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The Factors That Inhibit Positive, Continual, And Sustainable School Attendance With Students Of Rural Poverty

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THE FACTORS THAT INHIBIT POSITIVE, CONTINUAL, AND SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL

ATTENDANCE WITH STUDENTS OF RURAL POVERTY

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A Dissertation

Presented to

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by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study focused on the common factors that prohibit students from rural poverty attending school. The anticipated result of the study was to provide educational leaders of rural school districts strategies to use when attempting to increase attendance and academic success. School administrators, counselors, and teachers in high poverty rural schools in the State of Missouri were interviewed. The unique experiences of these professionals revealed that students of rural poverty have a lack of resources to meet essential needs. The administrators shared what their districts had done to meet essential needs. The interview of the teachers, social workers, and counselors provided practices school districts had implemented for families in efforts to increase attendance and academic success. School administrators were focused on trying to help students of rural poverty to break the poverty cycle and the generational hindrance of the poverty cycle. Rural school districts stressed the importance of building positive relationships between home and school and how that can make or break the educational success of children living in poverty. The study shares real-life applicable strategies for educational leaders of rural school districts to use when attempting to increase attendance and academic success of their students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deep gratitude goes to Dr. Terry McDaniel, who expertly guided me through the Ph.D. classes with an unwavering enthusiasm for my success and kept me consistently engaged with my research. The personal generosity of his time made my studies at Indiana State University life-changing and rememberable.

The appreciation extends to the time I spent in my first teaching position. That experience prompted my research, wanting to know about how myself and other educational leaders could create fruitful opportunities for students living in rural poverty. It wasn't what I taught those students; it was what they taught me about the unfairness of life and how simply having someone to believe in them could change their destiny.

I deeply appreciate Dr. John Boise and his wife Katie, who heavily influenced and encouraged me throughout my studies. Both Dr. Boise and Mrs. Boise never doubted my ability to create success, far before pursuing a career in education. Thank you both for believing in me from the start.

The foundation of my whole being is my family, who I value more each day. Many thanks to each of my children and the time they forgave, so I was able to focus on my studies and research. My heartfelt intent was to show them that education is the ticket to fulfilling their dreams, teaching them the value of education. My heart is full, knowing that my children believed their mom could and would graduate with a Ph.D. And finally, my husband, Joshua, who is my champion, continually showering me with encouragement, never deviating from our commitment to love and family. I am who I am because he believed I could.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE; 2016), attendance impacts the overall achievement not only of students' success but a district's success as well. A strong correlation exists between absences and poverty. Students living in an impoverished environment are linked to more than 50% of all absences (Johnston-Brooks et al., 1998). Poverty is prevalent where a school district has a high incident rate of chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service [USDA], 2017a) highlighted that lower educational accomplishment in rural areas is closely related to concentrated poverty and child poverty. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) and the USDA (2017a) agreed that there is a connection between rural poverty and the lack of attending school.

According to Hill and Duncan (1987), when students live within a low-income home below the poverty level, they are not likely to obtain academic achievement or successfully attain employment. The research of the USDA (2017a) found correlations with children raised in a home living at or below the poverty level and the possibility of them dropping out of school and having lower academic achievement overall. The USDOE (2016) reported that chronic absenteeism was widespread, targeting those students who are disadvantaged due to poverty and their inability to meet daily needs. About one out of every seven students missed three weeks or

more of school in 2013–14. That translates to approximately 98 million school days lost

(Department of Education [DOE], 2016).

The USDOE (2016) joined efforts with the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Ad

Council to initiate a public service campaign titled *Absences Add Up*. The program assisted

parents, communities, and educators in the growing concern of students failing to attend school

on a consistent basis. In June 2016, the USDOE and the Office of Civil Rights released the

findings of a report that had asked the nation's schools to keep track of the number of students

who missed 15 or more school days in a year. The results of the report estimated that 13% of

students were chronically absent (Jordan & Miller, 2017).

Zhang (2003) highlighted the role that attendance plays in the overall academic

achievement of students from poverty and how it greatly impacts the negative cycle of continual

poverty. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's definition, the rural child poverty rate has

grown 6.1% from 2003 to 2012, and the USDA (2016) reported that during the 2014–2015

school year, 51.8% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunches across the United States

(US Census Bureau, 2016). Additionally, the USDA (2017a) concluded that rural areas lag in

adults with college degrees, thus contributing to the increase in child poverty and the increase of

unemployment rates. Provided the range that exists in school district funding across the United

States, leaders in education need to better understand the underlying factors that contribute to the

lack of attendance in schools with a high rate of poverty. The achievement gap is eventually

reflected in financial situations and social status of the students, which causes negative effects on

the high school dropout rate. This achievement gap attributes to the students' overall

performance in reading and mathematics (Zhang, 2003).

Students' poor academic performance and absences contribute to the high cost of

education for public schools (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Biddle and Berliner (2002) reported

school districts' funding from local, federal, and state funding can vary for each child, ranging

from $4,000 to more than $15,000. The average school district takes in an estimated $5,000 for

each student during the school year; wealthier regions can take in $10,000 or more foreach

student during a school year. A student attending school on a regular basis does directly affect

public school funding, which is a reason why so many school administrators need assistance

when attempting to reach those students of rural poverty who are not attending school

continuously. "Funding differences in the United States generate huge disparities in the quality

of school buildings, facilities, curriculum, equipment for instruction, teacher experience and

qualifications, class sizes, presence of auxiliary professionals, and other resources" (Biddle &

Berliner, 2002, p. 2). Faryon and Crowe (2011) found that one school in San Diego lost

approximately $34 million in funding the previous year due to lack of attendance. Faryon and

Crowe agreed with the findings of Balfanz and Byrnes (2012); the disparity of funding widens

the academic success for students in poverty when compared to the students of wealthier regions.

The connection between rural poverty and lack of attending school contributes to poor academic

performance, higher dropout rates, and an increase in teenage crime rates, which, in turn, affects

the high cost of education, and a burden is placed on society to provide for individuals and

families.

Problem Statement

A relationship between rural poverty and poor school achievement exists. According to

Jensen (2009), studies indicated that family incomes are directly and significantly related to

student academic achievement. Low family income leads to poor academic achievement and

higher dropout rates. The problems created by absenteeism in rural poverty place a strain on

society because of the costs of education and additional economic burdens. According to Hill and Duncan (1987), when students live within a low-income home below the poverty level,they are not likely to obtain academic achievement or successfully hold a job. "It's unquestionable that crime ranks high among the effects of poverty" (Berrebi, 2011, p. 2).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to learn what the common factors are that prohibit students who attend public school from continuously attending school to promote academic success in rural districts with high poverty rates. In 2017, the USDA reported that rural American's level of education grew from 2000–2015; however, with the demanding federal regulations of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), school administrators within rural public schools struggle to meet and understand the needs of students living in rural poverty. Jimerson (2005) revealed that many rural districts suffer financially and struggle to meet the mandates of federal provisions, including dispersing funds based on the adequate yearly progress (AYP) of the district. Balfanz (2016) found in 2014 more than six million public school students fail to attend school continually. That is equivalent to three weeks of school.

Significance of the Study and Goals

The goal of this study is to enable school administrators to be able to identify the factors that influence student attendance and overall student academic achievement in rural poverty schools. Balfanz (2016) stated that the overall academic success beginning in kindergarten proceeding through high school graduation and college is dependent on low incidents of absenteeism. Balfanz explained that even missing a small fraction of academic time will adversely affect the academic success that can potentially be achieved. Mosley and Miller (2004)

reported that educational success is lacking in rural areas; fewer people graduate high school, and even fewer are successful at the post-secondary level of education. The socioeconomic background of a child is an indicator of academic achievement; economic disadvantage is decreased due to the reduced access to educational support, trauma-induced stress levels, poor nutrition, and the limited availability of adequate medical care (Claro et al., 2016).

The factors that impact the continuous attendance of students are prevalent to understanding what school administrators can do to increase the morale, attendance, and academic success of students within high-poverty rural districts. Once the common factors are distinguished, school administrators can work with local, state, and federal agencies to help students and their families meet their needs. Identifying these factors can assist school administrators in building a positive, trusting, and continuing relationship with the families and children who are affected by rural poverty. Hopefully, once knowledgeable of these impacting factors, educational leaders will be able to slowly close the educational gap that is facing high-poverty rural schools and the stigma that surrounds them.

Theoretical Base

This study will integrate the self-determination theory (SDT), a theory that is useful to explain the diversity in students' learning, motivation, performance, and persistence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The SDT theory examines the motivation of learners to determine if the behavior is intrinsically or extrinsically centered. Focus will be on the interpersonal environment and the effects of that environment on autonomous and controlled motivation. In addition, this study will include Dweck's (2006) research on achievement and success and how it truly depends on one's mindset. "There were two meanings to ability, not one: a fixed ability that needs to be proven, and a changeable ability that can be developed through learning. That's how mindsets

were born" (Dweck, 2006, p. 15).

Study Design and Methodology

This study will use a qualitative research method using a phenomenological methodology. Hays and Singh (2011) defined qualitative research as "the study of a phenomenon or research topic in context" (p. 4). According to Hays and Singh (2011), regularly qualitative research occurs in a natural setting, where the researcher spends a significant quantity of time gathering and examining the data. Public school administrators, secretaries, and guidance counselors in the state of Missouri in sixteen rural school districts, which have the highest rate of rural poverty in the state of Missouri and have an 80% or higher free and reduced lunch population, will be the participants interviewed in this study. The interviews and data collected will establish the baseline for what factors inhibit students of rural poverty from attending school continuously and working towards academic achievement. To analyze the data, the factors will be compared, seeking common threads (reasons) why students of rural poverty are absent from school. The final product will be identifying these factors, which will give school administrators the knowledge to identify the needs of their districts based on the findings.

Research Questions

1. What are the common factors that contribute to poor attendance of students who live in rural poverty?

2. What practices can improve attendance of students who live in rural poverty?

Assumptions

It is assumed that by identifying the common factors inhibiting the continuous attendance of students who reside in rural poverty, school administrators will be able to better meet or address the needs of those students outside the educational setting. If these common factors are

identified, it is assumed that the school district's ability to build a trusting relationship with the families that reside in rural poverty will be enhanced. The final assumption is when educational administrators and leaders are well informed of the inhibiting factors and able to build and enhance relationships with the families living in rural poverty, it will create a break in closing the gap of academic achievement that lies within rural poverty in America.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that the responses of the participants cannot determine the understanding of the questions. Also, the effects of the culture or climate of the schools participating cannot be controlled and may impact the responses. The overall perception and influence of rural poverty for each participant cannot be controlled and could affect the participants' replies during the interview.

Delimitations of the Study

One delimitation is having access to parents who have children living in rural poverty. This would create identification and possible humiliation of the parent and/or child. To avoid that potential humiliation, no students or parents will be identified or interviewed within this study. Those participating in this study will be school administrators, school counselors, and school secretaries who are employed in public schools that have a free and reduced percentage higher than 80% in Missouri. According to the USDOE (2016), 51.3% of students in Missouri receive free or reduced lunches. With these parameters, the applicability of the findings will be limited to public schools, leaving it problematic for private or charter schools outside the state of Missouri to utilize the results. The study will take place with the cooperation of seven school districts.

Definitions of Terms

Definitions of terms referenced throughout the study are listed below.

School *administrator* refers to "one who administers especially business, school, or governmental affairs" ("Administrator, Merriam-Webster (n.d.)" 2018, para. 2).

Every Student Succeeds Act was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015 and represents good news for our nation's schools. The new law builds on key areas of progress in recent years, made possible by the efforts of educators, communities, parents, and students across the country (USDOE, n.d.). This act takes the place of the No Child Left Behind.

.Free and reduced lunch program refers to a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free lunches to children each school day. The program was established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946. (USDA, 2018)

Guidance counselor refers to "a person who gives help and advice to students about educational and personal decisions" ("Guidance counselor, Merriam-Webster (n.d.)" 2018, para. 1).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) refers to federal legislation that enacts the theories of standards-based education reform. NCLB ensures that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. (US Legal, 2016)

School principal refers to "most important, consequential, or influential: chief the principal ingredient the region's principal city" ("Principal, Merriam-Webster (n.d.)" 2018, para.

l).

     Rural poverty refers to "researchers and others who analyze conditions in "rural" America, most often studying conditions in nonmetropolitan (non-metro) areas, rural towns, places with fewer than 2,500 people" (USDA, 2017b, para. 1).

Summary and Organization of the Study

     Chapter 1 discussed the purpose and importance of the study. Limited data is available for rural poverty and the factors inhibiting students from continually attending school. Included in the study are research questions to focus on the connection between rural poverty, academic success, and the common factors that contribute to poor attendance. Definitions of key terms used in the study are given. Chapter 2 is a review of literature relevant to rural poverty, absenteeism, early childhood, academic success, and how rural poverty impacts society. In the literature review, many sources and formats are used. Several resources are cited that link significance and direction of the study to discover the unknown common factors that attribute to poor attendance in rural poverty school districts. Historical backgrounds and specific characteristics of rural poverty were reviewed. Chapter 3 provides the methodology for this phenomenological study of the effects of rural poverty and how it contributes to poor attendance. Chapter 4 will reveal and then summarize the collected data and results of the research. Chapter 4 will also include quotes from the participants, then the determined common threads. Chapter 5 will be a summary of the findings, answering the research questions.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study will evaluate the factors that inhibit positive continual and sustainable school attendance with students of rural poverty. The research will be used to help determine the impact rural poverty has on students, society, and academic achievement. The study will focus on the underlying causes of habitual absenteeism for students who reside in rural, desolate, poverty-stricken areas, using only qualitative studies. This literature review focuses onthe history of rural poverty, the effects poverty has on early childhood, factors of chronic absenteeism, the impact absenteeism and poverty have on society, how absenteeism and rural poverty affect academic achievement, and how the self-determination theory and the fixed mindset theory apply to rural poverty. These elements are reviewed and focus not only on how poverty impacts their academic achievement but also how to improve the success of students who live in high poverty by revealing the underlying causes of their absenteeism.

History of Rural Poverty

Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) stated that the U.S. Census Bureau defined rural as conditions in nonmetropolitan areas; however, over a dozen definitions are used by federal agencies to define rural. Rural areas include, but are not limited to, "open countryside and settlements with fewer than two thousand and five hundred residents" (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008, p. 33). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2006) defined rural in three

categories—fringe, distant, and remote. According to the NCES, fringe rural is a territory that is five miles from an urban area or two and a half miles from an urban cluster. Distant rural is more than five miles but fewer than 25 miles from an urban area or 2.5 miles from an urban cluster. An urban cluster is an area that can vary in population from 2,500 to 49,999 people. The U.S. Census Bureau added urban areas to their definitions in 2000 and labeled them urban clusters to differentiate them from more populated urban areas; the definition has not been updated with the U.S. Census Bureau since 1950 (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). According to Farrigan (2018), in the United States, one in four children are living in rural poverty, compared to the one in five children who live in urban poverty.

The USDA defined poverty as when individuals' or families' incomes are under the poverty level (Farrigan, 2018). The National Center for Children and Poverty, along with the U.S. Census Bureau defined poverty as income of $28,643 or less for a family of four, $19,318 or less for a family of three, $12,486 for people 65 years old or less, and $11,511 for those 65 years and over. In 1960, the rates were set for the poverty level. "Poverty thresholds are set for families by size and composition, and they are updated annually to correct for inflation" (Farrigan, 2018, p.6). Deep poverty is defined as those who have incomes that are 50% or less than the federal poverty level (Fluharty, 2014). Fluharty stated percentages of deep poverty are the highest among rural children, and there is a significant gap between the children living in deep rural poverty versus deep urban poverty. According to Semega et al. (2017), in 2016, the poverty rate was 12.7% for the United States, which is a total of 40.6 million people living in poverty; 18% were children under the age of 18. Semega et al. (2017) stated that, in 2016, 18.5 million people reported a family income below half of their poverty threshold; 6.0 million were children under the age of 18, 10.9 million were ages 18–64, and 1.6 million were over the age of

65. Missouri's poverty rate for 2014, according to Semega et al., was 15.5%. The poverty rate of children in Missouri under the age of 18 was 21.3%, which was an increase from 21.0% last recorded in 2010.

America's beginnings were rural, "The earliest frontier schoolhouses were simple structures built of logs or on the prairie, made of sod" (Tieken, 2014, p. 11). In the 1930s, the Great Depression had Americans hysterical because of a shortage of food, money, employment, and the stock market crash. The amount of poverty was huge during that time (Kunjufu, 2006). Americans stood in line for government assistance during the Great Depression; it was not until 1933 that President Roosevelt signed the food stamp act to help farmers distribute their excess of goods due to the crash of the stock market. From 1939 to 1943, four million Americans were eligible to purchase surplus food. This came at the cost of 262 million dollars to the government (Tanner, 2013).

In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson addressed Congress and America to declare war on poverty (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). The acts that were signed as part of the effort to defeat poverty centered around four pieces of legislation: The Social Security Amendments of 1965, the Food Stamp Act of 1964, the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Bailey & Duquette, 2014). When President Johnson declared war on poverty, 19% of Americans were living below the threshold of poverty. By the end of that decade, it decreased to 12% (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). During the 1960s, the federal government implemented acts that concentrated on the education and training of Americans dwelling in poverty.

The 1970s policies were centered on providing income to those of poverty through federal assistance programs (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). President Nixon attempted to

complicate the qualifying process for welfare in an attempt to reduce the number of recipients as poverty hit an all-time historic low of 11% during his presidency. During the 1960s and 1970s, a federal program, which supplemented food for those with a low-income, gradually grew nationwide; that program is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; 2017). In 2015, the program provided over $44 million worth of food to children and families across the United States; half of the participants were children, and the other half were adults living with those children. The goal of the SNAP was to feed the hungry, increasethe well-being of others, and reduce the rate of poverty, all of which the SNAP has accomplished (Bartfeld et al., 2016).

In 1981, Congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, which mandated those receiving welfare needed to work in exchange for the welfare benefits. Women who had children were not held to the requirements of this act (Farmbry, 2014). In 1982, poverty rates drastically rose due to the recession: 14% in urban regions and 18% in rural areas (Gurley, 2016). In 1988, the Family Support Act passed to extend benefits to mothers who needed assistance with childcare in order to work and toughened punishments for those who were not compliant with the requirements (Farmbry, 2014).

President Reagan stated in 1988, "We waged a war on poverty and poverty won" (as cited in Waldfogel, 2016, p. 2). During his first and second terms, President Reagan attacked the welfare programs that President Roosevelt and President Johnson had put into place, calling them entitlement programs and claimed that welfare queens (single moms) had been taking advantage of the programs (Gurley, 2016). President Reagan cut spending for agriculture by 24.9%, which directly affected the food stamp program and cut education spending by 18.6% (Farmbry, 2014).

In 1990, the Rural Sociological Society assembled the first major taskforce on persistent

rural poverty by forming a group of researchers to study all aspects of rural poverty and lobbyfor

increased government funding for poverty-centered government programs (Gurley, 2016). In the

1990s, President Clinton promised to end welfare by establishing restrictions on the individuals

receiving welfare, creating incentives for married couples raising children, and giving the states

the ability to distribute the welfare funds. These changes only increased poverty. Tanner (2013)

reported that the SNAP program increased spending drastically from $17 billion in 2000 to over

$78 billion in 2012. These efforts made to assist those of poverty are, according to Tanner, to

blame for the continual reliance on the government for assistance. In 2009 The American

Reinvestment Recovery and Act (ARRA, 2009) was passed. It increased food stamp benefits,

assisted adults who received welfare to obtain employment, offered training to obtain new skills

required for a changing job industry and added federal monies to reinforce the operations of

those programs (Bartfeld et al., 2016).

When looking at the rural child poverty levels during the time span of 2003–2014, the

period saw the biggest rise (Farrigan & Hertz, 2016). Berrebi (2011) recognized issues, such as

hunger and lack of water or food being the effects of poverty, making children powerless

victims. Poor children are surrounded by unpredictable, disruptive, and disordered environments;

this attributes to their lack of transportation, food, medical attention, and less positive

enforcement from adults (Jensen, 2009). In efforts to feed the children of families living at or

below the poverty level, SNAP spent an estimated $80 billion, feeding over 47 million people in

2013 (Bartfeld et al., 2016). "The overwhelming majority of SNAP recipients in families with

children who *can* work *do* work. Over half of families with children with a non-elderly, non-

disabled adult in the household have at least one working member while participating in SNAP.

Almost 90% work in the year before or after participating" (SNAP, 2017, p. 2).

Rural poverty has continued to increase since 1960, when it was first recorded (USDA, 2017a). The rate of rural poverty in 1970 was 22%, and the rate of urban poverty was only 12% (O'Hare, 2009). Poverty rates are higher for rural children than for urban children; they aremore likely than urban children to live in extreme poverty. "In 2015, one in fivechildren or 14.5 million, lived below the poverty level — more than before the Great Recession. In 2007, one in six children were poor, equivalent to 13.3 million children" (SNAP, 2017, p. 3).

When the poor choose to relocate, they are likely to do so in another area that is impoverished because those are the only places they can afford, which attributes to the continuing poverty cycle (Gurley, 2016). The risk factors that surround the nature of poverty create a devastatingly synergistic effect, meaning that one factor feeds off of the other, creating leads to a never-ending cascade of toxic outcomes (Jensen, 2009). Poverty is a cruel cycle that shrinks the chance for poor, rural children to become successful because they are seen as uneducated (Gurley, 2016).

Rural poverty can be credited, but not solely to blame, for the volatile nature of the agriculture labor patterns, which supply temporary and seasonal work (Gurley, 2016). Rural America does suffer from the trends in the agricultural market. Impacted are the areas dependent upon farming, which is 19.8% of all rural areas and 6% of those living in rural areas during 2015 (USDA, 2017a). According to Duncan (2014), the definition of rural is not necessarily agricultural related; it is a misconception. In 1990, only 8% of all inhabitants of rural areas lived on farms (Dudenhefer, 1994). Rural America farming communities continue to fight to survive due to inflation of land prices, foreign trade of commodities, large corporate farms, replacement of labor with tractors and combines, and the closure of many rural schools (Tieken, 2014). Duncan concluded that the agriculture industry was partially responsible for rural poverty, but

the bigger picture was that losses of many labor-based industries contributed to the small rural

towns that are overwhelmed with poverty. Duncan found that the loss of coal mining was just as

guilty as the agriculture industry for rural communities that were abandoned, leaving the

residents with little or no resources.

In 1964, President Johnson spoke to declare war on poverty, yet the fundamentals of

combating poverty have not shifted. "Finding collaborative approaches that improve access to

opportunities is as imperative today as it was almost fifty years ago" (Kneebone & Berube, 2013,

p. 79). The issues that surround rural poverty, such as rural counties are often a distance from

shopping, education, and health care, have complicated the war on poverty (Duncan & Coles,

1999). Poverty remains a concern at the forefront of the American government. During the 50th

anniversary of President Johnson's famous speech declaring war on poverty, President Obama

declared,

> In the richest nation on Earth far too many children are still born into poverty, far too few
>
> have a fair shot to escape it, and Americans of all races and backgrounds experience
>
> wages and incomes that aren't rising, making it harder to share in the opportunities a
>
> growing economy provides. (as cited in Jackson, 2014, p. 1)

The Effects Poverty has on Early Childhood

Tough (2016) emphasized the impact poverty has on a child. From the start of

pregnancy, the foundation of the brain is established in the womb and then continues to form and

flourish from adolescence and into adulthood. Although the brain is forming in the environment

of poverty, it creates forms of dangerous stress levels that can be toxic to a developing brain,

similar to a developing brain exposed to substance abuse of the mother (Ostrander, 2015). Tough

agreed with Ostrander that younger children exposed to an uncertain and unpredictable

environment combined with the extreme stress levels that surround poverty all contribute to and

disrupt the skill set development that functions in the prefrontal cortex. Tough concluded that the

academic achievement gap that exists between the wealthier children and those exposed to

poverty begins prior to the fifth birthday for most children, and that gap remains throughout their

educational experience. There is a correlation between poverty and how it can damage the

physical, socioemotional, and intellectual welfare of children (Sapolsky, 2005).

Harris (2018) saw firsthand in her clinics that those children exposed to trauma and

poverty in their early years alone were affected by a life filled with a medical path of devastation

and stress. Harris conducted a study using tadpoles, exposing them to cortisol, a chemical the

brain produces when exposed to stress. In Harris's findings, when the tadpoles were exposed to

the cortisol, it shortened their life span and affected their overall health.

> The very idea that the events of childhood could affect people's health for the rest of their
>
> lives was scary, but if the stress-response system was indeed the mechanism in play, it
>
> opened up a huge runway for change. It meant that if we figured out the problem early
>
> enough in the child's development, we could make significant impact on his or her later
>
> life. (Harris, 2018, p. 26)

When children grow up in a chronically stressful home, it does affect the development of a child

negatively and has a direct bearing on the child's capacity to learn successfully once in school

(Tough, 2009).

The War on Poverty enacted the initial federal-funded program that was intended to assist

those children of poverty and enhance learning for young children from low-income families.

The program was Head Start, which has proven to increase school readiness for children under

the age of five (Waldfogel, 2016). Children who live in poverty would benefit from an early

education experience with Head Start, a program that focus on developmental milestones, prior to their first birthday to. In essence, this provides the opportunity for the child to be on grade level by the time they start kindergarten (Tough, 2009). The largest federal program implemented to improve the academic success of underprivileged and high-need students was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson, who believed thatevery student was entitled to a full educational opportunity (Waldfogel, 2016).

The poverty epidemic for children begins with the lack of early childhood education; it produces a cycle of living poor for individuals living in poverty. "It is vital that proactive efforts are made to ensure that every low-income child has the opportunity to participate in the Head Start program" (Smith, 2012, p. 1). Tough (2016) found that the success rate of children exposed to poverty declined if they began school at an earlier age. With a delay in children's ability to learn, this gap then remains in place through the end of their educational career. Duncan's (2014) research reflected that of Tough (2016) and Smith (2012) that if investments are not made in early childhood education, underprivileged children will remain living in unfit conditions, the same as their family has for years.

When the child is deemed to have a disability, intervention occurs, and services can assist in meeting developmental milestones such as speech, language, and walking. These services are provided under the Individuals with a Disability Act (IDEA) in which they are protected from discrimination (Godfrey, 2016). Tough (2016) claimed that early learning helps give children the best start in life, despite their economic status. According to Simpson et al. (2015), tackling early childhood poverty and poor academics is done with the intervention of early childhood schooling, where young students ages three to five interact positively with others by coloring,

learning to count, and using a play-based approach. The research of Owens (2010) indicated the goal for early childhood education is to create a readiness for school and address attainment gaps between those in poverty, which is important to later school performance.

Gratz (2006) reported that parents play an irreplaceable intricate part instilling into their children an excitement about learning. More than two-thirds of poverty-stricken families lack books, toys, and reading material to assist their children in age-appropriate development (Rokosa, 2011). Educated parents typically provide books and educational toys to their children early on to enhance their developmental skills. Parents with low incomes are unlikely to provide these essential elements and less likely to engage in conversation with a wide variety of language when interacting with their children (Tough, 2009). Teale and Sulzby (1986) revealed that children experience literacy primarily as a social learning process during their preschool years. "Parents strongly affect this social learning process because they are the biggest influenceat this early state in their children's lives" (Gratz, 2006, p. 3). Tough's (2016) research supported that when early childhood intervention is made in a child's life prior to the age of five,there is a greater chance of an educator having influence in the life of that child in the years to come (Gratz, 2006).

If a child is exposed to trauma, a possible delay in brain development can exist. With trauma comes the effects of poverty, poor living conditions, one-parent households, divorce, violence, substance abuse, and poor nutrition (Tough, 2016). Collins (2016) explained that childhood poverty creates prolonged adversity that is translated to toxic stress. The impact poverty has on early childhood development is substantial and explains the overwhelming amount of generational poverty (Duncan, 2014). According to Collins (2016), some experts have deemedpoverty in children as a form of trauma, a chronic complex trauma.

The Effects of Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is defined as when a student misses 10% or greater of the academic calendar or has been absent a month or more when totaled (Bickelhaupt, 2011). According to Cooper (2016), the majority of rural school districts combat students who are chronically absent from school, but the issue is an extreme concern in school districts that have a high percentage of enrolled students who reside in poverty. Chang et al. (2014) conducted a study that examined chronic absence and discovered similarities in those students who missed five or more days within the first 30 days of school. These students were defined as chronically absent.

Students' who are chronically absent from class will create a flaw in their academic achievements for the duration of their education (Cooper, 2016). Chang et al. (2014) stated that chronic absenteeism is a warning sign for several educational dangers, which can be evident as early as preschool or kindergarten. "Students must attend class to accomplish academic success" (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 4). Tardiness of a student also relates directly to academic success. "A student being late for school results in missed material that may not be covered again, yet the student remains responsible for the material missed that day" (Özkanal & Arikan, 2011, p. 69). When students are repeatedly absent or tardy from school, they fail to benefit from hearing the instructors' teachings, peer relations, and examples used to support the framework for successful educating (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). "Chronic absenteeism has numerous negative implications. Far reaching, these implications touch everyone and include academic and social difficulties, dropping out of school, delinquency leading to justice system involvement, and lower financial earnings in adulthood" (Bickelhaupt, 2011, p. 60). "A nationalrate of 10% chronic absenteeism seems conservative, and it could be as high as 15%, meaning that 5 million to 7.5 million students are chronically absent" (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 3). Similar to chronic absenteeism,

chronic truancy also leads to academic failure, a risky lifestylesurrounded by alcohol, drugs, and risky sexual behavior (Bickelhaupt, 2011).

Attendance affects the overall success of a school. "Schools whose students meet this requisite number of days meet one benchmark of AYP status and ensures funding for the next academic year" (Bickelhaupt, 2011, p. 54). Administration and school boards can create policies and rules to enforce strict attendance policies. An alternative approach to increase the attendance rate is to implement a zero-tolerance attendance policy. The military was the first to use this policy in 1983, and it has now been used in schools for the past ten years. Zero tolerance policies often decrease grades once the limit of unexcused absences has been reached by a student. Students' grades for assignments are marked with a zero, yet the students are urged to make up the work for academic success but given zero credit (Gage et al., 2013). "Although research findings indicate no negative effects associated with zero tolerance policies the relationship between zero tolerance policy and truancy has not been examined empirically"(Gage et al., 2013, p. 119).

Understanding the importance of students' attendance rate at school is vital; it contributes to their academic success (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students who do attend school regularly have a higher probability of flourishing as scholars. It is difficult for an instructor to construct a class in a way that promotes thinking skills and tracks progress when the absenteeism rate is elevated (Morrissey et al., 2014). Not only are students who do not attend school regularly at risk for failing, they are now also students who become at risk to continually be unemployed (Gottfried, 2011). "The relationship between attendance and academic performance of students in secondary schools is fairly and positively correlated that attendance influences academic performance ailing, yet also they become at risk to become socially corrupt with poverty and

crime" (Oghuvbu, 2006, p. 25).

Impact Absenteeism and Poverty Have on Society

Students who fail to attend school from elementary years into their high school have been directly correlated with later dropping out of high school, living on welfare, and being continually unemployed throughout their life (Wilkins, 2008). As a student progresses from elementary to middle or high school, his or her regular attendance becomes more important. "Studies suggest that school absences and tardiness may have a greater negative effect on achievement as children grow older" (Morrissey et al., 2014 p. 3). The importance of education is stressed in society and is of greater value when it is relayed from an individual who is successful,based on his or her education (Wilkins, 2008). If a parent or guardian is uneducated, it becomes less important to the child to obtain an education (Gratz, 2006). "As children grow older, parentsrecognize the importance of school attendance" (Morrissey, 2014, p. 1). Children are not as encouraged to attend school regularly in elementary school versus when they become older (Gratz, 2006). When students fail to see the importance of education, it is an educator's duty to drive home the importance of attending school regularly to ensure academic success. Educators are left to discover the underlying cause for the student not attending school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Balfanz and Byrnes stated that, and devaluing education is often linked to the lackof education the student's family has not received or completed within their lifetime. When a student has a positive, educated influence, higher social status, or sports involvement, he or she is more likely to attend school regularly.

Not only are students who do not attend school regularly at risk for failing, they also are students who become at risk to be unemployed (Oghubvbu, 2006). The relationship between attendance and academic performance of students in secondary schools is fairly and positively

correlated. That is, attendance influences academic performance ailing, yet they also become at risk of becoming socially corrupt (Gratz, 2006). Carter (2000) believed that the poor had been severely neglected. He reported that half of children who come from poverty conditions are challenged in literacy and comprehension. Carter also found that two-thirds of those same children could not multiply or divide by middle school, with conclusion that one in four children are faced with failure in our education system as a nation. Gottfried (2011) concurred with Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), Morrissey et al. (2014, and Oghuvbu (2006) that there is a relationship between attendance and academic success. Attendance is deemed to be theprimary factor of school success. "Students with better attendance records are cited as having stronger test performance, thereby suggesting that increased attendance is a direct indicator, rather than a determinant of school success" (Gottfried, 2011, p. 435).

> Students who are engaged in their learning in and out of the classroom, yield higher scholastic results, have an intelligent technique to learning, are more apt to receive a diploma rather than a general education degree (GED), possess the abilities to complete complicated tasks, dedicate their time to academics and activities that promote student success, and experience overall better well-being. (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013, p. 14)

> In order to track attendance and prevent attendance rates from falling, school leaders must implement intervention programs, such as developing incentives, making school more interesting and rewarding, increasing communication with parents, and supporting families in changing behaviors that contribute to absenteeism. . . These programs must be effective in reinforcing the effects of attending school regularly, in doing so, schools have to extend their resources and programs out to those students who are habitually absent

and are failing scholastically and on a social basis" (Bickelhaupt, 2011, p. 55).

It takes an entire local community and family involvement to enhance scholastic

accomplishments, recover attendance rates, and improve the overall attitude and performance in

and out of the classroom (Nelson et al., 2012).

Factors of poor attendance include economic, social influences, illnesses, unstable family,

or peer pressure issues (Gratz, 2006). The brutal cycle of generational poverty is passed on with

the preconception that living without is a way of life. Poor housing conditions, lack of basic

hygiene, little to no education, malnutrition, stressful events, unemployment, and limited

availability of services all contribute to the growing poverty in our nation (Berrebi, 2011).

Semega et al. (2017) reported that in 2016–2017 the number of shared households across the

nation increased from 24.1 million to 24.6 million. "There are some people who will never get

out of poverty because they want to stay there. I know that is a crazy thing to think, but it's just

the truth. It's because somehow that's the life they know" (Duncan, 2014, p. 77).

Impact Poverty Has on Academic Achievement

"The relationship between school attendance and achievement was concurrent; that is, in

the same year, more days absent or times tardy were associated with lower grades and test

scores" (Morrissey et al., 2014, p. 11). Lack of attending school can impact and lower the

student's chances for academic success (Chang et al., 2014). Absenteeism is the continuing

characteristic of failure to attend school, lacking a reason. Attendance impacts students' overall

academic achievements tremendously. To measure the overall comprehension of a student's

knowledge in a subject matter, consistent attendance in school is a key element. Many students

do not attend school regularly due to underlying social-economic situations. The facts are that

life is tremendously difficult for children who are raised in rural poverty; living in desolate,

isolated areas with limited resources and lack of transportation all contribute to the complexity

parents face meeting the basic needs of their children (Duncan, 2014). Dweck et al. (2014)

agreed that the children who live in poverty face adversity in and out of school, which adversely

affects their mind and ability to think clearly, which indefinitely resonates with their capability to

learn in a classroom setting.

Intervention programs researched by Bickelhaupt (2011) that were proven to reduce

absenteeism included using incentives for attending school, creating an environment that is more

thought-provoking, motivating, and pleasing, and opening the line of contact with parents and

guardians. Incentive programs that would interest students would include pizza parties, fieldtrips,

stickers or certificates, and influence from a community organization or leader. Intervention

programs are needed within schools to make an urgent and intense alteration in thestudents'

insights of how educators can influence and alter students' lives.

As President Obama stated in his State of the Union address, "When students don't walk

away from their education, more of them walk the stage to get their diploma" (as cited in

Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013, p. 57). Students' lives can only be influenced and motivated if

they attend school on a regular basis. Motivating students to embrace the idea of building

professional relationships with educators, who invest the time and dedication to educate them, is

an intervention that builds student morale (Nelson et al., 2012). Gottfried (2011) concurred with

Morrissey et al. (2014), Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), and Gratz (2006) that there is a relationship

between consistent attendance and overall academic success. Attendance is deemed to be the

primary factor of school success. "Students with better attendance records are cited as having

stronger test performance, thereby suggesting that increased attendance is a direct indicator,

rather than a determinant of school success" (Gottfried, 2010, p. 435). Students of poverty are

less probable to be academically successful, feel less content at their school, and not likely to

experience success in their place of work (Hill & Duncan, 1987).

> Students who are engaged in their learning, in and out of the classroom, yield higher
>
> scholastic results, have intelligent techniques to learning, are more apt to receive a
>
> diploma rather than a general education degree (GED), possess the abilities to complete
>
> complicated tasks, dedicate their time to academics and activities that promote student
>
> success, and experience overall better well-being. (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013, p.
>
> 14)

Poverty is defined by economic insecurity and a lack of access to material resources; evidence

from Ridge's (2011) research showed that low-income children have a keen understanding of

how poverty impacts their lives and that low income brings uncertainty to everyday life.

Research indicates that poverty and low academic achievement are related; the research also

indicates that poverty and lower academic achievement is directly related to lack of regular

attendance (Owens, 2010).

Abraham Maslow (1943) is known in the psychology field for his hierarchy of human

needs; the levels of hierarchy are physiological needs, safety needs, needs of love, affection and

belongingness, needs for esteem and need for self-actualization. The physiological needs are

defined as basic, oxygen, food, water, and the ability to regulate their body temperature.

Children living in poverty are exposed to many risk factors that prevent their basic needs being

met, such as family instability, poor nutrition, lack of health care, and often have parents who are

challenged with obtaining resources to meet the basic needs of their children (Halfon, 2016).

Academic achievement will be difficult for students who live in povertyfor the duration of their

education due to the lack of ability to focus on meeting academic standards when their focus is

often to meet the needs of survival, such as shelter, food, water, and personal hygiene (Duncan,

2014). Students must have their needs met to accomplish academic success (Ridge, 2011). When

students live in extreme poverty, they are less likely to be nurtured and even less likely to have

their daily needs met, which means they are not provided with opportunities to meet their

academic potential. "Although educators understand that poverty plays a pivotal role in student

success, they are often overwhelmed by the scope of the issue" (Lawson, 2008, p. 57). The role

of an educator in rural poverty is important, and the way out of poverty is through education

(Duncan, 2014). "For these children and families, the teacher may become the most important

link to empowerment" (Kirby, 2003, p. 2). The lack of transportation and resources contributes

to the importance of the school and educators being the links for rural impoverished and

disconnected children. If educators are not properly skilled to deal with struggles and distractions

that their students encounter when living in rural poverty, they often intensify the disagreement

instead of taking the opportunity to build arelationship with that student (Tough, 2012).

For educators, administrators, and others who work in education, understanding the

importance of student poverty at school is vital; it contributes to their academic success (Balfanz

& Byrnes, 2012). Students stand a more probable chance to flourish as scholars when schools are

attended constantly. It is difficult for a student to be attentive in a class in a way that promotes

thinking skills and tracks progress when the stress of poverty is prevalent in their lives (Owens,

2010). According to Lawson (2008), "These realities include ongoing crises that require

continual management, illness, death, violence, abuse" (p. 58). The realities that Lawson (2008)

related to are the result of their families' socioeconomic status; all are challenges that have an

impact on students' abilities to meet the basic requirements of what is needed for academic

success in school.

Poverty-stricken youth show higher rates of academic failure and an increased probability

of grade retention. Children from poor families are twice as likely to repeat a grade,

and they are about ten times as likely to drop out of high school. (Rokosa, 2011)

"In the early grades, students who are chronically absent have lower reading and math scores, as

well as weaker social-emotional skills that they need to persist in school" (Chang et al., 2014, p.

1). There is a large disadvantage for children who grow up in poverty, largely when growing up

in rural poverty. When exposed to trauma, malnutrition, poor health care, unfit living conditions,

developmental delays, and inadequate support for advancement, there is the answer to

generational poverty (Duncan, 2014).

Mindset & Self-Determination Theory Applied to Poverty

Mindset is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary (2021) as a fixed mental attitude

or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations, an

inclination or a habit. The studies of Dweck (2006) focused on two types of mindset, a fixed

mindset and a growth mindset. With a growth mindset, one can believe he or she can change and

grow through application and experiences. A fixed mindset will limit oneself, build barriers, and

set limits. An old debate is intellectual ability against environmental factors, so educators must

rethink old ideations that limit the ability or academic achievement of a child based on what the

results of his or her IQ test, or that of what the household income is (Jensen, 2009). With a fixed

mindset, an educator believes that an IQ measure is not likely to change. Research by Tong et al.

(2007) showed that an IQ could be changed based on home environment and living conditions.

Dweck (2006) found that more than half of society belonged to a negatively stereotyped group,

such as teachers who perceive children who come from a low-income home are not that

intelligent as those who come from a two-parent well-off home. Parents who struggled in a

school setting may project a negative attitude about school, and in an effort to protect their children, create a fixed mindset by discouraging them from participating at school (Freiberg, 1993). Stereotype threats are developed by those who are part of a labeled group that becomes susceptible to failure when reminded of their weakness, such as a child who is surrounded by poverty (Tough, 2016). Dweck (2006) explained this well, "Many minorities drop out of college and many women drop out of math and science because they just don't feel they fit in" (p. 77).

The mindset of students in an impoverished classroom setting can be influenced to believe, they likely have no chance to escape poverty, leaving them to have a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006). When students assume that their intelligence is unchanging and unreceptive to alteration, they develop a fixed mindset (Tough, 2016). According to Dweck (2006), fixed mindset educators often consider themselves as completely successful by just communicating and delivering the knowledge of the subject, forgetting to interject the passion for learning.

Education is the essential element to expand and create opportunities for students living inpoverty. It provides them the potential to impact and create change in their lives and those livingwithin the tirelessly underprivileged and decollate communities (Duncan, 2014). Dweck (2006) witnessed grown adults weep when they came to the realization that they can become more intelligent and can continually learn. "It's common for students to turn off to school and adopt an air of indifference, but we can make a mistake if we think that any student stops caring,"(Dweck, 2006, p. 201). Those students who do possess a growth mindset, the idea to stop learning does not make any logical sense to them. For students, it is a time of opportunity, a period to absorb teachings, and a chance to explore all that is possible for them to pursue in their future (Dweck, 2006).

Children of poverty are susceptible and influenced by the doubt and unstable households

in which they live (Tough, 2016). Tough used Dweck's (2006) studies to explain the mindset of students of poverty who were powerfully swayed by implicit and explicit messages toward their ability to expand and enhance their intelligence. Long-lasting socioeconomic poverty can generate settings that weaken the growth of themselves and the ability for self-determination and self-efficacy (Jensen, 2009). Sherman mirrored those findings in that citizens of poverty-stricken communities often form an invisible barrier between themselves and others, differentiating by income, class, race, education, and culture, which in turn is a fixed mindset that sets them apart from other people. Sherman (2009) determined that rural families often isolate their children or protect them by believing that they cannot conceive a life anywhere else. Jensen (2009) also agreed with the findings of Dweck in that IQ scores cannot be applied tothe ability of a student to learn. The mindset of the student must be one of enrichment and growth; the alternative is to promote an optimistic, inspiring, and successful experience that instills the concept that they are able to learn and continue learning.

Tough (2016) explained that the studies and research of Dweck (2006) were straightforward. When people sense that their individualism and right to decide are valued and seen as equal, they are more motivated to believe in themselves, accept responsibility, and engage actively in efforts to improve their mental health and their willingness to expand their knowledgewhen presented the opportunity. Dweck et al. (2014) stated that social belonging motivates students to long-term educational success. Dweck et al. surveyed a group of high school dropouts and found that the students desired individual attention from educators; when they did receive the attentiveness, the students related it to having a direct impact on deciding to stay and graduate from high school.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* (2021) defined self-determination as determination of

one's own fate or course of action without compulsion; free will, or the freedom of the people of a given area to determine their own political status; independence. Self Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory confirmed to be beneficial in the explanation of students' plans, functioning, and persistence while learning (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). The concept of the ability to meet ones' basic psychological needs has been interlaced within the SDT, specifying that essential psychological nutriments are needed for emotional and physical health, including social wellness (Vansteenkiste et al., 2010). Because of the wide field of issues that SDT can be applied to, such as education, healthcare, and sports, interest has risen surrounding this theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT addresses the basics of what makes up who we are, such as our goals, aspirations, self-regulation, personality, and how social environments can impact one's behavior and thoughts of how one perceives themselves (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

SDT is established as early as infancy; when babies cry, they are doing so out of intentions to alter or influence the environment in which they are surrounded (Wehmeyer, 2003). It is throughout middle and high school when students initially instigate power over the direction of their lives. When presented with the opportunity to have control or make choices that impact their lives, children with the guidance of an adult are more likely to make reasonable decisions. Children are then exposed to the concept of having accountability for their choices and decisions, which is not as likely to occur for a child living inpoverty (Jensen, 2009).

Secure relationships and steady surroundings are vital to a child's self-worth, which frequently are brutally missing in homes with little to no income (Jensen, 2009). Pauley et al. (2002) concluded that students who live in turmoil have a decreased ability to think, and they almost always suffer a negative educational circumstance. According to Deci (1995), those who had a troubled childhood but became successful as an adult claim they were able to overcome

those troubled years because they had a teacher or an influential adult who served as a coach and believed in them as well as encouraged them to believe in themselves.

Summary

Rural communities rely on schools for stability. They add a significant sense of identity. Rural communities need these schools because they contribute to a more enduring, workable, maintainable, and justifiable rural America (Tieken, 2014). Rural schools assist in preparing students for local jobs. They are a way of life in a community where students are taught values and maintain the local culture. Sherman (2009) found that those who reside in rural communities take enormous pride in being good parents and raising their children in what they perceive to be harmless environments. Parents often define the success of their children based on employment or income but rather, the ability to teach their children skills needed in a rural community to survive. Both rural people and rural communities are more deprived when compared to urban communities due to transportation and location (Mosley & Miller, 2004).

This chapter described the history of poverty and the effects poverty has on early childhood, absenteeism, academic achievement, and society. This chapter also reviewed the mindset and self-determination theory through a theoretical study of literature aligned with rural poverty. "Kids raised in poverty are more likely to lack and need a caring, dependable adult in their lives, and often it's teachers to whom children look for that support" (Jensen, 2009, p. 11).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn what the common factors are that prohibit students who attend public school from continuously attending school to promote academic success in rural districts with high poverty rates. The research questions centered on the common experiences of public-school personnel who work and interact with families who live at or below the poverty level. This study will allow educators to better understand the inhibiting factors that prevent students from rural poverty from continually attending school.

Method of Inquiry

This research study utilized a phenomenological approach in that participants were interviewed about their experiences with the parents, teachers, and students who live at or below the poverty line. Phenomenology is described as the science of essence of consciousness with a focus on the concept of intentionality and the meaning of a lived incident or occurrence from the first-person perspective (Kumar, 2012). Hays and Singh (2011) stated that phenomenology centers on comprehending the significance of the participants' lived occurrences, which is an impactful perspective to have. Kumar (2012) stated that descriptive phenomenology is a method of study for research that is accomplished with direct interaction with the researcher and the objects of study. It required the researcher to set apart any preconceptions and gather information through the personal experience that the subject shares; the phenomenon is to

encapsulate the experience. According to the conclusions of the studies by Alerby (2003) and Cornett-DeVito and Worley (2005), who have utilized phenomenology in educational settings, this method of inquiry has enhanced the learning environment for students since the study is based on a real-life scenario, which can be used to create ways for educators to enhance the learning environment for students. This study was based on real-life scenarios conveyed with interviews.

Participants and Recruitment

Interviews were conducted with public school administrators, guidance counselors, and school secretaries who have experience with addressing the needs of families who reside in rural poverty areas in the state of Missouri. The participants were employed by a public-school district within the state of Missouri that has a free and reduced lunch participation percentage of 80% or higher. This high percentage will signify the school district contains a significant number of students living at or below the poverty level established by the USDA (2017a). Seven school districts were identified using a Missouri Poverty Rate: County by County map (Voyles, 2018). In 2016 the map indicates the poverty rate in Missouri was 14%; 23 counties have a poverty rate above 20%, and seven counties have a poverty rate below 7%. An email was sent asking the superintendent of that district for permission to participate in the research. If the superintendent elected not to participate in the study, the next county on the list was contacted. If the superintendent approved the participation, I then sent an email to prospective school secretaries, counselors, school nurses, and principals to contact me if they were interested in being interviewed. Once consent was received, interviews were scheduled with each participant. The interviews were to be conducted in person and separately to enhance and secure the validity of the research. However, due to COVID-19, interviews were held via Zoom, separately with

each participant. "A researcher often has direct contact with people and settings and is therefore an instrument of the study" (Hays & Singh, 2011 p. 7). The goal of the interviews was for the researcher to stay neutral and nonjudgmental toward the participants and their experiences. The following school districts complied with the guidelines set for the study: Caruthersville, Hayti, Lutie, Clarkston, Southland, Charleston, Dawniphan, Manes, Gideon, Mountain View Birch, Raymondville, Morgan County R-I, South Iron, Centerville, Salem, Kingston, Richwoods, and Shellknob. The maximum number of participants was 64 if all school districts participated.

Instrumentation

According to Leung (2015), most qualitative research is designed to study a particular population or ethnic group of individuals. Leung further explained that the explanation of validity is appropriateness, indicating that it defines the tools, process, and data for the researcher's methodology. The validity must enable the discovery of the conclusions to be applicable. Leung stated that reliability is within the process and the results; the qualitative research reliability is with the thoroughness of the researcher.

This study utilized an interview structure for data collection. The information was collected through personal interviews via Zoom. I led the one-on-one interviews with the intention for the interview to last at least one hour; the questions are included in the interview protocol shown in Appendix A. The review of literature from the research was utilized to form the questions for the interview. Audio recordings and notes taken were used to document the interview. Following the interview, I summarized and reflected on the personal experience from the interview in the form of researcher field notes. The purpose of the notes was to document the thoughts and opinions about the responses of the interviewee in relation to the research questions. Additionally, non-verbal communication was documented throughout the interview.

To protect the identity of the participants, only I have accessibility to the recording devices and notes taken and used in the interview process. The use of a digital voice recorder on an iPad was utilized during the interview to record. At the conclusion of the interview, the conversations were transcribed in a word document on my personal computer.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was sorted using color-coded notes to identify themes within the findings. The artifacts and transcriptions were color-coded using Microsoft Word on my personal computer, protected by a password, kept for three years, and then destroyed.

Should a participant wish to withdraw from the study, his or her information and data will be destroyed immediately upon notification from the individual or school district. Hays and Singh (2011) reported that sorting keywords, which is often referred to as coding, does qualitative data analysis. Hays and Singh also recommended that the researcher code the data immediately after the data is collected, which was my intent in this study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the common factors that prohibit students who live in rural poverty districts from continuously attending school. This study provided knowledge and awareness of the common factors that affect attendance for school administrators of high-poverty public rural school districts. The identification of common factors can assist school educators and school administrators with what is needed for students to continually attend school while living in a rural poverty school district. A review of literature confirmed an academic gap between students who do attend school continually versus those who do not attend school continually when residing in a rural poverty area. Jensen (2013) indicated that the academic achievements of students who live in rural poverty are inadequate because if one is poor, the

chance of completing high school is significantly lower than if one is a student who lives in a home with a middle-class income level. The study identified the common threads which contribute to students' poor attendance and lack of academic success.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study focused on rural poverty and how it impacts students who live in rural poverty and their educational process. Research from the review of literature and this study indicated a relationship between rural poverty and poor school achievement. Research and quantitative studies reflected that students living in rural poverty were often unable to attend school and experienced a higher drop-out rate. Attendance impacts the overallachievement not only of the students' success but a district's success as well.

Although previous research findings in other studies can be helpful when identifying why students do not continually attend school when faced with poverty, little research focused on what schools have done or could do to bridge the academic gap of students who live in rural poverty. A lack of research exists on what the common factors are that prohibit students from attending public school in an area with high poverty rates and low academic success.

Research Questions

This study focused on the common factors that contribute to poor attendance of students in rural school districts with high poverty rates. Additional questions included:

1. What are the common factors that contribute to poor attendance of students who live in rural poverty?

2. What practices can improve attendance of students who live in rural poverty?

Impact of the Pandemic

The study was intended to be carried out through face-to-face interviews. However, due to the impact of the pandemic, Indiana State University required these research interviews to be via virtual meetings. The school was not visited by me; therefore, the culture and climate were not able to be considered in any findings. The virtual meetings posed an issue with the availability of the internet. Many rural districts do not have a stable internet connection. During many of the interviews, the connection failed and had to be restarted to complete the interview.

The study outlined 18 school districts that complied with the guidelines set for the study. All 18 districts were contacted, with only a few responding. Each district was contacted more than once requesting participation. Administrators and other district employees who met the criteria for the interview were often overwhelmed with extra work due to most districts being out of the building due to COVID-19. Only after many emails and phone calls was I able to obtain commitments from five school districts to participate with a total of 12 participants. The overall stress that COVID-19 has had on school districts impacted the availability and willingness of many districts to find the time and desire to participate in the study.

Research Participants

Participants were interviewed after matching the criteria for this research study. The participants were all employed by a rural school district and worked or interacted with families who live at or below the poverty level. Each school that participated in the study was identified by a non-gendered and non-identifying name. This method of coding was used to keep the identifying factors of the study confidential. None of the real names of the participants nor school district names were used when compiling data and themes.

Table 1 depicts the generalized information for the participants.

Table 1

Summarization of Participants, Experience, and Demographics

Participant	Years of Experience in Education	Number Years in the District	Level of Degree Obtained
Andy	25	2	Specialist
Alice	12	12	Specialist
Abby	17	9	Doctorate
Bob	25	5	Specialist
Brandy	14	14	Masters
Brenda	1	1	Bachelors
Cheri	19	2	Specialist
Chis	14	11	Specialist
Dawn	22	2	Specialist
Danielle	13	1	Masters
Debbie	21	1	Specialist
Ethan	22	6	Specialist

Summary of the Interviews

Prior to the interviews, the participants returned the signed informed consent. The interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes and were composed of ten structured questions found in Appendix A. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, a virtual software program, and arranged at the convenience of the participant. I wanted to ensure that the participants were not rushed and had adequate time to answer the ten questions. The following themes and supporting data

provide a condensed, yet detailed report of the interviews that were conducted with five school

districts and a total of twelve participants. A variety of professional educational participants were

interviewed, including the superintendent, principal, vice principal, counselor, teacher, and social

worker. The study identified the following themes: lack of resources to meet the essential needs,

poverty cycles among rural communities, and building positive relationships with parents and

schools, in correlation to the phenomenon of low attendance rates for students attending school

who live in school districts within rural poverty. Subthemes included what rural poverty looks

like, obstacles, prioritizing education, school participation, and building trust.

Theme 1: Lack of Resources to Meet Essential Needs

The interviewed participants provided a detailed and descriptive understanding of what

rural poverty looks like to them. Their responses indicated that the ability to educate students

successfully in a rural district with a high poverty rate starts with a deeper understanding of the

elements that surround rural poverty. The participants had professional knowledge of the

complexity that rural poverty presents. Chris stated, "Rural poverty significantly impacts our

families; they are struggling to meet their own essential needs without factoring in educational

needs." Students and families who live in rural poverty face many obstacles, and it does impact

their overall educational success, according to the findings in the study. Bob stated, "When their

essential needs are not met, we cannot expect to be able to educate them." The obstacles

participants discussed were poor housing conditions, no utilities, lack of food, no access to

medical care, broadband access, and drugs.

What Rural Poverty Looks Like

Each participant described what rural poverty looked like for their students, giving

examples of what they had seen. The living conditions of rural poverty can look vastly different

in each community, ranging from tents, campers, and trailers pieced together for shelter. Andy stated, "It is sad, we have a family next to the school living in a horrific house with no electricity, no water, and running a generator. We could hear them turn it on from in the school." Brandy reflected on the day her district took them on a bus tour to see the living conditions of many of their families. She explained that what the teachers saw that day were sheds being used as a home, houses without roofs, windows, or doors. Brandy stated, "Not the places I pictured my students going home to." Andy reflected, "I have worn many hats, I even drove a school bus, and before then, I didn't know that they [students] lived or grew up in that type of environment." Debbie stated, "To me, poverty looks like houses falling down, propped up doors, cardboard windows, and pieces missing of the house." Bob stated, "Rural poverty looks like a family of four living in a pop-up camper or a pop-up tent." Abby discussed how the living conditions impacted student attendance and how often it was not fit to live in and had a sad appearance. Abby further discussed the time a home visit was required due to lack of attendance, calling it impactful to see that there was no running water, and the electricity was being borrowed from the trailer next door with an extension cord through the make-shift window. Abby stated, "Being in their home provided a different perspective with where they are coming from, after seeing their living conditions." Dawn spoke of this perspective after seeing where students live and discussed that the houses were falling down often with no running water or electricity. Dawn stated, "There were blankets in the windows and doors, blowing in the wind. The house looked like it wasn't being lived in, and three kids ran out." She explained when they delivered food for COVID-19, the students would wait for us. Danielle stated, "It's hard for me to sleep at night with not knowing where students lay their head." Ethan mirrored much of what the other participants stated they saw, rundown trailers and living conditions that were not safe for kids. Ethan went on

further to explain,

> We have big farmers in our community with a lot of old money, and then we have a
> whole lot of have-nots living in rural poverty. Their farming equipment often costs more
> than the falling down shack they live in.

Abby stated, "Our teachers are well aware of what poverty looks like because it significantly impacts our attendance."

Brandy explained, "I have students who come to school and report being cold and hungry." Brandy then inferred that the cold and hungry students are often from homes with no electricity, no heat, and no cooking. Bob discussed the time he went to check on a student who did not show up for school and was always absent. Bob continued,

> I went to his house and did not find him, so I drove through the trailer park and found
> him fishing from a pond. He had missed the bus; they had no electricity, so he didn't
> have an alarm. He was fishing because he was hungry. That is the reality of what kids in
> rural poverty are faced with.

Providing food to families was one concern every participant had in common. Andy explained that his district provides a buddy-pack every week. Debbie explained that a buddy-pack was a bag of food donated by a food bank intended to last two days and has easy food for kids to eat. Debbie stated, "Almost all of our kids get a buddy-pack every Friday, so they'll have food over the weekend." Chris stated, "Families struggle to access food, hardworking families trying to make ends meet." Dawn stated, "More than 80% of our kids eat free or reduced meals because of poverty." Dawn continued with discussion that students have a poor diet outside of school and said, "When we had a blood drive many of our students who tried to give blood couldn't because their iron was too low." Participant Ethan explained, "In our area, poverty is

there, and students are hungry." He stated, "Elementary students often come to school only to feel safe and get fed for free; high school students often just don't come." He furthermore explained that his district sends home food in addition to the buddy-packs. He closed with, "All kids in our district eat free: free breakfast and free lunch. It often is the only hot meals they have. Our goal is to meet their essential needs, starting with food."

Participant Andy expressed frustration when he heard others say not to blame the parent. He disagreed and thinks living in poverty is a choice. He explained that he questions why they continue to live in poverty. Andy further explained the essential needs that his district provides. The examples given were not only food but also clothing, beds, furniture, glasses, and school supplies. Brandy said, "I have used my own resources to provide food, clothing, alarm clocks, whatever I can to reduce the barriers for families." Abby had much the same to say, giving examples of the resources they use to help families, such as food, clothes, and school supplies. Abby stated, "We are happy to provide the supplies a family needs; we do so strictly from donations from a community organization." She further stated, "We had one parent who needed food but refused it for the longest time. She was afraid how we'd judge her as a parent." She emphasized the importance of getting parents to allow you to help them, so they know you are not judging them but helping them. Danielle gave an example of how meeting the essential needs of a student can impact their willingness to attend school. She had a student who came from a home with the roof falling in and no door who wore a dirty coat that she was pretty sure was the dog's bed when he was not wearing it. The teachers and nurse washed it once a week. "The clean coat made him proud and kept him coming to school, so we'd wash it."

Obstacles

All the participants discussed in length the complexity that being rural brings to families.

Bob explained that having no resources was one of the many obstacles. Bob further explained that the distance to medical care was too far. Bob went on to explain,

> Rural poverty is so different than urban poverty. The resources they need, medical, government assistance, and food banks, are so far away. That is why we brought a medical team on-site once a week and a dental service twice a month. We are helping families meet their essential needs. There just isn't the access to resources in rural poverty as in an urban area. Transportation is a huge dilemma for our families; we don't have a city bus or sidewalks.

Dawn referred to a specific student who had an abscessed tooth.

> She had been late for school every morning for weeks, and when I asked her about it, she explained the free dental clinic was forty minutes away and had to wait in line to see if there was a spot for her to be seen by the dentist. The student went every day for two weeks before she was able to see a dentist, which by then the area was so swollen she had to get an antibiotic, wait, then go back to wait for a spot to have the tooth removed.

Dawn blamed this on no preventative care and no medical care that is accessible since the local hospital closed. Chris explained that to apply and receive welfare benefits for food and government healthcare requires a lengthy trip to a neighboring town. Many do not have the gas money needed to travel for resources.

Multiple participants discussed mental health and drug use as obstacles for parents and students. Abby explained that many of her parents have mental health and drug issues. Brenda discussed a situation where the school had to get involved because the student was not attending school regularly. The student was 13 years old, and her dad had a criminal past; he was injecting her with drugs to prohibit her from going to school and talking about the abuse and drugs.

Brenda stated, "The student since then has attempted suicide; it's hard for me to imagine her pain." Andy discussed a comparable situation with a 7th grade girl who was pimped out by her mom for money who was also giving kids drugs to sell at school. He reported, "You hear about it, but, for it to become real, breaks your heart." Andy stated, "Parents are using the kids to benefit them." Brandy reported that she has students who come to school experiencing issues at home due to parental drug use. Abby stated, "Often parents have mental health and drug issues." Alice discussed that the use of meth, heroin, and cocaine is prevalent in their community with parents and students. Alice stated, "I have a knack for kids to open up with me about addiction, and I get help for them; I have sent two kids to Job Core." Andy stated, "We have a family that lives close to the school, and the kids deal drugs at school, for the parents. We've tried to catch them." Danielle posed the question, "Is poverty the reason (for students not attending), or is drugs?" She went on to answer her own question, "Parents are on meth and don't even know what is going on."

Brandy discussed how the district supported students and families to meet their essential needs.

> We have a health clinic on-site one day a week; we have dental services that come to the school; we have an onsite food pantry that we stock with donations, a clothing closet, and we have onsite mental health services. We need more programs to help families remove the barriers, education for parents, drug treatment programs, and more mental health services; the list goes on and on.

Cheri discussed an obstacle that had not played a factor with attendance until the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced districts to online school. She explained that many families have no cell phone or home phone and no broadband access. "We can't educate them online

without internet or electricity at home." Ethan stated, "A kid may not have shoes to come to

school, but they have a phone and know how to get on snap-chat, but that phone doesn't have a

hot-spot to connect their chrome book to do schoolwork; it's a problem." Ethan discussed that he

is looking into a connectivity grant to extend our Wi-Fi. Dawn stated, "We partnered with an

internet company to provide Wi-Fi for our students, but many don't have Wi-Fi at home. We've

had to think outside the box while going to school online." Abby stated, "The further you get

away from the school, and town Wi-Fi is not available to have." Abby emphasized that

broadband is a more essential need. They have had to look into providing internet hot spots for

families.

Theme 2: Poverty Cycles Among Rural Communities

Throughout the interviews with the participants, the theme of poverty cycle arose and

became intertwined with the themes. The subthemes included prioritizing education and school

participation. The idea of a poverty cycle was used to define the reasoning and actions of the

parents and students who continue to live in rural poverty. Abby stated, "The cycle of poverty is

generational. No matter how many opportunities they can't see a way out." Bob explained that in

order to "break the cycle, you must get the parents on the same page as the school, often using

the carrot–stick approach." Bob stated, "You get more bees with honey than vinegar."

Cheri discussed comparing the poverty cycle to the family welfare cycle, with the idea of

why work when you have generational welfare. Danielle admitted not having all the answers and

stated, "I don't want them to expect it; we just give and give to the cycle, and I don't know how

to fix it." Danielle emphasized that giving included more than just food, "We give clothes,

personal hygiene products, backpacks, shoes, and the list goes on." Brenda discussed the only

way she sees students surviving the educational process is by coming to school to break the

cycle. Brenda stated, "They have to break the cycle to get out of here." Bob stated, "The goal is not to make it generational; with an education or skill, they can break the cycle." Bob went on to further explain that they have partnered with another school district to provide vocational classes to ensure their students could learn a skill. Cheri stated, "These kids have a long road ahead of them without tools. It was that a 4-year college or nothing seemed to be the options, but now we have a trade school they can enroll in."

Prioritizing Education

Ethan stated, "Parents have a lack of parenting; kids are making their own decisions. There is a lack of somebody there getting them up and around for school." Ethan explained that when this occurs, that is when they get the social worker or counselor involved or call the Division of Family Services to rectify the situation. He discussed having grown up in the community and acknowledged there has always been the haves and the have nots. He compared those to the community members who stay in school and those who drop out.

> I have friends who I went to elementary school with who later dropped out of high
> school. Those same friends are still in the community without a job and probably on
> some sort of government assistance. They are the same parents who don't push their kids
> to do their very best at school. It is as if they don't want a better future for their kids.

Debbie stated, "Parents have a view on education of not being smart enough and a lack of importance." Dawn discussed that parents often have preconceived notions of what the expectations are for school. She then stated, "I'd like to break those molds of what it (education) could be." Danielle stated, "The community gives (the) perception school is optional; they don't understand the need for education. Parents don't prepare their kids for education." She continued to assert that when students have sloppy backpacks with papers hanging out that are weeks old, it

means that the parents have not looked at them; it sends a message of nothing you do at school

matters. She also expressed that teachers talk about this issue all the time, but they do not have

the cure when parents have a lack of education to help kids and parents aren't involved. Brenda

stated, "Parents are unable to help kids succeed at school." He sees it as mom and dad

themselves need help and are not even able to wake the kids for school.

Andy recognized that parents do not value education, and they have a lack of

understanding because they are not educated. He reported that often he hears, "Don't blame the

parents," and he does disagree with that. He expressed, "We have to have the support of the

parents, and they need to be encouraging and working with their kids and make sure they are

doing their homework. We can't go home with them." His concern was what instruction and life

skills they are missing if they are not in school. He stated, "They need an education to survive

the cycle, the families are barely getting by, have no money and no job to provide for the

families' essential needs." He acknowledged it was sad but expressed that it was a choice to live

in poverty. He stated, "Often living in poverty is a choice that is made because of no education

and or drugs."

Chris believed that parents do not see school as important, defending his beliefs with the

idea of parents having a lack of experience with education. Alice talked about an example of a

parent not prioritizing education,

> I have a student who had missed 30 plus days, which is educational neglect and must be
>
> reported. I discovered that the student was home babysitting siblings so Dad could work.
>
> I knew Dad was working at a factory in town that had a point system and didn't want him
>
> to get fired. I had to report him; I am a mandated reporter.

Andy went on to discuss the laws about excessive absences and stated, "They do not do anything

when we report. I'd like to see the follow through on the state side. It's frustrating."

Cheri shared the thoughts about tying government funding to attending school, so parents were held more accountable. She discussed that for parents to receive such benefits as social security insurance, disability, and/or food stamps, their kids should need to attend school. She also shared that this would help prioritize education for parents the same way the state ties attendance to school funding. This only seems "fair." Andy stated, "We are paid for the attendance from the state, but for me personally, that is not the most important. I want them to become productive, functioning citizens and break the poverty cycle." Andy went on to discuss histhoughts about parents being held accountable.

> Parents need more accountability; the laws aren't good because when we hotline with excessive absences, there is not an action. I wish the state would follow through with their side. It's frustrating and makes us (school) look like the bad guy when we cover ourselves by reporting.

Abby linked generational poverty to special education and the significant impact on making progress with students and parents. He also believed there exists a generational lack of educational importance. He discussed how he thought students survived the educational process by keeping their heads down and doing what is needed to survive. Abby stated, "Getting them to excel can be difficult if they struggle and their parents struggled." Chris emphasized, "Kids are good at doing enough to get by and trying to slide by quietly." He explained that with the supports of welfare, they are just getting by with the bare minimum. Chris stated, "I see little interest from families for additional supports. Very few get involved, not a lot of involvement and not super important." Chris referred to this as "cycle under the radar."

Chris believed an underlying factor that affects students of rural poverty and their

continued attendance is the inconsistency of legal guardianship. Chris stated, "It creates

instability for the students. We have a lot of foster kids who are constantly changing houses and

kids who go back and forth from grandparents, to foster parents then sometimes to actual

parents." He questioned how the student knows who is in charge. Alice discussed that a major

population of students is being raised by grandparents. He stated, "Nine out of our 16

kindergarten students are being raised by a grandparent or other guardians." He continued by

stating, "When you don't raise your kids right, you raise your grandkids." Danielle stated,

"Young parents not knowing how to parent have grandparents raising grandkids."

School Participation

Extra-curricular activities for students who live in rural poverty also were stated to have

very little parental support. Alice bluntly stated, "Poverty impacts extra-curricular activities."

Danielle stated, "Parents and students don't participate. Those who do take part, often then the

parent does not come to watch. It's easier not to participate." Dawn stated, "No parents in the

stands, and very few (parents) are at every single event. Other parents buy shoes for kids without

the means to do so, just so they can play." Danielle attributed the lack of parent support to the

cost of gas and shoes. Brandy explained the lack of participation in terms of being unable to

secure transportation and the inability to purchase the equipment that is needed for the sport.

Andy also believed that the participation was not there for extra-curricular activities because kids

cannot afford shoes or uniforms. He stated, "Educators don't let kids go without. I've paid out of

pocket so they can participate." He went on to say, "Students have a lack of support from parents

because they don't attend games and can't get them picked up from practice."

Kids that live in poverty a lot of times don't have the same opportunities of those that

don't. My kids, for example, play on travel teams all year round, and the other kids don't

have the same opportunity or the means to do that. With school sports, the more practice

you get, the more you play, so it could be discouraging not to play when you're not as

good as those who play more often.

 Bob reported that fewer kids from poverty participate in sports than their peers. "They have no

access to rides home or after games; we have more seniors that ride the bus than drive. They

don't have cars." Abby reported that rural poverty affects extra-curricular activities quite a bit.

"Kids want to attend, but the transportation isn't available. Kids can't get a ride after practices

and games. We'd have a lot more kids be active if we were able to provide transportation."

Andy reported that "In 4th and 5th grade, our attendance for parent teacher conferences is

better than it is as they get older. We just can't get parents to come. The percentage drops the

older they get." Bob was frustrated when discussing the parent participation within his district,

having thrown everything in but the kitchen sink when trying to get parents involved. Abby

discussed the many attempts that their district had made to involve parents.

We've hosted a variety of nights hoping to get parent participation, a STEM night, a fine

arts festival, and music concerts. We optimistically anticipate a big draw, so we, of

course, have food. That's always the big draw. Only the families that typically show up

aren't the ones that you're hoping to see. We often see the same handful of families at

each event.

Dawn discussed the importance of students having a link to school. Dawn stated, "If

students can participate in extracurricular activities, they have a sense of belonging and pride.

Creating the relationship between school and home are vital when attempting to increase

academic achievement and attendance."

Theme 3: Building Positive Relationships with Parents and Schools

Brenda discussed how she affected rurally impoverished students to attend school more consistently by focusing on advocating for families. "We have to understand why the kid is not coming to school." Brenda continued to stress the importance of communicating with families to understand how the school can help. "Whatever I can do to help them as a family." Debbie stated, "We go door to door communicating with families. Phone numbers don't work. They change all the time with burner phones. So, we knock on their door." Abby stated, "Building a relationship is key; they don't know how much you care, till you care." Abby expressed the crucial element of getting to know what the family needs are the bridge to building a relationship. Danielle agreed and discussed the importance of relationships with not only students but also the entire family.

> Building a relationship with trust, touching their heart, letting them know you care is the only way these students will survive the educational process. We must have teachers and administration that genuinely care and make it [school] a safe place.

> Bob explained that he emphasizes with teachers how important it is to build relationships with students. He stated, "I tell my teachers you can't screw up the easy ones; anyone can teach them. You need to focus on the hard ones, who need you the most." Chris explained that she likes her teachers to not teach first but to build relationships first. Chris stated, "Often there is no connection or engagement with school for families, and we are trying to get a positive interaction." Debbie discussed how she wants her students to feel.

> I want them to know someone here (school) is going to show them love and attention. I want them to know we go out searching for them when they do not show up. I want them to know people care about them, and we want to show them a better way. We want them

to participate and be a part of society to better themselves. I want them to believe in themselves.

Building Trust

Dawn expressed the importance of starting young with daycare programs to help students and families trust the school. Dawn stated, "Partnering with parents early to help them see the value of education will get them on board and have a lasting impact." Abby explained that "Relationship and trust are the key impacts with the student when parents aren't available." Abby referred to a specific incident where the parent had a distrustful relationship with the school.

> I knew I had to get to know the family, or she would not trust me enough to let me help her and her kids. We knew she was not sending the kids to school because there was no running water, which meant the kids had not showered in days. She knew her life was not positive, but home visits coincide with a positive relationship. The best form of communication is a face-to-face home visit. Not judging but helping them. I offered to let the kids shower before school until she could apply for aid to get the water turned on. I also offered to have their clothes washed.

Alice expressed concern about the relationships being tainted when they "hotline for attendance." Alice stated,

> We are required to report parents who don't send their kids to school, but then parents blame the school when DFS [Division of Family Services] comes to their home to investigate. We are required to report when they have missed 30 or more days; it's educational neglect.

Alice went on to share a solution, "What we need to do is change the attendance policy,

completely overhaul the policy to fit the culture and heritage of the area. Our kids skip school to deer hunt because it puts food on the table. We should take off two weeks during deer season." He then explained that when kids do miss, they get a bad rap and have to make-up the days. Alice stated, "Common sense tells us to work individually with students, get to know them and why they are missing, then work to get them on track." Bob stated, "Even if there is a chance, you'll tarnish the relationship you have to do what is best for kids." Bob recalled a particular incident that left a lasting impression on him.

> We have a preschooler who came to school with a dirty bottle in their backpack. The bottle was full of mold. The teacher called DFS to report the bottle, and I went with them to the home in attempt to salvage the relationship with the family, but what I saw that day I'll never forget. Upon arrival, there were dead animals in the yard leading up to the door. Inside there was a baby in a crib that was filled with animal feces while the other toddler crawled on the floor that was filled with dirt and trash. The parents acted as if we, the school, had blown it all out of portion and there wasn't a thing wrong with the way they were living. I was sick. We're mandated reporters; parents don't understand that.

Brandy stated that one key is "arming districts with the tools necessary to empower these families so that they can begin to reduce barriers on their own." Her ideas included, "Creating programs which are specifically designed to help families who are experiencing rural poverty would be beneficial." Abby discussed that providing professional development for his staff is critical to know the importance of relationships.

> When we the school can damage relationships with families over something simple like homework, I preach to my staff about knowing where your kids are coming from before you are quick to react to their lack or their parents' lack of interest and participation.

Build a bridge of trust with each student and their family; it can make a difference for

years to come.

Chris discussed how valuable their school resource officer was to provide opportunities

and build relationships with families. Chris explained,

We have one SRO for our district. We added the position last year. That individual goes

to check on students when they don't attend school; it really opens the door to build a

relationship with that kid and get to know why really why they aren't coming to school.

Abby stated, "When we had the Century 21 Grant, we were able to have a social worker,

and it was great; she made a connection with the families and helped provide resources that

affected kids' attendance." Chris stated, "Personally, I think building relationships is the solution

that goes the furthest when trying to improve the attendance of students." Bob discussed the

impact a social worker has on their district.

We have a school-based social worker who works with our families. She provides mental

health services for our students during the school day and helps families connect with

services outside of school. She also does our professional development for our district,

focusing on trauma-informed information to share with the staff.

Debbie stated, "My staff needs trauma-informed training. They need to know how to

handle the effects that rural poverty has on our students: the abuse, physical and emotional, and

the drugs." Chris stated, "We see one to two kids in a class regularly who have experienced

trauma; from death to incarceration, trauma is becoming a lot more common." Debbie discussed

that less experienced teachers have so many expectations to meet academically that they often

attack the situation or behavior of a student with the student having consequences.

Young teachers tend to want to punish instead of finding out what the issue is, what is

really going on. It's important for them to know you love them; even when they are bad,

you still care. When a student doesn't do their homework, find out how we can do better

and what we should do to help them next time. Building trust.

Andy stated, "The key is providing an environment that they can come in that is a safe place to

come and where they are cared for and loved. They need to know we want them here." Brandy

was adamant when talking about what students of rural poverty need to survive successfully the

educational process, "As my superintendent always tells us, you have to make school the place

students want to be. Meaning we need to make them feel safe, secure, loved, heard, validated,

and understood. It really is about the relationships." Debbie shared her vision:

My dream is to build a shelter for kids at the school to come and only have to think about

what they learned that day. So many kids don't know what they are supposed to do after

school or if they even have a place to go. I would love to take away the worries. I want

them to have hot meals, a shower, and a place to feel wanted and safe.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the qualitative data that were obtained from the phenomenological

research. The data collected during formal interviews were sorted and presented through themes

of data. Chapter 4 included the data, which included understanding the underlying factors that

inhibit students of rural poverty from attending school and what could be implemented to

improve the attendance of these students. The lack of resources available was documented as a

theme due to the dynamics of living in a rural area. The poverty cycle, prioritizing education, and

the tone of relationships were evaluated to understand the impact these topics have on students

of rural poverty in correlation to the phenomenon of low attendance rates for students attending

school who live in school districts within rural poverty. Each school district is unique in having

its own solutions to increasing attendance which was noted throughout the presentation of the data collected.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the common factors that contribute to the poor attendance of students who live in rural poverty and what could be implemented to improve the attendance of these students. The research was conducted through data that were provided by interviews conducted virtually with professional public-school superintendents, principals, nurses, and social workers. The interviews gathered the participants' perceptions, personal experiences, and factors that contributed to students attending school continually. This study also intended to find the underlying causes for poor attendance for students who live in rural poverty.

Research Questions

This chapter contains discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the following research questions:

1. What are the common factors that contribute to poor attendance of students who live in rural poverty?

2. What practices can improve attendance of students who live in rural poverty?

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The findings of the common factors that contribute to poor attendance and what practices can improve the attendance of students who live in rural poverty are multidimensional and comprised three themes: (a) lack of resources to meet essential needs, (b) poverty cycles among rural communities, and (c) building relationships with parents and schools.

The sub-themes to support the themes in more detail are what rural poverty looks like, obstacles, prioritizing education, school participation, and building trust. These common factors were found to contribute to the lack of attendance and the findings of what practices can improve the attendance of students who live in rural poverty. The themes and supporting data provided a condensed yet detailed report of the interviews that were conducted with professional school district employees who met the aforementioned criteria of this research study. Some factors related to the lack of resources for rural families, and some are actions that districts have taken to provide the resources needed by families who live in rural poverty. All these factors contribute to creating a conducive environment where students can continually attend school and create academic success by breaking the poverty cycle. The following provides a detailed synopsis of the findings during this qualitative research study.

Limited Resources Available

All participants interviewed believed that the resources available to rural communities are limited. In many cases, participants believed that the essential needs of students were not being met at home and the school district was working to meet those essential needs in addition to providing education. This theme revealed a great amount of the underlying qualitative data that was provided during the interviews. The data obtained indicates what could inhibit students of rural poverty from continually attending school. The participants attributed this theme and the

following subthemes as the focal point to comprehending the challenges of rural poverty. Subthemes included what rural poverty looks like and obstacles.

What Rural Poverty Looks Like

All 12 of the interviewed participants described what rural poverty looked like to them. Each participant had their own view of rural poverty, yet the common themes of what rural poverty looks like with the participants included being unsafe, dirty, desolate, and sad. The sub-theme of what rural poverty looks like was supported by research previously cited in this study (Cromartie et al., 2014).

Obstacles

Each of the 12 interviewed participants cited obstacles as a factor for continual absences for students of rural poverty. The common obstacles that were commonly discussed in the interviews were the inability of parents to meet the essential needs of students. These obstacles that participants discussed were poor housing conditions, no utilities, lack of food, no access to medical care, lack of broadband access, and drugs. Bob, Brandy, and Dawn stated a direct link between lack of medical care and food as an obstacle for students. Andy, Alice, Abby, and Danielle all shared concern about drug use being an obstacle for parents and students. Abby, Cheri, and Ethan acknowledged the obstacle of no broadband service for the new online learning model due to COVID-19. The sub-theme obstacles were supported by research previously cited in this study (Bartfeld et al., 2016; Kneebone & Berube, 2013; SNAP, 2017; Tanner, 2013).

Poverty Cycle

All the 12 interviewed participants at some point in the interview referred to the poverty cycle. Rural poverty was defined as a continuous cycle that was a struggle for students to escape. The participants interviewed emphasized the importance of understanding the poverty cycle. The

generational poverty cycle of continual rural poverty had a relationship with how it affects the academic success of students who live in rural poverty. The participants explained this relationship within the sub-themes of prioritizing education and school participation.

Prioritizing Education

All the 12 interviewed participants noted the point that parents did not prioritize education or didn't see the importance of graduating. This lack of support was given as a reason by the interviewed participants for the lack of academic success exhibited by students of rural poverty. Four participants, Andy, Abby, Cheri, and Chris, referred to parents being unable to assist due to their own academic gaps, even referring to special education as a reason for academic gaps. Cheri and Andy both made statements that government welfare assistance for families should be tied to the attendance of students, comparing it to the state tying school district funding to student attendance. The sub-theme of prioritizing education was supported by research previously cited in this study (Gratz, 2006; Harris, 2018; Rokosa, 2011; Tough, 2009; Waldfogel, 2016).

School Participation

All 12 of the participants interviewed believed that rural poverty had a significant impact on school participation with students and parents. Multiple events were noted that had a lack of parent participation, including sports, parent teacher conferences, science fairs and music concerts. Transportation was the common theme that all 12 participants reported hindering the lack of school participation. A statement of magnitude was provided by Alice explaining that transportation hinders the participation of extra-curricular activities because there is no after-school transportation. The subtheme of school participation was supported by research previously cited in this study (Godfrey, 2016; Gratz, 2006; Owens, 2010; Rokosa, 2011; Simpson

et al., 2016).

Relationships

All interviewed participants shared the first step of increasing attendance for students who live in rural poverty was to build relationships with them. The theme of relationships and the impact it could have on students attending school quickly became evident during the interview process. The sub-theme included building trust.

Building Trust

All 12 participants that were interviewed believed that building trust with families was a non-negotiable trait of a successful relationship between school and home. All 12 interviewed participants emphasized how critical it was to communicate with families to ensure a trusting, long-lasting relationship. Statements of magnitude included the belief by Andy, Brandy, and Debbie that making school a safe and loving environment was vital to building trust with students and parents. They also believed that relationships begin with the teacher because they need to know what obstacles their students are facing when they leave their classroom. Abby believed that relationships and building trust are key to improving attendance and the academic success of students who live in rural poverty. The sub-theme of building trust was supported by research previously cited in this study (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Dweck et al., 2014).

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Implications

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The goal of this study was to enable school administrators to be able to identify the factors that influence student attendance and overall student academic achievement in rurally impoverished schools. Educators that work in a school where rural poverty is prominent hold a viewpoint on rural poverty. Based on the research conducted through interviews for this study,

the lack of resources, poverty cycle, and relationships all play a key role when working to improve attendance and overall academic achievement in rural poverty schools.

Understanding the Nature of Poverty

Rural poverty within itself is very complex in nature. Educators who work in rurally impoverished school districts need to comprehend fully the poverty cycle and obstacles that students and families living within rural poverty face. If an educator is unable to understand rural poverty and what it looks like, then it's unlikely the educator could have a major effect on the attendance or academic achievement of students who live in the circumstances of rural poverty. Students living in rural poverty have multiple obstacles, including limited access to medical care, transportation, and food banks.

The school is often the only staple of a small rural community, where students might receive more than just an education. Schools within rural communities are often providing food, clothes, medical care, mental health resources, and much more to families to ensure the continual attendance and academic success of their students. School districts providing these essential needs within their walls are preparing their students with what is needed before they can begin to learn. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is that the physiological needs of food, warmth, water, and rest need to be fulfilled before an individual can experience safety, belongingness, love, and then self-actualization to then achieve one's full potential (Maslow, 1943). School districts within these small rural communities seem to be able to navigate and provide some essential needs for students and families. Bringing outside service providers to the school during school hours can be a solution to providing medical, dental, and mental health care to students since transportation and costs are a common obstacle for families.

The school districts who participated in the interviews served free breakfast and lunch to

80% or more of their students. In addition, the buddy back-pack programs were noted to make an impact on students being able to eat over the weekend, with school mostly being the main source of food during the week. Providing clothes was an intervention that overwhelmingly had a positive impact on students and families who were unable to meet those essential needs. Methods and programs need to be in place for school districts to assist families by providing the essential needs that are vital to a student, so they can potentially attend school more continually and create academic success, which likely contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty.

The Look of Poverty

Knowing what poverty looks like is a critical element for an educator within a rurally impoverished school district to know and understand. Without knowing what rural poverty looks like, an educator is unlikely to comprehend the extensive circumstances in which the student is living.These living conditions are likely to impact the educator's perception about the overall participation, interest, and attention span of the students with whom they are attempting to connect and create academic success. If educators could see the make-shift houses, tents, and campers that many students call home, then a possible connection could be made as to why the students do not always attend school. The conditions are often not clean and lack running water, heat, or electricity. The actual sight of these living conditions might help an educator understand why a student does not always have their homework done. Students from rural poverty often face bigger obstacles than completing a worksheet or reading a book, and educators need to see that. Exposing educators to the raw elements within which students are being raised could promote an understanding and compassion for what rurally impoverished students face daily and what resources they are lacking.

Building Parent-School Relationships

Creating a relationship between parents and school could open doors for students. If parents can communicate with the school, the school is more likely going to be able to support the needs of the family. Parents are often not supportive of homework when the focus might solely be on where they will sleep that night or when they will have their next meal. The importance of meeting essential needs is put into perspective when students are faced with hunger and their overall safety compared to completing an assignment before they return to school the next day. Students who might not complete their homework could be faced with consequences such as detention, missing recess, or just simply being given a failing grade. These are consequences that students may not have control over. With the proper training and mentoring, educators can learn to make informed decisions to support the current and future needs of the student rather than just produce consequences for the student, when often the students' lives are consumed by negative consequences.

Parental support within the schools of rural poverty is often not present. The parents might not agree with the school's attendance policy, or the relationship has been tarnished due to a call to the authorities when the essential or educational needs of a student are not met. The negative perception of school is likely to impact the overall relationship with the student and parents. Communication between teachers, administrators, and parents could reverse a negative relationship. Parents often need to know that the school wants to assist families by supporting them and providing resources. Building and maintaining a relationship with a family could create continual attendance and academic success. Parents often need reassurance that the school is working with them rather than against them.

The support of a social worker or school resource officer to connect parents and school could be a positive element for the relationship. Providing such resources could assist the family

in learning to trust the school. Developing the relationship with families and the school could be an effective tool for improving students' school attendance and improving academic success.

Creating and maintaining relationships with students by far was the focal point of the participants interviewed. The dramatic impact that could be made on a student breaking the poverty cycle and creating academic success is more likely to happen if the student has a connection with an educator and the school itself. The connection was often referred to as having someone believe in them, love them, and support their emotional and essential needs in and outside of school.

Trauma in Poverty

With the proper trauma-informed training, educators could manage creating a successful, positive, and productive relationship with the student, parents, and school. Trauma could look different for each student, possibly ranging from abuse, neglect, foster homes, or incarceration. Administrators could facilitate trauma-informed training to enlighten teachers and staff regarding what trauma looks like and how it probably impacts the attendance and academic performance of a student. Training potentially gives teachers the power to recognize and respond to the event or circumstances that may have created trauma for a student. This could be the breakthrough a student needs tomake the connection to school. Furthermore, this could relate back to creating a safe environment for the student to feel welcome.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings that were garnered in this qualitative study indicate that further research needs to be conducted in a quantitative study to follow up with the findings. The underlying factors that contribute to the lack of continual attendance at school for students who live in rural poverty were garnered in this study that could be further researched in a comparison of schools

of rural poverty and schools of urban poverty to determine if they had the same impact, using quantitative research methods.

Jensen (2013) worked to educate teachers and administrators on engaging students of poverty and teaching with poverty in mind. Several researchers have conducted similar studies over the years without providing detailed quantitative data on what effect the suggested practices have when implemented. Most provide strategies on how schools can improve the academic achievement and life readiness of disadvantaged students but seldom provide the data of when those practices have been implemented within a school by teachers. This study suggested the implementation of strategies that could impact the overall success of students who live in rural poverty. A comparative study of a school implementing these strategies and a school that did not implement these strategies would provide further insight.

A further study could also be conducted in a school of rural poverty on the role of a social worker and compare the academic success rates to a school of rural poverty that did not have a social worker. Anecdotally, several of the participants who were interviewed had a social worker and reported the ability to create better relationships with families than when they didn't have a social worker. A comparative study would provide further confirmation about the effectiveness of a social worker employed by the school district. Does a rural school district need a social worker on staff? Whose responsibility is it to allocate the money for such a position?

Summary

The solution to creating continual attendance and academic success for students who live in rural poverty is not a universal practice that can just be implemented as a reading curriculum might be. However, the study has revealed that each school and each student have multiple contextual factors impacting the underlying factors that contribute to lack of attendance and

academic struggles when living in rural poverty. The factors determined during this study to have an impact on continual attendance were lack of resources, poverty cycle, priority of education, and relationships. The practices that could improve the attendance of students living in rural poverty are to provide essential service providers to families such as medical, dental, and mental healthcare, provide additional transportation, have a social worker or school resource officer to assist families, understanding how rural poverty works. Most importantly, this study determined that building trusting relationships between school and home is likely to create the biggest impact overall for improving the attendance and academic success for rurally impoverished students. Once those relationships are established, then the school can work to assist the family in meeting their essential needs, which are often the underlying inhibiting factors for continual attendance and academic success for rurally impoverished students.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you describe when you first became aware of the impact rural poverty has on education?

2. How do you see yourself willing to impact the students of rural poverty attending school more consistently?

3. What, if anything, would you change about the way schools handle rural poverty when attempting to increase attendance?

4. How does your school district view rural poverty and the lack of students who attend due to rural poverty?

5. What underlining factors do you think students of rural poverty are influenced by that inhibit them from attending school?

6. Can you describe what rural poverty looks like to you?

7. Can you describe a particularly difficult or traumatic experience in your professionallife as an educator related to rural poverty?

8. How do you see students of rural poverty surviving the educational process?

9. What impact does rural poverty have on extra-curricular activities for all grades?

10. What solutions are there to improving the attendance of students that live in rural poverty?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH SUPPORTED DOCUMENTATION

1.   Can you describe when you first became aware of the impact rural poverty has on education? Poor children are surrounded by unpredictable, disruptive, and disordered environments (Jensen, 2009).

2.   How do you see yourself willing to impact the students of rural poverty attending school more consistently? Programs must be effective in reinforcing the importance of attending school regularly and extend resources and programs to those students who areconsistently absent and struggle academically (Bickelhaupt, 2011).

3.   What, if anything, would you change about the way schools handle rural poverty when attempting to increase attendance? The relationship between attendance and academic performance of students in schools is fairly positively correlated, then studentsare more likely to live with continued poverty and criminal activity (Bickelhaupt, 2011).

4.   How does your school district view rural poverty and the lack of students who attend due to rural poverty? Society stresses the importance of one's successes on their education (Wilkins, 2008). There is a correlation between poverty and how it can damage the physical, socioemotional, and intellectual welfare of children (Sapolsky, 2005).

5.   What underlining factors do you think students of rural poverty are influenced by that inhibit them from attending school? Recognized issues such as hunger, lack of cleanrunning water, making children powerless victims (Berrebi, 2011).

6.   Can you describe what rural poverty looks like to you? Poverty is defined as fringe,

distant, and remote living (NCES, 2006).

7.   Can you describe a particularly difficult or traumatic experience in your professionallife

as an educator related to rural poverty? Harris (2018) saw firsthand in her

clinics that those children exposed to trauma and poverty in their early years alone were

affected by a life filled with a medical path of devastation and stress.

8.   How do you see students of rural poverty surviving the educational process? Povertyis

a cruel cycle that shrinks the chance for poor, rural children to become successful because

they are seen as uneducated (Gurley, 2016).

9.   What impact does rural poverty have on extra-curricular activities for all grades?

Students with an educational influence have more extra-curricular involvement, higher social

status is more likely to attend school regularly (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

10.   What solutions are there to improving the attendance of students that live in rural

poverty? Poverty is a cruel cycle that shrinks the chance for poor rural children to become

successful because they are seen as uneducated, leaving schools to find a solution to increase

awareness of opportunities (Gurley, 2006).

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW FORM

Date:
Interviewee:
Place:
Position of Interviewee:
Time of Interview:

I = Interviewee
R= Respondent

Question:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

APPENDIX D: INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

Introductory Email to the Superintendents within Missouri public school districts who have an 80% or higher free and reduced lunch participation. Once the Superintendent of the district approves the study, the email will then be forwarded to: Guidance Counselors, School Secretaries, School Administrators.

Greetings Colleagues,

I am writing you today both as a colleague and a researcher engaged in the dissertation process through Indiana State University. The purpose of my qualitative case study is to learn what the common factors are that prohibit students who attend public school from continuously attending school to promote academic success in rural school districts with high poverty rates.

A majority of the previous research related to my study indicates that students living in an impoverished environment are linked to more than 50% of all absences. In my research it was found that 14% of Missouri is living at or below the poverty rate, ranking 29th in the United States.

I am looking for seven school districts to participate in this study using a Missouri Poverty Rate: County by County map. Counties that have the highest poverty rate and a rate of 80% or more students are participating in the free and reduced lunch program, offered by the stateof Missouri. Once the participation is approved, I will then email the prospective

participants, school secretaries, counselors, school nurses, and principals to contact me if they are interested in being interviewed for the study. The interviews will be conducted in person and separately to enhance and secure the validity of the research. I will collect data by creating an audio recording of one-on-one interviews with the participants. The recording will be transcribed and coded for analysis. Participation is voluntary and kept confidential. No personal or district identity will be revealed in this study. I hope to conduct interviews this winter. I anticipate that the interviews will last thirty minutes. The interviews will be scheduled at the preferred time and location of theparticipant. I will provide each participant with a copy of the transcription of the interview to ensure that I've accurately captured the information relayed during the exchange. If it is possible, I may follow-up with participants via phone or email during the data analysis process to ask clarifying questions.

This is an important topic in our field of education and in the state of Missouri, which has 18.6% of children who live in poverty. I am optimistic that I will receive a strong response from interested and potential subjects to assist me with this research. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at my personal email address: ksiegel@sycamores.indstate.edu. Thank you for your assistance in this process.

Your time and consideration is appreciated,

Ms. Katie Siegel

PhD Candidate

Indiana State University

APPENDIX E: EMAIL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Introductory Email to the participants within Missouri public school districts who have an 80% or higher free and reduced lunch participation. Participants: Guidance Counselors, School Secretaries, School Administrators.

Greetings Colleagues,

I am writing you today both as a colleague and a researcher engaged in the dissertation process through Indiana State University. The purpose of my qualitative case study is to learn what the common factors are that prohibit students who attend public school from continuously attending school to promote academic success in rural school districts with high poverty rates.

A majority of the previous research related to my study indicates that students living in an impoverished environment are linked to more than 50% of all absences. In my research, it was found that 14% of Missouri is living at or below the poverty rate, ranking 29th in the United States.

I am looking for seven school districts to participate in this study using a Missouri Poverty Rate: County by County map. Counties have the highest poverty rate and a rate of 80% or higher participating in the free and reduced lunch program. If you are willing to be a part of this study, then I would like to interview you. The interview will be conducted in person and separately to enhance and secure the validity of the research. I will collect data by

creating an audio recording of a one-on-one interview with the participant. The recording

will be transcribed and coded for analysis. Participation is voluntary and confidential. No

personal or district identity will be revealed in this study. I hope to conduct interviews this

winter. I anticipate that the interviews will last thirty minutes. The interviews will be

scheduled at the preferred time and location of the participant. I will provide each participant

with a copy of the transcription of the interview to ensure that I've accurately captured the

information relayed during the exchange. It is possible that I may follow-up with participants

via phone or email during the data analysis process to ask clarifying questions.

This is an important topic in our field of education. I am optimistic that I will receive

a strong response from interested and potential subjects to assist me with this research. If you

are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at my personal email address:

ksiegel@sycamores.indstate.edu. Thank you for your assistance in this process.

Your time and consideration are appreciated,

Ms. Katie Siegel

PhD Candidate

Indiana State University