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## Factors Contributing To The Academic Success Of Low-Ses Students

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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS  
OF LOW-SES STUDENTS

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A Dissertation

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Department of Educational Leadership

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Lynn Kathryn Daanen

May 2015

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Keywords: Poverty, low SES students, school location, teaching strategies, relationships

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that may contribute to the success of some students of poverty to complete high school through graduation. The research examined if positive teacher–student relationship behaviors, the use of learning strategies, school locality or enrollment, years of experience as a principal, and years of teaching prior to becoming a principal had an impact on the non-waivered graduation rate of some Indiana poverty high schools. The study tested for a statistically significant difference between graduation rates or types of school locales on the relationship score and the learning style score. The study also examined if years teaching prior to holding an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size of the school, and years as principal might account for a significant proportion of the variance in the relationship score or the learning strategies score. The study’s results showed the participants’ current enrollment and years teaching prior to holding an administration position served as predictors of the learning strategies score. There was no significant difference between graduation rates or types of school locales on the relationship score or the learning style score. The participants’ years in current position, gender, and school location did not serve as predictors of the relationships score or the learning strategies score. The current enrollment of the participants’ schools and years teaching prior to administration did not serve as predictors of the learning strategies score.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have always believed every child has the right to learn and every school has the obligation to educate children to their greatest potential, no matter where they live.

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

Chinese Proverb, author unknown

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Many researchers who have published articles that explore the education of students of poverty posit the importance of utilizing meaningful strategies to increase student achievement and performance in schools. This study sought to discover whether any significant differences exist among teaching techniques, student–teacher relationships, and locality of schools for students from low-income homes with regard to their graduating or dropping out of high school. Jacobs (2010) crafted a compelling analysis suggesting learner achievement in the field of education is correlated to the education backgrounds and income of their parents. According to McNulty and Withington (2013, “a 2013 report from the National Center for Education Statistics found more high school seniors dropped out in the 2009-2010 school year than their counterparts in any other grade” (para. 1). Zhao (2013) reported that, “in 2009, the dropout rate for low-income students was five times greater than their high-income counterparts” (para. 8). “The expected dropout rate in 2008 for Indiana high schools was 27% (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011, pg. 5). This rate might be related to socioeconomic status (SES), as meals are provided to 46.7% Indiana students for free or at a reduced cost (Loughlin, 2012). McNulty and Withington (2013) identified that

the primary aim of education is not merely to enable students to do well in school, but to help them do well in the lives they lead outside of school. The paths of each of these students may be different, but the goal for each one of them should be the same (para. 8).

Finding ways to improve the graduating rate of students of poverty is an important objective and should be considered a local, state, and federal responsibility.

Leaders in a school's learning environment can influence the learning style within it. Educational Week (2004) referred to the function of leadership in schools as "case studies of exceptional schools indicate that school leaders influence learning primarily by galvanizing effort around ambitious goals and by establishing conditions that support teachers and that help students succeed" (para. 1).

Rhim (2009) maintained that schools failing to educate students of poverty must end the use of ineffectual methodologies and begin to raise expectations. Because students try to meet their teachers' expectations, it is imperative that educators' expectations for the learners are elevated. Students are imbued with confidence if they perceive their teachers are confident in their ability to reach higher levels of academic performance. Students of poverty who do not have a sense of personal safety in the school setting tend to have difficulty focusing on what is occurring in the classroom as well as with retention and recall. Fundamentals to the learner's achievement in effective poverty schools were an emphasis on refining the teaching, establishing educational benchmarks, and elevating the student's expectations (Rhim, 2009). Jacobson (2001) identified in his research that the result of leadership on student achievement for students of poverty was, "creating a safe learning environment, passion and persistence in improving the life chances of impoverished youngsters consistent were common to successful principals studied" (p. 3).

Teachers must cultivate an environment that fosters the concept that learning is relevant and desirable and encourage students to be inquisitive with the content (Weiss & Pasley, 2004). A classroom of this nature can be realized by setting clear, high, consistent yet attainable expectations for all students. Weiss and Pasley (2004) recognized that rigorous high-level teaching consists of a demanding curriculum aligned with content standards and applies effective instructional strategies to meet the academic needs of all students. Instruction at this level is an important element of a strategy that nurtures a culture of performance and achievement in the classroom. Holliday (2011) stated that educators believe either students of poverty are not capable of comprehending a demanding curriculum or they are not equipped with the fundamental knowledge required to master a challenging program of study.

School leaders are troubled regarding the increasing divergence between students of poverty and higher-income students who ultimately graduate. Herbst (2009) specified, “the achievement gap between students living above the poverty line and those living below it has been discussed in many arenas. Legislators, business people, civic leaders, and educators are all concerned about this discrepancy in achievement” (p. 1).

Students will not make the effort required for graduation if they persuade themselves that they will not be academically successful. Pytel (2006) interviewed 500 high school dropouts, ages 16-25, who gave several reasons for prematurely exiting school. Two-thirds indicated they would have made more of an attempt to complete high school had they believed their educators had higher expectations of them.

### **Statement of the Problem**

To achieve heightened student achievement, it is important that school systems recognize that students of poverty do not require remediation as much as they need encouragement. Pratt-



Ronco (2009) asserted that teachers should identify the proficiencies students are able to exploit in the learning environment instead of focusing on their deficiencies. To overcome difficulties and build erudition skills, it is essential for educators to identify student strengths that might be exploited rather than focus on student deficiencies. It is crucial that students know educators will listen to what they have to say (Pratt-Ronco, 2009). Participation in lessons can be inspired if teachers convey that they regard students as being an important part of the learning environment. Teel (2001) emphasized the importance of conveying to students of poverty they have value as individuals. According to Teel (2001), self-worth is the precursor of success rather than a sense of self-worth being derived from achievement and that learners need to understand how to have confidence in themselves regardless of shortfalls. He asserted, "Success motivation comes from self-value" (Teel, 2001, p. 3).

Many adolescents reported they were uninterested and discouraged with courses that did not seem significant to their personal lives (Convissor, 2013). Some students perceived they had fallen so far behind their peers' academic growth that they consequently conceded defeat and gave up. Educators should communicate to students that they are valued as a part of the learning community. Students related no one actually cared about their school involvement or they felt school personnel encouraged them to leave the educational milieu after they had been identified as problem students (Convissor, 2013).

Students need to believe their lives will improve. Teachers who do not believe students of poverty are capable of succeeding educationally impede the students' aspiration for a better future. Interviewed students suggested that they did want to be successful and when effective teachers required them to learn the subject matter, the students did so even if they didn't want to (Corbett & Wilson, 2002). It was important for educators to ensure the students had a safe environment to learn. Students who do not feel safe in school tend to have difficulty

concentrating in class and retaining what was taught (Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005).

Holliday (2011) declared that it is erroneous to claim society does not comprehend how to facilitate a learning milieu for students of poverty. Teachers must recognize students who free or reduced price lunches may be academically competent to achieve a higher education. Holliday (2011) claimed society must acknowledge students of poverty can gain advanced educational degrees as efficiently as any student.

Whether or not students qualify for free or reduced price lunches, some educators have had success in assisting students to attain mandatory high school credits for graduation. Students in city and rural schools are graduating from high school despite being classified as living in poverty. They work toward their academic endeavors and strive to reach their educational goals because it is crucial to them. Newmann (1986) claimed students are involved when they allocate considerable time and energy to assignments, give a great deal of attention to the elements of their tasks, and when they dedicate themselves to their work because it seems to have importance beyond that of being an assignment. Cepeda (2012) stated that a large percentage of learners expressed their assignments were not challenging. Thirty-seven percent of fourth-grade students considered their math activities too simple. Fifty-seven percent of eighth-grade students felt the same about their history assignments, as did 56% of 12th-grade civics students and other categories of students (Cepeda, 2012).

Teachers have the ability to successfully impact students of poverty in the educational setting. Cepeda (2012) interviewed 400 students from inner-city, low-income middle and high schools. The learners identified six main influences they felt contributed to their successful learning in school which included (a) teachers made sure that their students did their assignments, (b) the classroom was orderly and organized, (c) the students felt comfortable

asking for assistance and the teacher's help, (d) the coursework was explained so the students could understand, (e) there was diversity of classroom procedures, and (f) teachers took the effort to become familiar with the students and their situations (Cepeda, 2012).

Society expects students to fulfill the necessary requirements to complete high school. It is the responsibility of the educational organization to ensure that students are provided with everything needed to meet graduation requirements. In spite of this expectation, almost 7,000 students drop out of school every day. Annually, approximately 1.2 million students will fail to graduate from high school with their cohorts as intended (Education Week, 2010). Students who do not complete high school have a greater chance of experiencing life management problems. People who lack a high school diploma will have a significantly greater likelihood of spending their lives sporadically unemployed, on government support, or drifting in and out of jail than their contemporaries who did graduate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Failure to graduate from high school also predicts economic status. In 2009, students who did not complete high school had a median yearly income of \$19,540 while a high school graduate had a medium income of \$27,380. (Snyder & Dillow, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contribute to higher graduation rates for schools that serve a high percentage of students of poverty. Some factors associated with low SES backgrounds have been directly correlated with failing to graduate from high school. These include having parents with minimal educational achievement, lacking a sense of social inclusion in the school setting, and underestimating the future importance of graduating from high school (Ingrum, 2006). This study investigated whether the actions of the high school teaching staff have created opportunities for students of poverty to complete high school in spite of the barriers

they face as a result. This study further explored if teacher–student relationships had an impact on the students’ education and success as measured by graduating from high school. This study also sought to determine if the locality of the schools was a factor in the implementation of the research-based strategies for relationship management and learning strategies. This study additionally investigated whether certain principals or school characteristics could explain a significant amount of variance in the composite scores.

The rationale of this quantitative research analysis was to investigate what impels students of poverty to achieve a high school diploma. Barone (2006) claimed, “teachers and principals in high poverty schools can support and enhance literacy learning so all students are successful” (p. viii). Studies have examined barriers to educational success for students of poverty or the ability of the individuals to overcome these barriers. Herbst (2009) considered one obstacle as, “possibly, teachers perceived children from poverty and their achievements differently from the achievement of middle class students” (p. 5).

### **Research Questions**

1. Is there significant difference between graduation rate categories on the composite relationship score?
2. Is there significant difference across school location categories on the composite relationship score?
3. Is there significant difference between graduation rate categories on the learning style composite score?
4. Is there significant difference across school location categories on the learning strategies composite score?

5. Do years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal predict a significant proportion of the variance in the composite relationship score?
6. Do years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal predict a significant proportion of the variance in the learning strategies composite score?

### **Null Hypotheses**

H<sub>0</sub>1. There is no significant difference between graduation rate categories on the composite relationship score.

H<sub>0</sub>2. There is no significant difference across school location categories on the composite relationship score.

H<sub>0</sub>3. There is no significant difference between graduation rate categories on the learning style composite score.

H<sub>0</sub>4. There is no significant difference across school location categories on the learning strategies composite score.

H<sub>0</sub>5. Years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal do not predict a significant proportion of the variance in the composite relationship score.

H<sub>0</sub>6. Years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal do not predict a significant proportion of the variance in the learning strategies composite score.

### **Delimitations**

The study utilized only graduation rates of schools within Indiana and did not include schools with less than 49% of its students on free or reduced price lunch programs. The research focused only on high schools and utilized documentation from only the 2012-2013 school year. The study did not consider gender, age, race, or ethnicity for participant recruitment. .

### **Limitations**

Participation in the research process was voluntary. Participants completed the survey based on their understanding of the question and their answers were assumed to be honest. The results of the statistical analysis was based on the truthfulness of the responses provided by the principals. According to Baskas (2013), “results are limited as they provide numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative and generally provide less elaborate accounts of human perception. ... Preset answers will not necessarily reflect how people really feel about a subject” (p. 122). Information accuracy provided by the Indiana Department of Education (2014) regarding the graduation percentages was assumed.

### **Definitions**

Definitions are given for some terms used in this study for the reader to have an understanding of their use.

*Academic success* is defined as graduation from high school. The Coalition for Community Schools (2013) defined academic success: “graduation rates indicate academic success as they mean that students have sufficiently mastered K-12 curriculum to move on from grade 12” (para. 5).

*Educational environment* is a location where students are instructed by educators for the purpose of learning. The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood

Development defines educational environment: “the physical or affective tone or atmosphere in which teaching and learning take place” (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013, p. 8).

*High-performing* is a school with a graduation rate of 80% or greater using the adjusted cohort graduation rate published by the Indiana Department of Education (2014) as non-waiver graduation rate.

*High school* in this research is any educational building that has a 12th grade and graduates students.

*Learning strategies* are the educational processes used in the classroom by teachers to educate their students. The Kansas University Center for Research on Learning (n.d.) as asserts that “learning strategies are used by students to help them understand information and solve problems. Students who do not know or use good learning strategies often learn passively and ultimately fail in school” (para. 1).

*Low-performing* is a school with a graduation rate of less than 80% using the adjusted cohort graduation rate published by the Indiana Department of Education (2014) as non-waiver graduation rate.

*Non-waiver graduation rate* “excludes those graduates who received a diploma with a waiver and have not met the basic expectation that all students pass the state’s Graduation Examination before exiting high school with a diploma” (Indiana Department of Education, 2014, para. 7).

*Novice* describes zero to three years of work experience.

*Poverty schools* are schools that have a 50% or higher student population in the high school qualified for free and or reduced price lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

*Rural schools* are explained as schools that are located outside cities and towns (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

*School locations* are defined as the schools located in urban, rural, or suburban areas.

*Student–teacher relationships* are verbal and non-verbal communication between students and teachers (Okon, 2011).

*Suburban schools* are located in a “territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area” (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d., para. 5).

*Urban schools* are described as being in a “territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city” (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d., para. 1).

### **Significance of the Study**

Limited research was found on the perception of what propelled students of poverty to graduate high school. Identifying what propels students of poverty to graduate high school is beneficial for educational leaders. According to Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (2004), “because of their impact on school quality and student achievement, developing effective leaders of schools and districts is considered a top priority among researchers and policymakers” (para. 10). The U.S. Department of Education cautioned that “teachers and staff may stereotype at-risk students and assume that ‘those kids can’t be helped’” (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 29).

School personnel are responsible for the education of all students irrespective of the students’ economic status. This study could help district and instructional leaders identify specific factors and practices that support educational success for students of poverty. This study could also benefit educational leaders by examining what actions some low poverty schools took to graduate their students at a higher proportion than others. Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009) asserted that school leadership influences student achievement which motivates success



in high poverty schools. Principals who recognize the qualities of the teachers in their buildings are able to utilize their skills to develop an effective instructional program to improve student learning.

### **Summary**

This study contains five chapters. Chapter 1 describes the problem purpose, research questions, delimitations, limitations, definitions, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 is a literature review which includes an introduction, graduation and dropout rates, effects of poverty, barriers to success, self-images, misconceptions, relationships, learning strategies, expectations, and rural education. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for the study, including the study's purpose, research questions, description of the sample, data sources, data collection procedures, and the method of analysis. Chapter 4 describes the study's data and the analysis of each research question. Chapter 5 includes the study's findings, discussion of the interpretations, and recommendations for further investigation.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Students failing to graduate from high school pose problems at both the local and national levels. Swanson (2010) predicted that three out of every 10 members of 2010's high school graduating class, an estimated 1.3 million students, would fail to graduate with a diploma. The effects of this graduation crisis fall disproportionately on the nation's most vulnerable youths and communities. A majority of non-graduates are members of historically disadvantaged minorities and other educationally underserved groups. They are more likely to attend school in large, urban districts and come disproportionately from communities challenged by severe poverty and economic hardship.

Kennelly and Monrad (2007) declared, "when students drop out of high school, the toll on the quality of their individual lives as well as on the prosperity and competitiveness of the communities where they live—and collectively across the nation—is significant" (p. 4). Fields (2008) related that educationalists and city leaders throughout the country claim the continually high dropout rate in U.S. high schools escalates the danger to the country's strength and prosperity.

#### **Graduation Dropout Rate**

A significant number of the high school students attending schools in Indiana fail to graduate. According to the Children's Defense Fund (2011), 26,772 students in Indiana drop out

of school annually. The U.S. Department of Education (2010-11) reported that 14% of high school students in Indiana fail to graduate.

In 2008, the Alliance for Excellent Education maintained nearly 7,000 learners dropped out every school day (Amos, 2008). Levin and Rouse (2012) asserted that 30% of ninth graders will fail to earn a high school diploma. Students classified as students of poverty have a disproportionately high percentage drop out rate. Zhao (2011) reported that an estimated 70% of high school dropouts lived below the poverty line, that in 2009, the dropout rate for low-income students was five times greater than that of their higher-income counterparts, and that dropouts enter the work force without the necessary educational credentials to compete for higher paying employment. Kaufman, Alt, and Chapman (2004) stated, “in 2001, high school students living in low-income families were six times as likely as their peers from high-income families to drop out of high school” (p. 8).

Because many youth living in poverty are not graduating from high school, educators must identify ways to keep students in school if the cycle of poverty for those who choose to drop out is to be broken. While the consequences of not receiving a diploma are adverse, students continue to drop out.

### **Consequences/Benefits**

There are consequences for those who do not complete high school. When he was governor of West Virginia, Bob Wise spent time visiting younger students to promote education (Wise, 2008). The federal government had provided funding to improve reading skills at the elementary level as the prevailing view at the time was that schools did not have effective strategy choices to remediate high school students who were failing. He has since changed his opinion, concluding “both our nation and our schools need every student performing at the

highest level” (Wise, 2008, p.xii). Governor Wise realized good jobs for students without high school degrees no longer existed. Many industries have updated their machines and require educated personnel to work at their facilities. Rumberger (2011) identified some of the adverse outcomes confronting students who drop out of school:

Dropout students have a higher chance of undergoing negative consequences.

They have poorer health and higher rates of mortality than high school graduates; they are more likely than graduates to engage in criminal behavior and be incarcerated over their lifetimes. They are more likely to require public assistance and less likely to vote. (p. 5)

Goudie (2010) emphasized the importance of receiving a high school diploma by observing that “perhaps more accurately it’s not the benefits of a high school diploma that will help you be successful in your adult life, but rather the benefits of a high school education” (para. 1).

Students who graduate from high school typically earn a diploma in four years and can then elect to obtain a higher educational degree or enter the job market. The intent of a high school education is to prepare students for the different options they may pursue as adults. Goudie (2010) acknowledged, “employment options for people who don’t finish high school are extremely limited, both in terms of options and pay” (para. 5). Research from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) claimed individuals who successfully complete a high school education have a longer life expectancy, that they were significantly less likely to become parents during their teen years, and that their offspring were more likely to be healthier and attain a higher level of education. Research has shown that children whose parents graduated from high school had a higher probability of graduating from high school themselves compared

to the children of parents who did not receive high school diplomas (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). Another benefit to the broader society is that a greater percentage of high school graduates participated in community activities by being involved as volunteers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).

### **Individual Effects of Poverty**

Numerous research studies exploring strategies to educate students of poverty examine the importance of utilizing causative attributes to increase their achievement and performance in schools. Hammond, Linton, Smink, and Drew (2007) analyzed several studies and concluded that the family's socioeconomic status is one of the "family background factors most consistently found to impact a variety of student educational outcomes. Across a variety of measures, a family's SES was a major risk factor for dropping out of school in 10 of the 12 data sources" (p. 30).

Students of poverty experience negative stresses in their lives. Haycock (2001) identified issues associated with poverty that may impede students' abilities to achieve academic success, including (a) single family homes, (b) abuse, (c) parents having children at a young age, (d) parents' lack of education, (e) parents' lack of employment, (f) neglect at home, (g) drug abuse, (h) unsafe communities, (i) homelessness, (j) moving from place to place, and (k) the experience of unsatisfactory or unacceptable educational encounters. A school's poverty level is formulated using data about students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch; the Children's Defense Fund (2011) reported that of the 1,589,365 children living in Indiana, 368,540 receive free and reduced price lunches. O. K. Wong (2012) declared, "statistics data mean that, in general, the high level of poverty correlates to the low level of academic achievement" (p. 3). O. K. Wong

also asserted, “the measurement between poverty and student achievement is greater at the high school level than the elementary and middle school levels” (p. 7).

High school graduates will be less likely to require healthcare and welfare assistance or be involved in the criminal justice system than non-graduates (Levin & Rouse, 2012).

According to Harlow (2003), approximately 75% of state prison inmates did not complete high school. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2003) reported,

High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetime. . . . A 1% increase in high school graduation rates would save approximately \$1.4 billion in incarceration costs, or about \$2,100 per each male high school graduate. (para. 3)

An Alliance for Excellent Education (2011) report suggested a number of unfavorable effects for the country when students chose not to graduate from high school. One consequence of failing to acquire a high school diploma was a greater probability of relying upon government assistance. This was typically related to poverty, which was unequivocally linked to a dearth of job prospects. As a rule, the general government support programs utilized were subsidized low-income housing and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

One government effort to alleviate the deleterious effects of poverty on academic success was No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a federal mandate implemented with the goal of improving education for low-income students (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). “NCLB insisted that for low-income students’ learning to improve, there must be accountability to Washington on test scores in almost all 14,000 school districts” (Kirst & Wirt, 2009, p. 363). Federal funds were withheld from schools if some or all NCLB goals to increase educational performance were not met (Kirst

& Wirt, 2009). Although NCLB has been reviewed and refined, it has remained a major topic of complaint of many states (Great Schools, n.d.).

### **Corporate Effects of Poverty**

Mann (2012) opined the failure of so many high school students to graduate is a crisis with an impact beyond the students' own lives, with local and national consequences.

McLaughlin, Sum, and Khatiwada (2007) reported in a Massachusetts study that the average annual cost to the government for high school dropouts was \$1,567 more than was paid by them in state and local taxes. "The mean annual difference between the net fiscal contributions of high school graduates and high school dropouts was about \$3,080" (McLaughlin et al., 2007, p. 17).

They further predicted that "efforts to reduce the incidence of school dropout problems in the Commonwealth could improve both the economic prospects of adults and the fiscal position of state and local governments, a classic win-win situation" (McLaughlin, et al., 2007, p. 18).

According to Levin and Rouse's (2012) calculation, every high school graduate will, on average, contribute about \$127,000 to state and local budgets over a lifetime. This foresees a monetary gain to the public of almost \$90 billion for every year schools could reduce the number of high school dropouts by 700,000. After 11 years, the yield would accrue to close to \$1 trillion (Levin & Rouse, 2012). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) warned that the public can spend the money educating youth now or lose the money later. Unless high schools are able to graduate their students at higher rates, nearly 12 million students will likely drop out over the next decade, resulting in a loss to the nation of \$1.5 trillion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).

In contrast, high school graduates were able to offer both economic and social benefits to society. Their ability to generate higher taxable earnings resulted in equivalent gains to the local,

state, and national treasuries (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Levin and Rouse (2012) surmised that students who graduate from high school secure better jobs and higher incomes and their lifetime income potential is between 50-100% higher compared to those who do not graduate.

“In a global economy, the single most important issue facing our country is an educated work force,” said Houston Mayor Bill White, as cited by Fields (2008, para. 8). As the nation’s economy becomes more global and relies on technology for universal partnership and advancement, there must be educated personnel who are capable of meeting the demand for highly skilled job roles. Individuals who cannot keep up with the job requirements have a greater risk of becoming unemployed. The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, operating out of Clemson University in South Carolina, stated that those who drop out of high school are four times more likely to not have a job than those who have graduated from at least a four-year college (Hammond et al., 2007).

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2011), the nation can no longer afford to have more than one-quarter of its students leave high school without a diploma. High schools must be improved to provide all students an excellent education that will prepare them for college, a career, and to be productive members of society (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Educators must meet the needs of all students in the learning milieu and prepare them for their futures. This will benefit not only the student but the community at large.

### **Disincentives**

Civic Enterprises sponsored a report to establish what prompted learners to fail to graduate from high school (Bridgeland, DiJulio, & Morison, 2006). Many of the students who were surveyed had dropped out of school with passing grades and two years or less left of



school. The report analyzed why students did not complete high school when the consequences of not graduating so altered their future choices.

The decision is personal, reflects their unique life circumstances, and is part of a slow process of disengagement from school. There appear to be, however, clusters of reasons or common responses that emerge relating to the academic environment, real life events, and a lack of personal motivation and external sources of motivation and guidance.

(Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 3)

Bridgeland et al.'s (2006) report discussed what motivated students to drop out of school. Their assertion that the students "had 'too much freedom' seemed to relate to the most basic conditions in the school – lack of order, discipline and rules, making sure students attended class, and even limiting chaos that made students feel unsafe" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 8). The students reported they had difficulty waking up in the morning, failed to attend their classes, socialized in the hallways instead of going to class without any penalties, and reported the absence of regulations and school procedures (Bridgeland et al., 2006). When asked what could have been different in the high school, the responses included "too much freedom and not enough order and safety, keeping students from skipping classes (68%), maintaining classroom discipline (62%), and helping students feel safe from violence (59%)" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 9).

The students noted they would have remained in high school if they had been aware of the opportunities lost by dropping out of school and would have returned had they been younger (Bridgeland et al., 2006). "Participants in the focus groups wished they had listened to those who warned them of the problems associated with dropping out or that such voices had been more persistent" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 11). It is vital for their future success that students stay in

school and graduate. The study also asked the students what could have improved their chances for graduating from high school. Bridgeland et al. (2006) summarized findings from the study:

Our respondents had many thoughtful ideas about the specific actions schools could take to improve the chances that a student would stay in high school. Their most common answers related to classroom instruction—making what is learned in classes more relevant to their lives, having better teachers who keep classes interesting, and having smaller classes with more one-on-one instruction, involvement and feedback. (p. 11)

Bridgeland et al. (2006) further shared that the study noted

four out of five participating dropouts (81 percent) wanted better teachers and three-fourths wanted smaller classes with more individualized instruction. Over half (55 percent) felt that more needed to be done to help students with problems learning. Seventy percent of survey participants believed that more after-school tutoring, Saturday school, summer school, and extra help from teachers would have enhanced their chances of staying in school. (p. 12)

Teachers are able to provide an encouraging influence on the students they teach. The students recounted that receiving personal attention from their instructors made a positive impact in their school experiences (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 13). Noguera (2004) observed,

Too often we assume that if the adults do things right, the kids will fall into line. If we were more willing to listen and solicit their opinions, we might find ways to engage students more deeply in their own education. Students of poverty need to be invested in the learning environment. (para 36)

Students leaving high school often cite a lack of motivation, boredom, an unchallenging atmosphere, and an overall lack of engagement in school as a reason to drop out (Bridgeland et

al., 2006). Students need to be engaged in their learning. Hammond et al. (2007) determined through their research “general dislike of school is one of the primary indicators of low commitment to school that has been linked to school dropout” (p. 129). The students of poverty noted they sensed seclusion, exclusion, and a breakdown of involvement due to an absence of confidence; the students are estranged with their education because they fail to perceive a link between education and improved prospects on life and employment (Conchas & Clark, 2002).

Bryant (n.d.) claimed students of poverty did not feel they had a connection with their personal education and were therefore diffident about the prospect of making contributions to the classroom curriculum. These choices influenced the belief progression of learning from an early age, which affected their potential (Bryant, n.d.). Learners who left high school before graduating specified a course of action which would have prevented them from leaving school. Bridgeland et al. (2006) reported in a series of interviews that students who left high school identified a number of things that might have made a difference.

- 81% said there should be more opportunities for real-world and experiential learning so that students could see a connection between school and a good job.
- 75% wanted smaller classes and one-on-one attention by teachers.
- 55% felt that more help is needed for students who have problems learning.
- 70% believed more tutoring, summer school and extra time with teachers would have improved their chances of graduation.
- 81% said they wanted better teachers. (pp. iv-v)

### **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**

Rumberger (2011) argued that students are categorized by educators according to the students' perceived abilities. Based on this perception, students of poverty are not given the opportunities to excel in the educational setting because they are not generally being enrolled in higher level classes. This may diminish their career choices following high school. Rumberger (2011) claimed, "Individuals in these groups come to be identified by others—both adults and peers—by these group types" (p. 37). He also stated, "this sorting continues to disadvantage those in low track classes. Such students have access to high-status knowledge, fewer opportunities to engage in stimulating learning activities, and classroom relationship is less likely to foster engagement with teachers, peers, and learning" (Rumberger 2011, p. 39). O. K. Wong (2012) asserted that educators have failed to make our education system a success if a significant portion of students academically fail.

Teachers must recognize that these students are able to attain high academic goals when it is expected of them and they feel safe accepting the objectives. Books (2004) emphasized the importance of employing both skill and sensitivity when working with students of poverty. "Teachers must respond with competence and compassion to drowning children" (Books, 2004, p. 2). The Department of Education cautioned, "teachers and staff may stereotype at-risk students and assume that 'those kids can't be helped'" (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 29).

Holliday (2011) commented on two issues concerning students of poverty and what impact that status had on their education. He alleged that either people did not deem students of poverty could be taught at advanced stages in education or they did not employ effective methods to help students of poverty complete advanced levels (Holliday, 2011). Haycock (2001) interviewed adults and youths with respect to the dilemma of school dropout rates and reported

that the adults appeared to assume the youths did not care about education and blamed the home environments of those who were poor.

When we speak with adults, no matter where we are in the country, they make the same comments. “They’re too poor.” “Their parents don’t care.” “They come to school without an adequate breakfast.” “They don’t have enough books in the home.” “Indeed, there aren’t enough parents in the home.” Their reasons, in other words, are always about the children and their families. Young people, however, have different answers. They talk about teachers who often do not know the subjects that they are teaching. They talk about counselors who consistently underestimate their potential and place them in lower-level courses. They talk about principals who dismiss their concerns. And they talk about a curriculum and a set of expectations that feel so miserably low-level that they literally bore the students right out the school door. (Haycock, 2001, p. 7)

The students also expressed, “But what hurts us more is that you teach us less” (Haycock, 2001, p. 7). The educational system must facilitate reforms to construct a practicable system that will eradicate inflexible tracking or extreme and unnecessary humiliation of the defenseless learners and their families (Feinstein & Peck, 2008). When students felt they were not able to achieve academic success, they responded by failing to graduate from high school. Five hundred dropouts, ages 16-25, were interviewed by Pytel (2006) and cited several reasons for exiting school. Two-thirds reported that a perception of low expectations affected the amount of effort they put into school (Pytel, 2006). Books (2004) wrote that instructors must recognize that students living in poverty have relevance in education. They are an important sector of society and deserve the same educational opportunities as non-poverty students. “Poverty is a function

of political economy, not of scarcity, and not of personality” (Books, 2004, p. 11). She also emphasized that students of poverty are capable of learning. “Poverty walks into the classroom in the minds and bodies of children, and we respond—with ignorance or understanding, with hostility or affection” (Books, 2004, p. 12).

“Students for whom the teacher held lower expectations were called on in class less often, received less positive feedback from the teacher, and received less direct instruction and interaction with the teacher” (Terry & Irving, 2010, p. 114). One way of improving student interaction is to encourage a culture of achievement in the classroom where instruction is challenging, students feel comfortable asking questions, and students are expected to do their best (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2007). Weiss and Pasley (2004) identified five features of high-quality classrooms: (a) student engagement with the content, (b) a culture conducive to learning, (c) equal access for all students, (d) effective questioning, and (e) assistance in making sense of the content. O. K. Wong (2012) explained how successful schools dealt with low-achieving students. The learning difficulties were addressed immediately instead of letting them develop into crucial education barriers. The students were reassured and given the assistance they needed to foster positive self-worth. The educators worked to promote success for the students while setting high educational standards for them to meet (O. K. Wong, 2012). Copeland (2012) wrote,

For children from a diverse spectrum to learn at high levels, they need to be taught by people in schools, who believe they can learn, who approach teaching with the idea that students will learn if taught well, and who take seriously an ongoing effort to improve their practice in line with best thinking and examples in the field. (p. xi)

Sagawa (2003) reported that a National Academy of Sciences study that examined scientific evidence from youth development programs validated the importance of certain assets:

connectedness, feeling valued, attachment to prosocial institutions, the ability to navigate in multiple cultural contexts, commitment to civic engagement, good conflict resolution and planning for the future skills, a sense of personal responsibility, strong moral character, self-esteem, confidence in one's personal efficacy, and a sense of a larger purpose in life. (p. 35)

### **Self-Images**

Effective strategies to mitigate the dropout rate among low SES students in the United States is contingent upon the ability of educators to identify the causal factors prompting students to not complete high school. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) proposed students had indicated they felt alienated at school and that no one noticed when they failed to show up for class. High school dropouts also complained that school curricula did not address real-world challenges. More than half of the respondents reported the major reason for dropping out of high school was that they felt their classes were uninteresting and irrelevant. Others chose to leave because they were not doing well academically (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). According to a Colorado Children's Campaign (2010) policy brief, high school dropouts have a greater chance of living in poverty or with considerably low income. "Public schools are responsible for providing an education that will enable students from all backgrounds to learn and succeed" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 88). Borman and Rachuba (2001) warned that "schools that serve children of poverty and of color also may introduce risk factors by failing to provide a supportive school climate, by institutionalizing low academic expectations, or by delivering inadequate educational resources" (p. 1).

Tarr (2005) posited that a “student’s self-concept plays a major role in the kind of help he (sic) seeks when faced with challenging work” (Tarr, 2005, p. 4). Students of poverty should perceive themselves as educationally successful. Aronson, Fried, and Good. (2002) asserted “irrespective of the truth—or what psychometricians believe to be the truth—there is very compelling evidence that what a student thinks about intelligence can have a powerful effect on his or her achievement” (p. 115). Tarr (2005) stressed the connection between self-concept and impetus to learn. “There is a direct tie to how students think, feel, and believe about themselves and motivation” (p. 3). Students of poverty need to be told they are valued and worth recognition. Teel (2001) asserted that succeeding comes from self-esteem instead of self-esteem coming from succeeding. Students will be able to seize success when they are able to accept who they are despite inadequacies. Rawlinson (2011) wrote, “Poverty does not have to be the last word for a student’s growth and potential. Educators are powerful influences in children’s lives” (p. 33). Teachers can affect students’ personal perception of themselves. “Although the direct effects of teacher support on student self-concept remain unstudied, close relationships with teachers increase students’ academic and social skills” (Hamre & Pianta as cited in Manning, 2007, p. 13). Tarr (2005) encouraged educators by asserting

teachers, who help students understand they are responsible for their own success in life, automatically empower the student . . . helping students connect to a vision of their future provides them with the motivation to set and achieve goals. (p. 5)

### **Relationships**

Beegle (2003) talked to young adults who were considered students of poverty. Students stated how educators affected their assessments of themselves.



They believed most teachers in elementary and high school didn't care. Many failed to know an educator who had protected them or reached out to them. They felt the teachers didn't know what to do with kids like them. They felt they were continually being overlooked. They perceived teachers as the enemy. (Beegle, 2003, p. 15)

Students felt they were humiliated by teachers. Most of the contributors stated that educators had a damaging influence on their lives. "Participants felt that their teachers had the power to make them feel included, cared about, and safe from ridicule or violence, but didn't exert that power" (Beegle, 2003, p. 15).

The students did not experience a positive relationship with the educators in their lives. The students did not feel secure enough in the environment to put forth learning. "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" (Comer as cited in Payne, 2008, p. 48).

Students of poverty need to trust the educator in the room wants them to actually learn.

"Teachers are leaders in their classroom, and in order for significant learning to occur in any class or any school, relationships must be built" (Anderson, 2007, p. 7).

It is essential to understand that most students want to learn. They want to feel they are capable of contributing to a classroom milieu. They want to be challenged in their instruction with the expectation they will succeed. The importance of setting high expectations for students of poverty was identified by the Center for Public Education. The researchers commented, "High poverty schools with faculties that believe in their students, set high goals for their students, and have professional development activities that promote supportive and nurturing classroom environments have students with higher student achievement scores" (Center for Public Education, 2007, para. 2). Rhim (2009) believed it was essential to have advanced expectations for all learners, a secure and well-organized educational atmosphere, dedicated

teaching, highly qualified educators, and data-driven assessment and goals. He also stressed that schools that teach students of poverty and are considered failing must utilize effective educational practices and raise the expectations for both teachers and the learners (Rhim, 2009). Students will live up to an educator's expectations.

When students anticipate they will fail to comprehend an assignment, they will fail to make an effort. Akey (2006) commented on an analysis that found if students are fearful they will not be successful in their endeavor to do the assigned task, they will opt to not do it at all. Some students need to feel secure in the attempt of the assignment or task before they will begin or complete it. "Additionally, acknowledging student academic growth and improvement is another way to build student confidence. It is crucial for teachers to create collaborative supportive environments with high but achievable standards because it greatly affects students' engagement in school and learning" (Akey, 2006, p. 32). The National Research Council (2004), investigating the dropout rate, determined that the "evidence suggests that student engagement and learning are fostered by a school climate characterized by an ethic of caring and supportive relationships, respect, fairness, and trusts; and teachers' sense of shared responsibility and efficacy related to student learning" (p. 103).

As a result of researching dropout prevention, a Department of Education panel identified "increasing student engagement as critical to preventing dropping out. Engagement involves active participation in learning and schoolwork as well as in the social life of school" (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 4). The Department of Education also found "those student outcomes were most improved when a caring and supportive environment was combined with 'academic press', or a focus on learning and high expectations for student achievement" (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 30).

Kasen, Cohen, and Brook (1998) reported, “A positive school experience can compensate for the antisocial influence of family and community” (p. 49).

“Teachers have a greater effect on students and ultimately our society, than anyone other than parents” (Liesveld & Miller, 2005, p. 11). Educators have a responsibility to promote learning in the educational environment. Junkere (2009) stated, “The teacher-student relationship is a very important aspect of education. It significantly impacts the level of teaching and learning that happens at schools” (para. 1). Students of poverty and those who are considered at risk of not graduating need encouragement from the educators to advocate success for them in school. Wang and Haertel (1994) advised, “students, particularly those at risk of school failure, can benefit from certain protective supports provided by teachers” (p. 1). Educating students goes beyond teaching out of textbooks and it is essential to identify the student’s needs and their diverse backgrounds. Mendler (2001) observed, “It is troubling for any student to feel disconnected, but it is shocking those even successful, articulate students who are involved in school activities report a lack of connection between themselves and the school adults” (p. 3).

Teachers should know the students and understand their needs. Teachers should get to know each student and his or her individual skills and necessities; get familiar with their interests and intellectual potential. Understanding the cultural background and personality of each student is a key step to building a successful teacher-student relationship. (Cengage Learning, 2013, para. 9)

Students will engage with the objectives being taught if there is a parallel of respect and interaction between the learners and the instructor.

A teacher and student who have the qualities of good communications, respect in a classroom, and show interest in teaching from the point of view of the teacher and learning from a student will establish a positive relationship in the classroom, (Urooj, 2013, pp. 616-617)

“Learning is nurtured by trusted relationships” (Morrison, 2008, p. x). The student and teacher should feel a connection in the learning environment to promote educational growth for the student. The student should comprehend an involvement with the learning milieu and feel comfortable discussing the learning objectives with the educator. Stronge, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman (2008) wrote, “when positive teacher-student relationship exists, it encourages good rapport and creates an atmosphere that is conducive to learning” (para. 3). Students need to feel supported and develop an encouraging relationship with their teachers. Wang and Haertel (1994) asserted, “by developing nurturing, positive relationships with their students, teachers can buffer the impact of certain basic factors that may negatively impact on a student's academic achievement” (p. 1).

“Teachers who communicate effectively with their students should give appropriate and helpful feedback to their students” (Butt, 2012, p. 11). Some students are nervous in a classroom setting and are consequently reluctant to join in class discussions. Students who have low self-assurance may also find it problematic to interact during class.

“Teachers should play a proactive role in the construction of the relationship with students. Although students also take part in the interaction, it is the teacher's role to lead. Teachers should boast a degree of confidence required to build and keep a strong classroom relationship” (Cengage Learning, 2013, para. 8).

It is essential to foster a teacher–student relationship that is secure and enables the students to feel comfortable enough to engage in a conversation with the teacher when they need assistance (Stronge et al., 2007). “To form favorable teacher-student relationships, effective communication guided by emotional intelligence can build successful relationships” (Segal & Jaffe, 2008, p. 5).

“Interaction between the student and teacher becomes extremely important for a successful relationship through the entire time of a school year” (Butt, 2012, para. 11). Students who have a respectable relationship with the instructor will find their inner self-assurance to strive for educational advancement in the classroom. “Teachers can strengthen their relationship with students if they actually enjoy the time spent in the classroom. Creating a pleasant environment is not in conflict with keeping a professional distance” (Cengage Learning, 2013, para. 13). Mendler (2001) claimed,

Although many factors are certainly related to safety and school success, there is no doubt that achievement is apt to occur in a friendly, predictable classroom atmosphere guided by an enthusiastic teacher who “connects” with students and encourages them to create, take risks, and share ideas. (p. 6)

Junkere (2009) asserted, “Student readiness for learning and sharing increases when the teacher-student relationship is good” (para. 3). “Classroom interaction should be based on respect and self-esteem. Students should learn to both give and receive respect” (Cengage Learning, 2013, para. 10). “Students felt what mattered most is the relationships teachers established with their students was providing guidance to students who have felt inadequate or threatened” (Rose, 2005, p. 115). Educators can still utilize the traditional philosophies with their pedagogic planning and still stimulate open discussions with the students through thought-provoking

concepts. “Classroom work should be interesting and fun. Students should have certain control over their work in order to feel commitment and engagement with learning” (Cengage Learning, 2013, para. 13).

### **Learning Strategies**

Pratt-Ronco (2009) wrote, “For the school system, the rural poor youth don’t need remediation as much as they need encouragement; to recognize what they bring to the classroom rather than what they are lacking and seek to capitalize on their strengths” (p. 173). It is important for students of poverty to recognize they bring positive attributes to the educational environment. Gehrke (2005) claimed successful educationalists were mindful of their individual beliefs and realized their personal background may be different from their learners. The educators choose stratagems, methods, and sources that encompass their learners. They allowed the learners to associate knowledge to their personal experiences, and subsequently were able to enhance their students’ learning.

Many students of poverty claimed they were uninterested and discouraged with curricula that did not seem pertinent to their existence (Convissor, 2013). It is important that students feel they are part of the learning process and must be able to relate to what is being taught. Borman and Rachuba (2001) remarked, “students’ active participation and interest in the classroom and school are very important forces for counteracting academic risk” (p. 20). Boykin and Noguera (2011) stated,

Evidence seems to confirm that increases in academic learning and achievement are very likely to be preceded by the promotion and sustained enhancement of student engagement. They will sit in the classroom and become disengaged if they feel they are not connected to what is being taught. (p. 36)

It may be necessary that some students of poverty be taught steps of participating in the learning environment before they can become engaged in the curriculum.

Gajowski (2012) claimed that students living in poverty frequently required additional assistance before they became involved in the lesson. Jensen (2009) advised teachers to use activities in the classroom so the students learn to be included in the lessons. With respect to using stratagems to promote educational growth in students of poverty, he stated, “If a strategy makes the difference between learning and not learning it is crucial” (p. 3). LeBlanc-Esparza and Roulston (2012) turned around a low-performing high-poverty high school. One of the practices they deemed important was the belief that “students also need to understand the importance of what they are learning” (p. 1). Boykin and Noguera (2011) emphasized the importance of relating material to students’ personal beliefs, “with the respect to meaningful learning, heightened results are obtained when students’ personal values and interests are taken into account and when their personal experiences are reflected in the curriculum” (p. 111). Gorski (2008) concurred by stating, “Make curriculum relevant to poor students, drawing on and validating their experiences and intelligences” (p. 36). Anderson (2007) identified educational material to be “culturally relevant material from the student’s environment within lessons in order to personalize them” (p.7). Haberman (2010) identified that good teaching occurs when students are involved in planning what they will be doing, it is likely that good teaching is going on. Character is built by students who have had practice at comparing ideals with reality in their own lives and in the lives of those around them. (p. 81)

Gajowski (2012) emphasized learners learn more and remember more material when they were clearly joining in the teaching technique. Akey (2006) reiterated this belief by commenting

the learners would comprehend the material when they were able to personally connect with what was being taught. Beegle (2003) asked young adults who had been considered students in the poverty setting about their views on education. They stated that “education had little or no meaning in their early lives and simply was not important. It was just something they did and never knew why and it was the law” (Beegle, 2003, p. 14). They also believed they had to be there, or just went and never gave it a thought. They stated they did not know what to do with the education and it was not discussed at home (Beegle, 2003). Students need to feel connected to the learning process if they are going to retain what is being taught. In a U.S. Department of Education report, Dynarski et al. (2008) advised schools to “personalize the learning environment and instructional process. A personalized learning environment creates a sense of belonging and fosters a school climate where students and teachers get to know one another and can provide academic, social, and behavioral encouragement” (p. 6).

Educators should not assume students of poverty are unable to be successful learners; they have an obligation to support them. Gassama (2012) recognized that poverty affects students’ education negatively and asserted that teachers need to (a) address the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social learning of students, (b) make classroom environments safe and trusting, (c) build a classroom environment that encourages cooperative learning, and (d) when introducing new information, vary presentations, and do so in a new and exciting way.

O. K. Wong (2012) observed, “poverty grinds down hopes, aspirations, and performance with few exceptions” (p.vii). With respect to teaching material for students of poverty, he claimed educators “will need to obtain information from many sources for use in many different learning environments. A single teaching/learning source has never been and will never be sufficient for effective learning for all” (O. K. Wong, 2011, p. ix). Not all students learn



optimally using the same methods or techniques. Urso (2008) wrote, “children are unique; comparable to fingerprints and snowflakes no two children are identical. The way children construct knowledge is correspondently individualized” (p. 3). Positive teaching results come from appropriate competences and assistances, and negative educational results derive by means of inadequate competencies and supports (Feinstein & Peck, 2008).

An examination of several high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools in Kentucky found a number of similarities (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). The schools accentuated the significance of choosing the personnel for their school. They looked for educators who had the understanding that all learners were able to academically advance and wanted to teach with that philosophy in mind. Within the schools in the study, there were notable high expectations for learning. It did not matter where the children came from; they were given an expectation to be academically successful from the teachers and staff (Kannapel & Clements, 2005).

In 2004, Reeves performed a study called 90/90/90 (Reeves, 2009). The study’s name was derived from the participation criteria of 90% of students who received free or reduced price lunch, 90% of the learners were considered ethnic minorities, and more than 90% of the learners were passing or surpassing state standards. The analyses of effective high poverty educational faculties exhibited that successful instruction and administration have an overwhelming and emboldening affect on the learner’s academic success. Five descriptors were common among the 90/90/90 schools, including (a) emphasis was placed on educational attainment, (b) the schools had well-defined curriculum selections, (c) students’ academic achievements were assessed often and various modes of instruction were given when needed for academic progress: students who did not meet the required advancement were encouraged instead of ignored, (d) there was an importance placed on teaching nonfiction writing to achieve diagnostic information

about the learner, and (e) cooperative evaluating of the learner's work (Reeves, 2009). Everyone took an individual accountability for assessing the learner's work.

### **Safety/Security**

Hupfeld (2010) claimed that "the presence of at least one supportive and caring adult can make a world of difference for a child. The relationships available in schools, between teachers and students, provide opportunities for students to plan for and accumulate academic successes" (p. 3). Borman and Rachuba (2001) remarked on the importance of maintaining a safe learning atmosphere. "The goal of achieving a safe and orderly school environment is well linked to the affirmation of healthy social behavior that is characteristic of resilient children" (p. 2). "Schools foster safe and supportive environments in which these learning opportunities occur" (Hupfeld, 2010, p. 3). Learners who had encouraging interactions with their instructors felt driven by and advocated for by their instructors, observed their instructors as considerate, reassuring, and receptive, and those that felt they obtained direction and support from their instructors were more likely to graduate from high school (Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2008). Many students of poverty reported dropping out of school because they felt no one actually cared about their school participation or they believed they were somewhat compelled to drop out by school personnel who identified them as challenging or unsafe (Convissor, 2013).

Poverty has an adverse impact on learning. Supporting students of poverty in their efforts to overcome this effect is appropriate for not only the student living in hardship, but for society as a whole. A learning milieu that is safe and trusted will enhance the education of the student. Croninger and Lee (2001) declared, "School contexts influence engagement by supporting (or undermining) student's experience of themselves as related in school, as competent to succeed, and as autonomous or self-determined leaders" (p. 549). Educators must

provide a stimulating learning environment where students feel safe (Gassama, 2012). Boykin and Noguera (2011) maintained that the

learning climate is also crucial. The weight of evidence indicates that autonomy support leads to greater student engagement and a deeper processing of information whereas settings that suppress autonomy lead to less positive affect and reasonably adaptive performance on superficial, relatively simplistic learning tasks but not on more challenging tasks that require deep information processing. (p. 85)

### **Expectations**

Corbett and Wilson (2002) interviewed 400 students and teachers in inner-city, low-income, middle and high schools. The learners revealed six primary teaching attributes they credited as supporting success in learning at school when their teachers:

1. made sure that students did their work.
2. controlled the classroom.
3. were willing to help students whenever and however the students wanted help.
4. explained assignments and content clearly.
5. took the time to get to know the students and their circumstances.
6. varied the classroom routine. (Corbett & Wilson, 2002, p. 18)

When the teachers were interviewed, their perception of the students' views did not coincide with the reality of the students' educational attitudes. The teachers reported they thought some students did not care. The students interviewed stated they "simply wanted good teachers because such teachers made them learn—often in spite of themselves" (Corbett & Wilson, 2002, p. 11). Gorski (2008) labeled the belief that all students of poverty are the same as, "culture of poverty myth—the idea that poor people share more or less monolithic and

predictable beliefs, values, and behaviors” (p. 32). Noguera (2004) interviewed 150 students to discuss in what type of school they would like to be educated. He concluded that they “wanted a more interactive teaching style, a more relevant curriculum, school rules that were responsive to their living circumstances, and schools that gave them a role and a voice in their own education” (Noguera, 2004, p. 31).

It is inappropriate to make generalizations about students of poverty as averse to or unable to perform at a high level of learning. Boykin and Noguera (2011) emphasized as much, saying, “When this is done, insufficient attention is given to individual variation. If one student is designated as a member of a given cultural population, he or she must necessarily act, think, or feel a certain way” (p. 97). Educators must make the effort to understand where the deficits are and work with the students to improve their education.

Dwyer (2011) explained that educationalists recognize that most students of poverty comprehend the learning material but encounter difficulties in the fields of communication, reading, and learning stratagems. Educators should also acknowledge that students of poverty are able to learn these competences. When educating students of poverty, it is important to understand that meanings are in people, not words. Meanings are created by the context in which we grow up; to suspend judgment of parent/guardian behavior, make extra efforts to ensure understanding of the material being covered because of low self-confidence and/or shame, students from generational poverty are often silent, and their silence is often mistaken for understanding the material, and show and tell students that they are special. (Beegle, 2003, p. 18)

Boykin and Noguera (2011) advised, “At the most fundamental level, to optimize learning, a teacher must ensure that students are engaged in the learning process” (p. 43). Pratt-Ronco

(2009) wrote that optimism is a conscious thought act. For children living in poverty, optimism aids students to anticipate obstacles that may preclude them from attaining their objectives. Letting the students know the education environment is supportive of them is needed. Students of poverty need to comprehend and trust they will be supported in their academic endeavors. Students who have experienced encouragement from family, friends, and educators have been connected with educational accomplishments (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1994).

Borman and Rachuba (2001) defined resilient students as those learners who graduated in spite of the odds. They claimed, “resilient students tend to develop much stronger and supportive relationships with their teachers than do non-resilient students” (Borman & Rachuba, 2001, p. 20). Hamre and Pianta (2006) stated, “positive student–teacher relationships serve as a resource for students at risk of school failure, whereas conflict or disconnection between students and adults may compound that risk” (p. 59). Student engagement is positively correlated to teacher support (Akey, 2006; Garcia-Reid et al., 2005). Students’ educational achievement may depend on their perceptions of support by their teachers. “Supportive teachers are crucial components in assuring students of poverty are successful in their efforts to excel” (VanTassel-Baska, 2010, p. 6). Heller, Calderon, and Medrich (2003) commented on the numerous studies showing that teacher support and compassion promoted student involvement in the classroom and academic proficiency.

### **Schools**

A priority of educational evolution must be to assist the student of poverty to become academically proficient. Parrett and Budge (2012) contended the impact of education can be transformational in that

schools can disrupt the cycle of poverty, in both the long term and short term. An effective school can rescue a child from a future of illiteracy; it can help hundreds of students from the grim reality awaiting for those who exit school unprepared.

(p. 15)

Students of poverty have a higher risk of being educationally deficient. Educators have a responsibility to students of poverty and need to educate them using schooling techniques which support achievement in understanding what they are reading.

Goldenburg (2001) claimed that a

low SES child attending a low income school and living in a low income community is at far greater risk for reading difficulties than is the same child attending and living in a middle or high income school and community. (p. 217)

School personnel need to understand that students of poverty are able to comprehend the educational material being taught. Barone (2006) stated, “Teachers and principals in high poverty schools can support and enhance literacy learning so all students are successful” (p. viii). Beegle (2003) discovered through conversations with students of poverty, that “middle-class language and communication styles proved to be essential for success in the education world. Grammar and vocabulary arose as obstacles to learning and education for poverty learners” (p. 15).

Rawlinson (2011) wrote, “many students living in poverty enter school with barriers that interfere with learning and make it more difficult for them to stay in school” (p. xv). Some students of poverty enter the educational environment burdened with stressors which interfere with their concentration. Garcia-Reid et al. (2005) stated it was imperative to recognize the environmental influences on students of poverty. They live in communities in which they are

more likely to observe violence and may experience significant family chaos and disharmony at home. These influences may discourage students from making the required efforts to achieve academically, but school leaders can employ strategies to mitigate the consequences of these destructive factors and instead inspire productive participation with learning (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005).

### **Rural versus Urban Schools**

A school may have unique characteristics and matters related to its setting in a particular geographic location. Kennedy and Barker (1986) claimed, “although the basics of instruction are similar in urban, suburban, and rural schools, there are important demands of the rural instructional setting which are different” (p. 83). Urban schools also have challenges which may affect the education process. “In comparison to suburban and rural districts, urban school districts are frequently marked by higher concentrations of poverty, greater racial and ethnic diversity, larger concentrations of immigrant populations and linguistic diversity, and more frequent rates of student mobility” (Kincheloe as cited in Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011, para. 3). Pomoni (2010) explained, “one fundamental difference between urban and suburban schools is the characteristics of students. In majority, urban schools serve low income students coming from poor families, often living in crime ridden streets, or being minorities and limited English proficient (*sic*)” (para. 2). Ahram et al. (2011) asserted, “students attending urban schools enter at varied levels of academic readiness and oftentimes with particular stressors that challenge students’ ability to perform at high levels” (para. 6). Pomoni (2010) contrasted this profile with suburban schools, saying, “Suburban schools tend to serve middle-class, higher income or even affluent students, who have moved to the suburbs to avoid low quality life in the city” (para. 2).

Urban schools have difficulty procuring resources needed to educate all of the students. Ahram et al. (2011) noted, “Given the great needs of the students served by them, urban school systems are often under resourced” (para. 11). Pomoni (2010) remarked on staff recruitment difficulties, citing “lack of funding, obsolete facilities, and student behavior problems often deters teachers to apply for a job in urban schools” (para. 4). Ahram et al. (2011) contended teachers in urban schools may find it difficult to convey high aspirations for some of their students. “Teachers in urban school districts can feel overwhelmed by what they consider to be the high needs of their students, and thus lower their own expectations for student performance” (Ahram et al., 2011, p. 11).

High poverty school districts face specific faculty challenges in that they have fewer teachers who are classified as highly qualified, according to a U.S. Department of Education (2008) report which showed that nationally a student in a high poverty school is 5% less likely to have a teacher deemed highly qualified than a student in a low poverty school. Orfield and Lee (1993) commented on the faculty difficulties facing urban schools as “students in schools with high concentrations of low-income Black and Latino students are more likely to have inexperienced or unqualified teachers, fewer demanding college preparatory courses, more remedial courses, and higher teacher turnover” (p. 4). Principal turnover is higher in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools. Rice (2010) stated, “principals with the experience and skills found to be related to effectiveness are less likely to be working in high-poverty and low-achieving schools” (p. 1). High poverty high schools are more likely to have leaders lacking in administrated experience. Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) observed that a “high proportion of low-income students are more likely to have first-year principals and less likely to have principals who have been at the school at least six years than those serving a less-



disadvantaged population” (p. 67). It was also pointed out that the “proportion of principals in their first year leading a school is roughly 40 percent higher in schools in the bottom quartile of average prior achievement than in schools in the top quartile; the proportion of principals that have been at their current school at least six years is roughly 50 percent higher in schools with higher achieving students” (Branch et al., 2013, p. 67). The responsibility of principals has changed over the years. Being responsible for poverty schools can be demanding for those who want to make a difference. Leaders are responsible for graduation percentages, number of suspensions, special education laws, parent complaints, fiscal duties, teacher evaluations and more. Principalship is highly stressful as it means

long hours of work—for most, a 60- to 80-hour work week, workload and complexity of job, supervision of evening activities ‘unending,’ minimal pay difference between the top teacher and administrator, feeling overwhelmed with very high expectations, state and district mandates that require ‘mountains’ of paperwork, and increasingly complex society and social problems. The increasing demands of the position can cause many principals to feel the stress is not worth it. (Forbes, 2011, para. 11)

Many principals leave their jobs by the second year, which could account for why a high percentage of respondents are new principals. In a study of first-year principals, Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, and Ikemoto (2012) reported that 20 percent of principals left their first positions within two years. The percentage was higher at the lowest-performing schools.

A large number of students are enrolled in rural schools. Kennedy and Barker (1986) stated, “Nearly two-thirds of the 15,600 public school districts in the United States are in areas designated as ‘rural’ and roughly one-third of all public school students attend schools located in

these areas” (p. 83). Researchers reported significant difference between educating students from rural schools verses students from metropolitan schools. Bauch (2001) wrote about the “unique set of community identifiers or common features that make rural schools dramatically different from their metropolitan counterparts, citing economic, educational, and social characteristics” (p. 204). Eppley (2009) observed, “the rural teacher has students who are more likely to be poor and their parents have less education than urban parents” (p. 8). There are singular aspects to educating students in the rural communities. Eppley (2009) described the “unique challenges facing rural schools—including staffing and retention, funding, curriculum, and enrollment” (p. 2). Kennedy and Barker (1986) observed a particular challenge for the educator in a rural school as “the cultural and geographical isolation common to many rural areas is thereby compounded by a sense of professional isolation” (p. 83). Teachers in the rural school communities do not always get the commensurate educational support for different curricula they teach. Kennedy and Barker (1986) commented, “it is not unusual for rural teachers to be called upon to teach a class or subject in which they are not adequately trained and yet receive little, if any in-service support” (p. 83).

Students in rural communities may need to expand their awareness of surrounding populations and gain knowledge of other societies. Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) stated, “Rural schools have traditionally been tightly linked to their communities. In earlier years, the process of schooling reflected local values, local mores, local ways of being in the world” (p. 132). Eppley (2009) related an interview with a rural teacher who shared,

Students were deeply rooted in the immediate community, having extensive generational ties and few opportunities to travel beyond the nearest town. Because of this, it was essential that she both understand the children’s

relationship with their place and, simultaneously, use her adult point of view to help them understand their relationship with their larger world. She was certain that if both of these conditions weren't met, learning would not occur. (p. 1)

Some students who are educated in rural communities do not want to leave their surroundings for advanced education or employment. Bauch described "students who strongly identify with their rural place and may reject out of hand the notion of leaving it to seek higher education or follow a career path that will take them away from home" (as cited in Eppley, 2009, p. 8). Grady and Krumm further stated, "The most critical issues in managing and running small rural school districts are finances, regional economic conditions, state regulations, salaries, and providing an adequate variety of classes" (as cited in Chalker, 2002, p. 69).

### **Summary**

Educators must be cognizant of the educational needs of students of poverty. All children possess the right to be educated and have equivalent opportunities to meet their potential. Not completing high school impedes their choices of occupations. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2012), the unemployment percentages dated July 2012 showed the unemployment rate for people over 25 without high school completion was 12.7%. Those with a high school completion were 8.7% unemployed. If the person had some college, the percentage was lowered to 7.1%. Those who had a college degree had an unemployment rate of 4.1%.

It is important for students of poverty to complete high school so they can integrate into the working world more successfully. Bridgeland et al. (2006) reported, "there is no single reason why students drop out of high school. A lack of connection to the school environment; a perception that school is boring; feeling unmotivated; academic challenges; and real world events are barriers to graduation" (p. iii). Parrett and Budge (2012) stated, "most students who

drop out—more than a million a year—leave school between the ages of 14 and 16 after enduring years of schooling in which minimal achievement, frustration, embarrassment, and failure were daily realities” (p. 1). There are strategies teachers and school leaders could implement to greatly enhance student motivation and investment in their educational experience.

Parrett and Budge (2012) revealed,

Schools can disrupt the cycle of poverty, in both the long term and short term. An effective school can rescue a child from a future of illiteracy; it can save hundreds of students from the grim reality awaiting those who exit school unprepared. (p. 4)

McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, and Abrams (2006) revealed that “even in the harsh realities of high-poverty urban schools, effective teachers can enable and inspire their students for continual learning and lifelong development” (p. 13).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine factors contributing to the academic success of low-SES students in rural, urban, and metropolitan high schools having a majority of students who qualify for a free or reduced lunch program. This study investigated the presence or absence of positive teacher-student relationship behaviors and the use of specific learning strategies to foster academic achievement. Additionally, the study analyzed the significance of school performance type and the schools' locations.

Creswell (2009) stated, “quantitative research is a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. Number data is analyzed using statistical procedures” (p. 4). The purpose of quantitative research is to classify traits, calculate them, and create statistical paradigms in an attempt to explain what has been observed. The researcher uses tools such as questionnaires or equipment to collect data in the form of numbers and statistics for analyses.

#### **Research Questions**

In seeking information that may reveal the role of teacher-student relationships and defined learning strategies on the graduation rate in schools with low SES high school students, this study addressed the following questions:

1. Is there significant difference between graduation rate categories on the composite relationship score?
2. Is there significant difference across school location categories on the composite relationship score?
3. Is there significant difference between graduation rate categories on the learning strategies composite score?
4. Is there significant difference across school location categories on the learning strategies composite score?
5. Do years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal predict a significant proportion of the variance in the composite relationship score?
6. Do years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal predict a significant proportion of the variance in the learning strategies composite score?

### **Null Hypotheses**

H<sub>0</sub>1. There is no significant difference between graduation rate categories on the composite relationship score.

H<sub>0</sub>2. There is no significant difference across school location categories on the composite relationship score.

H<sub>0</sub>3. There is no significant difference between graduation rate categories on the learning strategies composite score.

H<sub>0</sub>4. There is no significant difference across school location categories on the learning strategies composite score.

H<sub>0</sub>5. Years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal do not predict a significant proportion of the variance in the composite relationship score.

H<sub>0</sub>6. Years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal do not predict a significant proportion of the variance in the learning strategies composite score.

### **Description of the Sample**

For this study, data were collected from principals at rural, suburban, and urban poverty schools in Indiana. For the purpose of this study, a poverty school is defined as having enrollment of greater than 50% of students who qualify for a free or reduced price lunch program. The survey solicited feedback from high-school principals. The participants were asked to gauge the current status within their building regarding teacher–student relationships and learning strategies.

### **Data Sources**

Information regarding 2011-12 free and reduced price lunch percentages was obtained for each school in the study from the Indiana Department of Education’s (2013) school and corporation data reports website (<http://www.doe.in.gov/accountability/find-school-and-corporation-data-reports>). Information regarding school districts, principals’ names, and email addresses were provided by the Indiana Department of Education database.

### **Survey Design**

A survey (Appendix A) was used to collect descriptive data for principal participants, level of learning strategies within the building, and indicators of teacher–student relationships. Demographic information, such as years teaching prior to holding an administrative position,

gender of principal, school enrollment size, years served as a principal, school location, and graduation rates were asked of each participant to provide insight into the makeup of the sample and to run the inferential tests as part of this study.

The learning strategies questions within the study (Questions 7-19) asked the principals what percentage of their teachers are performing the actions tied to the research in Chapter 2 within this study. The principals responded with a percentage ranging from 0-100% for these questions. The mutually respectful teacher–student relationships (Questions 20-24) asked the principals what percentage of their teachers were performing the actions tied to the research in Chapter 2 within this study. The principals provided scores ranging from 0-100% for these questions. The survey was administered using Survey Monkey.

To improve the survey’s validity, the Indiana State University Educational Leadership Ph. D. cohort in Kokomo reviewed the survey. The feedback from the review was used to improve the survey instrument’s ability to measure what the study intends. To ensure the survey’s reliability, data were examined using a Cronbach’s alpha test that measured the internal consistency of the results. The Cronbach’s alpha test was conducted for the questions that made up the learning strategies and relationship composite scores. If the initial Cronbach’s Alpha score was above .7 then the composite scores were utilized for all intended null hypotheses. If either of the areas being tested in the null hypotheses did not reach at least .7, then questions that are causing the internal consistency to be lowered were removed until this .7 level was reached. If after the removal of questions, the level did not reach .7 then the null hypotheses dealing with these areas were not tested.



### **Data Collection Procedures**

A letter (Appendix B) was sent to the principal of each school that introduced the study and provided a link to the survey. The letter also described the purpose of the study and included a brief description of the survey and instructions. The letter included appropriate information to assure participants that their responses were kept confidential and how anonymity for all survey participants would be protected. Data for all information were password protected. None of the participating schools were identified within this study. Seven days after the initial email, a follow up letter was emailed to principals in an attempt to increase the number of participants. The collected data was imported into SPSS and cross-checked to ensure accuracy.

### **Instrumentation**

The survey was developed after a review of current research, which examined means by which students of poverty are able to successfully graduate from high school. Findings suggest that teacher–student relationships and learning strategies are important factors as to whether low SES students graduate or fail to graduate.

The frequency of employing researched-based learning strategies and teacher–student relationship behaviors was determined through the principal responses to the survey. Participants provided information that assisted in determining the percentage of teachers within their building that were performing the learning strategies and teacher–student relationship actions found within the survey. The scores of each participant were averaged to create a composite score for each building represented in the study. The composite score for learning strategies was obtained by averaging the answers provided by each respondent for Questions 7-19. The composite score for relationships was obtained by averaging the answers provided by each respondent for Questions 20-24. Each composite score was rounded to the nearest

hundredth. The learning strategies composite score (13 questions for learning strategies) and the relationships composite score (five questions for teacher–student relationships) served as a dependent variable for the inferential tests.

### **Method of Analysis**

This study examined whether differences exist among learning strategies and teacher–student relationships based on the schools’ graduation rates within poverty high schools throughout the state of Indiana. Responses from principals of each school were examined and composite scores for each section found within this study were created. The schools’ composite scores for (a) the use of the learning strategies and (b) the teacher–student relationship behaviors are the dependent variables, and the independent variables are graduation rate categories (above 80% non-waiver graduation rate and below 80% non-waiver graduation rate) and school location categories (rural, suburban, or urban). The goal of these tests are to see whether the schools with higher graduation rates have a significant difference in the learning strategies and/or the relationship composite scores than schools not graduating as high of a percentage. The same goes for the other null hypotheses but with the focus on whether the location of the school impacts the scores for the learning strategies and/or the relationship composite scores.

The first research question examined whether there was significant difference between graduation rate categories on the composite relationship score. An independent samples *t* test was used to test the first null hypothesis. This was the appropriate test since the dependent variable (relationship composite score) was being tested for differences based on an independent variable (graduation rate type) with two levels. Research Question 2 examined whether there was a significant difference across school location categories on the composite relationship score. A one-way ANOVA was used, because of having one dependent variable with an

independent variable that has at least three levels (rural, suburban, and urban). If significant difference based on location is determined then a post hoc test was conducted to determine where the difference lies among the three levels. A Tukey's post hoc test was utilized if needed, as long as the assumption of homogeneity of variance had been met. If this assumption was violated, then the Games-Howell post hoc test was utilized since this test did not require equal variances on the dependent variable for each level of the independent variable. The third and fourth null hypotheses were tested in a similar manner as the first two null hypotheses with the only difference being the dependent variable changed from relationships composite score to learning strategies composite score.

The fifth research question examined whether years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal predicted a significant proportion of the variance in the composite relationship score. The criterion variable within this research question was the composite relationship score. Research Question 6 examined whether years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal predicted a significant proportion of the variance in the learning strategies score. The criterion variable within this research question was the learning strategies composite score. Multiple regression tests were utilized for these two nulls due to having multiple predictor variables that attempted to explain a significant proportion of variance within the criterion variable.

If a significant amount of variance could be explained within the criterion variable for either multiple regression test, the unstandardized and standardized partial regression coefficients were examined. For any significant predictor, the unstandardized partial regression coefficient predicts the overall amount of change in the criterion variable when the significant predictor

score is increased by one unit while holding all other predictor variables constant. This process was done for all significant predictor variables. If there was more than one significant predictor found within the model, then the standardized partial regression coefficient was examined since the use of beta weights allowed the overall impact comparisons to be made among different predictor variables that have different levels. Transforming the data into z scores to standardize the scores does this. Ultimately, if there are two or more significant predictors, the beta weights allowed me to rank order them.

### **Summary**

Some indicators associated with low SES have been directly correlated with failure to graduate from high school (Ingrum, 2006). Research asserts the importance of positive teacher-student relationship behaviors as they related to the academic success of low SES students attending high poverty schools. Utilizing learning strategies designed to meet the developmental and educational needs of students of poverty is also essential for academic success as measured by graduation from high school. This study examined research-based findings to achieve a better understanding in the specific area of educating students of poverty in Indiana. The research looked for significance between school performance and location and the survey's composite scores for teacher-student relationship behaviors and learning strategies. This study also provided a descriptive analysis of teacher-student relationships and learning strategies used within schools with high poverty rates throughout Indiana.

Chapter 4 reports the findings of this study and begins with a presentation of descriptive information which will allow the reader to understand the type of sample and level of implementation regarding researched based on teacher-student relationships and learning

strategies. The chapter concludes with the inferential results used to determine whether each null hypothesis should be retained or rejected, along with a brief summary of the findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contributed to higher graduation rates for schools that serve a high percentage of students of poverty. Some factors associated with low SES backgrounds have been directly correlated with failing to graduate from high school (Ingrum, 2006). This study investigated whether the learning strategies of the teaching staff in the high schools surveyed increased the likelihood these students would complete high school in spite of the barriers created by growing up in poverty. This study also explored if positive teacher–student relationship behaviors had an impact on the students’ education and their success as demonstrated by graduating from high school. This study also examined if the locality of the schools had an impact on the implementation of the research-based strategies for learning or building positive teacher-student relationships. This study additionally investigated whether certain principal or school characteristics could explain a significant amount of variance in the composite scores.

To measure the internal reliability of the survey, a Cronbach’s alpha test was conducted for each of the dependent variables within the null hypotheses. The learning strategies were Questions 7 through 19 of the survey. The learning strategies Cronbach’s alpha statistic was .893. Questions 19 through 24 focused on relationships. The relationships Cronbach’s alpha statistic was .768. With both of the Cronbach’s alpha statistics exceeding the recommended level of .7, all null hypotheses were tested within this study.

### **Descriptive Data (Whole Sample)**

Principals of high schools within in the state of Indiana were invited to participate in this study. The high schools involved in the study consisted of a large population of students from poverty determined by qualifying for free or reduce lunch comprising 50% or more of the building. The Indiana Department of Education database was used to obtain the email addresses of principals in the state of Indiana. The email (Appendix A) sent to principals consisted of a brief description of the study along with a link to the survey (Appendix B). Of the 212 high school principals who led buildings that qualified for this study, 68% responded (n = 141). Survey questions 1 through 7 were demographic in nature that asked respondents to provide insight into the characteristics of the principal or school. Questions 8 through 24 of the survey asked the respondent to determine the percentage of teachers displaying instructional strategies. Each of these strategies was founded on the research located in the Chapter 2 literature review. The survey can be found in Appendix B. The questions in this section utilized an 11-point Likert scale from 1 = 0% to 10 = 100%. The respondents choose the response they felt best represented the percentage of their staff currently utilizing these practices.

The descriptive statistics found within this section provide insight regarding the principal and school characteristics. Also, this section provides quantitative evidence of the principals' perceptions of researched based strategies currently being implemented by their staff in the areas of teacher-student relationships and learning strategies. The descriptive data were reported as a whole sample and then the responses were filtered to provide evidence regarding the impact graduation rate type and school locality may have had on the implementation of research-based strategies.

The principals were asked questions that helped describe their own personal characteristics. Of the 141 respondents, 63.8% were male ( $n = 90$ ) and 51 (36.2%) were female, which was reflective of the percentage of male and female principals within Indiana. With regard to the principals' years of experience teaching prior to entering administration, the most frequent response was six to 10 years' experience ( $n = 49$ , 38.8%). It should be noted that 43 (30.5%) of the respondents reported having taught 11-15 years prior to entering into administration. There were 25 (17.7%) respondents who had taught for less than five years and 24 (17.0%) respondents who had taught for 16 years or more before going into administration.

Principals were also asked how long they had held their current positions to assist in better understanding whether they served long enough in the position to establish the learning strategies and relationships they sought within the building. The most frequent response of the principals reporting their time in position from 0-3 years with 62 principals (44%) who fell into this category. This was indicative of high-poverty schools, as principal turnover is often high within these types of buildings. There were 43 principals (31%) who were in their current position for 4-7 years while 23 principals (16%) reported having served from 8-12 years. The fewest number of principals were those having served more than 12 years, with principals (9%) having reported as such.

The survey also asked questions to identify school characteristics such as location and enrollment size. Of the 141 participating schools, 67 (47.5%) were located in urban settings, 64 (45.4%) in rural locations, and the fewest number of schools were situated in suburban areas ( $n = 10$ , 7.1%). Representation based on location is reflective of Indiana schools in general as many suburban schools do not meet the 50% threshold required for participation in the study. With regard to school enrollment sizes, the most frequent responses were 600 or above ( $n = 68$ ,



48.2%) followed by 31 schools (22%) with an enrollment of 251-400 students. There were 27 schools (19.1%) with less than 250 students within the sample. The fewest number respondents reported having enrollment of 401-600 students ( $n = 15$ , 11%).

### **Learning Strategies and Relationships (Whole Sample)**

Principals were asked to report the current instructional choices made by their staff throughout the building. The survey included 13 questions regarding learning strategies' implementation. Each question was linked to empirical research presented in Chapter 2. Principals reported the highest level of implementation within their buildings on the following four learning strategies: collaboration within curricular areas ( $M = 8.51$ ,  $SD = 2.34$ ), peer discussions on instructional strategies ( $M = 7.50$ ,  $SD = 2.37$ ), active engagement within learning by students ( $M = 7.42$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ), and high expectations for learning by teachers ( $M = 7.34$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ). The following three learning strategies were reported as least frequently employed: peer conversations regarding student data ( $M = 6.19$ ,  $SD = 2.40$ ), using assessment results to guide instruction ( $M = 6.51$ ,  $SD = 2.51$ ), and teachers trying new instructional strategies ( $M = 6.54$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ ). The average learning strategies composite score for the entire sample was 7.01 ( $SD = 1.54$ ).

Since there were only five survey questions related to relationships, all the responses are presented from highest to lowest levels of implementation from the sample. Student respect for teachers ( $M = 8.50$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) and teacher/student communication regarding success in learning ( $M = 8.50$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) were rated as the most frequently employed strategies, followed by teachers demonstrating respect for student comments ( $M = 8.35$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ), student passion for learning ( $M = 6.82$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ) and teacher seeking parent participation with their child's

learning ( $M = 5.07$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ). The average relationship composite score for the whole sample was 7.45 ( $SD = 1.29$ ).

### **Descriptive Statistics by Graduation Rate (At or Above 80%)**

The responses were filtered based on the current non-waiver graduation rate for high-poverty schools in the next two sections. The data from schools with at least 80% of the students graduating without a waiver were reported in this section. There were 86 schools (61% of schools in the study) that had graduation rates at or above the 80% threshold. The whole sample reporting found earlier in this chapter, discussed principals' and schools' characteristics.

Within these schools, the most frequent responses for principals' years teaching prior to entering into administration was 11-15 with 30 of the 86 principals reporting as such (34.9%). Of the 86 schools, 48 were rural (55.8%), 32 urban (37.2%), and seven suburban (7%). The vast majority of principals leading these schools were male (80.2%). The most frequent response regarding current time in position was 0-3 years ( $n = 35$ , 40.7%) followed by 4-7 years ( $n = 23$ , 26.7%). Regarding school enrollment levels, a majority of the schools were above 600 students ( $n = 44$ , 51.2%) followed by 251-400 students ( $n = 19$ , 22.1%).

### **Learning Strategies and Relationships (80% or Above Non-Waiver Graduation Rates)**

The learning strategies and relationship questions found included in the survey were examined to measure levels of current implementation in each area. Means and standard deviations for each learning strategies question can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

*Reported Levels of Implementation for Learning Strategies (80% or Above Non-Waiver Graduation Rates)*

Learning Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers trying new strategies	6.44	1.86
Teachers evaluating their instructional effectiveness	6.38	2.72
Linking instruction to student personal experiences	6.97	2.00
Linking instruction to student interests	7.24	1.99
Incorporate rigor within instruction while providing supports needed	7.13	2.14
Teacher collaboration within curricular areas	8.83	2.00
Teacher collaboration across curricular areas	6.87	3.08
Differentiation of instruction based on assessment data	6.31	2.36
Peer collaboration over student achievement data	6.51	2.37
Peer discussions over instructional strategies	7.37	2.29
Peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies	6.85	2.03
High expectations placed on all students	7.45	2.01
Active engagement within lessons by students	7.22	2.13

Of the identified instructional strategies, four areas were the highest, including teacher collaboration within curricular areas, high expectations placed on all students, peer discussions over instructional strategies, and linking instruction to student interests. When comparing this order of implementation levels to the whole sample findings, teacher collaboration within curricular areas was the highest reported level for both. High expectations placed on all students

had the second highest reported score for schools with at least 80% non-waiver graduation rates, but on the whole sample this response was fourth. Peer discussions over instructional strategies were third for schools with at least 80% non-waiver graduation rates, but on the whole sample this response was the second most frequent. Linking instruction to student interests was fourth for these schools, but on the whole sample this researched-based strategy was not among the top four. Active engagement within lessons by students was third on the whole sample responses, but did not make it on the top four list of the schools at or above 80% for non-waiver graduation rate.

When exploring the areas on Table 1 for reported implementation levels by teachers, differentiation of instruction based on assessment data, teachers evaluating their instructional effectiveness, and teachers trying new strategies were rated lowest. Both differentiation of instruction based on assessment data and trying new strategies were on these schools and the whole sample lowest three list. It should be noted that the lowest response on the whole sample, peer collaboration over student achievement data, did not make the lowest three list for schools with at least 80% non-waiver graduation rates. The average learning strategies composite score for these schools was 7.04 ( $SD = 1.63$ ). This was a slight increase from the whole sample average of 7.01.

The questions regarding relationships for students were also explored within schools with at least 80% non-waiver graduation rates. The means and standard deviations for these schools can be found within Table 2.

Table 2

*Reported Levels for Relationships (80% or Above Non-Waiver Graduation Rates)*

Relationship Area	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers demonstrate respect for student comments	8.30	1.67
Students demonstrate respect for their teachers	8.58	1.38
Students are hearing they can be successful in learning from teachers	8.56	1.30
Students demonstrate passion for learning	7.33	1.62
Teachers actively seek out parent participation	5.26	2.09

When examining the relationship questions for schools with at least 80% non-waiver graduation rates, it was evident the scores on relationships were higher for these schools than the whole sample results on four out of five questions. The only question for which the average score was lower for these schools was teachers demonstrate respect for student comments with a mean difference of -.05. The other four areas had higher reported responses than the whole sample. The average relationship composite score for schools with at least 80% non-waiver graduation rate was 7.60 ( $SD = 1.27$ ). This is higher than the whole sample average relationships composite score of 7.45.

### **Descriptive Statistics by Graduation Rate (Below 80%)**

The responses were filtered based on the current non-waiver graduation rate for these high poverty schools in the next two sections. The data from schools with non-waiver graduation rates below 80% were reported in this section. There were 55 schools (39%) that had graduation rates below the 80% threshold. Within these schools, the most frequent response for

principals regarding years of teaching experience prior to entering administration was 6-10 with 23 of the 55 principals falling into this category (41.8%). The second most common reported response was 11-15 years (23.6%). It should be noted, this was the same top two as the whole sample. Within the 55 schools, there were 16 rural (29.1%), 35 urban (63.6%), and four suburban (7.3%). The data regarding this showed a higher percentage of the schools below 80% non-waiver graduation rates from the urban areas when compared to the whole sample, which then resulted in lower percentage of schools from the rural areas. Results from suburban schools remained consistent with the whole sample. There was a higher percentage of females (61.8%) leading these schools then males (38.2%). The female percentage was almost double what was reported in the whole sample.

The most frequent response regarding current time in position was 0-3 years ( $n = 27$ , 49.1%) followed by 4-7 years ( $n = 20$ , 36.4%). The percentages for each group were similar and followed the same order as the whole sample. With regard to school enrollment levels, the most frequent response for the schools was above 600 students ( $n = 24$ , 43.6%) followed by less than 250 students ( $n = 16$ , 29.1%). The percentages for each group were similar but the order was slightly different than the whole sample, as the less than 250 students was not the second most frequent response on the whole sample (3<sup>rd</sup>).

### **Learning Strategies and Relationships (Below 80% Non-Waiver Graduation Rates)**

The learning strategies and relationship questions found within the survey were examined to determine the current implementation levels of each area for these schools. The mean and standard deviations for each learning strategies question can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

*Reported Levels of Implementation for Learning Strategies (Below 80% Non-Waiver Graduation Rates)*

Learning Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers trying new strategies	6.71	2.60
Teachers evaluating their instructional effectiveness	7.16	2.03
Linking instruction to student personal experiences	6.91	2.04
Linking instruction to student interests	5.96	1.71
Incorporate rigor within instruction while providing supports needed	6.80	2.15
Teacher collaboration within curricular areas	8.02	2.75
Teacher collaboration across curricular areas	6.35	3.62
Differentiation of instruction based on assessment data	6.82	2.73
Peer collaboration over student achievement data	5.69	2.39
Peer discussions over instructional strategies	7.71	2.51
Peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies	7.42	2.59
High expectations placed on all students	7.16	2.15
Active engagement within lessons by students	7.73	1.59

When examining the reported levels of implementation regarding instructional strategies, the following four areas were the highest a) teacher collaboration within curricular areas, b) active engagement within lessons by students, c) peer discussions over instructional strategies,

and d) peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies. When comparing this order of implementation levels to the whole sample findings, teacher collaboration within curricular areas was the highest reported level for both. Active engagement in lessons by students was second for schools below 80% non-waiver graduation rates, but on the whole sample this response was third. Peer discussions over instructional strategies had the third highest score for schools below 80% non-waiver graduation rates, but on the whole sample this response was higher and rated as second. Peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies had the fourth highest score for these schools, but on the whole sample this researched-based strategy was not among the top four. High expectations placed on all students was fourth on the whole sample responses but was not among the highest-rated four of schools below 80% for non-waiver graduation rate.

When exploring the areas on Table 3 for reported implementation levels by teachers, the three areas rated as lowest included (a) peer collaboration over student achievement data, (b) linking instruction to student interests, and (c) teacher collaboration across curricular areas. Peer collaboration over student achievement data was the lowest for schools below 80% non-waiver graduation rate and the whole sample. Linking instruction to student interests and teacher collaboration across curricular areas were the second and third lowest reported implementation levels for schools below 80%, but these were not among the lowest three areas on the whole sample reported responses. Differentiation of instruction based on assessment data and teachers trying new strategies were second and third on the whole sample reported responses, but were not among the lowest three for schools below the 80% non-waiver graduation rate. The average learning strategies composite score for these schools was 6.96 ( $SD = 1.41$ ). This was a slight decrease from the whole sample average of 7.01.



The questions regarding the relationships for students were also explored within schools below 80% non-waiver graduation rates. The means and standard deviations for these schools can be found within Table 4.

Table 4

*Reported Levels for Relationship (Below 80% Non-Waiver Graduation Rates)*

Relationship Area	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers demonstrate respect for student comments	8.43	1.52
Students demonstrate respect for their teachers	8.36	1.77
Students are hearing they can be successful in learning from teachers	8.40	2.02
Students demonstrate passion for learning	6.04	2.18
Teachers actively seek out parent participation	4.78	2.24

When examining the relationship questions for schools below 80% non-waiver graduation rates, it was evident the scores on relationships were lower for these schools than the whole sample results on four out of five questions. The only question for which the average score was higher for these schools was teachers demonstrate respect for student comments, with a mean difference of .09. The other four areas had lower reported responses than the whole sample. Students demonstrate passion for learning had the largest mean difference with a -.78 decrease from the whole sample. The average relationship composite score for schools with at least 80% non-wavier graduation rate was 7.20 (*SD* = 1.27). This was lower than the whole sample average relationships composite score of 7.45.

### **Descriptive Statistics by Location (Rural)**

The responses were filtered for high poverty schools in the next three sections based on location type. The data from rural schools were reported in this section. There were 64 schools (45.4%) that were located in rural areas. Within these schools, the most frequent response for principals regarding years teaching prior to entering into administration was 11-15 with 22 of the 64 principals in this category (34.4%). The second most common reported response was 6-10 years with 18 principals (28.1%). It should be noted these two responses are in the opposite order for the whole sample. There was a higher percentage of males (90.6%) leading these schools than females (9.4%). The female percentage was about one-fourth of what was reported in the whole sample. The most frequent response regarding current time in position was 0-3 years ( $n = 29$ , 45.3%) followed by 4-7 years ( $n = 19$ , 29.7%). The percentages for each group were similar and followed the same order as the whole sample.

### **Learning Strategies and Relationships (Rural Schools)**

The learning strategies and relationship questions found within the survey were examined to examine the current implementation levels of each area for these rural schools. The mean and standard deviations for each learning strategies question are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Reported Levels of Implementation for Learning Strategies (Rural Schools)*

Learning Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers trying new strategies	6.31	2.14
Teachers evaluating their instructional effectiveness	6.66	2.53
Linking instruction to student personal experiences	7.02	2.30
Linking instruction to student interests	6.22	2.24
Incorporate rigor within instruction while providing supports needed	6.83	2.43
Teacher collaboration within curricular areas	8.44	2.46
Teacher collaboration across curricular areas	6.58	3.12
Differentiation of instruction based on assessment data	6.08	2.80
Peer collaboration over student achievement data	6.59	2.80
Peer discussions over instructional strategies	7.27	2.43
Peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies	6.95	2.52
High expectations placed on all students	7.42	2.15
Active engagement within lessons by students	7.23	2.16

When examining the reported levels of implementation regarding instructional strategies, the four areas reported as highest included (a) teacher collaboration within curricular areas, (b) high expectations placed on all students, (c) peer discussions over instructional strategies, and (d) active engagement within lessons by students. When comparing this order of implementation level to the whole sample findings, teacher collaboration within curricular areas was the highest

reported level for both. High expectations placed on all students had the second highest score for rural schools, but on the whole sample this response was fourth. Peer discussions over instructional strategies had the third highest score for rural schools, but on the whole sample this area was rated as second. Active engagement within lessons by students was fourth for these schools, but on the whole sample this researched-based strategy was third.

Table 5 presents implementation levels by teachers, which were report as lowest in (a) differentiation of instruction based on assessment data, (b) linking instruction to student interests, and (c) teachers trying new strategies. Differentiation of instruction was lowest for rural schools and was second lowest for the whole sample. Linking instruction to student interests was the second lowest for the rural schools but was not in the lowest three for the whole sample. Teachers trying new strategies was the third lowest for rural schools but was the second lowest for the whole sample. Peer collaboration over student achievement data was lowest on the whole sample results but not in the lowest three areas for rural schools. The average learning strategies composite score for rural schools was 6.89 ( $SD = 1.41$ ). This was a slight decrease from the whole sample average of 7.01.

The questions regarding relationships for students were also explored within rural schools. The means and standard deviations for these schools are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

*Reported Levels for Relationships (Rural Schools)*

Relationship Area	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers demonstrate respect for student comments	8.45	1.22
Students demonstrate respect for their teachers	8.79	1.26
Students are hearing they can be successful in learning from teachers	8.66	1.18
Students demonstrate passion for learning	6.83	2.22
Teachers actively seek out parent participation	5.20	2.40

When examining the relationship questions for rural schools, it was evident the scores for relationships were higher for these schools than the whole sample results of all five questions. The largest mean difference increase was on students demonstrating respect for their teachers, followed by students are hearing they can be successful in learning from teachers. The average relationship composite score for rural schools was 7.59 ( $SD = 1.27$ ). This was higher than the whole sample average relationships composite score of 7.45.

**Descriptive Statistics by Location (Suburban)**

The data from suburban schools were reported in this section. There were 10 schools (7.1%) located in suburban areas. Within these schools, the most frequent response for principals regarding years' teaching prior to entering into administration was 11-15 with seven of the 10 principals placing in this category (70%). The second most common reported response was less than five years with three principals (30%) reporting as such. No principals in the

suburban category reported having either 6-10 or 16+ years' experience. All 10 principals from the suburban schools were males who reported having between eight to 12 years' experience.

### **Learning Strategies and Relationships (Suburban Schools)**

The learning strategies and relationship questions were examined to determine current implementation levels of each area for these suburban schools. The mean and standard deviations for each learning strategies question are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

#### *Reported Levels of Implementation for Learning Strategies (Suburban Schools)*

Learning Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers trying new strategies	5.90	1.10
Teachers evaluating their instructional effectiveness	5.90	2.38
Linking instruction to student personal experiences	7.20	1.75
Linking instruction to student interests	7.10	1.73
Incorporate rigor within instruction while providing supports needed	7.10	1.73
Teacher collaboration within curricular areas	9.10	.32
Teacher collaboration across curricular areas	6.60	2.59
Differentiation of instruction based on assessment data	7.30	1.57
Peer collaboration over student achievement data	6.00	2.11
Peer discussions over instructional strategies	6.80	2.57
Peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies	7.30	1.83
High expectations placed on all students	7.80	.92
Active engagement within lessons by students	7.90	.88

When examining the reported levels of implementation regarding instructional strategies, the questions reported to be highest included a) teacher collaboration within curricular areas, b) active engagement within lessons by students, c) high expectations placed on all students, and d) peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies. When comparing this order of implementation levels to the whole sample findings, teacher collaboration within curricular areas was the highest reported level for both. Active engagement within lessons by students was second for suburban schools, but was third for the whole sample. High expectations placed on all students had the third highest score for suburban schools, but was fourth for the whole sample. Peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies had the fourth highest score for these schools, but on the whole sample this researched-based strategy was not in the top three areas.

When exploring the areas on Table 7 for reported implementation levels by teachers, the three areas were rated the lowest included a) teachers trying new strategies, b) teachers evaluating their instructional effectiveness, and c) peer collaboration over student achievement data. Teachers trying new strategies were the same for the lowest of suburban schools, but had the third lowest for the whole sample. Teachers evaluating their instructional effectiveness were the same for the lowest for the suburban schools but this area was not among the lowest three for the whole sample. Peer collaboration over student achievement data was the third lowest for suburban schools, but was lowest for the whole sample. Differentiation of instruction based on assessment data was the second lowest on the whole sample results, but was not among the lowest three areas for suburban schools. The average learning strategies composite score for suburban schools was 7.08 ( $SD = 1.40$ ). This is a slight increase from the whole sample average of 7.01.

The questions regarding the relationships for students were also explored within suburban schools. The means and standard deviations for these schools are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Reported Levels for Relationships (Suburban Schools)*

Relationship Area	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers demonstrate respect for student comments	9.00	.00
Students demonstrate respect for their teachers	8.70	1.06
Students are hearing they can be successful in learning from teachers	8.60	1.07
Students demonstrate passion for learning	7.10	1.52
Teachers actively seek out parent participation	6.10	1.97

When examining the relationship questions for suburban schools, the scores on relationships were higher for these schools than the whole sample results on all five questions. The largest mean difference increase was on teachers actively seek out parent participation, followed by teachers demonstrate respect for student comments. Teachers actively seeking parent participation was one of the three questions with the lowest mean scores for the whole sample. The average relationship composite score for suburban schools was 8.80 ( $SD = .81$ ). This was higher than the whole sample average relationships composite score of 7.45.

**Descriptive Statistics by Location (Urban)**

The data from urban schools are presented in this section. There were 67 schools (47.5%) that were located in urban areas. Within these schools, the most frequent response for principals regarding years teaching prior to entering into administration was 6-10, with 31 of the



67 principals (46.3%) reporting that number of years' experience. The second most commonly reported response with 14 principals reporting to have had 11-15 years' experience (20.9%). It should be noted that these two responses were in the same order as the whole sample. There was a higher percentage of females (67.2%) leading these schools than males (32.8%). The female percentage was almost double what was reported in the whole sample. The most frequent response regarding current time in position was 0-3 years ( $n = 33$ , 49.3%) followed by 4-7 years ( $n = 24$ , 35.8%). The percentages for each group were similar and followed the same order as the whole sample.

### **Learning Strategies and Relationships (Urban Schools)**

The learning strategies and relationship questions found within the survey were examined to see the current implementation levels of each area for these urban schools. The mean and standard deviations for each learning strategies question are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

*Reported Levels of Implementation for Learning Strategies (Urban Schools)*

<i>Learning Strategy</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers trying new strategies	6.87	2.30
Teachers evaluating their instructional effectiveness	6.84	2.49
Linking instruction to student personal experiences	6.84	1.75
Linking instruction to student interests	7.19	1.64
Incorporate rigor within instruction while providing supports needed	7.15	1.91
Teacher collaboration within curricular areas	8.49	2.41
Teacher collaboration across curricular areas	6.76	3.58
Differentiation of instruction based on assessment data	6.81	2.29
Peer collaboration over student achievement data	5.84	1.96
Peer discussions over instructional strategies	7.84	2.28
Peer discussions over effectiveness of instructional strategies	7.15	2.10
High expectations placed on all students	7.19	2.11
Active engagement within lessons by students	7.52	1.85

When examining the reported levels of implementation regarding instructional strategies, the four areas of (a) teacher collaboration within curricular areas, (b) peer discussions over instructional strategies, (c) active engagement within lessons by students, and (d) high expectations placed on all students were reported as being highest. When comparing the order of implementation levels to the whole sample findings, the same order was present. Table 9

presents results for reported implementation levels by teachers, with (a) peer collaboration over student achievement data, (b) teacher collaboration across curricular areas, and (c) differentiation of instruction based on assessment data reported as lowest. Peer collaboration over student achievement data was the lowest for both urban schools and the whole sample. Teacher collaboration across curricular areas was reported as the second lowest for the urban schools but was not among the lowest three for the whole sample. Differentiation of instruction based on assessment data was the third lowest for urban schools and was the second lowest for the whole sample. Teachers trying new strategies had the third lowest on the whole sample results but not among the lowest three areas for urban schools. The average learning strategies composite score for rural schools was 7.11 ( $SD = 1.33$ ). This is a slight increase from the whole sample average of 7.01.

The questions regarding the relationships for students were also explored within urban schools. The means and standard deviations for these schools are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

*Reported Levels for Relationships (Urban Schools)*

Relationship Area	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers demonstrate respect for student comments	8.16	2.00
Students demonstrate respect for their teachers	8.18	1.78
Students are hearing they can be successful in learning from teachers	8.33	2.00
Students demonstrate passion for learning	6.78	1.76
Teachers actively seek out parent participation	4.79	1.90

The scores for urban schools were lower than the whole sample results on all five questions. The largest mean difference was for students demonstrating respect for their teachers, followed by teachers actively seek out parent participation. The average relationship composite score for rural schools was 7.25 ( $SD = 1.36$ ). This was lower than the whole sample average relationships composite score of 7.45.

### **Findings and Analysis of Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were examined and tested throughout the remaining portion of this chapter:

H<sub>01</sub>. There is no significant difference between graduation rate categories on the composite relationship score.

H<sub>02</sub>. There is no significant difference across school location categories on the composite relationship score.

H<sub>03</sub>. There is no significant difference between graduation rate categories on the learning strategies composite score.

H<sub>04</sub>. There is no significant difference across school location categories on the learning strategies composite score.

H<sub>05</sub>. Years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal do not predict a significant proportion of the variance in the composite relationship score.

H<sub>06</sub>. Years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal do not predict a significant proportion of the variance in the learning strategies composite score.

## Hypotheses Testing

The mean, standard deviation, and mean scores were included in the statistical analysis of the data. The first and third null hypotheses used an independent samples  $t$  test as differences on one dependent variable were being examined for two groups. The second and fourth null hypotheses used a one-way ANOVA to evaluate the null hypotheses as difference on one dependent variable were being examined for at three groups. The fifth and sixth null hypotheses were tested with multiple regression tests to identify whether any significant predictor among the predictor variables existed for the criterion variables. Multiple regression was needed due to having more than one predictor variable attempting to predict a significant amount of variance within the criterion variable.

### **H<sub>01</sub>: Relationships Composite Score Based on Graduation Rate**

An independent-samples  $t$  test was conducted to compare teacher–student relationships in high poverty schools with non-waiver graduation rates at or above 80% and non-waiver graduation rates below 80%. This test was utilized to determine whether significant differences for the dependent variable (composite relationship score) existed between these two school groups.

The assumptions for the independent sample  $t$  test were tested to insure the findings were appropriate. The assumption of independence was met because none of the dependent variable scores were found in more than one group. The Levene's test of equality of variances was used to test whether the variances for both groups on the dependent variable were equal to one other. The Levene's test yielded a non-significant result,  $F(139) = .919, p = .340$ . Since the significance level of the Levene's test was greater than .05, the assumption for homogeneity of variance was met. The assumption of normality was used to verify that each sample was

normally distributed through use of the Shapiro-Wilk test revealing that the assumption of normality was met,  $p > .05$ . An examination of the data was conducted to identify any data points that might impact the inferential results. No outliers were present in the relationship composite scores for either condition as the scores on the dependent variable were within 1.5 standard deviations from the edge of the box plots.

There was no significant difference in relationship composite scores between schools with a graduation rate at or above 80% ( $M = 7.60$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) and schools with a graduation rate below than 80% ( $M = 7.20$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) with  $t(139) = 1.81$ ,  $p = 0.072$ , two-tailed. Based on these results, the null hypothesis was retained and the positive teacher-student relationship attributes identified in the survey tool are not significantly different among the two school types.

### **H<sub>02</sub>: Relationships Composite Score Based on Location Type**

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether significant differences of teacher–student relationships composite score existed among the rural, suburban, and urban settings. The independent variable represented the three different types of school locations: rural, suburban, and urban. The dependent variable was the teacher–student relationship composite score.

The assumptions for one-way ANOVA were tested to insure the findings were appropriate. The assumption of independence was met because each type of school location was exclusive of the remaining two. The Levene’s test of equality of variances was used to verify that variances within the groups on the dependent variable were equal to one other. The Levene’s test yielded a non-significant result,  $F(2, 138) = 2.36$ ,  $p = .098$ . Since the significance level of the Levene’s test was greater than .05, the assumption for homogeneity of variance was met. The assumption of normality was used to verify that each sample is normally distributed.

The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to test the assumption of normality. The assumption for normality was met,  $p > .05$ . No outliers were present in the relationship composite scores for any condition as the scores on the dependent variable were within 1.5 standard deviations from the edge of the box plots.

There was no significant difference among schools in rural ( $M = 7.59, SD = 1.25$ ), suburban ( $M = 7.90, SD = .81$ ), and urban ( $M = 7.25, SD = 1.36$ ) schools on teacher–student relationships composite score. This was evident with the one-way ANOVA result,  $F(2, 138) = 1.81, p = .167$ . Based on these results, the null hypothesis was retained and the participating schools did not show significant differences based on location type on the relationships composite score.

### **H<sub>03</sub>: Learning Strategies Composite Score Based on Graduation Rate**

An independent samples  $t$  test was conducted to compare learning strategies being implemented in high poverty schools with non-waiver graduation rates at or above 80% and non-waiver graduation rates below 80%. This test is used to determine whether significant differences for the dependent variable (learning style composite score) existed between the two groups.

The assumptions for the independent sample  $t$  test were tested to insure the findings were appropriate. The assumption of independence was met because each dependent variable score was found in only one group. The Levene's test of equality of variances was used to test whether the variances for both groups on the dependent variable were equal to each other. The Levene's test yielded a non-significant result,  $F(139) = 1.843, p = .177$ . Since the significance level of the Levene's test was greater than .05, the assumption for homogeneity of variance was met. The assumption of normality was used to verify that each sample was normally distributed.

The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to test the assumption of normality, and the assumption of normality was met,  $p > .05$ . The detection of outliers was done to identify any data points that might impact the inferential results. No outliers were present in the learning strategies composite scores for either condition as the scores on the dependent variable were within 1.5 standard deviations from the edge of the box plots.

There was no significant difference in learning strategies composite scores between schools with a graduation rate at or above 80% ( $M = 7.04$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ) and schools with a graduation rate below than 80% ( $M = 6.96$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) with  $t(139) = .329$ ,  $p = .743$ , two-tailed. Based on these results, the null hypothesis was retained and the learning strategies attributes identified in the survey tool are not significantly different among the two school types.

#### **H<sub>04</sub>: Learning Strategies Composite Score Based on Location Type**

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether significant differences on the learning strategies composite score existed among the rural, suburban, and urban settings. The independent variable represented the three different types of school locations, including rural, suburban, and urban. The dependent variable was the learning strategies composite score.

The assumptions for one-way ANOVA were tested to insure the findings were appropriate. The assumption of independence was met because each type of school location was exclusive of the remaining two. The Levene's test of equality of variances was used to verify that variances within the groups on the dependent variable were equal to one other. The Levene's test yielded a significant result,  $F(2, 138) = 4.631$ ,  $p = .011$ . Since the significance level of the Levene's test was less than .05, the assumption for homogeneity of variance had been violated. The one-way ANOVA test was robust to violations of the assumption of homogeneity, and if the results of the one-way ANOVA were significant, a post hoc test that did



not require equal variances assumed was utilized. The assumption of normality was used to verify that each sample was normally distributed. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to test the assumption of normality. The assumption for normality was met,  $p > .05$ . The detection of outliers was done to identify any data points that might impact the inferential results. No outliers were present in the learning strategies composite scores for any condition as the scores on this dependent variable were within 1.5 standard deviations from the edge of the box plots.

There was not a significant difference among schools in rural ( $M = 6.89, SD = 1.77$ ), suburban ( $M = 7.08, SD = 1.40$ ), and urban ( $M = 7.11, SD = 1.33$ ) on learning strategies composite score. This was evident with the one-way ANOVA result,  $F(2, 138) = .345, p = .709$ . Based on these results, the null hypothesis was retained and the participating schools did not have significant differences based on location for the learning strategies composite score.

#### **H<sub>05</sub>: Testing for Significant Predictors of the Relationships Composite Score**

The stepwise multiple regression test was performed to determine if years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal could explain a significant amount of the variance in the relationships composite score. If significant, then a prediction equation can be generated to allow one to predict the criterion variable score based on knowing the significant predictors values.

Multiple regression assumptions were examined to verify that the data yielded accurate predictors. The independence of residuals assumption was examined using the Durbin-Watson test to verify that there was no correlation between the residuals within the model. The Durbin-Watson value can range from 0 to 4; any correlation between the residuals decreases as this value approaches 2. The Durbin-Watson score in this analysis was 2.032 thus the assumption was met.

The assumption of linearity was tested to ensure a linear relationship existed between the criterion variable and each of the predictor variables, as well as collectively. Linearity was verified by visual inspection of scatterplots and partial regression plots and this assumption was met with evidence to support the linear relationship of the criterion variable and predictor variables.

The assumption of homoscedasticity was examined to verify the residuals were equivalent for all of the predicted values of the criterion variable. The variance was tested using the plot of studentized residuals against the unstandardized predicted values. The spread of the data values did not increase or decrease as the predicted value increased thus the assumption was met.

Multicollinearity was examined to verify the predictor variables were not too strongly correlated to determine which predictor variable explained the variance within the criterion variable. The levels of tolerance for the predictor variables years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal were above 0.2, and as such, the assumption was met.

Standardized residuals were examined to validate that there were no significant outliers, high leverage points, or highly influential data points. No standardized residuals fell outside of + or - 1.5 standard deviation from the edge of the box plots; therefore, this assumption was met. Normality of residuals was examined to verify the residuals were approximately normally distributed using the normal p-p plot of regression standardized residual. The residuals were aligned with the diagonal line on the normal p-p plot of regression standardized residual so the assumption was met.

The predictor variables have a small relationship to the criterion variable with the multiple correlation coefficient value of .149. The amount of variance explained in the criterion variable by the set of predictor variables is 2.2%. This explained variance was non-existent when the sample size and number of predictors allowed for adjustment. This was done in order to provide a more conservative figure of the explained variance. The average residual distance from the prediction line was 1.3.

The multiple regression test results revealed that predicted values of the relationships composite score cannot be significantly determined based on the values of years in current position, current enrollment, years teaching prior to administration, gender, and school location. These variables did not serve as significant predictors of the relationship composite score,  $F(5, 135) = .615, p = 0.689$ . Based on these results, the null hypothesis was retained.

#### **H<sub>06</sub>: Testing for Significant Predictors of the Relationships Composite Score**

The stepwise multiple regression test was performed to determine if years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal could explain a significant amount of the variance in the learning strategies composite score. If significant, then a prediction equation could be generated to allow one to predict the criterion variable score based on knowing the significant predictors' values.

Multiple regression assumptions were examined to verify the data yielded accurate predictors. The independence of residuals assumption was examined using the Durbin-Watson test to verify that there was no correlation between the residuals within the model. The Durbin-Watson value can range from 0 – 4; any correlation between the residuals decreases as the value approaches 2. The Durbin-Watson score in this analysis was 2.29; therefore, the assumption was met.

The assumption of linearity was tested to ensure that a linear relationship existed between the criterion variable and each of the predictor variables as well as collectively. Linearity was verified by visual inspection of scatterplots and partial regression plots, and this assumption was met with evidence to support the linear relationship of the criterion variable and predictor variables.

The assumption of homoscedasticity was examined to verify the residuals were equivalent for all of the predicted values of the criterion variable. The variance was tested using the plot of studentized residuals against the unstandardized predicted values. The spread of the data values did not increase or decrease as the predicted value increased so the assumption was met.

Multicollinearity was examined to verify the predictor variables were not too strongly correlated to determine which predictor variable explained the variance within the criterion variable. The levels of tolerance for the predictor variables years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal were above 0.2 so the assumption was met.

Standardized residuals were examined to identify significant outliers, high leverage points, or highly influential data points. No standardized residuals fell outside of + or - 1.5 standard deviation from the edge of the box plots so this assumption was met. Normality of residuals was examined to verify the residuals are approximately normally distributed using the normal p-p plot of regression standardized residual. The residuals were aligned with the diagonal line on the normal p-p plot of regression standardized residual so, the assumption was met.

The predictor variables had a medium relationship with the criterion variable with the multiple correlation coefficient value of .348. The amount of variance explained in the criterion variable by the set of predictor variables was 12.1%. This explained variance was reduced when the sample size and number of predictors were considered (8.8%). This was done in order to provide a more conservative figure of the explained variance. The 3.3% decrease in explained variance for the criterion variable was the shrinkage within the model. The average residual distance from the prediction line was 1.47.

The multiple regression test results revealed that predicted values of the learning strategies composite score could be significantly determined based on at least one of the predictor variables. At least one of the predictor variables did serve as a significant predictor of the learning strategies composite score,  $F(5, 135) = 3.712, p = .004$ .

To determine if the predictor variables were significant predictors of the learning strategies composite score, the coefficients output were examined. The following variables served as significant predictors of the learning strategies composite score: years teaching prior to going into administration and school enrollment size. The years teaching prior to going into administration for the principal was significant,  $t = -2.885, p = .005$ . The school enrollment was a significant predictor,  $t = -2.665, p = .009$ . Due to having these two variables on different metrics,  $z$ -scores have to be calculated in order to rank these significant predictors on overall impact on the learning strategies composite score. By examining the standardized partial regression coefficient, the years teaching prior to going into administration ( $\beta = -.255$ ) has a larger impact on the learning strategies composite scores than school enrollment ( $\beta = -.237$ ).

The unstandardized partial regression coefficients allow one insight into the predicted impact on the learning strategies composite score when a significant predictor is increased by

one-unit and all other predictor variables are held constant. The predicted value of the learning strategies composite score was 8.60 when the values of the predictor variables were zero. The predicted change in the learning strategies composite score when a principal has one additional unit of teaching prior to entering the field of administration was expected to decrease by .403 while all other predictor variables were held constant. It was important to note that this was a categorical variable so this change would mean moving from less than five years to 6-10 years, and so on. The predicted change in the learning strategies composite score when the school enrollment was increased by one level was expected to decrease by .303 while all other predictor variables were held constant. It is important to note that this was a categorical variable so this change would mean moving from less than 250 students to 251-400 students, and so on.

### **Findings Based on Inferential Statistics**

Based on the aforementioned data, the following determinations were made.

- There was no significant difference on the relationships composite score among high poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate at or above 80% and poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate below 80%.
- There was no significant difference in the relationships composite score between high poverty schools in rural, suburban, and urban locations.
- There was no significant difference on the learning strategies composite score among high poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate at or above 80% and poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate below 80%.
- There was no significant difference in the learning strategies composite score between high poverty schools in rural, suburban, and urban locations.

- The participants' years in current position, current enrollment, years teaching prior to administration, gender, and school location did not serve as predictors of relationships composite score.
- The participants' years in current position, gender, and school location did not serve as predictors of the learning strategies composite score. The current enrollment of the school and years teaching prior to an administrative position were statistically significant predictors of the learning strategies in the survey tool.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Chapter 5 of this study consists of four sections including a summary, results, implications and recommendations, and areas of further research. The summary section presents the purpose of the study and a review of the research questions. A summary of the data in Chapter 4 is provided in the results section. The implications and recommendations section analyzes the results and provides recommendations based on the findings. Suggestions for research which could further develop aspects of this study are included in the areas of further research section.

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contributed to higher graduation rates for schools that serve a high percentage of students of poverty. The research examined whether or not actions of the teaching staff could urge students to complete high school in spite of barriers related to poverty. This study explored the impact of implementation research-based strategies for relationships and learning on non-waivered graduation rates by school type and location. Collected data were analyzed to determine whether certain principal or school characteristics were predictive of the use of the strategies being examined. This study addressed the following questions:



1. Is there significant difference between graduation rate categories on the composite relationship score?
2. Is there significant difference across school location categories on the composite relationship score?
3. Is there significant difference between graduation rate categories on the learning style composite score?
4. Is there significant difference across school location categories on the learning strategies composite score?
5. Do years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal predict a significant proportion of the variance in the composite relationship score?
6. Do years teaching prior to an administrative position, gender of principal, enrollment size, and years as principal predict a significant proportion of the variance in the learning strategies composite score?

### **Results**

The highest mean scores for the whole sample were for teacher collaboration within curricular areas, students demonstrating respect for teachers, teachers communicating they believe their students could be successful learners, and teachers demonstrating respect for what students have to say. The three lowest mean scores relating to learning strategies in the whole sample were for teachers who actively sought opportunities to review student assessment data with other teachers to guide educational decisions, teachers who use assessments as a guide to adapt instructional strategies, and teachers who consistently try new instructional strategies. Teachers actively seeking opportunities to review student assessment data with other teachers

occurred slightly more frequently in the low-performing schools than the high-performing schools; this strategy had the lowest learning strategy mean score in urban schools and was among the lowest three learning strategies for suburban schools. It was not among the lowest three learning scores in rural school locations. The lowest mean score for the whole sample was for teachers who actively sought out parental participation within the learning process. High-performing schools had higher mean scores than low-performing schools for four out of the five relationship attributes. Teachers demonstrating respect for what students had to say had a slightly higher score in low performing schools.

Rural schools exceeded the mean relationship scores of the whole sample by the greatest amount for the three indicators of personal interaction, namely, (a) the percentage of students who demonstrate respect for their teachers, (b) the percentage of teachers who communicate to students they can be successful, and (c) the percentage of teachers who demonstrate respect for what students have to say.

The three highest mean scores for suburban schools were for (a) the percentage of teachers who collaborate within curricular areas, (b) the percentage of teachers who demonstrate respect for what students have to say, and (c) the percentage of students who demonstrate respect for teachers. The lowest mean scores in the suburban school survey group were tied for the percentage of teachers who consistently evaluate their effectiveness and the percentage of teachers who consistently try new instructional strategies. Suburban school locations mean scores exceeded the whole sample mean scores to the greatest extent in the responses to two of the three questions with the lowest means for the whole sample (the percentage teachers who actively seek parental participation and the percentage of teachers who utilize ongoing assessment in the classroom).

There was no significant difference on the relationships composite score among high-poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate at or above 80% and poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate below 80%. There was no significant difference in the relationships composite score between high-poverty schools in rural, suburban, and urban locations. There was no significant difference on the learning strategies composite score among high-poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate at or above 80% and poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate below 80%. There was no significant difference in the learning strategies composite score between high-poverty schools in rural, suburban, and urban locations.

The participants' years in current position, current enrollment, years teaching prior to administration, gender, and school location did not serve as predictors of relationships composite score. The participants' years in current position, gender, and school location did not serve as predictors of the learning strategies composite score. The current enrollment of the school and years teaching prior to an administrative position were statistically significant predictors of the learning strategies in the survey tool.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The most highly rated responses in the whole sample under learning strategies were centered on teacher collaboration and student engagement. Routine collaboration within a curricular sphere was characteristic of teachers in high schools who strived to achieve educational success for their students (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). In the schools that participated in the survey, it appeared that teachers tended to view one other as resources. It was through collaboration that teachers were willing to learn new techniques for reaching students, when strategies were discussed, and when results were shared. Faculty

members who were collaborative in their values, ideals, expectations, team work, and dialogue about problems of practice strengthen and improve each other (Graham, 2007).

A productive learning environment is comprised of educators who perceive the needs of the students, convey respect, and impart recognition for diligence (Salend, 2011). The schools surveyed appeared to have teachers who believed their students could make a positive contribution to learning. It is important for students of poverty to feel they are able to contribute to the learning process of the classroom and perceive that their opinions and experiences are valued (Pratt-Ronco, 2009). When listening to a student, it is imperative to carefully analyze for meaning and understanding. This validates to the learner a trusting relationship between teachers and students through the use of dialogue. It also has a positive impact on the self-esteem of the learners by showing them regard for what they express (Allington & Johnston, 2000). A learning environment needs to exhibit a sense of acceptance and awareness for the students' individualities. Students knowing they are a welcomed part of the learning experience and understand what they have to contribute to the classroom is a valuable part of the learning process (Gehrke, 2005).

The lowest-rated responses on the survey were related to teachers actively seeking opportunities to review assessment data with other teachers to guide educational decisions and the use of assessments as a guide to adapting instructional strategies. This may reflect fewer resources to teach and implement the use of data or a perception that assessments would not be meaningful as a way to enhance academic success in the classroom. Teachers may not be familiar with new instructional strategies, may not perceive that changing strategies will have positive impact on academic success, or believe that their instructional strategies make any contribution to academic failure. Annual data from statewide testing may not specifically

provide adequate information to the teachers which could contribute to improving student learning. The assessment of student learning for the purpose of improving instruction is a fundamental basis of effective teaching (Bulger, Mohr, & Walls, 2002). Teachers must formally, informally, formatively, and summatively assess their students on a continual basis to determine each student's individualized progress. Teachers have traditionally used information to determine the growth or lack of growth of their students and to check for knowledge about objectives (Bulger et al., 2002). Effective teachers actively monitor, adjust, assess and update their teaching strategies, and examine their objectives as they reflect and modify their actions accordingly (Bulger et al., 2002). Teachers may need to be better educated on the different resources available for assessing students as well how to evaluate the data accurately and effectively.

The relationship areas of the survey showed higher scores with respect to teacher–student interactions such as two-way respect and conversations regarding student success, but this does not appear to have led to a passion for the students to learn. It is possible that teachers in the participating schools may find too much of their time is devoted to personal interactions and disciplinary responses and not enough on academics. Some teachers may be unaware of the ineffectiveness of some types of positive relationship behavior on academic success. For many students of poverty, home environments may be a barrier to learning if they are not conducive to study and completing homework. It may be useful to create a time for this during the school day. In some schools, students who are being disciplined may be segregated into study halls. Chaotic environments in study halls do not support study and completing homework. Disruptive students should not be housed in study halls with students who would want to study. Students should not be permitted to use time in a study hall for socializing instead of completing assignments.

Expectations and goals must be well-defined and consistent; clear expectations and consequences should be defined and adhered to continuously (Dicken, Foreman, Jensen, & Sherwood, 2008). Students prefer an orderly environment. H. T. Wong and Wong (2009) stated, “School is a concept wherein students are welcome to learn and enhance the quality of their lives without fear of intimidation or harm, guided by hospitable and caring people in a clean and orderly environment” (p. 48).

Higher rates of graduation occurred in participating schools where principals reported a greater number of years in a teaching position prior to entering into administration. This is likely because leaders with classroom experience may be better able to mentor and support teachers. Poverty schools tend to have greater percentage novice teachers (Haycock & Hanushek, 2010). Teaching experience informs leadership decisions. It is the principal who establishes expectations for students and teachers. The personality and passions of the principal contribute significantly to each school’s culture and are reflected in the faculty and students (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

The study’s whole sample showed the response to peers collaborating about student achievement assessments (percentage of teachers who actively seek opportunities to review assessment data with other teachers to guide educational decisions) was rated the lowest. Peer collaboration over student achievement data appears to occur slightly more frequently at schools with higher graduation rates, though the difference was not significant on its own. Communication between teachers with respect to student data leads to collaboration and a growth in student learning. Teachers collaborate to determine where the students are lagging academically and what strategies should be used to challenge the students and at the same time re-teaching to their academic deficits. Teachers work together and use the student’s data to drive

their instruction (Goddard et al., 2007). Poverty schools tend to have a higher percentage of novice teachers and a higher turnover rate (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor & Wheeler, 2006). These novice teachers may not have adequate access to significant mentors on staff. Teachers may feel less connected to one other in low performing schools (Donald, 2013). When the school's locality is perceived to be unsafe, teachers may be leaving sooner when school is ended for the day.

The measure of peers collaborating about student achievement was not among the lowest three reported for rural schools. Peer collaboration over student achievement data appears to occur more frequently at rural schools than suburban schools and more frequently at suburban schools than at urban schools. Rural schools may have better communication and collaboration between teachers or teachers tend to support one other more at these schools because the staffing tends to be less specialized than at urban or suburban schools. Teachers may have more time to discuss data with each other due to the smaller class sizes.

Responses to the survey yielded higher mean scores for all of the relationship questions from schools with at least 80% non-waiver graduation rates with the exception of the attribute regarding teacher respect for student comments. However, the mean scores for the two types of schools are nearly identical. Teacher respect for student comments seems a positive attribute, but it also appears the relationship impact on academic success requires the presence of more than this one measure. Another consideration may be that student comments in different performing level schools may not have same relevance to the subject of instruction. It is also important to understand not all conversations are constructive to the learning environment. The teachers may spend more time communicating and caring about what the students have to say, but does the conversation revolve around academics? Will the topic increase the student's

academic skills? Some students may use opportunities to talk in class as a way to derail teaching. Students may be very adept in getting a teacher off topic to avoid a topic they are not interested in. Novice teachers may be less skilled at keeping discussions on track for lessons. Poverty students may often be seeking social and emotional support and assistance from teachers and the school.

Teachers at low-performing schools may be dealing with discipline at a higher frequency. Students who display behavior difficulties in the classroom sidetrack other learners from their education and compel the teacher to devote instruction time to interacting with the student and engaging in student behavior management. Taking time to mediate conflicts and solve discipline issues reduces time which should be used for teaching and interrupts the learning process in the classroom. Teachers who teach in high performing schools may be able to spend more time on educating the learners instead of communicating with them due to discipline issues. Teachers who are able to devote a greater part of communication providing education and spend more time assessing comprehension can make a more positive impact on learning (Christophel, 1990; Guskey, 2003).

The survey responses for rural schools specifically showed the three largest deviations from the whole sample on relationship questions to be for the three personal interaction indicators of (a) the percentage of students who demonstrate respect for their teachers, (b) the percentage of teachers who communicate to students they can be successful, and (c) the percentage of teachers who demonstrate respect for what students have to say. Teachers in smaller schools are more likely to know parents and siblings of students and to see them socially outside the classroom, resulting in close community ties in rural schools. In the rural culture, students are more likely to be raised by parents who place a priority on respectful behavior (West



Virginia Department of Education, 2010). It is also possible that because many rural schools are smaller, educators are able to develop enduring relationships with their students. Teachers are more likely to be involved in afterschool activities and sports which would foster closer relationships between the teachers and the students involved in the activities. More personal relationships would also increase the likelihood that teachers would demonstrate respect for what the students have to say.

Two learning strategy responses were tied for the lowest mean score in the suburban school survey group: the percentage of teachers who consistently evaluate their effectiveness and the percentage of teachers who consistently try new instructional strategies. Suburban schools that are located in low-income areas and enroll a high number of poverty students tend to pay a lower average salary to teachers when compared to low-poverty suburban schools (Moored, 2013). This may explain why more experienced teachers tend to move away from schools that have higher numbers of poverty and lower-achieving students. Teachers who have the opportunity to do so are more apt to relocate to more affluent schools, leaving the teaching staff in poverty schools with a higher percentage of novice teachers (Clotfelter et al., 2006). Poverty schools are more likely to have a greater number of teachers using an emergency teaching license for the subject(s) they are teaching (Almy & Theokas, 2010). Novice teachers and those teaching out of their areas of expertise may not have the knowledge or resources to do continuous evaluation of their teaching effectiveness.

The two highest mean deviations for suburban school locations appeared in the responses to two of the three questions with the lowest means for the whole sample including the percentage of teachers who actively seek parental participation and the percentage of teachers who utilize ongoing assessment in the classroom. Teachers in suburban schools appear slightly

more likely than their urban or rural colleagues to use ongoing assessments to individualize instruction. Suburban high schools are generally large enough that teachers are able to participate in team meetings at their curricular level. Within their teams, teachers are able to discuss different learning strategies and ways to meet individual students' needs. They interact with one other to discuss and compare strategies that have proved successful. It is also possible that the use of teams is an indication that the suburban school culture tends to value supportive relationships of collaboration and respect than they do to impersonal data collection and analysis. The three highest mean scores for suburban schools were for a) the percentage of teachers who collaborate within curricular areas, b) the percentage of teachers who demonstrate respect for what students have to say, and c) the percentage of students who demonstrate respect for teachers. When students trust their teachers, they are more likely to feel comfortable discussing personal concerns and problems (Lineburg & Gearheart, 2013). Teachers can work to make sure students recognize students are important, appreciated, missed when they are not in school, and can be confident that the teachers are concerned about them as individuals.

The suburban school reported responses for teachers actively seeking out parent participation were higher than for the whole sample. It is important to strengthen the parent-school connection to facilitate closing achievement gaps and improving the learning environment in rural, suburban and urban schools. "When parents are involved, students show improvement in grades; test scores, including reading and math achievement; attitude toward schoolwork; behavior; academic perseverance; completion of homework; attendance and participation in classroom learning activities" (Christenson, 2004, p. 6). Collaboration between parents and teachers may have a positive impact on a student's academic success. According to the National Center for School Engagement, "when parents are involved students tend to achieve more,

regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background or parents' educational level" (Martinez, 2004, para.1).

When parents are involved in their child's education, students tend to have fewer behavioral difficulties and better academic functioning (Leuchovius, 2006). Largely based on their personal experience, teachers tend to have low expectations of the efficacy of parental participation. Low parental educational achievement is a characteristic of poverty population (Haycock, 2001). Parents of poverty may have obstacles in their own lives. Many times, the parents have jobs which require them to be away from the home, making them unavailable. They may have to work shifts during school hours or not be able to take time off for school activities. Some parents do not have good access to transportation to and from the school. Parents have no access to transportation may keep them from participating at school. Working parents are often unable to attend school functions and conferences during school hours.

The suburban school location was least represented in the whole survey sample. The percentage of at least 80% non-waivered graduation rates are greatest in rural locations (75%) followed by suburban (60%) and urban locations (48%). Suburban schools are the smallest subset in the study as only 10 suburban schools' principals participated as opposed to 64 from rural and 67 from urban schools. The small group of suburban school principal participants may not be representative of Indiana poverty suburban schools. The IDOE Compass site lists 467 public and non-public schools in its graduation rate database (Indiana Dept., of Education (2014). Survey requests were sent to 212 qualifying poverty schools. The data from this survey does not indicate the graduation rates of non-poverty Indiana schools, nor does it show how many of presumably 255 non-poverty schools are in suburban locations. It is possible that suburban poverty schools tend to be located near non-poverty suburban schools, sharing cultural

and philosophical approaches to education. If suburban schools in Indiana tend not to be a common poverty demographic, they may be less well-equipped to respond effectively to the challenges of poverty students.

The statistical analysis of data provided by the surveyed principals of Indiana poverty high schools failed to reveal a significant difference in the aggregate scores of positive teacher-student relationship attributes between high-performing (at or above 80% non-waiver graduation rate) and low-performing (below 80% non-waiver graduation rate) schools. Research supports the conclusion that positive relationships between teachers and poverty students have an impact on the likelihood of academic success. Gallagher (2013) stated, “Low-income students who have strong teacher-student relationships have higher academic achievement and have more positive social-emotional adjustment than their peers who do not have a positive relationship with a teacher” (para. 3). “When individuals who made it out of poverty are interviewed, virtually all cite an individual who made a significant difference for them” (Payne, 1996, p. 7). Rimm-Kaufman (2014) stated, “teachers who foster positive relationships with their students create classroom environments more conducive to learning and meet students' developmental, emotional and academic needs” (para. 2).

Although the aggregate scores between high-performing and low-performing schools in this survey did not demonstrate statistically significant variation on the aggregate score, it may be interesting to note that the top three relationship attributes for each group were not ordered in the same sequence. Both groups showed the relationship question of what percentage of teachers consistently communicate to their students that they believe they can be successful within their learning, as having the second highest mean score. The high-performing schools' highest mean score was for the question related to the percentage of students demonstrating respect for their

teachers, and the lowest of the three was for the question asking what percentage of teachers demonstrates respect for what students have to say. Conversely, the low-performing schools' highest mean score was for the question dealing with teachers demonstrating respect for what students have to say and the lowest of the top three was for the percentage of students demonstrating respect for their teachers. The identification of respect for teachers in high-performing schools as the top relationship attribute (as opposed to respect for students in low-performing schools) may represent a subtle difference between the two school types that the survey questions in this study did not illuminate. An investigation of other or a greater number of relationship attributes could provide more informative data. It seems likely that not all positive relationship attributes have the same impact and that a deliberative approach may be required to develop aspects of teacher-student relationships that can have a positive impact on learning and academic success.

There was no significant difference in the relationships composite score between high poverty schools in rural, suburban, and urban locations. Some measure of commonality exists among poverty schools, although these location types have markedly different characteristics. Bouck (2004) described such an area of commonality:

Teachers in both settings have lower expectations for their students. Students can internalize the messages sent by teachers and other educators when, because of their social class or other demographic variables, they are offered more, or only, low-level classes. Students in rural and urban schools understand that they are not expected to have high achievement. (p. 40)

Bouck (2004) also observed that “each school type—whether it be rural, urban, or suburban—carries with it a unique set of characteristics that are often mitigated by other factors such as poverty and a culturally diverse student population” (p. 41).

Research of urban, suburban, and rural schools reveals similar significance and characteristics for supporting relationships between teachers and students in high poverty schools. In general, teachers who effectively communicate high expectations for their students are exhibiting the belief that the students are able to master the curriculum. Irrespective of school location, teachers can motivate their students to greater academic efforts by acknowledging their achievements.

If a student feels a personal connection to a teacher, experiences frequent communication with a teacher, and receives more guidance and praise than criticism from the teacher, then the student is likely to become more trustful of that teacher, show more engagement in the academic content presented. (Rimm-Kaufman, 2014, para. 1)

Urban, suburban, and rural students all perform at higher levels when teachers are able to associate the school work to their own personal experiences. Showing interest in students and letting them know they are supported promotes learning. Darrisaw-Akil (2013) commented, “Close relationships with teachers have been shown to promote self-efficacy and resiliency in students. When teachers and other staff members show interest in, and actively listen to, students, students exhibit more resilient behaviors” (p. 24). When students know they are cared about, they will apply themselves to the curriculum being taught. Darrisaw-Akil (2013), also observed, “caring relationships with teachers and other adults can help students apply themselves in school, even when tasks are difficult or boring” (p. 24). These teaching traits can have a beneficial effect on students and teacher relationships.

There was no significant difference on the learning strategies composite score among high poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate at or above 80% and poverty schools with a non-waiver graduation rate below 80%. The schools' principals reported that the teachers were utilizing some combination of the learning strategies in the survey to statistically equivalent extents. Successful teaching involves a variety of processes within the learning environment. Gehrke (2005) stated, "Effective teaching, as defined by student outcomes and improvement, is a result of the right combinations of methods, materials, student characteristics, teacher characteristics, and the context in which teaching and learning occur" (para. 4). The most frequently utilized learning strategies were similar for both types of schools. Both high-performing and low-performing schools in the study had mean scores in the learning strategy top three for responses to the questions of the percentage of teachers collaborating within curricular areas and the percentage of teachers discussing instructional strategies with other teachers frequently. The low-performing schools had below 80% non-waiver graduation rate even though the participants reported the teachers collaborated and discussed instructional strategies with one other. It may be that the ways in which collaboration occurs is not as effective as the ways teachers collaborate in high performing schools. Effective collaboration should be conducted at set times and continue throughout the school year to assure success. This research did not specify how the collaboration occurred. A discussion about students between teachers in the workroom during a prep or lunch period will not have the same effect as those between teachers who meet weekly to assess what is and is not working for the students. Teachers in the high-performing schools may be utilizing collaboration time on a more consistent basis. Formal collaboration occurs during team meetings, after-school staff meetings, or data meetings where teachers discuss student data and what steps should be taken to increase productivity. Some

schools have Information and Communication Technology (ICT) or Response to Intervention (RtI) programs. These programs are designed to facilitate and improve learning for students as a result of teachers meeting to review data, grades, and learning styles of the students. Other factors that can enhance collaboration are physical proximity of classrooms within curricular areas that encourage daily discussions between teachers and a cultural climate in the school that embraces interactions between teachers. Principals that promote teacher gatherings to discuss learning can have a significant impact on collaborative activity. Burns (2011) stated, “A large body of research shows that mandatory teacher collaboration, sometimes called ‘professional learning communities,’ gets results” (para. 9).

Learning to use collaboration and or learning communities in a meaningful and effective way also requires professional development that some schools do not offer. Teachers may meet to facilitate learning, but if they are not reviewing data to identify areas for improvement, they may not be making meaningful accomplishments. They may meet within their curricular areas, but the frequency with which they meet and the extent to which they are reflecting is important. Principals may be talking about improving learning at meetings but not targeting the right areas that would result in a positive impact. Teachers in poverty schools often work with a challenging group of students, and as a result of external influences must keep control of the classroom so learning can go on. It is important that the teachers engage of self-evaluation to measure how effective they are and where they can find opportunities to improve learning.

Recent changes in the Indiana evaluation system place an emphasis on student assessment in order to evaluate teacher’s instruction and productivity. There are various assessment tools school districts may purchase to guide formal assessments. Teachers may also find it helpful to use some types of informal assessment. Schools with a higher graduation rate



may be using assessments to guide their teaching practices more frequently or in a different way than low performing schools. If the assessment results and discussions about instructional strategies are not used effectively to inform teaching in both school types, the end result may differ. Indiana has implemented academic growth and passing End of Course Assessment (ECA) scores as part of the evaluation tool for principals and teachers. Schools are responsible for these scores which have an impact on salaries and may result in state takeover of the school. Schools whose students do not show growth and pass the ECA must go through rigorous state-mandated steps for improvement which involve examining data related to learning strategies.

There was no significant difference in the learning strategies composite score between high poverty schools in rural, suburban, and urban locations. Learning strategies are more effective when the teacher is able to match learning styles with students' needs. Teachers in different locations may utilize various teaching strategies to meet their learners' needs. The curriculum content may need to be related in various ways to meet the needs of the diverse students in the classroom. Teachers must be familiar with the cultural background of students in their classrooms. In spite of growing up with different cultural influences, poverty students require similar teaching modalities; visual, auditory, tactile or kinesthetic. Constructivism encourages learners to utilize prior knowledge and personal familiarities within their local culture to make associations with their lessons and learning. Scaffolding involves (a) presenting the material to be learned by modeling the assignment, (b) offering assistance to the students to aid in completion of tasks, and (c) giving instruction to the students during tasks. Scaffolds are progressively removed as the student progresses to a self-directed learning plan. Interviews with students in a high school literacy initiative demonstrated that when teachers provide assistance to struggling students, the learners feel more compelled to strive to achieve a higher level of

learning (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007). Diamond, Corrin, and Levinson (2004) revealed, “They identified certain practices that they found particularly encouraging. These included providing one-on-one help when they faced difficulties, establishing high expectations for students’ performance, and recognizing their academic accomplishments” (p. 18).

Years of experience in a classroom may not be predictive as relationship and teaching are two different constructs. The time spent teaching at a school does not reflect how a teacher is able to interact with a student. Relating to students is a skill not always learned in school. Teachers can learn the different techniques of interacting, but students know if the adult is being honest or following a script. Novice teachers are able to care about the students as well as seasoned teachers (Dyck, 2005). Experience in the classroom does not always make a teacher proficient as an educator and or a valuable resource for positive student relationship.

The number of students enrolled in the school may not be predictive of positive teacher relationships for several reasons. The relationship between teacher and student to promote learning is done within a classroom and the number of students in a single class may be more relevant than the number of classrooms in the school building. It is also likely that teachers who understand the importance of connecting to the students in the school are able to interact with them regardless of the size of the enrollment. Schools with large student enrollments may present more opportunities for relationships to develop and students have a larger choice of teachers with whom they might interact. Conversely, teachers in small schools often are able to better know their students. In smaller schools, teachers tend to work with students in groups so more teachers become familiar with a student. Teachers in smaller schools usually have a keener awareness of the culture of the students and a familiarity with their families, either having taught by siblings, or through community contact (Grauer & Ryan, 2012).

School locations did not demonstrate predictive value in this study. Relationship scores reflect activities that happen inside the classroom, not merely in the locale of the building. Students from different localities face different hardships; teachers reside in the same localities as their students are able to understand and relate to the students' needs arising from those hardships, although the teachers may not have the same personal experiences. Some teachers are able build relationships by using listening skills and observations even though they don't share the personal experiences of their students (Noguera, 2004). In Indiana, parents may choose the school their child attends. This has resulted in students being educated in localities in which they do not reside. Different locations result in different needs and different types of relationship rules when conversing with students (Powell, 2012). Good teachers usually seek to teach at a location in which they feel comfortable and enjoy the personalities of the students (LaPlante, 2005).

Principals who have classroom experience have some understanding of teachers' needs. The survey showed the number of years principals previously taught had an impact on the use of learning strategies. The highest percentage of participants taught 6-10 years before going into administration (35%). This study's participants may have included former lead teachers or others who had leadership quality responsibilities as teachers. Previous experience in a classroom can provide experience concerning the importance of using data to promote learning strategies. Teaching experience can build understanding about the importance of matching the learning strategy to the learner and increase familiarity with different types of learning strategies. These principals may benefit from their knowledge of working with teachers to promote the use of learning strategies. They are more likely to have had experience with working with students with different needs. Experience working with teachers may provide them a better basis on

which to relate to them. Time in a classroom provides principals with an understanding of the importance of connecting learning strategies to students and can increase their knowledge and expertise at using reflection when using learning strategies. They may have more resources to contact with questions about learning strategies.

The number of students enrolled in the poverty schools was a significant predictor of use of learning strategies in the study. In larger schools, there may be a wider range of disciplines taught and principals would not be expected to be proficient in all the different academic areas. Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010) stated, “High school principals cannot be expected to provide substantive support to the multiple disciplines that are taught in middle and high school” (p. 40). Teachers in these schools would have more responsibility for the academic growth of their students and managing any difficulties the students in their classroom may have. Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) observed that, “student poverty and district size amount to a double disadvantage. Larger schools with high-poverty student populations are most likely to experience limited leadership—even when we control for the effects of school level and urbanicity” (p. 101). Teachers might not always be able to turn to the principal for direction. “Schools located in larger metropolitan areas exhibit significant disadvantages regarding the presence of leadership—from principals as instructional leaders and from shared norms among teachers” (Louis, Leithwood, et al., 2010, p. 99). It would be difficult for the principal to understand the needs of all the teachers and learners in high schools categorized as large in the study. Forbes (2011) commented on one of the challenges of administering a large school as “constantly scanning the environment for new ideas, tools, and solutions. To do so, they must overcome numerous barriers: lack of time, insufficient rewards” (para. 6). Teachers are required to assume more accountability in larger poverty schools. English 10, Algebra, and Biology

teachers are not only accountable for individual learners but they must also validate their instruction as measured by their students' ability to pass the GQE testing. Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010) commented on the importance of student learning by asserting, "instruction and classroom environments have the greatest impact on student learning" (p. 317). Louis, Leithwood, et al. (2010) observed,

The teachers' leadership focused on collective responsibility for student learning to be more likely present in high poverty schools than in low poverty schools, but teachers are less likely in high poverty schools to share norms around teaching and instruction. (p. 97)

Team meetings can bring teachers together who are proficient in a subject area. In larger schools, monthly staff meetings can be more productive due to the broad degree of resources offered by a variety of experienced teachers. Teachers are able to collaborate with a larger pool of teachers to discover which strategies worked and which did not. Larger schools have the capability to create small learning hubs within the school. A larger enrollment enables schools to offer tutoring sessions during the day and study halls staffed by teachers so students are more likely to receive teacher assistance when needed. Larger schools have a broader pool of teachers to which the tasks of investigating different learning strategies can be assigned. The larger pool of teachers enables counselors to better align students' learning styles with specific teachers. Schools are able to offer a larger number of class choices. Schools with higher student enrollments can form a larger community of individuals working together to promote educational success. Larger schools may be more easily form community partnerships.

### **Areas for Further Research**

But let's be clear: We have to stop looking at children through the location of the schools they attend and just look at them for who they are: Young men and women who deserve a high-quality education no matter where they live. And the schools and people who serve them, no matter where they are, must do better by all of them. (Biddle, 2011, para. 11)

The statistical analysis of the responses received from the participants in the survey of Indiana poverty high schools did not support the consensus of the studies described in the literature review in this paper. According to school administrators, in 2007-08, between 68 and 78 percent of 12th-graders in high-poverty schools (free or reduced lunch program enrollment > 50%) graduated with a diploma. (Aud et al., 2010). The Indiana 2013 non-waiver graduation rate in all poverty schools (Free or reduced price lunch plan [FRLP] > 50%) was similar, averaging 72.1%. Participants of this study might have been biased in favor of the high performing end of the spectrum, making it less likely to identify significant differences between the two groups. The demarcation between high performing and low performing schools is extremely narrow, between 79.9% and 80%. Only 15% of all poverty high schools reported non-waiver graduation rates of less than 65%. Had the number of participants been filtered as "mid performing" as opposed to high or low for the purposes of this survey, the pool of low-performing schools would have been too small.

The participants in 61% of the schools were classified as high-performing, reporting a non-waiver graduation rate at or above 80 and the remaining 39% were low-performing with a reported non-waiver graduation rate below 80%. The composite scores of behaviors associated with a positive teacher-student relationship and learning strategies to promote academic success

were reported in both groups without a statistically significant difference. What then might account for the disparity in the graduation rates? In a research summary report from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, Roderick, Kelley-Kemple, Johnson, and Beechum (2014) emphasized the importance of reaching students in the 9th grade to improve the graduation rate. The data showed a significant increase in the percentage of students graduating, “when schools concentrate their efforts on helping students make a successful transition to ninth grade” (Roderick et al., 2014, p. 8). The researchers discovered the importance of concentrating on the success of students in the 9th grade to reduce the dropout rate in high school. It is possible that the non-waiver graduation rates in Indiana poverty schools may be more closely aligned with whether or not the students are on track for graduation at the completion of the 9th grade. Are there additional learning techniques not examined in the survey which could explain why schools followed the research based methods and still had a low non-waiver graduation rate? Would the survey data have different results if the teachers were asked the questions instead of the principals? These are questions which might be answered as a result of further research.

To further clarify the findings in this study, future research might incorporate other states. The participants in this study were restricted to high schools in Indiana. Research involving a higher number of Indiana participants could provide a more comprehensive data. While this study requested high school principals to complete the survey, research including teacher provided data regarding students of poverty may provide data from a different perspective. A focus on the academic success of ninth-graders in poverty schools with respect to graduation rates could also be informative.

The data showed that Indiana poverty schools were more likely to use the surveyed learning strategies when the principal of the school was more experienced in a teaching setting prior to becoming a principal or when the school enrollment was higher. Students of poverty benefit from a safe environment, positive student-teacher relationships, and instruction linked to students' personal experiences, assessment driven instruction, high expectations, utilizing new instructional strategies and verbalizing to the students they can learn.



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## APPENDIX A: LETTER TO INDIANA PRINCIPALS

Dear Indiana Principal:

I am implementing a study for my PhD from Indiana State University. Under the guidance and authorization of my dissertation chair, Dr. Terry McDaniel, I am sending this survey. The title of my dissertation is, "Factors Contributing to the Academic Success of Low-SES Students"

I am inviting you to be a participant in an electronic survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FCXDPSN>. The IP addresses will not be collected. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained; however, absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed over the Internet. There are no known risks to those who participate in this research study. The questionnaire will take about five minutes to complete.

Thank you for your consideration in representing your school as part of this study. I would appreciate if you would please complete the survey within one working week of receiving this email.

If you have any questions about the rights of a research subject or if you feel you've been placed at risk, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN, 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or by e-mail at [irb@indstate.edu](mailto:irb@indstate.edu)

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

Lynn Daanen

[ldaanen@sycamores.indstate.edu](mailto:ldaanen@sycamores.indstate.edu)

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY

1. Was your non-waiver graduation rate:  
At or above 80%      Below 80%
2. How many years did you teach prior to going into administration?  
Less than 5 years      6-10 years      11-15 years      16+ years
3. What is the location of your school? (choose one please)  
Rural              Suburban      Urban
4. Gender  
Female              Male
5. Current Enrollment  
Less than 250              251-400              401-600              More than 600
6. How many years have you been in your current position?  
0-3 years              4-7 years              8-12 years              More than 12 years
7. Approximately what percentage of your teachers consistently try new instructional strategies? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Approximately what percentage of your teachers consistently evaluate their effectiveness? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Approximately what percentage of your teachers link their instruction to their student's personal experiences? \_\_\_\_\_



10. Approximately what percentage of your teachers link their instruction to their student's interests? \_\_\_\_\_
  
11. Approximately what percentage of your teachers incorporate rigor within their instruction while ensuring the proper supports are in place to make all students successful? \_\_\_\_\_
  
12. Approximately what percentage of your teachers collaborate within curricular areas?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
13. Approximately what percentage of your teachers collaborate across curricular areas?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
14. Approximately what percentage of your teachers utilize ongoing assessment in their classrooms so they can individualize their instruction for all students? \_\_\_\_\_
  
15. Approximately what percentage of your teachers actively seek out opportunities to review student assessment data with other teachers to guide educational decisions?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
16. Approximately what percentage of your teachers discuss instructional strategies with other teachers frequently? \_\_\_\_\_
  
17. Approximately what percentage of your teachers discuss the effectiveness of instructional strategies with other teachers frequently? \_\_\_\_\_
  
18. Approximately what percentage of your teachers have high expectations for all students as evident by their instructional and assessment practices? \_\_\_\_\_