degree to which accurate inferences are made based on results from a given instrument, dependent upon not only the instrument, but also upon the instrumentation method and the characteristics of the grouping considered (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified in this study:

Sample demographics. For this study secondary archival data were used for students enrolled in grades four, five, and six from composite MAP results from the years of 2012, 2013, and 2014 in the areas of Communication Arts (CA) and Mathematics (MA). Additionally, secondary archival data for students enrolled in grades four, five, and six were gathered from the composite SRI results from the 2013 and 2014 school years. This sample was identified as a limitation because only one school in one district was selected for this study; therefore, similar results may not occur in other schools and districts.

Instrument. For this study a survey was prepared for parents/guardians of enrolled students in grades four, five, and six. This survey was completely anonymous

and voluntary. All parents were supplied with an informed consent form prior to taking the survey. The survey was made available in multiple ways with the goal of yielding a higher return. Individual surveys are a limitation as data are collected at a single point in time, and it can be difficult to measure changes in the opinion of a population unless two or more surveys are administered at different points in time (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.

Summary

The information throughout this chapter provided specific details about poverty as it relates to academic success. Additionally, details pertaining specifically to Elementary School A illustrated information about student achievement and how it relates to poverty. Student populations were discussed along with details regarding situational and generational poverty and its impact on academic achievement. These findings were instrumental to this research project. Additional topics to be discussed throughout the project for consideration include, but are not limited to, the levels of academic achievement on the SRI and MAP by students in grades four, five, and six over the past three school years. Chapter Two addresses topics pertinent for the study. These topics include: characteristics of students in poverty in which social characteristics and educational performance are reviewed; best practice for teaching students in poverty in which parent involvement and state and community response to poverty are also reviewed. Additionally, the personal field experience for this study is highlighted near the end of Chapter Two.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Ruby Payne (2009) stated, "To survive poverty, one must be an incredible problem solver" (p. 371). Poverty does impact and affect educational outcomes (Hernandez, 2011). Households maintained by people with low levels of education are more likely to remain in poverty or fall into a deeper state of poverty (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014). For this study, the researcher investigated the correlation between students living in poverty and the academic achievement level attained on two formative assessments, the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade level assessments.

The purpose of this project was to examine the correlation between generational poverty and student achievement on the elementary level as measured by performance on standardized tests. These tests, which are both formative and summative, will include the SRI and MAP grade level assessments. The researcher will conduct associational research to study the relationship between poverty and student achievement. Data from this study will be used to develop a shared plan of action to address identifiable gaps in learning associated with poverty.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher considered the inequalities created through child poverty and examined multiple data to determine whether poverty creates a discrepancy in academic performance in a rural elementary school in southern Missouri, Elementary School A. Characteristics of generational poverty which impact all aspects of child development were used as the conceptual framework for the study. The following topics are discussed in order to more effectively comprehend the impact of students in poverty: characteristics

of students in poverty, social characteristics of students in poverty, educational performance by students in poverty, best practices for teaching students in poverty, parental involvement, and state and community responses to poverty.

Characteristics of Students in Poverty

Approximately one-third of children in America attend schools in rural areas or small towns (Strange, 2011). The needs of these children are often overlooked and their schools are often underfunded (Strange, 2011). The poverty of rural America typically leads to educational issues including underachievement and a high number of dropouts (Irvin, 2011). Additionally, young people living in poverty must deal with many issues in their families including; school dropout, poor academic performance, drug addiction, underage pregnancies, unemployment, malnourishment, and homelessness (Johnson, 1991). Young people become susceptible to these same traits the longer they are exposed to this lifestyle. The cycle of poverty continues (Johnson, 1991). Children of poverty often leave school unprepared for life as adults (Knapp, 1990).

Many of America's children are living in poverty. The number of students living in poverty has steadily increased since the year 2000 ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Additionally, there are many students living in poverty from a variety of races, including American Indian/Alaska Native; children with two or more racial backgrounds; Asian/Pacific Islander; black; Hispanic; and white ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). In the United States alone, there are nearly seventy-five million children and of these seventy-five million children, over fifteen million live in poverty ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). One out of every five children lives in poverty ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). In the past decade the number of students living in poverty has

increased by nearly four million (“Poverty Facts and Figures,” 2011). In addition to the high number of children living in poverty, many of these children are growing up in single-parent households (“Poverty Facts and Figures,” 2011). Poverty combined with a single-parent household creates very difficult educational circumstances for all children regardless of race or the part of country in which they live (“Poverty Facts and Figures,” 2011). The National Poverty Center released the following numbers for students of different races who live in poverty: 38.2% of Black children live in poverty, 35% of Hispanic children live in poverty, 30.8% of foreign-born children live in poverty, and 46.1% of Mexican children in the United States are living in poverty (Turner, 2012).

Poverty lines are constantly changing. However, the numbers which describe families living in poverty are quite alarming. Families of three persons with a total income of less than $7,870 annually are considered to be living in extreme poverty (Cuthrell, 2010). Poverty itself is defined as a family of two, one adult and one child, earning $15,030 or less per year (“Poverty Facts and Figures,” 2011). Additionally, many families in poverty are considered the working poor. These families are typically families of four who earn around $22,113 per year (Turner, 2012). Families living in poverty also have school-aged children suffering from hunger. Over 20% of children in America, or approximately 16 million, do not have enough to eat (Felling, 2013). The hunger crisis leads to students struggling in schools and with academic achievement (Felling, 2013).

Does poverty impact student attendance? A common characteristic of students living in poverty is the lack of consistently strong attendance rates by poverty-stricken students (“Poverty Facts and Figures,” 2011). According to attendance statistics, over

20% of students living in poverty who are of kindergarten age have chronic absenteeism ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Conversely, kindergarten students not living in poverty miss school 7% of the time, a huge discrepancy ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Nearly 15% of students living in poverty who are of first-grade age have chronic absenteeism; conversely, about 6% of first-grade level students not living in poverty miss school, another large discrepancy ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Approximately 7% of third-grade students living in poverty have severe or chronic absenteeism, whereas third-grade students not living in poverty miss school around 4% of the time ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Finally, nearly 10% of fifth-grade students living in poverty struggle with chronic absenteeism ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Conversely, about 4% of fifth-grade students not living in poverty have attendance issues ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). The negative impact poor attendance has on students is staggering (Hernandez, 2011).

Social characteristics. Parents are a child's first teacher. Children from low-income families often arrive at school and are not prepared for kindergarten (Lamy, 2013). Often, parents are encouraging children to read simply by communicating with them and with others within the family (Hernandez, 2011). Parents are, in essence, modeling appropriate and acceptable behaviors for their child (Hernandez, 2011). However, many times parents living in poverty are uncertain how to help children due to their own academic deficiencies (Hernandez, 2011). Additionally, there are other constraints high-poverty parents have. Many families living in poverty lack the appropriate health insurance and many are uncertain how to attain heath care (Hernandez, 2011). Often times, health insurance or lack thereof, is viewed as a strong characteristic

of families living in poverty (Hernandez, 2011). Children living in poverty are also more likely to have parents who are educationally limited (Hernandez, 2011). This is often the case because lower wage earning families are associated with lower educational levels achieved by those in poverty (Hernandez, 2011).

According to Rothstein (2008), students in poverty suffer from many medical problems as well, and these medical issues relate to high rates of absenteeism which leads to lower-performing students and schools. For example, many students living in poverty do not have and cannot afford health insurance (Rothstein, 2008). Therefore, students in poverty suffer from illnesses such as asthma, which causes poor sleep habits, irritability, and lack of exercise (Rothstein, 2008). Also, children living in poverty often suffer from anemia which can lead to problems at school such as diminished cognitive ability and more frequent behavior issues (Rothstein, 2008).

Students living in poverty may be at a disadvantage at school. A number of students living in poverty do not have parents who will read aloud to them, and the result is students with smaller vocabularies as well as limited language (Rothstein, 2008). Additionally, students living in poverty are from neighborhoods with a high crime rate and high rate of drug use (Rothstein, 2008). Therefore, students living in poverty are cared for less often and supervised less often (Rothstein, 2008). Truly, students living in poverty struggle to find a positive role model (Rothstein, 2008).

The disadvantages listed lead to an achievement gap which will not change until the gap is recognized and discussed. How can these issues be addressed? Students living in poverty need someone to advocate for not only their education, but also their health (Rothstein, 2008). Good pediatric and dental care for all is vital for students to perform

at a higher level (Rothstein, 2008). Teachers are judged for low achieving students who may suffer from poor health, a circumstance beyond the control of educators (Rothstein, 2008). Students who suffer from poor health struggle to be top achievers in schools (Rothstein, 2008). Additionally, students need stability in their lives. By addressing housing issues for low income families, children may become less mobile throughout the school year (Rothstein, 2008). Also, strong, high-quality child care is needed to ensure children are receiving the interaction they need to become better learners (Rothstein, 2008). Funding after school programs would assist students in poverty and reduce the number of children sitting in front of televisions without being properly engaged (Rothstein, 2008).

The majority of students from poverty-stricken or low-income families enter the elementary school setting well behind other students in the areas of math, reading, and general knowledge (Herman-Smith, 2013). The importance of early intervention in students' academic lives is consistently monitored along with the results from these early interventions (Herman-Smith, 2013). However, many times, families living in poverty have a difficult time supporting the educational process (Herman-Smith, 2013). Parents may not possess the skillset to help their children (Herman-Smith, 2013). Parents have trouble coping with the stress of work, finances, and helping their kids (Herman-Smith, 2013). In many instances parents become very authoritative or neglectful (Herman-Smith, 2013). Both behaviors are detrimental to students (Herman-Smith, 2013).

Over the course of several decades, academic achievement has been linked to economic success and societal accomplishment (Herman-Smith, 2013). Academic achievement, however, in the United States is not equally distributed (Herman-Smith,

2013). Children raised in conditions where higher incomes are prevalent in the family outperform children raised by parents living in poverty (Herman-Smith, 2013).

The push for early intervention in children's lives has been prevalent for decades (Herman-Smith, 2013). This movement seeks to equalize educational opportunity for all students from diverse backgrounds and varied classes of people (Herman-Smith, 2013). The major concern with this endeavor is that all parents would be able to assist their children due to a lack of education themselves (Herman-Smith, 2013). The troubling portion is discrepancies remain and differences impact students' lives and achievement still today (Herman-Smith, 2013). Unfortunately, the gaps between low-income, middle-income, and upper-income families seem to get larger with time (Herman-Smith, 2013).

For many years, social professionals have been investigating correlations between family poverty and students outcomes (Duncan, 2013). Nearly 25% of students at age six are living in poor conditions or poverty (Duncan, 2013). Many of these professionals believe families experiencing poverty have very poor family relationships (Duncan, 2013). Parents in poverty may not be mentally prepared to have a good relationship with their children (Duncan, 2013). Poverty can bring forth parental depression which negatively impacts children (Duncan, 2013). Low income parents are atypically very authoritative and less likely to provide their children with important learning skills or activities (Duncan, 2013).

Administrators and teachers are beginning to understand all children do not possess middle-class values, cultural norms, or social experiences (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). With this in mind, school districts have become more effective in providing professional development opportunities to assist educators in understanding the culture of

students living in poverty (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Too often, students from poverty-stricken homes are inappropriately labeled with characteristics such as being incapable of learning, not worthy to learn, and too uncultured to learn (Sato & Lensmire, 2009).

Ruby Payne (2005), a leader in the field of children living in poverty, has identified at least 13 characteristics of students living in poverty. These characteristics include the following; children of poverty laugh when corrected for doing wrong; students from homes of poverty argue with the teacher; children living in poverty respond angrily toward the teacher; poor children often make vulgar or inappropriate comments; poor children get into physical altercations due to their lack of ability to use verbal language or a belief system for conflict resolution; poor students do not keep their hands to themselves; children of poverty cannot follow directions; children of poverty are unorganized due to never being taught the necessary skills to plan, schedule, or prioritize; children of poverty often only partially complete tasks; students of poverty often disrespect teachers because they have no adult in their lives worthy of respect; children of poverty verbally and physically abuse other students; students of poverty steal or cheat because they do not have the proper role models in their lives; and children in poverty speak constantly because poverty is participatory (Payne, 2005).

Educational performance. Who is to blame for the lack of success in America's schools? Behrent (2011) suggested poverty, not America's teachers, is the key factor for schools failing. Conversely, Karns (2002) noted for many years, schools which have underachieved academically have been given a pass based on the number of disadvantaged students within the district. However, students now and in the future must still be taught properly and districts must strive to achieve at high levels (Karns, 2002).

Teachers and administrators must expedite achievement no matter the poverty rate or background of the school district (Karns, 2002).

Students in the United States are hungry (Felling, 2013). Teachers from every background; (suburban, urban, rural, or inner city), see it daily (Felling, 2013). This hunger impacts educational performance by students. Hungry kids struggle with school-work, homework, and engagement in the classroom (Felling, 2013). Children who are hungry also have more behavior problems, and these behavior problems negatively impact the learning process in schools (Felling, 2013). What can be done? Schools and families must realize the importance of feeding students breakfast (Felling, 2013). Ninety percent of teachers surveyed believe students who eat breakfast have better concentration in the classroom (Felling, 2013). Eighty-nine percent of teachers surveyed believe students who eat breakfast see higher academic achievement (Felling, 2013). Seventy-three percent of teachers saw students with better classroom behavior and 56% of teachers saw an increase in student attendance (Felling, 2013). Each of these factors plays a key role in educational performance (Felling, 2013).

Contrary to what some may believe, there is no safe level of inadequate nutrition (Berliner, 2010). A missed meal, any meal, is detrimental for children (Berliner, 2010). These missed meals impair students' abilities to focus cognitively or learn on the appropriate level (Berliner, 2010). In order for students to be successful in school, there must be a form of early intervention (Armstrong, 2010). Students must have good nutrition and good health care (Armstrong, 2010).

According to research, the most effective way to close the achievement gap between students is with early interventions such as mandatory preschool (Cuthrell,

2010). However, the United States in the only industrialized country which does not have universal preschool for children (Cuthrell, 2010). Teachers and school districts have learned in the last 30 years the value of early childhood education to student success (Hardy, 2006). Often times, students who come from backgrounds of poverty on any level are behind academically (Hardy, 2006). These students are often referred to as "at-risk" students who need early interventions to close the learning gap they are facing (Hardy, 2006). It is the responsibility of the school district to provide the best learning environment possible and to ensure the students' success – no matter the cost (Hardy, 2006). Schools have been given the task of helping students succeed regardless of ability level or lack of resources (Hardy, 2006). Many believe schools should take a larger role, but at the same time schools must have the appropriate resources to do it (Hardy, 2006).

Absenteeism, both in students as early learners and in students as later childhood learners, is consistent with low academic achievement (Hernandez, 2011). Attendance is a crucial part of the education process ("Attendance is Vital," 2009). Sadly there are families who lack the resources to ensure students are attending school on a regular basis ("Attendance is Vital," 2009). Students in families of poverty are vulnerable because they often lack transportation, clothes, food, or other social resources to help them succeed ("Attendance is Vital," 2009). Some schools have initiated reward systems for not only students, but for parents who ensure their students are attending school at a high rate ("Attendance is Vital," 2009). This initiative has been successful in many communities and illustrates the importance of adult support for students attending school ("Attendance is Vital", 2009).

Schools operate on the presumption students are going to attend school at a high rate barring an extraordinary illness or event in their lives (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In order for high levels of student achievement to take place, students need to be in school as often as possible (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Recent studies show absenteeism is tied to deficiencies in mathematics and standardized test scores (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). The national rate of chronic absenteeism ranges from 10 to 15% (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Five million to seven and a half million students are struggling to attend school regularly (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). High numbers of chronic absenteeism are most notable among low-income families (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Poor attendance in schools cannot be overlooked. Students who are chronically absent from school during kindergarten experience a lower academic performance rate in first grade (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Among those living in poverty, the chronically absent kindergarten students are impacted twice as much in first grade (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Achievement gaps on all elementary and secondary levels can also be attributed to chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students living in poverty seem to benefit more from regular school attendance than other students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). With this in mind, schools should do whatever it takes to ensure all students, but especially students living in poverty, attend school regularly (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). By ensuring all students are attending school regularly, schools are improving America's educational system on all academic levels (Balfanz, 2012).

Students poverty designation and student attendance go hand in hand. As previously stated, students living in poverty benefit the most from being at school, but are often the most difficult group to commit to regular school attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes,

2012). Students chronically missing school are separated into three groups; those who cannot attend school, those who will not attend school, and those who do not attend school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students who cannot attend school are often susceptible to absenteeism for many reasons including: housing instability; illness; or family responsibility (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students who will not attend school miss school for the following reasons: (a) they wish to avoid being bullied; (b) they do not feel safe; (c) they wish to avoid being harassed; or (d) they want to avoid being embarrassed (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students who do not attend school miss school for the following reasons: (a) neither the students nor their parents appreciate the value of being in school; (b) students have other things they would rather be doing; or (c) students simply skip school just to skip school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Teachers possess a vital role for students attending school regularly. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) suggested the following 10 incentives to be offered to students for attending school regularly:

- Positive comments to children
- Positive notes home to parents
- Extra time at the computer or PE
- Free homework pass
- First-in-line privileges for lunch or dismissal
- Cookie coupon
- Pencils, pens, stickers, posters, book covers, bookmarks
- Team certificates for the best record or most improved record
- Name on the “Attendance Wall” in the classroom

- Chance to act as teacher's assistant. (p. 8)

Administrators, parent organizations, and community members also play a vital role for students attending school regularly. The following 11 incentives may be offered to students for coming to school regularly:

- Recognition during morning announcements
- Certificate/award at student assembly
- Breakfast/lunch with the principal, superintendent, school board president, mayor, etc.
- School supplies (e.g. pencil wit logo)
- Food coupons redeemable in school cafeteria
- Food gift certificates for McDonald's, Wendy's, etc.
- Ice cream/pizza party for class with best attendance
- "School money" for the school store
- Choice of donated product (movie, tickets, gift certificate)
- Traveling trophy for grade-level homeroom with best monthly attendance
- Attendance T-shirts/hats/buttons. (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 8)

Schools developing relationships with nonprofit providers, civic organizations, and faith-based organization can be an effective way to help students in poverty (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014).

On average, students in kindergarten living in poverty have lower reading and mathematics achievement levels (Duncan, 2013). Additionally, these students have more frequent behavior issues characteristic of children in poverty (Duncan, 2013). The number of fourth grade students reading below proficiency in 2011 was extremely high

(Long, 2012). Eighty-four percent of Black fourth grade students did not read proficiently (Long, 2012). Fifty-eight percent of White fourth grade students did not read proficiently (Long, 2012). Eighty-two percent of Hispanic fourth grade students did not read proficiently (Long, 2012).

Children raised with higher family incomes outperform children raised by parents living in poverty (Herman-Smith, 2013). These students perform better in the following areas: graduation rates, standardized testing rates, college enrolment rates, and college graduation rates (Herman-Smith, 2013). For many years the Title I program has been charged with boosting achievement (Mast, 2003). However, findings revealed there is no evidence to support Title I as a means of improving performance in high-poverty areas (Mast, 2003). Many have believed high-poverty schools may show performance has increased throughout the school year, but standardized tests say otherwise (Mast, 2003). What seems to be occurring in high poverty areas which receive Title I funds is the grading and expectations are inconsistent with the true level of achievement (Mast, 2003). In essence, high-poverty schools are not tough enough (Mast, 2003). The relation between high-poverty and low-poverty schools is the grade A, or superior, in the high poverty school is actually a C, or average, in the low poverty schools (Mast, 2003). This discrepancy does not help high poverty schools, it actually hurts them (Mast, 2003). For many years high-poverty school districts eligible for Title I funds or supplemental funds were thought to have the same opportunities has low poverty school districts (Long, 2012). This could not be more untrue. The difference can be seen by the illustration where many high poverty school districts rent their textbooks and many low poverty schools have students with district-issued laptops (Long, 2012).

Students living in poverty are more likely to drop out of school before high school graduation than other students (Joseph, 2004). Students living in poverty and students in the upper class of society both experience drop-outs before completing high school (Joseph, 2004). However, the drop-out rate for poor students is six times that of the students in the upper class (Joseph, 2004). Despite many school districts' best efforts over a number of years, districts with a high number of students living in poverty achieve very little success with students past the third grade (Machtinger, 2007).

Not every child who comes from a poverty stricken family is low achieving initially (Armstrong, 2010). What typically happens is these young children who come from high-poverty backgrounds and families attend schools in high-poverty areas which cannot provide a high-quality education (Armstrong, 2010). There is little these families can do to change the school without the assistance of the government (Armstrong, 2010). However, many feel the government is not on their side, and the government paints a nasty picture of impoverished families (Armstrong, 2010). School districts must not accept children who are financially poor will also have poor academic performance (Togneri, 2003). Districts must do all they can to see children succeed which often involves taking a better look at instructional practice and other methods for improvement (Togneri, 2003). Schools cannot simply use poverty as an excuse for poor performance (Angelis, 2011).

The learning needs of students change over time. The needs of students in fourth and fifth grades, born into poverty, change dramatically during these two pivotal years (Pogrow, 2009). Unfortunately these changes have been overlooked and in fourth and fifth grade causing the academic decline to accelerate at a rapid pace (Pogrow, 2009).

However, the learning capacity of these students is in place; it just has to be discovered, and this is the challenge which lies ahead for educators (Pogrow, 2009). Once the specific learning gaps have been identified for these students, individualized methods will assist in bringing these learners to the correct achievement level (Pogrow, 2009).

How do schools address this academic slide? Educators tasked with teaching fourth-grade and fifth-grade students cannot rely on uniform techniques for teaching students in kindergarten through third grade (Pogrow, 2009). In many cases teachers of early learners focus on teaching and learning basic educational skills (Pogrow, 2009). The expected level of achievement in older grades is not the same (Pogrow, 2009). Early learners are expected to recall large amounts of information which can be memorized and internalized (Pogrow, 2009). While this material is important and essential for learners, this approach will not be effective for older learners (Pogrow, 2009).

The mindset for fourth-grade and fifth-grade students is not the same (Pogrow, 2009). Additionally, the skill set required for older students is not the same, either (Pogrow, 2009). Students in fourth and fifth grades are often expected to generalize information, synthesize, and create ideas (Pogrow, 2009). These expectations require different methods of teaching (Pogrow, 2009). Practitioners should implement learning strategies which assist older students in processing new information (Pogrow, 2009). These higher-level thinking skills will benefit the students as they move forward (Pogrow, 2009). The challenging portion is students of poverty often lack the capacity to generalize information (Pogrow, 2009). Many of these students have numerous amounts of content knowledge, but struggle to process new information (Pogrow, 2009). Content

knowledge and new information are the two pieces of curriculum fourth-grade and fifth-grade students need the most, but often struggle to piece together (Pogrow, 2009).

Students born into a family living in poverty possess specialized needs (Pogrow, 2009). However, teachers need to be aware these students are certainly intelligent (Pogrow, 2009). The cognitive ability of these students is there, but there are real struggles students face when attempting to retain and apply content (Pogrow, 2009). Teachers must find creative ways to implement learning strategies for topics such as application and synthesis (Pogrow, 2009). Children born into poverty lack the understanding for higher-order thinking because it has never been a part of their lives or conversation at home (Pogrow, 2009). Rarely do families living in poverty have meaningful conversations around the dinner table (Pogrow, 2009). The lack of familial conversation has greatly contributed to deficiencies in the vocabulary of impoverished students (Pogrow, 2009). Many students born into poverty reach fourth or fifth grade without the necessary tools of understanding the true concept of understanding (Pogrow, 2009). For this reason, consequently, students on these levels struggle to apply the content learned (Pogrow, 2009).

Fourth-grade and fifth-grade students with academic deficiencies need intense small group instruction (Pogrow, 2009). It is not fair to assume teachers, even the best teachers, can make up for the vocabulary gap in student homes (Pogrow, 2009). Pogrow (2009) noted three findings for assisting fourth-grade and fifth-grade students born into poverty. The first, “daily time,” to help alleviate the learning and vocabulary gaps students need during 35 minutes of daily instruction at school for up to two years (Pogrow, 2009). Instruction must be intense and focused; teachers cannot simply ask

questions for students to answer (Pogrow, 2009). Students should verbalize what they are learning (Pogrow, 2009). The small group instruction will only be effective if the teachers recognize the need to listen and speak to these delayed learners differently (Pogrow, 2009). During small group instructional time, students should be expected to verbalize key thinking skills while illustrating understanding (Pogrow, 2009). The second finding, "moral reasons," details that although students may be able to develop an appropriate sense of understanding in grades four through eight, it is best to begin the intervention as early as possible (Pogrow, 2009). Students should not have to struggle aimlessly when proven interventions can be put in place in fourth and fifth grade (Pogrow, 2009). Proven interventions increase student achievement which will assist in building a high-quality school. Finally, with "improve learning," students benefit from eliminating remediation (Pogrow, 2009). Students benefit from appropriate intervention strategies which allow them to think critically and reflect on learning (Pogrow, 2009). These once struggling students have changed and are now prepared to appreciate learning (Pogrow, 2009).

Best Practice for Teaching Students in Poverty

In order for educators to fully understand the needs of students, teachers should be afforded the opportunity of having devoted time to collaborate and discuss important issues (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Basically, teachers need to not only know student academic deficiencies, but the culture from where their students originate (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Knowing students' backgrounds will assist educators in providing the best educational opportunities for students (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Recognizing the

culture students of poverty are bringing with them to school will help teachers provide an academic experience relevant to children's lives (Sato & Lensmire, 2009).

Sato and Lensmire (2009) recognized five levels of culturally responsive teaching:

- Acknowledging the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups as content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- Bridging home and school experiences.
- Finding meaningful connections between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- Using a variety of instructional strategies aligned with student learning styles.
- Incorporating multicultural information, resources, and materials in all of the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. (p. 367)

Schools must strive to look beyond the test scores and examine the relationships they are building with families and community leaders (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014).

The duty of educators is to provide basic needs and an appropriate education to all children (Landsman, 2014). Have educators forgotten their duty? Many schools are differentiating between students in poverty and other students in how they are treated and educated (Landsman, 2014). Poverty has divided the teaching of students (Landsman, 2014). Students from more affluent backgrounds are educated in a variety of ways promoting development of the whole child, while students from poverty are simply taught how to be obedient (Landsman, 2014).

On the bright side, there are many students in rural, urban, and suburban schools which serve students of poverty who are receiving meaningful educations (Landsman,

2014). These schools provide strong academic programs which focus on the students' needs as a whole, not simply academia (Landsman, 2014). For instance, these schools know many students living in poverty suffer from hunger (Landsman, 2014). To combat this fact schools are offering programs on Saturdays and Sundays so students will have a place to go and food to eat on the weekend (Landsman, 2014). Successful schools create a welcoming environment for students and parents where all feel at ease (Landsman, 2014). Educators in these schools are offering challenging lessons while meeting the basic needs of students (Landsman, 2014).

According to Landsman (2014), there are nine things teachers can do to overcome the challenges of poverty: (a) "make time for extras," (b) "tell students to ask for help," (c) "use visuals to help organize assignments," (d) "imagine their obstacles – and see their strengths," (e) "listen," (f) "don't tolerate teasing," (g) "connect curriculum to students' interests," (h) "speak out," (i) "find allies," (p. 17). Making time for extras is really about providing extra opportunities to do things at school which may not be directly related to the academic curriculum (Landsman, 2014). Students can have time throughout the day to read silently, eat lunch with the teacher, or even play games (Landsman, 2014). This does not have to occur each day, but the emphasis should be on how to build strong programs which benefit students and meet their needs (Landsman, 2014).

Asking for help is difficult for some students (Landsman, 2014). Many times, educators make assumptions of students and these assumptions lead to student failure (Landsman, 2014). Students do not always have the means to purchase essential supplies, but will not ask for help because of the risk of embarrassment (Landsman,

2014). Teachers will have to build relationships with students so asking for help is no longer difficult (Landsman, 2014).

Using visuals to help with organization is highly beneficial for students living in poverty (Landsman, 2014). Students living in poverty often come from chaotic home lives and need organization (Landsman, 2014). Educators must create beneficial and effective ways for students to be organized throughout the school day (Landsman, 2014). Seeing the strengths in students promotes success in schools (Landsman, 2014). Students of poverty have obstacles that many other people never see or could imagine (Landsman, 2014).

Schools should be accommodating for families who struggle with poverty by adjusting their methods, not their expectations (Landsman, 2014). Teachers can focus on what the students do have instead of what students do not, and teachers can focus on students' strengths instead of their weaknesses (Landsman, 2014). Listening is a vital part of teachers' jobs (Landsman, 2014). Sadly this is often overlooked due to rushes to meet deadlines or to stay on track with test preparation (Landsman, 2014). Educators must listen to what students are saying about their needs, their concerns, and their successes (Landsman, 2014).

Safety is an important aspect of all schools. Teachers and schools cannot tolerate teasing for any reason and should promote a climate of safety (Landsman, 2014). Students in poverty often do not have the possessions other students have and may even look differently than other students look (Landsman, 2014). There is still no room for these students to be teased (Landsman, 2014). Spending time working on appropriate behaviors early in the school year will enable the class to use time more effectively as the

year progresses while creating a climate of classroom community (Landsman, 2014). Connecting curriculum to the interests of the students is a key portion of teaching and learning (Landsman, 2014). Students become more engaged when the curriculum impacts them directly and on a personal level (Landsman, 2014). Often these curricula lead to students becoming more engaged in school and in the community (Landsman, 2014).

Children need an advocate (Landsman, 2014). Educators should speak out for children who may be overlooked for gifted or special programs because of their low socio-economic status (Landsman, 2014). Challenge the status quo by doing what is right for children (Landsman, 2014). Teachers need allies when advocating for students (Landsman, 2014). There are many teachers who want to advocate, but feel their voice does not matter (Landsman, 2014). Uniting these voices for the benefit of students will assist in overcoming the challenges of poverty in schools (Landsman, 2014).

Teachers are not the only group responsible for implementing strategies to assist with overcoming the challenges created by poverty. School administrators are also charged with making the appropriate adjustments to be successful (Landsman, 2014). According to Landsman (2014), there are six things administrators can do to overcome the challenges created by poverty: (a) “develop a trusting relationship with teachers,” (b) “spend time in classrooms,” (c) “give teachers a picture of students’ realities,” (d) “advocate for high-quality classes,” (e) “offer after-school programs and services,” and (f) “communicate commitment” (pp. 20-21). Principals and teachers should have a strong professional relationship built upon trust (Landsman, 2014). Teachers need to be able to come to principals to discuss problems or concerns without the threat of

retaliation (Landsman, 2014). Also, principals should be willing to stand up for teachers who are often burdened with new mandates, requirements, or protocols (Landsman, 2014). If these things are not beneficial, educators should say so (Landsman, 2014).

Spending time in the classroom is an important aspect of leadership (Landsman, 2014). This time should not always be about teacher evaluation. This time should be reserved, occasionally, for observation (Landsman, 2014). In addition, strong principals and leaders will visit classrooms to assist with student projects or to offer assistance with teaching (Landsman, 2014). These visits build a strong collaborative climate within the school (Landsman, 2014).

Principals should strive to share information with teachers which illustrates students' realities outside of school. Leaders should strive to communicate with parents to find out familial needs and concerns and be willing to share these with the appropriate school personnel (Landsman, 2014). Sharing the familial findings with school personnel will assist teachers with making suitable decisions in the classroom (Landsman, 2014). Leaders in school should support high-quality classrooms (Landsman, 2014). Principals, like teachers, must advocate for poor students to be treated fairly academically (Landsman, 2014). All students should have the opportunity to receive gifted educational services in schools (Landsman, 2014). Also, when possible, get teacher assistance into classrooms where the greatest need arises (Landsman, 2014).

Offering after-school programs and services is simply good for schools and students (Landsman, 2014). Principals should work with local stakeholders to offer and provide after-school programs that enrich students' academic experiences (Landsman, 2014). These programs could include art enrichment, physical education, and other

academic activities which meet the interests of students (Landsman, 2014). Lastly, to help overcome the challenges of poverty in schools, principals will communicate their commitment to success (Landsman, 2014). This means leaders will strive to find long-term solutions for the daily problems facing the school and its children (Landsman, 2014).

According to Redeaux (2011), 90% of teachers in public schools are White. Also, these teachers come from mostly middle-to-upper class backgrounds (Redeaux, 2011). School teachers and administrators may not know what it feels like to poor, live in poverty, or be socially disadvantaged (Brown, 2014). Many students have this burden on their lives every day (Brown, 2014). Sadly, the burden does not end here (Brown, 2014). Students of poverty are often weighed down with the burden of family problems, such as drugs or overcrowding (Brown, 2014). These problems directly impact student academic achievement (Brown, 2014). Teachers and educators should consider students in poverty have many obstacles to overcome; hunger pangs and single-parent households are the norm for many disadvantaged students (Brown, 2014). One way to combat the many obstacles students in poverty face is by assisting students in becoming more resilient through good teaching (Brown, 2014). Teachers should share their success stories; by sharing these stories of success students may become more resilient academically (Brown, 2014).

To begin the process of instilling resilience in students living in poverty, educators must consider four topics; identifying masquerading students, paradigms in progress, familiar narratives, and setting the standard (Brown, 2014). Masquerading students are students who struggle with two identities (Brown, 2014). These identities

are described by the identity the student has at school and the identity the student has while in his/her neighborhood or home (Brown, 2014). During school, the student may be willing to learn and attempt to better themselves academically (Brown, 2014). This disconnect begins with they return to their neighborhood or home where academia may not be appreciated (Brown, 2014). These students struggle to carry over the learning at school to their lives away from school, thus failing to produce strong academic results (Brown, 2014). Paradigms in progress refers to two paradigms that are thought to be the two main reasons some students succeed and others do not (Brown, 2014). The first thought is one where students are not thought to be resilient by nature, but resilience is a learned behavior (Brown, 2014). Students, over the course of their academic careers, learn education will possibly assist them in overcoming present circumstances (Brown, 2014). Students see what education can bring them materialistically (Brown, 2014). Students begin to understand there is a better life regarding the material things they may possess by having a strong educational background (Brown, 2014). The second thought simply states students are intrinsically motivated to make better, sounder decisions (Brown, 2014).

Familiar narrative basically refers to teachers knowing and getting to know students and students' needs (Brown, 2014). Some students are bright, but cannot illustrate this for fear of being tormented at home or in their neighborhood (Brown, 2014). Some students seem disinterested in school or academia, but in truth the students are simply hungry which causes them to be disengaged (Brown, 2014). Educators and administrators are tasked with knowing all students and how best to appropriately meet their needs (Brown, 2014).

Setting the standard for students at school is imperative for positive outcomes (Brown, 2014). Students need to believe they can be successful (Brown, 2014). Teachers should be able to establish the truth, students, regardless of difficult circumstances with their home life, are capable of being academically successful (Brown, 2014).

According to Eric Jensen (2013), the most important factor for motivating students and student success does not depend on the students' home lives. Student success depends on schools and teachers (Jensen, 2013). Jensen (2013) pointed to seven important differences educators can make when dealing with poverty and how each impacts engagement in the classroom. These differences include the following: health and nutrition, vocabulary, effort, hope and the growth mind-set, cognition, relationships, and distress (Jensen, 2013). Health and nutrition can be addressed by schools (Jensen, 2013). Jenson (2013) continued to note, schools have the ability to offer free breakfast to students and should do so. Breakfast greatly impacts the success of students and their day (Jensen, 2013).

The vocabulary of those who are low on the socio-economic chain is usually quite limited compared to the people not living in poverty (Jensen, 2013). Schools must address lack of vocabulary in the classroom (Jensen, 2013). Teachers should begin to offer vocabulary enrichment as a means to help students become more successful in school and in life (Jensen, 2013). The effort of many poor students is less than desirable (Jensen, 2013). Teachers need to do a better job of strengthening relationships with these students so effort in school increases which in turn will raise the level of achievement (Jensen, 2013).

Teachers have to be connected to students and must invest in student lives (Jensen, 2013). It is imperative teachers make smart choices and know how students are doing not only in school, but away from school as well (Jensen, 2013). These teacher choices must be present when dealing with hope and the growth mind-set (Jensen, 2013). Often schools and teachers accept less than students' best effort (Jensen, 2013). Schools and teachers must change and expect every student to give his or her best every day (Jensen, 2013).

Cognition is addressed in schools by starting with a firm and stable foundation for kids to move on and be successful (Jensen, 2013). Students in poverty are often subject to poor habits which can be attributed to a poor home life (Jensen, 2013). Schools must work to teach children the importance of prioritizing and organizing everything they do (Jensen, 2013). Schools can then begin teaching those core cognitive skills all students need (Jensen, 2013).

Relationships are vital for student growth (Jensen, 2013). Children need an adult at school who may provide for them a strong, positive, and caring relationship (Jensen, 2013). Teachers must be mindful at all times of this need in students' lives (Jensen, 2013). Student affirmation is key to encourage continued hard work and achievement (Jensen, 2013). Lastly, what can be done to combat distress? To battle distress in the school setting, teacher-student relationship building is vital (Jensen, 2013). Students require a low stress level in school to develop and achieve to their greatest potential, and teachers may promote these types of behaviors each day (Jensen, 2013). Additionally, schools must be diligent to ensure students know how to cope with difficult days and

situations (Jensen, 2013). Every day is not without stress, but schools and teachers may train students to handle difficult situations appropriately (Jensen, 2013).

Schools have a responsibility to readjust the mindset about how they can improve teacher quality (Pascopella, 2006). High-poverty school districts should change the method by which teachers are hired so the highest poverty schools are receiving qualified candidates (Pascopella, 2006). Teacher quality can be improved by ensuring building principals have the capacity to collaborate with new teachers to promote improvement (Pascopella, 2006). Also, districts should look into budgetary issues which place the most highly qualified teachers in schools which are not those of the highest need (Pascopella, 2006). One of the most important tools for student academic success is the teacher (Pascopella, 2006). School districts and schools across the country are failing students by not putting the best teacher candidates with the students who need them the most (Pascopella, 2006). Schools are failing in part because of their consistent misplacement of teachers (Pascopella, 2006). Teachers with little to no experience and less education are continually placed in schools with students who have the most need (Pascopella, 2006). Quite the opposite should be happening. Teachers with more experience and education should be teaching students who have the most pressing educational needs (Pascopella, 2006).

In Armstrong's (2010) writing regarding poverty and its reality for students, she pointed out there are many key items schools cannot dismiss. First, schools should understand poor diets have a negative impact on learning (Armstrong, 2010). Students must be afforded the opportunity to have good nutrition in order to achieve at a high level (Armstrong, 2010). Next, Armstrong (2010) noted schools should debunk bias-inducing

myths. Not every poor child is a delayed learner (Armstrong, 2010). Every poor child may not need the same educational interventions (Armstrong, 2010).

Too often, schools are judged as a whole prior to knowing the truth about individual students (Armstrong, 2010). A school may have a demographic made up of students living in poverty (Armstrong, 2010). That does not mean the school must have a culture of poverty (Armstrong, 2010). There is simply a difference in values and behaviors schools need to be able to address appropriately (Armstrong, 2010). Also, schools should limit the use of test scores (Armstrong, 2010). These tests are simply one piece of data to be used as a means of informing classroom instruction (Armstrong, 2010). Standardized tests in general are biased (Armstrong, 2010). If states continue to base a child's knowledge on the results of one test, the results will be catastrophic for schools (Armstrong, 2010). Schools and teachers should provide quality instruction for students (Armstrong, 2010).

If all were fair in education in the public schools, students with the greatest needs would be taught by the greatest teachers (Armstrong, 2010). However, students with the highest level of need often receive instruction from the most inexperienced teachers in the school (Armstrong, 2010). Educators in low-income areas lack the expertise to truly address the needs of high poverty students (Armstrong, 2010). Schools do not do a good job assigning teachers to groups with high poverty (Armstrong, 2010). Districts must begin to recruit teachers who are properly trained and properly certified to teach these children (Armstrong, 2010).

The school day must be driven by the needs of the students. Too often schools are more driven by teacher schedules and spaces than what is best for students (Pogrow,

2006). Successful schools with high numbers of students living in poverty should determine exactly what students know academically and what they do not know academically (Morgan, 2012). Schools must measure student success and progress frequently (Maranto, 2011).

There are many strategies to consider when educating both poor students and poor schools. Building a strong school environment is essential for students to be successful, and this begins by hiring and retaining teachers who believe in their students (Cuthrell, 2010). Teachers should collaborate with colleagues to implement instructional strategies that work (Cuthrell, 2010). Additionally, teachers must work together to provide assessments to meet the needs of the students and school (Cuthrell, 2010).

The school wide environment is vital for achievement, but the classroom environment is extremely important as well. This responsibility falls solely on the teacher (Cuthrell, 2010). Teachers must create a strong, positive classroom environment especially for students living in poverty (Cuthrell, 2010). Educators should work to raise the self-esteem of students living in poverty and be willing to change and grow themselves in order to see student success (Cuthrell, 2010). Teachers and schools must interact with parents of students living in poverty (Cuthrell, 2010). Teachers should initiate contact to parents and invite them to be involved (Cuthrell, 2010). In other words, family engagement is essential to student success (Cuthrell, 2010). It is crucial for teachers and schools to do whatever it takes to discuss the education of children with the proper parents even if it means altering routine to help fit the parents' schedules (Cuthrell, 2010).

Effective school-to-home communication as well as home-to-school communication is critical. For teachers to be effective in the classroom, instructional design should be addressed (Cuthrell, 2010). The use of multiple teaching strategies to engage all children is key, but especially to ensure engagement of children living in poverty (Cuthrell, 2010). Educators have to bring lessons to life informing students of how content relates to college, career, and the workplace (Cuthrell, 2010). Program design in schools is an important factor of consideration for schools (Cuthrell, 2010). Teachers and schools should provide multiple avenues for teachers to assist students beyond the school day (Cuthrell, 2010). Teachers need to have both physical and virtual resource centers at their disposal (Cuthrell, 2010). Further, teachers need the opportunity to experience meaningful professional development in areas related to improving classroom instruction (Cuthrell, 2010).

Schools, parents, and administrators know the importance of great teachers, and the impact teachers have on the lives of children (Rosenberg, 2012). Additionally, these groups recognize the negative impact mediocre teachers have on the lives of children (Rosenberg, 2012). Schools and administrators must consistently strive to hire the most highly skilled teachers possible (Rosenberg, 2012). The development of personal relationships between teachers and students is vital to the student's academic achievement (Burney, 2006).

High poverty schools can be successful. According to Chenoweth (2013), there are four characteristics principals share in high-achieving schools with high rates of poverty. Principals believe all students have learning potential (Chenoweth, 2013). These leaders have spent years in the classrooms teaching and have seen student success

(Chenoweth, 2013). Students' successes may not have all been on the same level, but there is measureable success (Chenoweth, 2013). Successful leaders do not give up on students in poverty (Chenoweth, 2013). Principals with high-achieving schools in high-poverty areas realize the importance of both management and instruction with instruction being the central focus of management (Chenoweth, 2013).

Principals have shifted the mindset from being building managers to instructional leaders (Chenoweth, 2013). This shift promotes strong, effective teaching in the classroom and has proven to increase student achievement (Chenoweth, 2013). Successful principals in high poverty areas also acknowledge the importance of building the capacity of adults within the building (Chenoweth, 2013). Teachers hold the greatest power over student achievement (Chenoweth, 2013). Many teachers, when beginning a teaching job, are honestly underprepared for what is in store (Chenoweth, 2013). Therefore, principals must create an environment where knowledge and expertise are shared among colleagues (Chenoweth, 2013). Finally, successful principals value both success and failure (Chenoweth, 2013). This is believed to be true because lessons can be learned from both successes and failures, and it is important for leaders to value these lessons (Chenoweth, 2013). In times of both success and failure, the principal should unify the building (Chenoweth, 2013). Schools must strive to find leaders who value the success of all students as well as leaders willing to grow people into becoming great educators (Chenoweth, 2013). Chenoweth (2009) added it is vital for teachers to collaborate when teaching students in poverty. This collaboration strengthens the instruction in ways not possible when teachers work in isolation (Chenoweth, 2009).

As difficult as it may seem, schools need to change their mindset when educating students living in poverty. Schools are often guilty of focusing on only what students do not know (Turner, 2012). Schools need to focus on students' strengths and build from those (Turner, 2012). Many schools have the opportunity to work with pre-service teachers attending local universities and should use these opportunities for school improvement (Miller, 2005). The partnership between schools and universities is essential for both parties to succeed (Miller, 2005). Schools are getting extra help for struggling students and students are getting a more individualized education when these pre-service teachers are available (Miller, 2005). Additionally, pre-service teachers are gaining real classroom experience to inform their teaching as time passes (Miller, 2005). Teachers will be better prepared to assist high poverty classrooms thanks in part to spending more time in the classroom (Miller, 2005).

Schools should not be held solely responsible for the welfare of poor children and families (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2002). Low-achieving schools are often held to an unfair standard by which the rate at which they must improve is difficult to achieve (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2002). A major concern for many high-poverty schools is too often teachers, especially math teachers, leave for less-impoverished districts (McKinney, 2008). A fact that gets overlooked in schools is the student-to-counselor ratio (Lapan, 2012). When the student-to-counselor ratio is low, students have shown improvements in academics as well as behavior (Lapan, 2012).

How does a school know good teaching is taking place in the classroom? How does a school know children are actively learning and are actively engaged? According to Haberman (2010), good teaching can be affirmed or assumed:

- When students are engaged with topics they regard as vital;
- When students are engaged with descriptions of human differences;
- When students are focused on important concepts, big ideas, and practical principles not solely on individualized facts;
- When students have a role in planning lesson topics and lesson activities;
- When students are applying knowledge from a lesson learned;
- When students are active in the lesson;
- When students gain good, real life experiences from lessons;
- When students are asked to question common sense and search for deeper meaning related to taught ideas;
- When technology plays a key role in teacher instruction and student learning;
- When students are expected to reflect on their own lives and how individual lesson can impact them now and in the future. (pp. 81)

In order for school officials to effectively help students in poverty they must first know what poverty really is, and examine whether or not they show any form of bias towards these students (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014).

High-performing, high poverty schools do exist. These schools are bound by 14 common standards which these schools apply in multiple varieties (Bell, 2001). High-performing, high-poverty schools have a main goal of implementing rigorous standards for all students (Bell, 2001). These schools focus on high quality teaching and learning in the classroom and prioritize working hard, high expectations, and perseverance and persistence (Bell, 2001). These institutions also promote discipline and an environment which is safe and orderly (Bell, 2001). District leadership is supportive and this is

evidenced by their actions (Bell, 2001). Principals in these schools must be viewed as strong instructional leaders along with being innovative and resourceful while providing all necessary resources possible (Bell, 2001). These districts have shared leadership among parents, teachers, principals, and district leaders (Bell, 2001). These schools value collaboration as a means of accomplishing school goals and implementing effective professional development (Bell, 2001). Students are monitored regularly and early intervention in given often to ensure academic success (Bell, 2001). These schools have an atmosphere and culture synonymous with a family (Bell, 2001). Parents and schools are actively involved to ensure the school mission is prevalent in the homes of these students (Bell, 2001). Finally, these schools, including the students and the faculty, view themselves as one portion of a system centered on the academic program that exists across grade levels and across the curriculum (Bell, 2001). Much can be gleaned from the successes of these high-performing, high-poverty schools. The most important note and most optimistic note is these schools accept ownership of the results they produce (Bell, 2001).

According to Parrett (2009), high-poverty schools can be successful as long as the leadership in the district is asking the proper questions about success and achievement. Leadership questions include the following: (a) Are the data systems being used for classrooms and schools working? (b) Are policies that are ineffective being eliminated? (c) Do students have access to extended learning periods or extended school days? and (d) Are schools using their professional learning times effectively (Parrett, 2009)? Leaders must also pose questions about learning including the following: (a) Is the instructional framework serving as a guide for instruction and assessment? (b) Does the

district utilize common assessments? (c) How many students are proficient readers and how many are struggling readers? and (d) Is the district using targeted interventions to assist with low performing students (Parrett, 2009)? Leadership within the schools must also answer question about the learning environment being created such as the following: (a) Is the influence on student poverty on student achievement understood? (b) Has the school worked to develop relationships between it and the students? and (c) Has the school engaged parents, families, and the community (Parrett, 2009)? Leaders and schools must focus on these difficult questions to ensure all can be done is being done so students have every opportunity to be successful (Parrett, 2009).

Many teachers may never face the reality of living in poverty. With this in mind, teachers do want to assist students living in poverty just like they want to assist those students not living in poverty (Sato and Lensmire, 2009). However, there is no fail proof list of instructional strategies which work for every child living in poverty (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Teachers need support in becoming more effective in educating students from all backgrounds, poverty included (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Educators must be willing to listen and respect their students' ideas (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Teachers should strive to recognize who their students really are as thinkers, students, and people (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Finally, educators must strive to show patience with students even when the demands of the classroom seem insurmountable (Sato & Lensmire, 2009).

Parent involvement. In order to help overcome the challenges families living in poverty face, it is the school's responsibility to enhance parental involvement. Schools should provide parents who are very busy and possibly working multiple jobs, the

opportunities to get involved at school (Gorski, 2013). To escape poverty, education is essential (Mistry, 2009). One strategy for school improvement is growing the number of parents involved in the school and its activities (Bower, 2011). However, schools continue to struggle in getting parents to become more involved in the school (Bower, 2011). Traditional methods of parent involvement centered on parents giving time and money to the school (Bower, 2011). That has to change, because not all parents have extra time or money but still want to be involved (Bower, 2011). Schools cannot discount parents who do not or cannot give money to support programs (Bower, 2011). Parents may still have services to offer to the school and its students (Bower, 2011).

Schools need to reach out to parents by communicating with them as often as possible (Bower, 2011). Teachers and school officials should strive to keep all parents abreast of school activities (Bower, 2011). Educators and school leaders should be calling parents, sending notes home to parents, and even visiting parents at home if the situation is safe (Bower, 2011). One constraint many parents have is feeling ill equipped to communicate with schools about their children (Amatea, 2007). Too often schools feel parents do not care when in reality many parents are simply lacking confidence in their abilities to communicate (Amatea, 2007).

Parental involvement is extremely important for a child's success in education and life (Chapman, 2003). Parents and schools need to work together to form bonds to see students succeed (Chapman, 2003). Parent and practitioner collaboration will form effective connections for students to success (Chapman, 2003). Many times parents of students who live in poverty have been alienated or alienate themselves from the school and school settings (Chapman, 2003). Parents may need to improve their education, but

the relationship between the school and the parents should improve for the sake of the children (Chapman, 2003). In many educational programs, parent involvement is overlooked (Slavin, 2013). It is important schools have support for parents (Slavin, 2013). Assisting parents in their understanding ensures children are successful (Slavin, 2013). Parents should be educated properly in the areas of their child's curriculum and cognizant of student attendance and student behavior (Slavin, 2013).

Teachers and administrators often-times do not realize the way they are perceived by low-income families (Jeynes, 2011). Families living in poverty often view principals and teachers as being very demanding without offering much in return (Jeynes, 2011). Schools need to start learning how to effectively work and assist low-income families as well as low-income students (Jeynes, 2011).

Jeynes (2011) noted school districts must show a vested interest in students' families in order for strong and lasting relationships to be established. Examples for school districts to consider when attempting to foster strong parental involvement include the following: (a) "Offer parents access to basketball courts, weight rooms, and other athletic facilities," (b) "have a once-a-week parents day," (c) "incorporate an 'adopt a block' outreach," and (d) "recognize existing involvement" (Jeynes, 2011 pp. 38-39). Traditionally, schools have reached out to mothers of students regarding who to involve in important conversations or programs (Dessoff, 2009). Involving fathers in the educational process, especially children of poverty, is essential for student growth (Dessoff, 2009). For this cause, schools will need to create opportunities for fathers to get involved (Dessoff, 2009). With this in mind schools will need to appeal to the interests of fathers by creating opportunities for fathers to want to be at the school

(Dessoff, 2009). Schools can offer the use of athletic facilities such as basketball courts or weight rooms to appeal to the fathers' interests (Dessoff, 2009). If educators can get the fathers to the school then schools and parents can begin to have important conversations regarding student achievement (Dessoff, 2009). Do schools ask for too much? Families living in poverty often believe this to be true (Dessoff, 2009). Parents recognize public schools are funded by local tax dollars, state tax dollars, and federal tax dollars; yet in the eyes of low-income families schools are always asking for more money to help with budget short falls (Dessoff, 2009). Schools have fundraisers for a variety of efforts, but parents feel it is too much (Dessoff, 2009). One example of schools giving back is by inviting parents to visit the school for lunch, at the expense of the district (Dessoff, 2009). Schools can offer other benefits to parents as well as a way to change the perception parents often have of the schools (Dessoff, 2009).

An important aspect of schools is community service (Dessoff, 2009). School personnel should be encouraged to search for ways schools can give back to the community (Dessoff, 2009). When school personnel give back to the community by working with civic organizations or community organizations it helps change the parents' perceptions schools only ask for support but never give back support within the community (Dessoff, 2009). Families in poverty are often over-looked for the amount of support and interest expressed and illustrated in students' lives (Dessoff, 2009). Too often low income families are labeled inappropriately (Dessoff, 2009). In truth, parents of at-risk children are beginning to become more involved in their children's education (Dessoff, 2009). Teachers who recognize this fact and foster a relationship with parents will in turn see continued parental involvement in schools (Dessoff, 2009).

School districts have to show appreciation to the parents for the work families are doing in relation to staying involved with their children's education (Dessoff, 2009). This appreciation illustrates to parents that teachers and schools truly do care about students (Dessoff, 2009). Parents will then be more willing to stay involved and listen to suggestions from the teachers about how best to help children at home (Dessoff, 2009).

Schools must improve academic performance, but cannot do it on their own. Parental involvement with the school increases student performance and the quality of schools (Dessoff, 2009). Increased parental involvement with the school more often than not leads to improving the home lives of families as well (Dessoff, 2009). The home environments become conducive for learning (Dessoff, 2009). The increased level of engagement between parents and schools does lead to student academic success (Dessoff, 2009). The National Network of Partnership School (NNPS) conducted a study regarding parental involvement which involved 91 school districts which were comprised of over 900 schools. The findings from this research indicated schools with successful parental involvement programs had increases in student attendance, academic performance, grade-level reading levels, and overall students' skill sets (Dessoff, 2009).

In order for schools to achieve the level of desired parental engagement needed for school improvement some school districts are planning open and written policies of exactly what community and parental involvement truly mean (Dessoff, 2009). These policies openly state parents and community members need to be part of district level committees and school improvement committees (Dessoff, 2009). These policies are important to parents of current and future students so there is a plan in place for committee members to change if the need arises (Dessoff, 2009).

Having written improvement policies for parental and community involvement are also beneficial for schools carrying out plans for improvement (Dessoff, 2009). An example of this is Jane H. Bryan Elementary school in Hampton, Virginia (Dessoff, 2009). This elementary school sought to improve in the area of language arts for grades three, four, and five (Dessoff, 2009). The goal was for 70% of students to pass the language arts portion of the student assessment (Dessoff, 2009). Along with teachers and administrators, the school involved parents, community members, bus drivers, custodians, and crossing guards in this initiative (Dessoff, 2009). Working together these groups of adults read to children, listened to students read, and celebrated together when books were completed (Dessoff, 2009). The school met and surpassed its goal and while doing so piloted a community initiative to increase student reading levels (Dessoff, 2009).

One difficulty schools battle is not having an adequate number of parents actively involved in the educational process due to cultural differences which may exist in the community (Dessoff, 2009). The school should be aware of these cultural differences and reach out to these communities with the goal of increasing parental engagement which in turn will help increase student achievement (Dessoff, 2009). Schools should also be willing to reach out to parents and express the need for students to be reading on higher levels (Dessoff, 2009). Schools should entertain the possibility of allowing student performances by students who have read bibliographies or non-fiction books as a way to involve parents in the planning and production of the performances (Dessoff, 2009).

Schools should also be willing to reach out to parents when student attendance issues arise in the schools (Dessoff, 2009). Some schools have seen student attendance increase when the schools began involving the parents in the reward process (Dessoff, 2009). A school in Virginia put an attendance monitoring plan in place to reward parents rather than the students. The school purchased pizza for the parents whose children received perfect attendance for an entire month (Dessoff, 2009). The community got involved as well (Dessoff, 2009). A local grocer provided dessert and soda to compliment the pizza (Dessoff, 2009). These efforts, as small as they may seem, are making a difference in the school (Dessoff, 2009).

State and community response to poverty. Can educational opportunities exist that are both achievable and affordable? America's primary national educational goal should be to provide education to both advantaged and disadvantaged families while eliminating achievement gaps between these two groups (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Over the course of the past 20 years, the nation's presidents, governors, legislators, corporate leaders, and educators have strived to implement changes addressing achievement in schools (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). These changes have centered around standards-based criteria suitable for all students on all academic levels (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). America's need to provide students of all socio-economic backgrounds with a high-quality education is based on its need to compete in the world marketplace (Rebell & Wolff, 2012).

The standards-based reform initiatives put in place over the past several years, including NCLB, are strong efforts to increase academic achievement (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). However, these reform initiatives do not address the core issue underlying the gap

in student academic achievement (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). These reforms do not address the obvious pattern of childhood poverty impacting students' academic achievement (Rebell & Wolff, 2012).

Among the world's most wealthy nations, the United States has the highest level of children living in poverty (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Of children living in poverty, only 25% rank above the world's highest scorers on the international student assessment (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). This statistic leads many to believe America not only has an academic problem, but a poverty crisis as well (Rebell & Wolff, 2012).

The impact of poverty on children's learning is multifaceted. Students raised in extreme poverty conditions are more likely to experience circumstances that may lead to academic failure (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). In addition, the longer children live in poverty, the more serious and long lasting the effects of poverty on their lives (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). In order for America's schools to succeed, the socio-economic barriers will have to be eliminated (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Rebell and Wolff (2012) noted the following areas have been identified as support services to assist with helping children overcome poverty: (a) "early childhood education beginning from birth that ensures the range of development necessary to be ready for school," (b) "routine and preventive physical and mental health care that maintain bodies and minds that are able to learn effectively," (c) "after-school, summer, and other expanded learning time opportunities that bolster academic learning and promote social, emotional, and civic development necessary to succeed in school," and (d) "family engagement and support that foster students' academic development" (p. 62).

Upon examining and researching the needs of students who live in poverty four conclusions were drawn by Rebell and Wolff (2012). Students' educational opportunities should be considered a legal right (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Also, individual states should create a policy infrastructure which fulfills this right (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Additionally, states should offer these services for a reasonable price (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Finally, the return on this investment will be substantial in relation to financial, educational, moral, and political outcomes (Rebell & Wolff, 2012).

All students need access to an appropriate education (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). The U.S. Supreme Court has also stated children have a constitutional right to an education which prepares them for exercising the right to free speech and right to vote (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Since an appropriate education is a right to all people, states should strongly commit to ensuring this education is granted properly (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). State funding should be allotted for schools to provide students with this opportunity (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Additionally, states should provide learning standards that address the areas of support services, early childhood education, health, and extended learning time (Rebell & Wolff, 2012).

Economically, federal and state monies are not always spent on the best educational programs (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Many times, money is spent on efforts which are not coordinated properly and provide little to no educational gain (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Acknowledging times are difficult economically, it is imperative to allocate money wisely (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). With this fact in mind it is more important now, than ever, to face the needs of children from low income families (Rebell

& Wolff, 2012). With the rising number of children living in poverty the burden to meet students' academic needs is imperative (Rebell & Wolff, 2012).

Early childhood education has been proven to impact school districts with high numbers of students living in poverty (Truscott, 2005). The annual return on state government's investment in early childhood education and development programs ranks near the top of all programs (Truscott, 2005). Early childhood education programs have been linked to reducing criminal behaviors, student drop-out rates, and poverty (Truscott, 2005). However, states continue to reduce resources and funds for early childhood programs (Truscott, 2005). The National Institute for Early Education Research determined that in recent years funding for early childhood programs has fallen by approximately half a billion dollars (Truscott, 2005). Additionally, per pupil expenditures have been reduced in preschool programs to the lowest levels in over a decade, and overall funding for preschool programs decreased in 27 of the 40 states analyzed (Truscott, 2005). These pieces of data are hard for professionals to comprehend considering research illustrates investing in early childhood programs increases student academic achievement (Truscott, 2005). The benefits of preschool can be tracked not only to kindergarten, but through the third grade (Truscott, 2005).

Of the 250 poorest counties in the United States, 244 of these counties are located in rural America (Truscott, 2005). Communities must find common ground to combat this poverty and join with urban areas to overcome the many challenges facing these students and families (Truscott, 2005).

All schools are not created equal and are not funded equally (Barlow, 2012). Schools are being measured unfairly against one another (Barlow, 2012). Districts are

required to meet the same high standards regardless of family background, poverty rate, or at-risk student rate (Barlow, 2012). These decisions made at the federal and state level have led to many school districts failing according to the given standards (Barlow, 2012).

Plenty of states struggle to fund schools (Strange, 2011). There is an increased stressor when attempting to fund low income, high-poverty schools (Strange, 2011). The issue with many rural schools in low economic areas is many of these schools have no one to advocate for them (Strange, 2011). Legislators simply do not hear from people in impoverished areas so these schools suffer (Strange, 2011). One answer for many of these underfunded schools is to consider consolidation (Strange, 2011). In nearly half of states struggling economically and educationally, consolidation is a very real possibility (Strange, 2011). This push to close schools has come from those in the urban community with a negative view of rural schools (Strange, 2011). Some even feel rural schools are not operating in a professional manner and these schools are dominated by local people with only a local perspective (Strange, 2011).

What are some of the challenges facing rural schools? Enrollment in rural schools is declining which increases the cost for districts to educate students (Strange, 2011). Budget constraints at the state level place school districts in financial distress (Strange, 2011). Additionally, there are discrepancies in economic fortunes between rural schools and schools in urban areas (Strange, 2011). All of these challenges make it more difficult to educate kids of high poverty in rural America (Strange, 2011).

The statistics show it costs more to educate students in rural areas than students in suburban areas (Strange, 2011). The cost per student to educate children in rural areas is $8,400 annually (Strange, 2011). The cost to educate children in towns is also $8,400 per

year (Strange, 2011). The cost to educate children in cities is $8,100 annually (Strange, 2011). Finally the cost to educate children in the suburbs is $7,900 per year (Strange, 2011). It costs more to educate rural school children for a variety of budgetary reasons including teacher retention and salary, transportation, and local tax revenue (Strange, 2011). Personal property taxes in rural America are difficult for rural school districts to overcome because they are often very low and do not meet the needs of the district (Strange, 2011).

The bottom line is funding among schools is not equitable, and many times rural schools are the schools which do not receive enough funding from state government or federal government (Strange, 2011). This dilemma causes many concerns for students and schools which are not only rural, but also have a high-poverty rate (Strange, 2011). In some states, approximately 6% of schools with a lower rate of poverty are receiving more Title I aid from the federal government than in other states where up to one-third of the students live in poverty (Strange, 2011). This huge discrepancy in congressional appropriation in essence keeps much-needed monies out of rural America schools of extreme need (Strange, 2011).

Few believe the Title I money given to schools is divided equally (Christie, 2009). Many believe these funds have been inadequate and do not meet the schools' needs (Christie, 2009). Additionally, studies from its own Government Accountability Office show federal aid is not equitable among schools with low poverty rates and schools with high poverty rates (Christie, 2009). Many research centers across the country confirm, after performing an equity analysis of states and for education across school districts (Lloyd, 2014).

In order for failing schools to change course it requires experience, determination, courage, and support from the entire community (Rubio-Cortes, 2010). Leaders of these schools must encourage the entire community including parents, businesses, and local government to take action (Rubio-Cortes, 2010). In 2003, National Civic League and MetLife Foundation introduced the MetLife Foundation Ambassadors in Education Awards Program (Rubio-Cortes, 2010). This program recognizes school and community partnerships which excel in these four areas:

- Schools are a valuable community resource.
- Schools can be more successful if they educate and involve the entire family.
- Community dreams can result from school leadership.
- Schools play an important role in the promoting youth civic engagement and preparing youths for their global role in solving society's challenges. (Rubio-Cortes, 2010, p. 5)

This program helped celebrate the work of school leaders within the community (Rubio-Cortes, 2010).

Schools have an obligation to work side by side with the community in which they reside. Schools can do this by inviting the community in as a partner in making a difference in the lives of students (Rubio-Cortes, 2010). Together these entities can assist low-income families in becoming more engaged in the educational process (Rubio-Cortes, 2010). Communities and schools can collaborate to plant a garden to help provide food for families living in poverty (Rubio-Cortes, 2010). Schools and communities can work together to provide housing for low-income families (Rubio-

Cortes, 2010). The youth in America's schools need to be connected to the community (Rubio-Cortes, 2010).

Networks of compassionate and supportive adults within the community play key roles in seeing students of poverty achieve great things (Tomlinson, 2013). Something often misunderstood by community members and schools is students living in poverty can learn (Smith, 2012). Poverty is not in itself a learning disability (Smith, 2012). Poverty is a very challenging obstacle many students are forced to overcome (Smith, 2012). The community effort to reach children must be increased (Smith, 2012). Community agencies of all kinds must strive to partner with schools to ensure educational success (Smith, 2012). Schools should work to build relationships with these organizations to help eliminate many of the achievement gaps which exist between communities and schools (Smith, 2012). Sadly, for many students living in poverty, no network exists to support students looking to improve socially and academically (Noguera, 2011).

Personal Field Experience, January 2015 - Kipp Delta Elementary Literacy Academy: Helena, Arkansas

KIPP is a national network of 141 KIPP public schools in 20 states and the District of Columbia enrolling more than 50,000 students (Maranto & Ritter, 2014). The majority of KIPP schools are middle schools that serve fifth through eighth-grade students. The remaining schools include high schools and pre-kindergarten/elementary schools.

Over 95% of KIPP students are African American or Hispanic/Latino, and more than 80% of KIPP students are eligible for the federal free or reduced-price meals

program. KIPP schools enroll all interested students, space permitting, regardless of prior academic record, conduct or socioeconomic background (Maranto & Ritter, 2014).

The Kipp Delta Elementary Literacy Academy is located near the Mississippi delta in the small town of Helena, Arkansas. Helena is a town of approximately 12,000 people and at first glance the town looks abandoned–vacant buildings, buildings falling in on themselves, run down and condemned homes, and not a lot of traffic circulating in town on what should be a busy work day. One might think this small town has little to offer, but located in the heart of this delta town is a "diamond in the rough" – the Kipp Delta Elementary Literacy Academy.

The Kipp Delta Elementary Literacy Academy was founded in 2009, and currently serves approximately 430 students in grades kindergarten through four. There are 25 full time educators charged with educating these students and ensuring high academic achievement. This elementary school does not exist in the traditional setting. The school is located downtown in what looks to have been, at one time, department stores. The Kipp Academy has renovated the interior of the buildings to create a learning environment that values the well-being of kids and strong instructional practices, all while promoting personal and familial responsibility in the educational process.

Currently the poverty rate at the school is extremely high: 93% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals at the school. While some may believe the poverty rate in the community is too high for students to succeed, the exact opposite is true. The proficiency rating for these students in the core areas of communication arts and math is over 90%. This statistic means 90% of students attending the Kipp Delta Elementary Literacy Academy perform at the proficient or advanced levels on grade-level testing.

How can a school with an extremely high poverty rate be so successful? Compared to traditional public schools in disadvantaged communities, KIPP schools increase student achievement and attainment, and seek to build community rather than commodity among teachers, students, and parents (Maranto & Ritter, 2014). The school promotes seven behaviors for students to illustrate every day. These behaviors include grit, self-control, gratitude, zest, optimism, social intelligence, and curiosity. Students and faculty sharing the same goals, speaking the same language, understanding the same needs, and consistently working hard have contributed to the success of this academy. There are no acceptable excuses for underachieving. Teachers expect kids to be successful and to learn. In turn, students respect teachers and work hard each day to produce high academic results. Teachers work long hours and consistently improve instructional practices. Teachers work in grade-level teams with a grade-level teacher leader to ensure the best instructional practices are being implemented daily. Weekly, teams meet after school to discuss successes and challenges and how best to address any concerns. Team meetings have assisted in producing high-yield instructional practices for Kipp teachers. The instructional support teachers have allows for consistent improvement and professional growth. Teacher development in turn produces high student achievement based on strong instructional practices.

The Kipp Delta Elementary Leadership Academy advocates strongly for personal and familial accountability. Students take ownership of academics and parents must be willing to do everything possible to assist with children becoming strong academic students. Parental involvement is imperative for student success. With this in mind the

school requires both parents and students to enter into a commitment, much like a contract, with the academy. The parental commitment reads as follows:

- Parents will always help their children the best that they can and do whatever is necessary to prepare them for college;
- Every night, the parents will review the child's homework, call the teacher if necessary, and read with their child;
- Parents will make preparations for students to be at school all day between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.;
- Parents will be responsible for students attending summer school and Saturday school when the school sees fit;
- Parents will continually communicate with the school regarding academics, attendance, personal contact information, and will carefully review documents sent home daily;
- Parents will allow their children to attend field lessons and ensure that their child adheres to the school dress code;
- Parents will support the academy's rules to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all staff and students;
- Parents, not the school, are responsible for the actions and behaviors of their children.

The student commitment reads as follows:

- Students will behave, think, and work the best that they know how and will do whatever it takes to prepare themselves and their teammates for college;

- Students will complete their homework every night, and call their teacher if questions arise;
- Students will board a bus on time each morning, or will arrive at school on time each morning promptly at 8:00 a.m. and will remain at school all day until 4:00 p.m.;
- Students will attend summer school and Saturday school when necessary;
- Students will ask questions when they do not understand the lesson;
- Students shall follow the appropriate dress code;
- Students will be nice, work hard, and be safe to help protect the interests, safety, and right of other students and faculty members;
- Students will be honest and take responsibility for actions and behaviors. Students will work hard to become a better person and a better student each day.

Students and parents working together to fulfill these essential commitments is a key element to the success of the Kipp Delta Elementary Leadership Academy.

Visiting the Kipp Delta Elementary Leadership Academy was truly a privilege and an experience that proved beneficial both personally and professionally. The instructional practices by the faculty, the relational capacity between the students and the teachers, the students' never ending respect for themselves and for others are only a glimpse of what makes the KIPP Delta School so special. The visit revealed high academic achievement is within reach for all students who live in poverty. In order for this success to be realized there must be commitment by the students, parents, faculty, and community. Make no excuses. Work hard. Be nice. The impact of poverty on

academic achievement is real; however, the KIPP Academy proves students living in a high-poverty area can also succeed on a very high academic level.

Summary

As previously stated, poverty does impact educational outcomes (Hernandez, 2011). School districts are in a constant battle to help students succeed no matter their socio-economic status (Hernandez, 2011). Additionally, the topics researched cannot be overlooked. Districts and teachers must know the characteristics and typical educational performance of students living in poverty (Hernandez, 2011). Also, teachers and districts should know best practices for teaching students living in poverty, how to engage parents and increase parental involvement, and the community's response as well as the state's response for poverty (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). The task is great, but with the proper research, determination, and desire, school districts have the opportunity to increase the achievement level of many students.

In Chapter Three, the methodology for this study is described. Population and sample, instrumentation, and data collection procedures are presented. Also included are descriptions of the data analysis and ethical considerations.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Methods and procedures utilized in this study are outlined in this chapter to illustrate how these findings are useful and meaningful for Elementary School A moving forward. Additionally, the purpose and problem, rationale, research questions and hypotheses, research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations are discussed in this chapter.

Problem and Purpose Overview

Poverty does impact and effect educational outcomes (Hernandez, 2011). For this study, the researcher investigated the correlation between students living in poverty and the academic achievement levels attained on two formative assessments, the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level assessments. In addition, the researcher analyzed student achievement and the correlation of parental survey data for students living in poverty and those not living in poverty.

As stated in Chapter One, one out of every five children lives in poverty ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Since the year 2000, the United States alone has seen the number of children living in poverty increase by four million ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education noted 20% of public schools were classified as high-poverty schools (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). With these staggering statistics, it is imperative to monitor the progress of students' academic achievement levels. Students living in poverty are not achieving on a consistent basis to a comparable academic level of those not living in poverty (Hernandez, 2011). Children living in poverty have a higher rate of absenteeism and a lower rate of academic

achievement (Hernandez, 2011). For example, of third-grade students never living in poverty and reading on the appropriate grade level, only 2% failed to graduate from high school within the proper time frame ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Conversely, of third grade students living in poverty, not reading on the appropriate grade level, 26% failed to graduate ever ("Poverty Facts and Figures," 2011). Poverty does impact and effect educational outcomes (Hernandez, 2011).

The purpose of this research project was to examine whether a relationship exists between generational and situational poverty (Payne, 2005) and student achievement on the elementary level as measured by performance on end of the year standardized testing and other formative quarterly assessments, such as the SRI and the MAP. The MAP testing data considered are the academic areas of Communication Arts (CA) and Mathematics (MA). Information generated from this study will allow the researcher, a principal at Elementary School A, to inform policy decisions which influence students and parents of poverty.

While multiple data exist on children living below the poverty level, there are still gaps regarding contemporary rural poverty (Payne, 2005). This study involved examination of the relationship between poverty and student achievement on the SRI and the MAP at Elementary School A. Currently, a chasm exists between teacher and community understanding of the impact of generational and situational poverty on student academic performance at Elementary School A. Data from this study will be used to develop a shared plan of action to address identifiable gaps in learning associated with poverty, to improve instructional practice at Elementary School A, and to inform community involvement.

Research questions and hypotheses. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level assessments for grades four, five, and six?

$H1_0$: There is no relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level assessments for grades four, five, and six.

2. What is the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)?

$H2_0$: There is no relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

3. What are the learning and achievement gaps between students living in poverty and students not living in poverty?

4. What perception do parents of students in grades four, five, and six at Elementary School A have regarding student learning and teacher communication?

Research Design

1. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Lindenwood University approved the research project (see Appendix A). Then, permission for extracting data was secured from the school district's central administration office (see Appendix B).

2. Archival MAP data were collected for students who were enrolled in grades four, five, and six from years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 from one rural elementary school in Missouri.

3. Archival SRI data were collected for students enrolled in grades four, five, and six from years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 from one rural elementary school in Missouri.

4. Informed consent was given by the participating parents (see Appendix C), then the survey (see Appendix D) was distributed to parents of students enrolled in grades four, five, and six from years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 from one rural elementary school in Missouri to determine perceptions of their child's academic success.

5. Data were examined to measure the strength of a linear association between students living in poverty and the following variables: MAP grade level assessment performance and SRI. The researcher used a Pearson product-moment coefficient (Pearson *r*) for this correlation (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

6. Data were examined to measure the strength of a linear association between students not living in poverty and the following variables: MAP grade level assessment performance and SRI. The researcher used a Pearson product-moment coefficient (Pearson *r*) for this correlation (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

7. Parental perceptual survey data were examined to determine whether parent perceptions of student academic success correlate with student performance on the MAP grade level assessment performance and SRI.

8. Descriptive statistics were used to convey the findings of the parent survey. The survey results provided needed information to determine if the parents believe they are engaged in the educational process. The data from the survey were then compared to the archival data. These data pieces were used to illustrate how parental findings were descriptively similar or dissimilar to the student archival data.

The key components for this design stemmed from the archival data that were collected and archived by the school district. The data were accessible and relevant. Therefore, the results from this study will be useful moving forward.

Population and Sample

The researcher currently serves as the building-level administrator from which the all data were extracted. Survey participants were recruited from a purposive, nonrandom sample of parents of students in grades four, five, and six who reside in the district. Valid informed consent for all survey participants included the following: (1) disclosure of study procedures and potential risks to prospective research participants; (2) participant comprehension of the information; and (3) participant voluntary agreement, free of coercion and undue influence, to research participation.

A third party obtained all MAP and SRI archival data, and all identifiable characters from the data were removed to ensure the secondary archival data were anonymous. The data were collected and stored in a secure location under lock and key and will remain there for three years after completion of the study. The data were stored digitally and protected by the researcher's username and password.

Instrumentation

The setting for this study was in one rural elementary school in Missouri. As the researcher is the elementary building principal, the archival data were readily available. In order to use the appropriate data, permission was secured from the school district's central administration office. Additionally, a survey was created to gather purposeful information from the parents. The survey questions were initially reviewed by the

dissertation committee members before changes were made to assure alignment with the conceptual framework and research questions.

Data Collection

The types of data used for this study were archival data, purposive nonrandom sample data, and data from the causal-comparative research (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Additionally, results from the parent/guardian survey were disseminated for the study. The data collected were from annual summative assessments, the MAP, as well as from quarterly formative assessments, the SRI, given over the course of the previous three school years. These data were collected from students who were in grades four, five, or six. The data were recorded using basic causal-comparative design (Fraenkel et al., 2015). The recording illustrated subject characteristics such as groups, independent variables, and dependent variables (Fraenkel et al., 2015). All parents/guardians were supplied with an informed consent prior to the distribution of the survey. The survey was completely anonymous as well as voluntary. The survey was made available in multiple mediums with the goal of yielding a higher return rate.

Data Analysis

Quantitative methodology was used as an appropriate research technique in this study to analyze achievement data as correlated to student socioeconomic status. The archival data were sorted using statistical analysis of trends, consistencies, inconsistencies, comparisons, contrasts, and variables based on the characteristics of the specific group being studied (Fraenkel, et al., 2015). Categorically the secondary data were sorted in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, the comparison of achievement levels between male and female students, the comparison of achievement

levels of male and female students in poverty, and the comparison of achievement levels of all students living in poverty and all students not living in poverty. The primary data used for this study were archival data which had been recorded and on file for multiple years. In order for the results of the study to be valid, no data were omitted. All archival data were used for this causal-comparative research to be effective. This study was likely to be unique due to a variety of factors. The uniqueness primarily stemmed from the amount of students in this district who live in poverty. The number of students living in poverty heavily outweighs those not living in poverty.

Ethical Considerations

Valid informed consent was obtained from a purposive nonrandom sample of parents living in Elementary School A's school district and have no relationship to the researcher. Valid informed consent for all survey participants was included: (1) disclosure of study procedures and potential risks to prospective research participants; (2) participant comprehension of the information, and (3) participant voluntary agreement, free of coercion and undue influence, to research participation. All participants were protected by the removal of identifiers from collected data.

This research was conducted as a partial requirement for the dissertation of the researcher through Lindenwood University at the Southwest Missouri Campus.

Summary

Methods and procedures utilized in this study have been provided in this chapter to illustrate how these findings are useful and meaningful for Elementary School A in the future. Additionally, the purpose and problem, research questions and hypotheses,

research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations were presented in this chapter.

Moving forward, Chapter Four will illustrate the data and data trends regarding academic achievement on the MAP and the SRI assessments. These data pieces were used to identify relationships that may or may not exist between academic achievement and poverty. Finally, the survey results provided needed information to determine if the parents believe they are engaged in the educational process. The data from the survey were then compared to the archival data. These data pieces illustrated how parental findings are descriptively similar or dissimilar to the student archival data.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

Poverty directly impacts students on a variety of levels. Students living in poverty struggle to focus, retain information, or comprehend basic information (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between students living in poverty and the academic achievement levels attained on two formative assessments, the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade level assessments.

Additionally, valid informed consent was obtained from parents living in the school district for which the study was conducted. To be eligible for the survey, parents must have students who currently attend Elementary School A and are in grades four, five, or six. Valid informed consent was obtained from survey participants and have no relationship with the researcher. Valid informed consent for all survey participants included: (1) disclosure of study procedures and potential risks to prospective research participants; (2) participant comprehension of the information, and (3) participant voluntary agreement, free of coercion and undue influence, to research participation.

The assessment data for this project included archival data from Elementary School A. Data were collected from two types of student assessments; the SRI and the MAP. The SRI measures students' reading levels based on the appropriate grade level of the students (Scholastic, 2015). Students score in one of four levels on the SRI: advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (Scholastic, 2015). The MAP measures students' academic levels based on the appropriate grade level (MODESE, 2015). Students score in one of four levels on the MAP: advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (MODESE, 2015).

For both assessments, the archival data extracted included results from students in grades four, five, and six. The categories for the dissemination of the SRI data included gender; semester the assessment was administered; reading level; and whether students qualify for free meals; reduced priced meals; or full pay meals. The categories for the dissemination of the MAP data included gender; grade level; communication arts achievement level; mathematics achievement level; and whether students qualify for free meals, reduced priced meals, or full pay meals.

Analysis of Data

The researcher utilized survey data and archival MAP grade level data in the academic areas of Communication Arts (CA) and Mathematics (MA), as well as SRI grade level data to analyze the research questions which follow.

Research question 1. What is the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade level-assessments for grades four, five, and six?

$H1_0$: There is no relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level assessments for grades four, five, and six.

A Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between a student's free and reduced priced meal status and the student's proficiency rank on the MAP mathematics (MA) and communication arts (CA) exams. As seen in Table 1, fourth grade MA data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation, yet no

statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and mathematics performance on the MAP (r = .123, n = 64, p = .166).

Fourth grade CA data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015) There was a positive correlation, yet no statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and communication arts performance on the MAP (r = .063, n = 64, p = .309).

The results for fourth grade reveal a relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level assessments. Therefore, for grade four, null hypothesis $H1_0$ must be rejected.

Table 1

Fourth-Grade Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient Table

		F/R/Full	CA Achieve	MA Achieve
F/R/Full	Pearson Correlation	1	.063	.123
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.309	.166
	N	64	64	64
CA Achieve	Pearson Correlation	.063	1	.482
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.309		.000
	N	64	64	64
MA Achieve	Pearson Correlation	.123	.482	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.166	.000	
	N	64	64	64

Note: The p-value used for testing a statistical hypothesis is significant at $p \leq .05$.

As seen in Table 2, fifth-grade mathematics data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation and statistically significant relationship between free and reduced priced meal status and mathematics performance on the MAP (r = .393, n = 43, p = .005).

Fifth grade communication arts data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al. 2015). There was a positive correlation, yet no

statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and communication arts performance on the MAP (r = .215, n = 43, p = .083).

The results for fifth grade reveal a relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level assessments. Therefore, for grade five, null hypothesis $H1_0$ must be rejected.

Table 2

Fifth-Grade Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient Table

		F/R/Full	CA Achieve	MA Achieve
F/R/Full	Pearson Correlation	1	.215	.393
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.083	.005
	N	43	43	43
CA Achieve	Pearson Correlation	. 215	1	.673
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.083		.000
	N	43	43	43
MA Achieve	Pearson Correlation	.393	.673	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.005	.000	
	N	43	43	43

Note: The p-value used for testing a statistical hypothesis is significant at $p \leq .05$.

As shown in Table 3, sixth grade mathematics data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation, yet no statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and mathematics MAP(r = .121, n = 35, p = .244).

In Table 3, sixth grade communication arts data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation, yet no statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and communication arts performance on the MAP (r = .193, n = 35, p = .133).

The results for sixth grade reveal a relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade-level

assessments. Therefore, for grade six, null hypothesis $H1_0$ must be rejected.

Table 3

Sixth Grade Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient Table

		F/R/Full	CA Achieve	MA Achieve
F/R/Full	Pearson Correlation	1	.193	.121
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.133	.244
	N	35	35	35
CA Achieve	Pearson Correlation	.193	1	.826
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.133		.000
	N	35	35	35
MA Achieve	Pearson Correlation	.121	.826	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.244	.000	
	N	35	35	35

Note: The *p*-value used for testing a statistical hypothesis is significant at $p \leq .05$.

Research question 2. What is the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)?

$H2_0$*:* There is no relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

A Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to determine the relationship between a student's free and reduced priced meal status and the student's proficiency rank on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

As seen in Table 4, SRI data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation and statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and student achievement on the SRI for the first-semester assessment ($r = .478$, $n = 42$, $p=.001$), second-semester assessment ($r = .436$, $n = 42$, $p=.002$), and follow-up post-assessment ($r = .409$, $n = 42$, $p=.004$). The results for this study reveal a positive correlation between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). Therefore, null hypothesis $H2_0$ must be rejected.

Table 4

Reading Inventory Data Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient Table

		F/R/Full	1st Semester SRI Data	2nd Semester SRI Data	Follow-up SRI Post-Assessment
F/R/Full	Pearson Cor.	1	.478	.436	.409
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.001	.002	.004
	N	42	42	42	42
1st Semester SRI Data	Pearson Cor.	.478	1	.846	.717
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.001		.000	.000
	N	42	42	42	42
2nd Semester SRI Data	Pearson Cor.	.436	.84	1	787
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.002	.000		.000
	N	42	42	42	42
Follow-up SRI Post-Assessment	Pearson Cor.	.409	.717	.787	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.004	.000	.000	
	N	42	42	42	42

Note: The *p*-value used for testing a statistical hypothesis is significant at $p \leq .05$.

Research question 3. What are the learning and achievement gaps between students living in poverty and students not living in poverty?

For the SRI, there were 42 student assessments reviewed for consideration. On this particular assessment, students have the opportunity to score on four levels of achievement; advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (Scholastic, 2015). The students' achievement data were then connected to the free, reduced, or full pay meal data. As seen in Table 5, of the 42 students tested, seven students, or 16.67%, scored advanced while paying full price for meals; two students, or 4.76%, scored advanced while receiving free meals; and one student, or 2.38% scored advanced while receiving reduced priced meals.

Of the 42 students tested, eight students, or 19.05%, scored proficient while paying full priced for meals; 12 students, or 28.57%, scored proficient while receiving free meals; and four students, or 9.52%, scored proficient while receiving reduced priced

meals. Of the 42 students tested, four students, or 9.52%, scored basic while receiving free meals; one student, or 2.38%, scored basic while receiving reduced priced meals; one student, or 2.38%, scored basic while paying full price for meals. Of the 42 students tested, two students, or 4.76%, scored below basic while receiving free meals.

Table 5

Scholastic Reading Inventory Proficiency Compared to Free/Reduced Price Meal Status

	Free Price Meals	Reduced Price Meals	Full Price Meals
Advanced	2 (4.76%)	1 (2.38%)	7 (16.67%)
Proficient	12 (28.57%)	4 (9.52%)	8 (19.05%)
Basic	4 (9.52%)	1 (2.38%)	1 (2.38%)
Below Basic	2 (4.76%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

For the MAP, there were 64 student test scores for fourth grade reviewed in the areas of communication arts. On this particular assessment, students have the opportunity to score on four levels of achievement; advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (MODESE, 2015). The students' achievement data were then connected to the free, reduced, or full pay meal data. As seen in Table 6, the communication arts data revealed that of the 64 fourth-grade students tested, five students, or 7.81%, scored advanced while receiving free meals; three students, or 4.69%, scored advanced while paying full price for meals; and one student, or 1.56%, scored advanced while paying reduced prices for meals.

Of the 64 student tested, two students, or 3.13%, scored proficient while paying full price for meals; 13 students, or 20.31%, scored proficient while receiving free meals; and three students, or 4.69%, scored proficient while receiving reduced price meals. Of the 64 student tested, nine students, or 14.06%, scored basic while paying full price for

meals; four students, or 6.25%, scored basic while receiving reduced price meals; and 20 students, or 31.25%, scored basic while receiving free meals. Of the 64 student tested, four students, or 6.25%, scored below basic while receiving free meals. There were zero students who scored below basic while receiving reduced or full pay meals.

Table 6

Fourth-Grade MAP CA Proficiency Compared to Free/Reduced Price Meal Status

	Free Price Meals	Reduced Price Meals	Full Price Meals
Advanced	5 (7.81%)	1 (1.56%)	3 (4.69%)
Proficient	13 (20.31%)	3 (4.69%)	2 (3.13%)
Basic	20 (31.25%)	4 (6.25%)	9 (14.06%)
Below Basic	4 (6.25%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

For the MAP, there were 64 student test scores for fourth grade reviewed in the areas of mathematics. On this particular assessment, students have the opportunity to score on four levels of achievement: advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (MODESE, 2015). The students' achievement data were then connected to the free, reduced, or full pay meal data. As seen in Table 7, mathematics data revealed that of the 64 fourth-grade students tested, one student, or 1.56%, scored advanced while receiving free meals; one student, or 1.56%, scored advanced while paying full price for meals; two students, or 3.13%, scored advanced while paying reduced prices for meals.

Of the 64 student tested, five students, or 7.81%, scored proficient while paying full price for meals; 14 students, or 21.88%, scored proficient while receiving free meals; four students, or 6.25%, scored proficient while receiving reduced price meals. Of the 64 student tested, eight students, or 12.50%, scored basic while paying full price for meals; two students, or 3.13%, scored basic while receiving reduced price meals; and 25

students, or 39.06%, scored basic while receiving free meals. Of the 64 student tested, two students, or 3.13%, scored below basic while receiving free meals. There were zero students who scored below basic while receiving reduced or full pay meals.

Table 7

Fourth-Grade MAP MA Proficiency Compared to Free/Reduced Price Meal Status

	Free Price Meals	Reduced Price Meals	Full Price Meals
Advanced	1 (1.56%)	2 (3.13%)	1 (1.56%)
Proficient	14 (21.88%)	4 (6.25%)	5 (7.81%)
Basic	25 (39.06%)	2 (3.13%)	8 (12.50%)
Below Basic	2 (3.13%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

For the MAP, there were 43 student test scores for fifth grade reviewed in the areas of communication arts. On this particular assessment, students have the opportunity to score on four levels of achievement: advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (MODESE, 2015). The students' achievement data were then connected to the free, reduced, or full pay meal data. As seen in Table 8, communication arts data revealed that of the 43 fifth-grade students tested, three students, or 6.98%, scored advanced while receiving free meals; one student, or 2.33%, scored advanced while paying full price for meals; and two students, or 4.65%, scored advanced while paying reduced prices for meals. Of the 43 student tested, six students, or 13.95%, scored proficient while paying full price for meals; six students, or 13.95%, scored proficient while receiving free meals; and one student, or 2.33%, scored proficient while receiving reduced price meals.

Of the 43 student tested, four students, or 9.30%, scored basic while paying full price for meals; three students, or 6.98%, scored basic while receiving reduced price meals; and 13 students, or 30.23%, scored basic while receiving free meals. Of the 43

student tested, four students, or 9.30%, scored below basic while receiving free meals. There were zero students who scored below basic while receiving reduced or full pay meals.

Table 8

Fifth-Grade MAP CA Proficiency Compared to Free/Reduced Price Meal Status

	Free Price Meals	Reduced Price Meals	Full Price Meals
Advanced	3 (6.98%)	2 (4.65%)	1 (2.33%)
Proficient	6 (13.95%)	1 (2.33%)	6 (13.95%)
Basic	13 (30.23%)	3 (6.98%)	4 (9.30%)
Below Basic	4 (9.30%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

For the MAP, there were 43 student test scores for fifth grade reviewed in the areas of mathematics. On this particular assessment, students have the opportunity to score on four levels of achievement; advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (MODESE, 2015). The students' achievement data were then connected to the free, reduced, or full pay meal data. As seen in Table 9, mathematics data revealed that of the 43 fifth-grade students tested, two students, or 4.65%, scored advanced while receiving free meals; five students, or 11.63%, scored advanced while paying full price for meals; and one student, or 2.33%, scored advanced while paying reduced prices for meals. Of the 43 student tested, three students, or 6.98%, scored proficient while paying full price for meals; 10 students, or 23.26%, scored proficient while receiving free meals; and four students, or 9.30%, scored proficient while receiving reduced price meals.

Of the 43 student tested, three students, or 6.98%, scored basic while paying full price for meals; one student, or 2.33%, scored basic while receiving reduced price meals; and nine students, or 20.93%, scored basic while receiving free meals. Of the 43 student

tested, five students, or 11.63%, scored below basic while receiving free meals. There were zero students who scored below basic while receiving reduced or full pay meals.

Table 9

Fifth Grade MAP MA Proficiency Compared to Free/Reduced Price Meal Status

	Free Price Meals	Reduced Price Meals	Full Price Meals
Advanced	2 (4.65%)	1 (2.33%)	5 (11.63%)
Proficient	10 (23.26%)	4 (9.30%)	3 (6.98%)
Basic	9 (20.93%)	1 (2.33%)	3 (6.98%)
Below Basic	5 (11.63%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

For the MAP, there were 35 student test scores for sixth grade reviewed in the areas of communication arts. On this particular assessment, students have the opportunity to score on four levels of achievement; advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (MODESE, 2015). The students' achievement data were then connected to the free, reduced, or full pay meal data. As seen in Table 10, communication arts data revealed that of the 35 sixth-grade student tested, five students, or 14.29%, scored advanced while receiving free meals; one student, or 2.88%, scored advanced while paying full price for meals; and zero students scored advanced while paying reduced prices for meals.

Of the 35 student tested, four students, or 11.43%, scored proficient while paying full price for meals; seven students, or 20.00%, scored proficient while receiving free meals; and one student, or 2.88%, scored proficient while receiving reduced price meals. Of the 35 student tested, two students, or 5.71%, scored basic while paying full price for meals; zero students, or 0.00%, scored basic while receiving reduced price meals; and 10 students, or 28.57%, scored basic while receiving free meals. Of the 35 student tested, four students, or 11.43%, scored below basic while receiving free meals; zero students, or

0.00%, scored below basic while paying full price for meals; and one student, or 2.88%, scored below basic while receiving reduced price meals.

Table 10

Sixth-Grade MAP CA Proficiency Compared to Free/Reduced Price Meal Status

	Free Price Meals	Reduced Price Meals	Full Price Meals
Advanced	5 (14.29%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (2.88%)
Proficient	7 (20.00%)	1 (2.88%)	4 (11.43%)
Basic	10 (28.57%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (5.71%)
Below Basic	4 (11.43%)	1 (2.88%)	0 (0.00%)

For the MAP, there were 35 student test scores for sixth grade reviewed in the areas of mathematics. On this particular assessment, students have the opportunity to score on four levels of achievement; advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic (MODESE, 2015). The students' achievement data were then connected to the free, reduced, or full pay meal data. As seen in Table 11, mathematics data revealed that of the 35 sixth grade student tested, four students, or 11.43%, scored advanced while receiving free meals; zero students, or 0.00%, scored advanced while paying full price for meals; and zero students, or 0.00%, scored advanced while paying reduced prices for meals.

Of the 35 student tested, five students, or 14.29%, scored proficient while paying full price for meals; 11 students, or 31.43%, scored proficient while receiving free meals; and one student, or 2.88%, scored proficient while receiving reduced price meals. Of the 35 student tested, one student, or 2.88%, scored basic while paying full price for meals; one student, or 2.88%, scored basic while receiving reduced price meals; and eight students, or 22.86%, scored basic while receiving free meals. Of the 35 student tested,

four students, or 11.43%, scored below basic while receiving free meals; zero students, or 0.00%, scored below basic while paying full price for meals; and zero students, or 0.00%, scored below basic while receiving reduced price meals.

Table 11

Sixth Grade MAP MA Proficiency Compared to Free/Reduced Price Meal Status

	Free Price Meals	Reduced Price Meals	Full Price Meals
Advanced	4 (11.43%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00)
Proficient	11 (31.43%)	1 (2.88%)	5 (14.29%)
Basic	8 (22.86%)	1 (2.88%)	1 (2.88%)
Below Basic	4 (11.43%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

Research Question 4. What perception do parents of students in grades four, five, and six at Elementary School A have regarding student learning and teacher communication?

Analysis of Survey Data

To gather data for research question four, an anonymous survey was administered to parents of students in grades four, five, and six. Descriptive statistics were utilized to convey the findings of the parent survey. The survey results provided additional information to understand if parents believe they are engaged in the educational process.

Survey question 1. What is the person's gender filling out this survey? Of the 50 completed surveys, 23 surveys, or 46%, were completed by males/fathers, and 27 surveys, or 54%, were completed by females/mothers.

Survey question 2. What is the person's age filling out this survey? Of the 50 completed surveys, 28% were completed by parents ranging in ages from 26-35, and 52%

of the surveys were completed by parents ranging in ages from 36-45. Finally, 20% of the parents completing the survey were of the age of 45 or older.

Survey question 3. What relationship best describes your current state? Of the 50 completed surveys, 56% of the parents responding were currently married, while 32% of the surveys completed were by parents who were divorced. Ten percent of the parents filling out the survey were single. Finally, one survey, or 2%, indicated a parent was widowed.

Survey question 4. How many children do you have? Of the 50 completed surveys, 10% of parents had one child, 42% of parents had two children, 38% of parents had three children, and 10% of parents had four or more children.

Survey question 5. What is your highest level of education? Of the 50 completed surveys, 48% of parents' highest level of education was a high school diploma or a GED, 14% of parents had some college experience, 32% of parents were college graduates, and 6% of parents had a vocational degree.

Survey question 6. How many hours per week are you employed? Of the 50 completed surveys, 6% of parents worked between 21-30 hours per week, 68% of parents worked between 31-40 hours per week, and 26% of parents were not currently employed.

Survey question 7. Do you own a computer or have access to the internet? Of the 50 completed surveys, 84% of parents had a computer or access to the internet, while only 16% of parents did not have a computer or access to the internet.

Survey question 8. Do your children currently receive free or reduced meals at school? Of the 50 completed surveys, 60% of parents had children receiving free or

reduced meals at school, while 40% of parents had children who did not receive free or reduced meals at school.

Survey question 9. How much time per day do you spend reading with your child/children? Of the 50 completed surveys, 66% of parents read with their children, but spent less than 30 minutes per day reading with their children. Eight percent of parents spent between 30 minutes and an hour per day reading with their children. No parents responded they read with their children more than one hour per day. Finally, 26% of parents responded they read with their children zero minutes per day.

Survey question 10. How much time per day do you spend assisting your child/children with school work? Of the 50 completed surveys, 72% of parents responded they helped their children with school work, but for less than 30 minutes per day. Sixteen percent of parents assisted their children with school work for more than thirty minutes per day, but for less than an hour per day. One parent, or 2%, responded they helped their children with school work for more than hour per day. Finally, 10% of parents responded stating they did not help their children with school work.

Survey question 11. How often do you communicate with your child's teacher? Of the 50 completed responses, 8% of parents communicated with their child's teacher weekly, 22% of parents communicated with their child's teacher monthly, 46% of parents communicated with their child's teacher quarterly, and finally 24% of parents responded they did not communicate with their child's teacher at all.

Survey question 12. Do you currently know your child's reading level? Of the 50 responses, 38 parents, or 76%, stated they knew their child's current reading level. Twelve parents, or 24%, stated they did not know their child's current reading level.

Summary

Chapter Four began with an overview of data analysis procedures and a description of the population sample for the study. Research questions one and two were examined using a bivariate Pearson one-tailed test of significance to determine the Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficients (*r*) and *p*-values of statistical significance for the examined data. The primary focus of the study was to determine the relationship between poverty and student achievement in Elementary School A as measured by two formative and summative assessments, the SRI and the MAP.

Descriptive statistics were used for research question three to examine whether achievement gaps exist between student achievement on the SRI and the MAP and students' free and reduced price meal status. Descriptive statistics were used for research question four to examine parent perceptions and student achievement in Elementary School A.

Chapter Five provides the researcher's interpretation of the data and conclusions. Findings are presented in a manner which may be interpreted for replication of the study. In addition, suggestions for application to policy, practice, and future research are discussed.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

America's schools are struggling to succeed academically and the number of children living in poverty continues to grow. In the United States, 20% of public schools are considered high-poverty schools (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). Many factors impact student academic achievement. These factors include, but are not limited to, social characteristics such as single-income family homes or single parent homes (SerVaas, 2011).

Additionally, the amount of parental involvement in a student's academic journey should be considered when discussing student achievement (SerVaas, 2011). Parents must be involved in the educational process (SerVaas, 2011). The impact of poverty on student academic achievement cannot be overlooked (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). Schools should strive to collaborate with parents, community members, civic organizations, churches, and other schools to provide the best educational experience possible for kids (SerVaas, 2011).

Throughout the course of this study, student academic achievement was in the forefront. The study involved consideration of student performance on appropriate grade-level formative assessments including the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). Parental perception of student academic performance was also an integral piece for this study.

Findings

Research question 1. What is the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade level assessments for grades four, five, and six?

$H1_0$: There is no relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) grade level assessments for grades four, five, and six.

A Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between a student's free and reduced priced meal status and the student's proficiency rank on the MAP mathematics and communication arts exams.

Fourth-grade mathematics data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation, yet no statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and mathematics performance on the MAP. Fourth-grade communication arts data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

There was a positive correlation, yet no statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and communication arts performance on the MAP. For fourth grade, mathematics and communication arts, the students achieving in the top two levels, advanced and proficient, included students receiving free, reduced, or full pay meal status. The glaring differences occurred in the bottom achievement level, below basic, for both mathematics and communication arts. On the bottom level of achievement, only students qualifying for free meals scored below basic in communication arts. On the bottom level of achievement, only students qualifying for free meals scored below basic in mathematics.

Fifth-grade mathematics data showed no violation of normality, linearity or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation and statistical significant relationship between free and reduced priced meal status and mathematics

performance on the MAP. Fifth-grade communication arts data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation, yet no statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and communication arts performance on the MAP. For fifth grade, in both mathematics and communication arts, the students achieving in the top two levels, advanced and proficient, included students receiving free, reduced, or full pay meal status. The glaring differences occurred in the bottom achievement level, below basic, for both mathematics and communication arts. On the bottom level of achievement, only students qualifying for free meals scored below basic in communication arts and mathematics.

Sixth-grade mathematics data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation, yet no statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and mathematics performance on the MAP. Sixth-grade communication arts data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation, yet no statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and communication arts performance on the MAP.

For sixth grade, in both tested areas, mathematics and communication arts the students achieving in the top two levels, advanced and proficient, contain students receiving free or full pay meal status. The glaring differences occurred in the bottom achievement level, below basic, for both mathematics and communication arts. On the bottom level of achievement, every student qualifying for free meals scored below basic in communication arts with the exception of one student who qualified for reduced priced meals. All students qualifying for free priced meals scored below basic in mathematics.

Null hypothesis $H1_0$ is rejected.

Research question 2. What is the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)?

$H2_0$*:* There is no relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

SRI data showed no violation of normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity (Fraenkel et al., 2015). There was a positive correlation and statistical significance between free and reduced priced meal status and student achievement on the SRI for the first-semester assessment, second semester assessment, and follow-up post-assessment. Of the 42 SRI scores, only two students scored in the bottom achievement level, below basic. Both of these students received free meals. However, the data showed students receiving free meals scored very similarly to students receiving full price meals on the top three levels of the assessment: basic, proficient, or advanced.

Null hypothesis $H2_0$ is rejected.

Research question 3. What are the learning and achievement gaps between students living in poverty and students not living in poverty?

The learning and achievement gaps between students living in poverty and students not living in poverty were evidenced by the two formative assessments for the MAP. A higher percentage of students scored in the top two levels of the SRI than in the top two levels on the MAP. However, the two assessments provided similar data when discussing the bottom level, below basic, of both the SRI and the MAP. The only group of students scoring on the bottom level, below basic, for both the SRI and the MAP, were

students receiving free meals. There were no students receiving full pay meals who scored on the bottom level, below basic, on either assessment, the SRI or the MAP.

The number of students scoring in the top two levels, advanced or proficient, on the SRI was 34 students, or 80.95%. Of the 34 students scoring in the top two levels on the SRI, 15 received full pay priced meals, 14 received free meals, and five received reduced price meals. The number of students scoring in the bottom two levels, basic or below basic, on the SRI was eight students, or 19.05%. Of the eight students scoring in the bottom two levels on the SRI, one received full pay priced meals, six received free meals, and one received reduced price meals.

The number of students scoring on the top two levels, advanced or proficient, on the communication arts portion of the MAP was 64 students, or 45.07%. Of the 64 students scoring in the top two levels on the communication arts portion of the MAP, 39 received free meals, 17 received full price meals, and eight received reduced price meals. The number of students scoring in the bottom two levels, basic or below basic, of the communication arts portion of the MAP was 78, or 54.93%. Of the 78 students scoring in the bottom two levels of the communication arts portion of the MAP, 55 received free meals, 15 received full price meals, and eight received reduced price meals.

The number of students scoring on the top two levels, advanced or proficient, on the mathematics portion of the MAP was 73 students, or 51.41%. Of the 73 students scoring in the top two levels of the mathematics portion of the MAP, 42 received free meals, 19 received full priced meals, and 12 received reduced price meals. The number of students scoring in the bottom two levels, basic or below basic, of the mathematics portion of the MAP was 69, or 48.59%. Of the 69 students scoring in the bottom two

levels of the Mathematics portion of the MAP, 12 received full priced meals, 53 received free meals, and four received reduced price meals.

Research question 4. What perception do parents of students in grades four, five, and six at Elementary School A have regarding student learning and teacher communication?

The survey data for this research project were drawn from the population of parents who currently have students attending Elementary School A, in grades four, five, and six. Fifty surveys were completed and reviewed for this study. In Chapter Two, it was noted parental involvement is essential for strong student academic outcomes (Gorski, 2013). In order to help overcome the challenges families living in poverty face, it is the school's responsibility to enhance parental involvement (Gorski, 2013). Schools should provide parents who are very busy and, possibly working multiple jobs, the opportunities to get involved at school (Gorski, 2013). According to the survey, 8% of parents communicate with their child's teacher weekly, 22% of parents communicate with their child's teacher monthly, and 46% of parents communicate with their child's teacher quarterly. However, 24% of parents have not communicated with their child's teacher at all. Additionally 24% of parents completing the survey did not know their child's current reading level. On the other hand, 76% of parents did know their child's current reading grade level.

Also, in Chapter Two, it was noted students need to reach out to parents by communicating with them as often as possible (Bower, 2011). According to the survey data there is room for improvement for parent-to-child and child-to-parent communication. Sixty-six percent of parents read with their children, but spent less than

30 minutes per day reading with their children. However, 26% of parents responded in the survey that they spent zero minutes per day reading with their children. In a similar question regarding homework assistance, 72% of parents reported assisting their children with homework, but for less than 30 minutes per day. Ten percent of parents responded by stating they did not assist their children with school work.

Of the parents who completed the survey, 60% had students receiving free or reduced meals at school, while 40% of parents had students receiving full price meals at school. It is worth noting, not all students receiving free or reduced meals have low academic achievement, and not all students receiving full pay meals have high academic achievement. The survey data from participating parents helped solidify areas of improvement for Elementary School A regarding communication and increased opportunity for parental involvement.

Conclusions

This study was guided by four research questions. The questions were proposed to determine if there were student achievement data to support tying academic achievement to poverty in Elementary School A on two specific formative assessments, the SRI and the MAP. There were students of high poverty status who achieved advanced placement in both the communication arts and mathematics areas of the test. It is worth noting, students achieving the very lowest rating on the MAP in the areas of communication arts and mathematics came only from homes with high poverty rates.

Results from the study regarding achievement on the SRI were more clearly defined. There was a positive correlation between student poverty designation and SRI reading levels. While a population of students tested on the appropriate reading level for

their specific grade no matter their economic status, it is worth noting, the students who tested in the lowest level, below basic, on the SRI were only those students from homes with high poverty rates.

Students living in poverty can be academically successful. In order for success to occur, schools must begin asking what may be done to share information with parents and ensure parents understand the information being shared (Gorski, 2013). Parents may not always be able to be present in their child's school (Gorski, 2013). However, parents strongly impact their child's education by setting high standards for them regarding academic achievement (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). The survey data were insightful and provided meaningful feedback regarding parent perceptions and student academic achievement. Moving forward, Elementary School A will apply these findings to improve communication with parents.

Implications for Practice

According to Epstein (2011), schools must do a better job of recruiting high achievers into the education profession. One issue some see, including President Obama, is the system for rewarding teachers is broken (Klein, 2011). All teachers are paid the same and generally treated the same regardless of their affectivity (Klein, 2011).

Elementary School A will strive to work with district leaders to promote post-secondary educational programs for students. Elementary School A is a school whose staff aspires to create a positive learning environment built upon the foundations of collaboration, community, safety, citizenship, and trust, while developing prepared and successful students. There are hurdles to overcome, and one is the high number of students living in poverty. Regardless, academic success is a possibility for all students.

The KIPP Delta literacy academy in Helena, Arkansas, is a great model for Elementary School A to try and emulate moving forward. The KIPP Delta School, as noted in Chapter Two, has a very high level of poverty; 93% of their students receive free or reduced meals at school. The KIPP Delta School has overcome this hurdle with strong will, determination, effective teacher professional development programs, and strong relational capacity with parents in the community. Students attending the KIPP School follow seven characteristics to help garner success; grit, self-control, gratitude, zest, optimism, social intelligence, and curiosity. Students attending the KIPP Delta literacy academy score 91% proficiency on grade level assessments. To attend to the needs of students living in poverty in Elementary School A, the issue of best practice for teaching students in poverty will be addressed. Teachers will collaborate with teams to discuss effective instructional strategies to be used daily in the classrooms. Additionally, instructional leaders will be established in order for teachers to collaborate to prepare effective and sound lessons for implementation.

Moving forward, Elementary School A will also strive to have accountability measures in place for future school years. Accountability on all academic levels leads to success. The KIPP Delta literacy academy is a prime example of holding each other accountable. For instance, the KIPP Delta School expects the students to believe they can be successful. Students and adults follow three thoughts and actions each day: (a) Be nice, (b) Smile, and (c) No excuses. The teachers are encouragers of the students and peers, while holding to the mantra of never making excuses for underachieving. They simply keep trying until they get it right.

The KIPP School also has a strong parental involvement program. Many parents volunteer to help in a variety of ways. Parental involvement is essential for student academic success (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). Elementary School A will strive to implement stronger practices for parental involvement opportunities. Also, the KIPP School has procedures in place for parent involvement at school, but also at home with children. Parents of KIPP Delta students must sign a letter of commitment, much like a contract, to be fulfilled throughout the school year. This commitment ensures parents are involved with their child's education on a daily basis. Elementary School A will follow this practice and strive to increase the level of commitment by parents in their child's education.

Lastly, Elementary School A will use the student achievement data regarding academic achievement on specific formative assessments such as the SRI and MAP to inform best instructional practices for teachers in specific grade levels. These data pieces should be used as tools for identifying deficiencies within specific grade levels, specific demographics, and specific content areas. Using the data will assist in creating lessons which are effective and needed to address specific areas of concern for targeted grade levels and targeted content areas such as communication arts and mathematics. Data-driven decisions based on what the best practices are for moving Elementary School A to high rates of academic success will be the academic and instructional focus.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provided sufficient levels of data to ensure validity of the study, future researchers may be inclined to gather more data over a longer collection period. One may wish to expand the data collection over a period of academic years. Other

considerations for future research could include tying student achievement on multiple assessments over a period of years to specific teachers to determine if teachers are positively or negatively impacting student achievement. Additionally, the data collection could be expanded to schools of similar size and demographics to compare and contrast findings for student academic achievement on similar formative assessments such as the MAP. Data collection could also be expanded to consider other academic areas.

Although the parent survey data provided a sufficient amount of descriptive data to ensure validity for this study, future researchers may be inclined to collect parent survey data over the course of multiple school years. The collection of survey data for this project was for the current academic year. Additionally, the survey data for this study included parents of students in grades four, five, and six. Expanding the survey to parents of all students could be beneficial. Future researchers would benefit from using multiple years of survey data to establish whether improvement strategies for parental involvement and parental communication with the school were effectively implemented.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to determine the relationship between students living in poverty and student achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) grade level assessments. The literature, current at the time of this study, reveal socioeconomic status has a correlation with student achievement (SerVaas, 2011). In this study, learning and achievement gaps between students living in poverty and students not living in poverty were identified. Parent survey responses for student learning and school communication added valuable perceptual data for the primary investigator.

After examining multiple data, as well as statistical analyses, it was found while students of poverty may find academic success, the majority do not (Smith, 2012). Challenges moving forward include how best to identify and implement proven instructional practices which will positively impact academic performance for all students. Additionally, Elementary School A will focus on striving to increase parental involvement throughout the process.

Appendix A

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE:	January 30, 2015
TO:	Seth Huddleston
FROM:	Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board
STUDY TITLE:	[710276-1] The Impact of Poverty on Elementary Academic Achievement in One Rural Elementary School in Missouri
IRB REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	January 30, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE:	January 30, 2016
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of January 30, 2016.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

If you have any questions, please contact Robyne Elder at (314) 566-4884 or relder@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to relder@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

Appendix B

Permission to Extract Archival Data

Dear Dr. [redacted],

My name is Seth Huddleston, and I am in the doctoral program at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri. The research I wish to conduct for my doctoral dissertation involves retrieving archival data from the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) data for the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and the 2013-2014 academic years. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Terry Reid. I am hereby seeking your consent to retrieve these pieces of data from students at [redacted] Elementary School.

I have provided you with a copy of my dissertation prospectus.

Sincerely,

Seth Huddleston
Lindenwood University

Appendix C

Adult Consent Form

Lindenwood University

School of Education
209 S. Kings Highway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

The Impact of Poverty on Elementary Academic Achievement
in One Rural Elementary School in Missouri

Principal Researcher: Seth Huddleston

Telephone: 417[redacted] E-mail: sah842@lindenwood.edu

Participant _____Contact info_____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Seth Huddleston under the guidance of Dr. Julie Williams. The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not academic achievement in schools is directly related to poverty.

2. a) Your participation will involve:
   - Completing a survey. A survey will be provided to all parents who have students enrolled in grades four, five, and/or six. This survey will be completely anonymous.

   b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be less than thirty minutes.

   Approximately 50 participants will be involved in this research.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about academic achievement and may provide opportunities for academic progress in your district.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the researcher in a safe location.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Researcher, Seth Huddleston at 417-[redacted] or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Julie Williams at 417-256-6150. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Participant's Printed Name

_____

Date

_____ _____

Signature of Principal Researcher Researcher Printed Name

_____

Date

Appendix D

Parent Survey

Thank you for taking the time to assist with this important project. Your privacy is very important, therefore, this survey is completely anonymous.

Please circle the answer to each question.

1. What is the person's gender filling out this survey?
    a. Male
    b. Female

2. What is the person's age filling out this survey?
    a. 18-25 years of age
    b. 26-35 years of age
    c. 36-45 years of age
    d. 45+ years of age

3. Which relationship best describes your current state?
    a. Married
    b. Divorced
    c. Widowed
    d. Single

4. How many children do you have?
    a. 1
    b. 2
    c. 3
    d. 4 or more

5. What is your highest level of education?
    a. High school/GED
    b. Some college
    c. College graduate
    d. Vocational degree/other

6. How many hours per week are you employed?
    a. Less than 20
    b. 21-30
    c. 31-40
    d. Not currently employed

7. Do you own a computer or have access to the Internet?
    a. Yes
    b. No

8. Do your children currently receive free or reduced price meals at school?
    a. Yes
    b. No

9. How much time per day do you spend reading with your children?
    a. Less than 30 minutes per day
    b. More than 30 minutes per day
    c. More than 1 hour per day
    d. 0 minutes per day

10. How much time per day do you spend assisting your children with school work?
    a. Less than 30 minutes per day
    b. More than 30 minutes per day
    c. More than 1 hour per day
    d. 0 minutes per day

11. How often do you communicate with your child's teacher?
    a. Weekly
    b. Monthly
    c. Quarterly
    d. None at all

12. Do you currently know your child's reading level?
    a. Yes
    b. No

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