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# Quality Education in Idaho: A Case Study of Academic Achievement in Three High-Poverty Rural Schools

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Quality Education in Idaho:

A Case Study of Academic Achievement in Three High-Poverty Rural Schools

Christine Brown

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

### Quality Education in Idaho: A Case Study of Academic Achievement in Three High-Poverty Rural Schools

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Doctor of Education

The focus of this research is bridging the achievement gap for students living in poverty through quality education. Such a study is important because the percentage of students affected by poverty is increasing and the persistent gap in achievement evidences that the right to quality education for students in poverty is not being met. This is mixed-methods study of three high-poverty elementary schools in Idaho. Both quantitative (achievement test scores) and qualitative data (interviews of seventeen teachers and principals) are compared and contrasted. The findings provide evidence that quality education for students in poverty requires relatable curriculum, teachers who are knowledgeable and caring, and a school environment where social-emotional needs are addressed. Quality teachers deliver instruction and provide interventions for student based on individual needs. Loving, caring, and consistent teachers and administrators are a determining factor for success by providing a safe and stable environment for students and staff. Other findings show families have great influence on children and their ability to succeed. Participants felt that supporting families will, in turn, support student achievement. This dissertation recommends the following: (a) a stronger emphasis on teacher quality including competency in content, pedagogy, and dispositions of a caring, quality teacher; (b) a focus on social-emotional needs of student in poverty; (c) the establishment of consistent staff and leadership in schools with high rates of poverty, and (d) a concentration towards building relationships between school staff and families in order to support families in poverty as they strive for their children's academic achievement.

Keywords: educational methods, teacher attitudes, educational environment, poverty, family influence, elementary education, family influence, small group instruction, emotional needs, teacher caring, educational policy, teacher competencies, civil rights, social justice, academic achievement, access to education, student rights

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

This study examined the achievement gap of low income rural students in high poverty schools through the lens of human rights using the capability approach which focuses on helping individuals reach their full potential. This approach is used in order to investigate the effects of poverty and capability on academic performance and the right of all children to have a quality education. Within this study, certain factors were identified that seemed to be associated with academic success for students in high-poverty schools in rural Idaho. This research explored the intersection and understanding of poverty and rights in education. In the context of this research, rights *in* education, which is contextualized differently from right *to* education, is considered as quality education (Babaci-Wilhite, Geo-JaJa, & Lou, 2012; Freire, 1974; Tomasevski, 2001a). It is learning as a process involving not only the consumption of ideas but also the recreation of the local and global concepts. It allows the student to reclaim the right to self-dignity and autonomy, i. e., freedom (Freire, 1970). As a process of critical discovery and learner-centered, it is the pursuit of other rights to be local, human, and liberated. In the alternative, right for education without the recognition of the centrality of the learner or of the intrinsic nature and value of what it is to be human is not truly meaningful education for humanization and social-emotional needs of learners living in the poverty (Levesque, 1997). Education is a powerful tool for creating opportunities, eliminating inequalities, and enabling people to pull themselves out of poverty. In the alternative it can also be a powerful tool for dehumanization and domination, if knowledge is considered a gift to be bestowed by the oppressors on those they consider less knowledgeable (Freire, 1974). This study investigated the inputs or resources needed to enlarge the capabilities

of students living in poverty and help schools meet their duties towards ensuring the rights of students who have been denied their right to quality education.

### **Human Rights and the Right to Education**

The United States Constitution does not specify a right to education, leaving this to state constitutions (*Kadrmas v. Dickinson Public Schools*, 487 U. S. 450, 1988; *Papason v. Allain*, 478 U. S. 265, 1986; *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U. S. 202, 1982; *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U. S. 1, 1973). However, the Supreme Court has clearly stated the importance of the government providing free and public education to benefit individuals as well as society as a whole. From *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U. S. 483 (1954), Chief Justice Warren stated, “In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.” Justice William J. Brennan observed in *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U. S. 202 (1982):

Public education is not a *right* granted to individuals by the Constitution. But neither is it merely some governmental ‘benefit’ indistinguishable from other forms of social welfare legislation. Both the importance of education in maintaining our basic institutions, and the lasting impact of its deprivation on the life of the child, mark the distinction. (p. 457)

The position of the court towards education is evident as it supports the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. This clause is focused on impartial governance as state governments draw no distinctions among individuals based solely on differences that are irrelevant to legitimate governmental objectives. The clause includes the right to education for all children regardless of race, gender, family and cultural background, socioeconomic status (SES), and so forth. The support of the federal government towards providing educational opportunity to each child is evident. The federally administered and funded Title I program, which is

specifically intended to meet the needs of economically and otherwise disadvantaged students indicates in its statement of purpose: “The purpose . . . is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965, p. 13). The court and federal government are clear and explicit in stating support and promotion of education to all citizens but designate the responsibility of providing such an education to individual states.

Each state describes within its state constitution, in varying degrees, the state’s responsibility for providing education for its citizens (Ziebarth, 2000). In *Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc.*, 790 S. W. 2d 186 (1989). The Kentucky Supreme Court interpreted its state constitution to require that “each child, every child, in this Commonwealth must be provided with an equal opportunity to have an adequate education” (*Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc.*, 790 S. W. 2d 186, 1989, "Opinions of Experts," para.12). In this particular case, equal opportunity to an adequate education came from an equalization of funding. “The children of the poor and the children of the rich, the children who live in the poor districts and the children who live in the rich districts must be given the same opportunity and access to an adequate education” (*Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc.*, 1989). A case was brought to the supreme court of Texas regarding the discrepancy of educational funding throughout the state due to the dependence of school financing to property tax. This case, *Edgewood Independent School District v. Kirby*, 777 S. W. 2d 391 (1989), showed a range of funding from \$2,112 per student to \$19,333 per student. The court found this practice unconstitutional according to their state’s constitution’s promise that there be the provision of an “efficient system of public free school” (“Opinion,” para. 5) for all children.

In Idaho, the state constitution includes in Article IX, § 1 an establishment of a “uniform and thorough system public, free common schools” (Constitution of the State of Idaho, 1889, para.1) as well as a compulsory attendance law (Art. IX, § 9) that requires every child to attend public school or to be educated by other means. The Idaho Supreme Court, in *ISEEO III (Idaho Schools for Equal Educational Opportunity v. State*, 976 P. 2d 913, Idaho 1998), interpreted a “uniform and thorough system” to require the state to “provide a means for school districts to fund facilities that offer a safe environment conducive to learning” (para.1). The case was appealed several times and continued in *ISEEO V (Idaho Schools for Equal Educational Opportunity v. State*, 129 P.3d 1199, Idaho 2005), resulting in a mandate from the court to the legislature to develop a facilities funding system that would meet constitutional requirements. Unfortunately, the decision of the court was never fully implemented by the state legislature and it appears that only insignificant funding changes have occurred. The courts have shown a priority of equal opportunity of education in Idaho, but their mandates have yet to be fully fulfilled by the state’s legislators.

As these cases illustrate, it is often through the courts that state constitutional rights and guarantees to education are defined and detailed. Although not all state courts interpreting their own constitutions are equally clear and vary in their definition, understanding, and conceptualization of rights in education, many are clear and adamant in requiring equalization or adequacy of educational funding which can have a direct result on the educational opportunity of children and families living in poverty. “Litigation has been used as a way to equalize educational funding patterns and thereby more equitably provide for maximized learning opportunities for all students” (Ferrin & Hallam, 2008, p. 372). Most state supreme courts and their decisions taken as a totality display a firm commitment to the right to a free public

education, and most include requirements like adequate, equal, uniform, or efficient as proxies for stating duties to students in poverty and school systems.

Although not recognized as an enforceable law in the United States at the federal level—or in Idaho—a clear statement regarding the right to education is given in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948). The UDHR was completed in 1948 as the result of the negation of human rights during World War II. The document “represents the universal recognition that basic rights and fundamental freedoms are inherent to all human beings, inalienable and equally applicable to everyone, and that every one of us is born free and equal in dignity and rights” (United Nations, 2014, p. 1). UDHR’s Article 26: The Right to Education is relevant to this study just as is the U. S. Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U. S. 483 (1954). Article 26 states that “everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory” (United Nations, 1948, “Article 26,” para. 1). Article 26 declares the right of an equal educational opportunity is one of the most of the valuable rights U. S. children have. This was reaffirmed when the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 41/128, “Declaration on the Right to Development,” which declares:

States should undertake, at the national level, all necessary measures for the realization of the right to development ...equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income. (United Nations, 1986, "Article 8," para.1)

Rights are expanded through promoting and protecting the human right to education. This study will focus on both the UDHR’s Article 26: The Right to Education (United Nations, 1948)

and the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U. S. 483 (1954) decision as they relate to students and families living in poverty. The right of education is defined by General Comment No. 13 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (1999) as follows:

Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Education has a vital role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and controlling population growth. Increasingly, education is recognized as one of the best financial investments States can make. But the importance of education is not just practical: a well-educated, enlightened and active mind, able to wander freely and widely, is one of the joys and rewards of human existence. (p. 1)

The right of education is the foundation for exercising many other rights and is vital in allowing humans to obtain their capabilities in life. This right is imperative for families living in poverty as it gives them a chance to expand their capabilities and opportunities in life to address the problem of contradictions in education—dehumanization—and distortions of being more fully human. The capability approach, as developed by Sen (1999, 2009), focuses on using education as a way to enable individuals to reach their full potential and liberate themselves from being less fully human is the basis of this study. The literature and results of this critical area of educational reform that affirms responsibility, authority, and development of capabilities to governments will be discussed in depth in Chapter 2.



## Poverty as a Barrier to Accessing Right to Education

Education, though not a fundamental right guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution, is a human right as described by the United Nations (United Nations, 1948). Providing educational opportunities is generally informed by states and federal government through court decisions and the rights guaranteed in the 14th Amendment of the U. S. Constitution. As such, it should be made available and accessible to all people especially individuals living in poor circumstances as they are in jeopardy of having those rights, or at least the right to an adequate education, denied. The Human Rights Council of Australia stated, “looking at poverty through the human rights lens—as a denial of human rights—enables a richer understanding of the different dimensions of poverty and encourages a more comprehensive policy response to the structural causes of poverty” (Frankovits & Earle, 2000, p. 7). An examination of poverty as a barrier to human rights shows education as a possible means of escaping impoverishment and enlarging other rights. Education mitigates corrupting human values and promotes human development and pursuit of freedom (Geo-JaJa, 2006). Judge Richard Rives, who ruled in *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education*, 294 F. 2d 150 (5th Circuit 1961), agreed that education leads to future opportunities. “Without sufficient education [people] would not be able to earn an adequate livelihood, to enjoy life to the fullest, or to fulfill as completely as possible the duties and responsibilities of good citizens” (*Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education*, 294 F. 2d 150, 5th Circuit 1961, para. 13). Education is a way to amplify opportunity, increase access to additional human rights, and ensure liberation of humanity from poverty to individuals’ self-affirmation and right to be human.

Education is a right and also a multiplier for other rights. It enables people to have choice about their future and gives opportunities to make life decisions regardless of an individual’s

family and parents' socioeconomic and social status. "Education is a key lever of sustained long-term productivity and social stability, as well as a key facilitator for breaking down barriers that exclude marginalized households from economic and political participation" (Geo-JaJa, 2006, p. 128). When using a human rights, or right-based approach perspective to view education and students, educators are more likely to see the gap in achievement between poor and non-poor students as a violation of their right to education.

### **Poverty and Right to Education**

In an attempt to protect the right to education for children living in poverty in the United States, President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 sponsored the largest reform agenda since Roosevelt's New Deal. The president proposed to Congress several pieces of legislation that would focus on education as a means to seek to alleviate the effects of poverty (Cremin, 1990; Independence Hall Association, 2008). The president declared a "war on poverty" that included initiatives focused on improving "the education, health, skills, jobs, and access to economic resources of those struggling to make ends meet" (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014, p. 2).

One of the many results of this declaration was the creation of the Title I program as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). The purpose of the Title I program is to be a safety net program "to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families" (U. S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 1). Schools use eligibility of the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program (FRPLP) to identify low-income families and students, and district/school funding for Title I is based on this measurement for rate of poverty. The objective of the Title I program is "to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards" (p. 1). The national Title I budget for the 2014–2015 school year was \$14.4 billion and served 21 million (out of an estimated 31 million

students nationwide) students who qualify for services (National Title I Association, 2014, p. 1). From fiscal year 2000 to fiscal year 2007, funding for Title I has increased by 35%, after adjusting for inflation, from \$9.5 billion in 2000 to \$12.8 billion in 2007 (Institute of Education Sciences, 2007). In Idaho, 429 schools (approximately 66% of all public schools) are served with Title I funds totaling over \$56 million allocated to Idaho schools in Fiscal Year 2015. Table 1 shows Title I allocations from 2007-2015 at both the national and state level for Idaho (U. S. Department of Education, 2015).

Table 1

*National and Idaho Title I Allocations 2007–2015*

Fiscal year	Idaho Title I allocation	National Title I allocation
2007	\$41,327,392	\$12,838,125,280
2008	\$46,662,555	\$13,898,875,000
2009	\$50,102,244	\$14,492,401,000
2010	\$49,334,169	\$14,492,401,000
2011	\$54,016,992	\$14,463,416,198
2012	\$54,549,522	\$14,516,457,566
2013	\$52,917,450	\$13,760,219,000
2014	\$57,460,631	\$14,384,802,000
2015	\$56,589,136	\$14,386,948,799

Although Title I has provided significant resources for improving education for students living in poverty nationwide, an achievement gap still exists between poor students and their higher socioeconomic (SES) peers (Fullan, 2006; Kahlenberg, 2013; Levin, 1994; Noguera, 2011; Walberg, 2010). This gap in achievement informed the core of this dissertation. Discovering possible solutions to closing the gap and providing rights in education to all students, especially those living in poverty, was the focus of this study.

An increasing number of students continue to be affected by poverty in the United States. “In 2012, approximately 11.1 million school-age children (children 5 to 17 years old) were in

families living in poverty. The percentage of school-age children living in poverty in 2012 (21 percent) was higher than it is two decades earlier in 1990 (17 percent)” (Kena et al., 2014, p. 20). In Idaho, during the 2012–2013 school year, 60% of all public schools have at least half the student body eligible for free and/or reduced lunch. This significant percentage has remained consistent over previous years with 61% in 2010–2011 and 62% in 2011–2012 (Idaho State Department of Education, 2014). The number of students living in poverty in U. S. schools is alarming, but more alarming is the discrepancy of achievement between students of different SES. Poverty in itself does not cause low achievement, but some of the effects and characteristics of poverty (as discussed in Chapter 2) can make it difficult to do well in school.

The achievement gap for students living in poverty is well documented in the literature which demonstrates students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are less like to achieve academic success than their higher socioeconomic counterparts (Bridges, Fuller, Rumberger, & Tran, 2004; Coleman, 1968; Coleman et al., 1966; Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Jensen, 2009; Kahlenberg, 2013; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Levin, 1989a, 1994; Schlee, Mullis, & Shriner, 2009; Slaby, Loucks, & Stelwagon, 2005; Slavin, 1987; Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989; Walberg, 2010). This research is further discussed in this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Educational achievement in Idaho is in crisis with more than 60% of Idaho’s fourth and eighth graders not proficient in math and reading (Students First, 2013). As accountability in education increases, so does the growth in the percentage of students affected by poverty along with the persistent gap in achievement. With these continuous increases, educators need to be aware of the barriers of academic achievement attributed to poverty as well as possible solutions so as to provide all students with quality education.

Despite the barriers, there are schools and educators that are unique in their ability to overcome the obstacles created by poverty in order to impact student achievement and close the gap. Such schools around the country, and in Idaho, are anomalies in their characteristics of being both high-poverty and high-achieving. An examination of high-poverty, high-achieving schools and their characteristics is a focal point of this study and will be examined more in depth in Chapter 2. The problem this study proposes to address is inequity in student achievement in Idaho through the exploration of possible explanations for the success found in high-poverty, high-achievement schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between poverty and high-performing elementary schools in Idaho as well as factors considered important for improving academic achievement. In turn, this research stands to inform educators and policy makers about the factors and the relationship among them could increase access and opportunity to quality education for students living in poverty. As a result, states and governments may be more able to provide and protect the rights stated in the 14th Amendment, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and other pertinent cases regarding quality education for all citizens.

### **Research Questions**

The research for this study is guided by a core research question and three sub questions.

- Main question: How do teachers and administrators in high-poverty, high-achieving schools perceive quality education for students living in poverty?
- Sub questions:
  - From the perspective of the teachers and administrators, what are the characteristics of quality education for a student living in poverty?

- What *new* strategies, innovations, and methods were implemented and found to be effective in attaining high academic success for students living in poverty?
- What resources do teachers and administrators value as vital contributors to the success of students living in poverty?

### **Research Methods**

The case study for this research included three elementary schools in rural southern Idaho serving grades kindergarten through third grade. Harvest (pseudonym) had a poverty rate of 69.5% and an achievement rate on state testing in 2012, of 95% in reading and 96% in math for students living in poverty. Bounty (pseudonym) had a poverty rate of 71% and an achievement rate on state testing in 2012 of 91% in reading and 93% in math. Orchard (pseudonym) had a poverty rate of 74% and an achievement rate on state testing in 2012 of 80% in reading and 79% in math. These three schools were chosen based on their demographic similarities as well as their differences in achievement scores.

This mixed-method study compared and contrasted the quantitative data from achievement test scores as well as the qualitative data from interviews of teachers and administrators from the three case study schools. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with the teacher leaders and administrators at each school in order to delve deeper into topics and obtain personal viewpoints. This process allowed for the identification of elements that were common among all schools as well as their dissimilar characteristics in order to identify effective strategies in working with students living in poverty.

Qualitative data were analyzed using the grounded theory methodology which allowed the voices of the participants to create the theories that became the findings for this study to

improve education for students living poverty. This brief overview provides a framework for the study and detailed processes about the methodology are found in Chapter 3.

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of this research lays in its investigation for effective practices for schools educating students living in poverty. As stated previously, and as will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 2, the achievement gap between the academic performance of students of high and low SES families is well documented and widely considered a problem in our current educational system nationwide and in Idaho (Coleman et al., 1966; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Levin, 1994). Many studies have been conducted about academic achievement in high-poverty schools (Coleman, et al., 1966; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Levin, 1994). However, little research exists that is focused on high-poverty, rural schools at the elementary level in Idaho. This research is a case study of elementary schools that have been successful in closing the achievement gap and supporting rights *in* education to Idaho schools. This study will assist in identifying elements of significance that may inform practice for high achievement in other rural, high-poverty elementary schools in Idaho and around the nation in order to ensure equity of education for all children.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

The main limitation of this study was the availability of testing data in recent years in Idaho. The state is in the process of transitioning their high-stakes test Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) from one form to another. This transition has limited the availability of data after 2013. Along with the limitation of data due to the transition, the data supplied on the Idaho State Department of Education website was incomplete and, in some instances, inaccurate when compared to the districts' data. The second limitation is also in regards to data collected.

The available data from the districts were classified by the achievement of students in the categories of *all students* as well as *students living in poverty*. The category of *all students* also included the *students living in poverty*. As a result, the achievement gap reported in this study would be greater due to the *students living in poverty* being counted twice. Unfortunately, the data provided from the school district was unable to show the achievement of students not economically disadvantaged without their lower socioeconomic counterparts. The third limitation, similar to other qualitative studies (Creswell, 2003), is that the findings are not generalizable to all schools. However, schools of similar demographics and location may find potential transferability of the findings (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The fourth limitation is in regards to access. In order to protect students' rights to privacy as described in Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974), the researcher did not have access to all standardized testing information at the case study schools, only aggregated testing results. The aggregation of data applied to free and reduced lunch information as well as percentages were given, but not individual names of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. The final limitation is related to access to the staff to be surveyed and interviewed. The researcher had access to the teachers and staff of the case study schools, but, as a former district administrator, past working relationships may have been a hindrance in gathering information from them. On the other hand, as the researcher is no longer employed at the school district, the faculty may have felt more inclined to speak freely in their interviews.

A delimitation in this study is that the researcher delimited the sampling frame for interviews to certified staff members in the leadership team at the case study schools. The leadership teams were made up of the school principal and a grade-level representative from each grade the school serves. The team met regularly to discuss and solve school-wide problems



with a continual focus on student data and school improvement. The leadership team members are responsible to relay information discussed in meetings to their grade-level team in order to create and maintain effective communication among all faculty members. The leadership team members are chosen to represent their grade-level team in a variety of ways and responsibilities so they were selected to represent their colleagues in this study also. A consequence of this choice is that the researcher was not able to hear the viewpoints, opinions and perceptions of each staff member. Due to time constraints, the leadership team was selected as representing their grade level team in order to share the views of that team. The resulting smaller sample size allowed the researcher to lengthen and deepen interviews. Another consequence of the delimited sampling was the exclusion of all classified staff members. Some classified staff members may have had responsibilities in delivering instruction but, per Title I regulations, all para-educators who provide instructional support must work under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, Title 1, Part A, 1965, §1119(g)(3)(A)). This delimitation does not reflect on the importance of classified staff members as many deliver effective instruction, care deeply for student achievement and are vital in helping students who are at-risk to succeed academically. Without devaluing their contribution, the ultimate responsibility of instruction does not lie with classified staff members but rather with certificated teachers. Consequently, only the perspectives of the certificated staff in the leadership team are included in the interview data due to their influence and ultimate responsibility for the quality of instruction in the school.

The second delimitation was the choice of the researcher to select schools to represent high-poverty schools that serve students kindergarten through third grade. This choice limited the state testing data to the third grade—only one grade level in the school. Although the school

reports achievement in only one grade level, the earlier grades contribute to the success of the schools as student achievement cannot occur in third grade if it was not a focus in kindergarten, first, and second grades as well. This delimitation reflects the researcher's emphasis and value on early intervention and primary grades as influential years for the success of students living in poverty.

The third delimitation is the disregard of language ISAT data in order to focus exclusively on math and reading ISAT scores to reflect academic achievement. This choice was based on the lack of emphasis and accountability within the state of Idaho regarding the language test which may be due, in part, to the overlap of content between the reading and language tests. Regardless of the cause, in order to focus on data that is the most pertinent, this study used only math and reading ISAT scores to reflect academic achievement of the three case study schools.

The final delimitation was the choice to focus on a comparison of three schools within 60 miles of each other in rural Idaho rather than comparison of high-poverty, high-achieving schools in a wider range of locations. The restriction of time to complete this project necessitated this delimitation of the scope of this study.

### **Definitions of Terms**

- *Achievement gap.* The achievement gap shows the difference in academic performance between students living in poverty and their mid- and high-income counterparts (Coleman et al., 1966; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Walberg, 2010). Student achievement can be a difficult thing to measure as the definition of achievement is subjective. Some researchers will measure achievement through standardized testing and others will find testing too limiting by requiring prior knowledge that is biased against students of varied race, ethnicity, and economic levels. Standardized tests can be harmful as they do not

measure creativity, innovation, or higher-order thinking and therefore is not measuring true achievement in students (Ayers, 1993; Kohn, 2000; Popham, 1999). It is recognized that capabilities of students is difficult to measure and achievement in school reaches far beyond the results of one standardized test (Ayers, 1993; Kohn, 2000; Popham, 1999). However, for the purposes of this study, standardized test results provided a measurable indicator of overall achievement. Within the structure of this study, the gap in achievement was measured through a standardized test called Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). The ISAT is a state proficiency test by which this study focused on the comparison of results between students receiving free and reduced lunch and students ineligible for the free and reduced lunch program due to higher SES of the family. Standardized testing is a limited way of measuring achievement, but it is a standard measure of basic skills that fulfills the federal requirement for a measure of student achievement. This test is a required assessment for all schools in Idaho which provided efficiency and consistency in the comparisons of scores for this study.

- *At-risk students.* A student could be at risk of failing academically for various reasons (Levin, 1989a). “A student described as ‘at risk’ is one who is in danger of failing to complete his or her education with an adequate level of skills. Risk factors include low achievement, retention in grade, behavior problems, poor attendance, low SES, and attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students” (Slavin & Madden, 1989, p. 4). This study focused on students who are at risk of academic failure due to their family’s low SES.
- *Characteristics of poverty.* Poverty is often seen as lack of resources, but the characteristics of poverty are much more complex and interrelated (Atzaba-Poria, Pike,

& Deater-Deckard, 2004; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Jensen, 2009; Mayes, Cutri, Rogers, & Montero, 2007; Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher, & Koch-Schulte, 2000). Lack of funds would naturally lead to a lack of housing, food, health care, and other physical needs (Chambers, 1995; Fullan, 2006). Other factors of poverty relate to lack of self-dignity and empowerment and include humiliation, vulnerability and other social-emotional needs (Chambers, 1995; Freire, 1970, 1974). Lack of vocabulary and experiences is also a characteristic of children living in poverty (Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001; Hart & Risley, 2003; Levin, 1994). Being poor does not inevitably lead to a child's low achievement in school, but these characteristics can affect the achievement of a child and a parent's ability to help their children succeed in school (Coleman, 1968; Kahlenberg, 2013; Noguera, 2011). This study recognizes these characteristics and the effect on achievement. The responses from participants' interviews and the subsequent findings directly relate to these characteristics.

- *Human rights.* The United Nations (1996) defined human rights as “rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status” (para. 1). The framework for guaranteeing the rights of all people in all countries is provided by international human rights law, but in the United States these human rights standards are not generally enforceable unless they are implemented through local, state, and/or federal law. As this study takes place in Idaho within the United States, human rights for this research are those specified in the U. S. Constitution within the Bill of Rights with the added facet of the United Nations contribution of UDHR Article 26: Right to Education (United Nations, 1948).

- *Intervention instruction.* Intervention instruction is referred to in this study as the means of designing and delivering interventions to students who are at risk for academic failure. Interview data from participants in this study describe the most effective ways to deliver interventions are through small group instruction, early intervention, and extended day.
- *Instructional strategies.* This term is used in this study to define strategies teachers use to help students of poverty succeed. Instructional strategies are centered on the approach of teachers to instruct and teach concepts to students. Interview data showed that this phrase referred to differentiation of curriculum and connecting curriculum to real-world experiences as the strategies most used by participants of this study.
- *Poverty.* The National School Lunch Program uses the poverty threshold chart from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2014) (see Appendix A) to determine eligibility for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program. “The free guidelines are at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines and the reduced price guidelines are between 130 and at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines” (Child Nutrition Programs, 2014, p. 14). When reporting for standardized testing, schools report students in poverty using the lunch-program count, combining students living in both high (free lunch) and low (reduced lunch) poverty. As this study analyzed data from standardized tests reported by public schools, this is the definition of poverty used.
- *Quality education.* Quality education in this study is synonymous to rights *in* education (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012) and can be described by the last two of Tomasevski’s (2001b) “4As”: *acceptability* and *adaptability*. These terms go beyond availability and accessibility of education to ensure that education is at a level where children’s capabilities will be realized. Quality education includes standards of health, safety, and

teacher certification. *Acceptability* stresses the use of indigenous language as the language of instruction. *Adaptability* refers to schools' ability to adapt to children's needs in order to serve students individually. Defining further characteristics of quality education for students living in poverty is the purpose of this study and are provided in Chapter 4.

- *Right to and rights in education.* Babaci-Wilhite et al. (2012) differentiated the right *to* education as the “availability and accessibility of education” (p. 8) and rights *in* education as acceptable and adaptable education meaning the education is of quality and meets children's needs. Rights *in* education for the purposes of this study is synonymous with quality education. This level of quality education objectifies learners' freedom and rights and negates corrupting human values and learners' liberty and needs. They include the need for respect and protection of the learners' cultures, native languages, and individual needs to fulfilling rights *in* education. This study will focus on rights *in* education as it correlates with capability approach in using education to allow students to increase their capabilities.
- *Social-emotional needs.* In the context of this study, social-emotional needs refer to the need of students to feel safe, loved, and welcome in the school environment. Being from a poor family does not dictate that a student will not do well in school, but often the anxiety and stress associated with life in poverty will become a barricade to learning and succeeding in schools (Fullan, 2006; Noguera, 2011). Participants in this study agreed that students, especially students living in poverty, need to feel safe and cared for, be responsible, and have a sense of community in order to obtain high achievement. Relationships between students and the staff are paramount in meeting students' social-

emotional needs given that a meaningful relationship with an adult can create a sense of belonging and increase motivation (Fullan, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012; Raufelder, Scherber, & Wood, 2016).

- *Teacher dispositions.* This term refers to the views, attitudes, and expectations of the teacher regarding students living in poverty. Participants of this study described that appropriate dispositions of a teacher should include the ability to see the potential of students to achieve as well as the willingness to sacrifice time or whatever necessary to help students succeed.
- *Teacher quality.* The quality of a teacher can affect student achievement. Hanushek, Rivkin, Rothstein, and Podgursky (2004) stated, “A string of good teachers can overcome the deficits of home environment” (p. 22). For the purposes of this study, teacher quality is defined by the participants’ interview responses. The characteristics most valued by the participants of this study to show the quality of a teacher were knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy as well as compassion, kindness, and caring.

### **Chapter Summary**

This study informs educators and policy makers of the effects of poverty on academic achievement, and examines the achievement gap through the view of human rights in order to illuminate the right of all children to have a quality education. Currently, little research has been conducted in Idaho regarding rural poverty, especially at the elementary level. This study will begin to fill that gap. This study will provide data regarding key elements that contribute to academic success for students living in poverty in rural, high-poverty schools in Idaho. This information will assist other similar schools in making curriculum and pedagogical decisions in order to provide quality education and narrow the achievement gap for students living in poverty.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

In this review of literature, poverty and the effects of poverty will be examined through the perspective of human rights. This chapter is segmented into three sections with each section focused on an aspect of rights *in* education and how it relates to children and families living in poverty. The first section is dedicated to defining quality education in order to identify possible elements that contribute to academic success for students living in poverty that will narrow, and eventually close, the achievement gap. The second section includes the theoretic framework for this work in order to examine the relationship between education and human rights focusing specifically on the right to education as a way to improve living conditions and opportunities for families living in poverty, providing the education is of high quality. The final section examines the effects of poverty on educational achievement and the achievement gap. The gap is investigated as it is evidence of unprotected rights *in* education which is a lack of access to quality education.

#### Quality Education

As this study strives to define quality education for students living in poverty, educators must not get lost in the latest curricula fads and focus too much on professional development, but look at underlying components that will accelerate learning as well as improve capabilities and opportunities in life for students. Quality education will enable people to perceive themselves as empowered agents that can address the problem of poverty and the deprivation of the right to quality education by questioning traditional practices and discovering better solutions.

In identifying quality education, Hanushek (1996a) identified what quality education *is not* by stating there is no evidence that teachers' education, experience, or salary impact student



performance. The literature shows that the quality of teachers has little impact on the quality in education (Coleman et al., 1966; Hanushek, 1996a; Xin, Xu, & Tatsuoka, 2004). However, Card and Krueger (1996a) provided strong evidence of positive teacher effects on learning and labor market outcomes. Longitudinally, a more recent study by Hanushek et al. (2004) showed that “a string of good teachers can overcome the deficits of home environment” (p. 22). An, Hannum, and Sargent (2007) noted that disagreement among researchers on teacher impact on outcomes is due to measurement error, specification, or the “narrow conceptualization of teacher quality” (p. 312). They implied that teacher quality has been conceptualized simplistically, as easy-to-measure background factors thought to be linked to productivity such as teacher education or training, teacher salary or teacher experience. “While identifying a mix of easy-to-measure and easy-to-manipulate inputs has a great deal of theoretical and policy appeal, the lack of consistent findings suggests the value of exploring alternative approaches” (p. 312). An et al. (2007) suggested an important dimension of teaching style is the extent to which students are given the opportunity to participate actively in the classroom, as opposed to listening passively to lectures. For instance, Brophy (2000) described quality education as a successful classroom where teachers “feature more time spent on interactive discourse and less time spent in solitary seatwork . . . [or] extended lecture presentations” (p. 11). This agrees with the critical pedagogy introduced by Freire (1970), where problems are posed within the content in order to promote and sustain dialogue among teachers and students. A quality classroom gives ample opportunity for students to share thoughts or reason and expand understanding. Brown (2011) suggested teachers “are the backbone of any education system” (p. 25), and it is the relationship between students and instructors that produces quality learning. These researchers noted that positive interactions between students and teachers are major determinants of quality education.

### **Right to Education and Rights in Education**

In the United States, the concept of the right to education and equality of educational opportunity was strengthened with the creation of the common school by Horace Mann in the mid-19th century. Mann's ideas focused on uniting all citizens "of varied religions, ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, and professions—into one community" (Berkman, 2009, p. 253). This contextualization of education focused on the social rate of return (value found intrinsically or within oneself) over economic rates of return (instrumental or extrinsic rewards). According to Ferrin (2011):

Compulsory education, established in the United States long before other international declarations of human rights included it as a child's right, is rooted in both the ideal and utilitarian visions of the role of education in shaping and defining what democracy in a constitutional republic should be. . . . Rationales for public education and the common schools have included preparing children for high duties that sound in religious values, and include the need for a process for inculcating skills, dispositions and values that prepare citizens to operate with appropriate vigor and virtue in the demands of a democracy, including acting as informed voters, engaged citizens, and even in such focused civil duties dear to the hearts of law faculty, as wise and judicious jury members. (p. 1)

Mann's common school ideals centered on building capabilities through the focus of the child's development of a moral character and his or her potential to become a contributing member of society, but this aim can only be achieved when children are in school and receiving a quality education. This form of education of common curriculum and self-integration produces citizens with choice and freedom and, in turn, better citizens within the country.

Children attending school is part of providing a right to education, but it is not a complete fulfillment of that right. “Building schools is usually the first step towards providing education for children, although there is no evidence that the building itself, expensive as it may be, has any effect on children’s learning” (Tomasevski, 2001c, p. 35). The supposition is that in order to provide rights *in* education, the available education should be of good quality that enables the enlargement of opportunities and expansion of children’s capabilities for a better future (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012; Robeyns, 2006; Tomasevski, 2001b, 2001c). Individuals, families, and society as a whole should expand on the right *to* education in order to provide rights *in* education by permitting access to quality schooling for all children (Robeyns, 2006). Quality education focuses on learning time, not seat time. Providing physical and human resources (schools, teachers, and materials) does not fully or completely fulfill rights in education to children. In the same vein, “getting children to school does not guarantee that they learn anything there . . . expanding schooling to increase access to education around the world has not in fact expanded quality Education for All” (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012, p. 9). A child’s right to education is not fulfilled unless the education provided is a quality education. This quality education is referred to rights *in* education rather than right *to* education. Life gap and opportunity gap between rich and poor students which are growing faster than ever before can only be mitigated by rights *in* education. In fact, students living in poverty are already visibly more affected than higher socioeconomic peers in reading and math skills by the time they get to third grade.

Tomasevski (2001b), in the third volume of a series of primers devoted to “elucidating key dimensions of the right to education, the respect of all human rights *in* education, as well as enhancing human rights through education” (p. 5), expounded upon a basic framework for governmental obligations to provide and protect the right to education. According to

Tomasevski, the 4As will ensure rights are being met and quality education is promoted which would, in turn, benefit individuals and society as a whole. She calls this the 4As framework, which includes *availability*, *accessibility*, *acceptability*, and *adaptability*. *Availability* and *accessibility* provide rights *to* education, while *acceptability* and *adaptability* ensure rights *in* education.

- *Availability* indicates governments are required to establish and fund schools and provide teachers in order to make education available to all children.
- *Accessibility* is defined as securing “access to education for all children in the compulsory education age-range . . . free of charge” (p. 13)
- *Acceptability* of education means the education that has been made available is at a level of quality that would benefit the students. Levels of standards of health, safety, teacher certification is set up and enforced by the government. Acceptability also stresses the use of indigenous language as the language of instruction. Instruction given in a language foreign to young children makes education unacceptable.
- *Adaptability* refers to schools’ ability to adapt to children’s needs whether they be children with disabilities or children unable to attend school and need education brought to them.

Governments may provide school buildings, which provide *availability* and *accessibility*, but that alone is the right *to* education, not rights *in* education which includes *acceptability* and *adaptability* (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012; Tomasevski, 2001b, 2006). It is noted that policy leaders understand the challenges they face but may not understand their responsibility to improve outcomes for all children especially students living in poverty and those that are

refugees (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2007). The context of the 4As—for schools in the future—is to afford all children the same life chances. According to Babaci-Wilhite et al. (2012), this vision is about a crucial movement that calls for education reengineering. This is about how we want to go into the future and investing in equitable curriculum and historically low-performing school in low-income areas using research-based reforms (Pritchett, 2013).

Babaci-Wilhite et al. (2012) discussed the right to a quality education by defining the difference between the right *to* education and the right *in* education in the context of the 4As.

The goal of universal education across the world is consistent with the definition of the *right to education*, while that of achieving universal quality education is consistent with *rights in education*. . . . *Rights in education* are associated with the capacity to attain quality education. Rights in education expand people’s capabilities, including educational capabilities. . . . A right to education might be optimal regarding accessibility, but less than optimal in protecting rights in terms of factors that must matter intrinsically. (pp. 8–9)

The authors concluded that rights *in* education are provided when students’ capabilities are expanded and enlarged. Whereas the right *to* education may provide availability and access to school, rights *in* education represent a quality education that should include a safe facility, quality instruction that will enhance the students’ lives, and protection and promotion of all human rights. It is all about improving and aligning education in the early years from preschool through third grade. It is an approach to closing the opportunity and achievement gaps and creating schools that prepare all learners for success in their respective societies.

Getting all children to school is still mistaken for their right to education, although they can be brainwashed, indoctrinated, abused, harmed for life. All rights of the child apply

*to* education and *in* education. If they do not, human rights will not be achieved through education. (Tomasevski, 2001c, p. 33)

Attending school is part of protecting the right to education, but to fully increase capabilities of children living in poverty, rights *in* education, which ensures quality, must be promoted and protected. Tomasevski (2001b) noted:

Those children who do have access to schooling may not get the education that would encompass cherishing peace or respecting human rights. They may be sitting in a class with over a hundred other children, taught by an overworked and underpaid teacher, beaten each time they fail to do their sums properly. An assumption that getting children to attend school equals the realization of their right to education thus often conflicts with reality. (p. 43)

It is the assertion of this research that quality education addresses the 4As (Tomasevski, 2001b) as they provide a framework for children to be nurtured as they learn and grow in order to increase their capabilities and enable them to make choices regarding their future. Quality education must be addressed as it gives access to other rights and expounds capabilities. Educational equity and rights is improving students' outcomes across the planet.

### **Concepts of Education and Human Rights**

Understanding different theories of providing education will direct governments and societies in delivering appropriate and high quality education for children in order to fulfill the rights *in* education. Robeyns (2006) identified three rationales of education as (a) human capital approach, (b) rights-based approach, and (c) capability approach. These three rationales are explained below in order to create a framework for this study regarding quality education for students living in poverty.

**Human capital approach.** The human capital theory focuses on education as a means to increase revenue and become more economically productive. It provides the right *to* education. The significance of education and human capital has been brought out in many studies and debates of poverty and growth and development. Other benefits that education bestows consists in direct additions to welfare possibilities. But unfortunately, human capital theory, derived from neo-classical economics, separates economic activities from social and cultural activities. But can this economy be a separate world outside of society itself becomes the question. If answered in the affirmative, a lot of the nuances of human activities and social meanings to that which is the concern of this dissertation will be lost. In this approach, education becomes an investment that will pay off when the student becomes an employee that earns and contributes monetarily to society.

Thus, education is important because it allows workers to be more productive, thereby being able to earn a higher wage. By regarding skills and knowledge as an investment in one's labour productivity, economists can estimate the economic returns to education for different educational levels, types of education, etc. (Robeyns, 2006, p. 72)

Human capital is an economic theory that illustrates the relevance of education in its ability to create skills and knowledge in workers that serve as an investment for higher future earnings (Becker, 1976; Levin, 1989b; Robeyns, 2006). Becker (1976) explained, "Human capital analysis assumes that schooling raises earnings and productivity mainly by providing knowledge, skills, and a way for analyzing problems" (p. 19). The human capital approach sees human capital as the store of knowledge, social and personal attributes, including creativity embodied in man to perform labor to produce economic value. This approach enables us to think

of not only years in school but also school quality, training, and attitude to work. This skill and knowledge is presumed to directly increase a worker's productivity in all tasks.

Hanushek and Woessmann (2007) conducted a meta-analysis where they examined research in the field of human capital. As they examined studies correlating years of schooling and economic growth, they found conflicting results in that some studies showed a correlation and others did not. The authors concluded that the research they studied focused on years of education without taking into consideration the quality of education and the rationality and irrationality of the investor in education. "Rather than counting how long students have sat in school, it seems crucial to focus on how much students have learned while in school when estimating the effect of education on economic growth" (p. 25). Attending school alone did not increase wages, the quality of education made a difference. Card and Krueger (1996b) studied schools in North and South Carolina and found a correlation between education attained and wages. They noted, "Earnings rise with educational attainment. If two individuals are otherwise identical, the person with more education tends to earn more" (p. 34). They also found that school quality made a greater difference in increasing wages.

The marginal payoff to additional schooling is higher for those who attend higher quality schools. . . . One would expect students who have access to higher quality schools to benefit more per year of schooling than students who have access to lower quality schools. (p. 34)

The benefits of quality education can be seen in employment and economic advantages for the individual as well as the community he or she belongs to. Levin (1994) demonstrated this in a study of at-risk students, noting:



Greater investment in at-risk students leads to greater educational attainments, resulting in higher adult incomes and government tax revenues. Such investments also confer savings to taxpayers and society in terms of lower student repetition of grades, fewer placements in expensive special educational classes, fewer teenage pregnancies, and lower demands on the criminal justice and welfare systems. (p. 171)

Investment in education is advantageous for individuals and society as a whole and improves the way of life in communities.

According to Robeyns (2006), the problem with the human capital approach is that the only motivation for investing in education is financial gain. Therefore, if the act of learning will not enable a person to hold a high-paying job in the future, then it is not worth the time and effort of the student, teacher, or society. “Human capital theory cannot explain the behaviour of someone who wants to spend her time studying something without any prospect of economic returns from this education” (p. 72). Human capital approach does not take into account intrinsic rewards that come from learning thus many studies only can show a correlation between education and higher wages. It strips the social process of work of its non-exchange characteristics and gives a simple commodity interpretation of education. It ultimately eliminates rights and people as a central economic concept.

**Rights-based approach.** The rights-based approach is based on the ideas expressed in the UDHR stating that education is indeed a human right. “The rights-based framework submits that every human being, including every child, is entitled to decent education, even when one cannot be sure that this education will pay off in human capital terms” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 75). The mission is to ensure that all children not only have a right *to* education but also ensures rights *in* education, this mission is accomplished depending on how this approach is carried out.

Rights *in* education respect and promotes learners' agency and optimum development. These children's rights have been translated into legislation, policies, and programs locally and internationally. One limitation of the rights based approach is that it puts the responsibilities on the government and becomes legal rights enforced through courts without enlisting the moral obligations of the citizens. "Surely individual persons, families and communities also owe their children access to good education, even when they are not bound by any legal duty to provide any such education" (p. 78). The challenge of the rights-based approach is moving people and governments beyond the basic right to education to providing a quality education that improves the capabilities of students. This means that predominately focused of this approach goes beyond basic education and children's rights in education. It is situated within life-cycle and lifelong learning processes.

The government and citizens must pay for education and can reap the societal rewards of having an educated population. Beyond the financial aspects, there is a moral imperative for governments to provide education to every child without mandatory fees (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2003). The former stated that the right to education—like all human rights—is universal and inalienable. International conventions have placed a binding commitment on ratifying states. Tomasevski (2001b) called all adults to be duty bearers to ensure all children have not just the right *to* education, but rights *in* education that includes the 4As of *availability*, *accessibility*, *acceptability*, and *adaptability*. "All of us, as adults, share the power of affirming or negating children's right to education. Children can only have rights only if we comply with our individual and collective duties" (Tomasevski, 2001a, p. 25). The right to schooling belongs to all children and it is the responsibility of all citizens to protect this right. Denial of this inalienable right is not acceptable at any level. Uvin (2004) stated, "human rights violations,

wherever they occur and however they are justified, whether inspired by fascism, communism, religion, tradition, or the free market, are not acceptable and ought to be ended—period” (p. 24). The loss of rights can come from various sources and reasons, but policies should be in place to promote and protect the right to education. According to Human Rights Council of Australia (2001):

The realization of the right to education depends on focusing on issues of discrimination and access to education, especially at the primary school level; of taking into account the degree to which local communities can exercise their right in guiding education and in providing support for their children’s education. It is not necessarily about buildings but about the resources and policies to enable all children to enjoy the right, regardless of their geographic location, their gender, race, language or ethnic. (p. 7)

Thus, the above scholars considered the right to quality education as more than having a teacher and a school building in a community. This right is fulfilled when society provides access to a quality education for all children (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012).

Robeyns (2006) suggested a shortcoming of the rights approach is its sole focus on providing children with schooling through law and policy, but not necessarily through practice illustrating a de jure/de facto dichotomy. Despite those limitations, rights-based approach is both comprehensive and flexible with a scope that is quite vast. In this approach, students can be in the same classroom with same teacher and inputs and yet have very different achievement scores. Tomasevski (2006) found that the law in China stated there would be free and compulsory education for all children, but the practice of “miscellaneous fees” (p. 129) were priced so high that it denied access for poor students to schools. Geo-JaJa and Mangum (2001, 2003), along with Robeyns (2006), cautioned against the practice when governments may agree

to educate every child and feel their obligation is fulfilled without ensuring the quality of that education. “It will be necessary that the government goes beyond its duties in terms of the rights-based policies, to undertake action to ensure that every child can fully and equally enjoy her right to education” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 77). Governments and school systems have an opportunity and responsibility to provide the right *in* education, a quality education that will protect and promote human rights through curriculum, instruction, and actions. A quality education will enable students to increase their capabilities to mitigate poverty and bridge the achievement gap.

**Capability approach.** The capability approach was initially proposed by Amartya Sen (1999, 2009) in order to deliver more effective assessment of situations of deprivation, specifically in developing countries (Ballet, Koffi, & Pelenc, 2013). This approach focuses on education as a way to present opportunities for citizens to grow, develop, and become. It is seamlessly correlated with rights *in* education. This theoretical framework is dichotomized into two core narrative claims: the claim that the freedom to achieve well-being is a moral obligation and that freedom to achieve well-being is understood in terms of principle capabilities. The comprehensive development model that goes beyond economic growth or standardized tests, that focus on expansion of people’s capabilities (opportunities) provides a framework to address issues like poverty, inequality, and student achievement gaps that cannot be addressed by human capital theory alone. This approach expands the rights-based approach by providing not just an education, but a quality education that focuses on individuals’ ability to *do* and to *be* which increases students’ abilities, opportunities, and potential.

The capability approach is a framework for thinking about poverty, inequality, and human development. The core characteristic of the capability approach is a focus on what people are able to *do* and to *be*, meaning their capabilities. “Capabilities are the real opportunities to

achieve valuable states of being and doing” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 78). A strength of this approach is its clear objective to “expand the freedom that deprived people have to enjoy valuable beings and doings. They should have access to the necessary positive resources, and they should be able to make choices that matter to them” (Alkire, 2005, p. 117). Education is a fundamental means to provide opportunities to participate in social and economic life. Possessing a freedom of choice of education influences capabilities which dictates poverty and well-being. In this sense, it is a complete human development model. It is desired to remove mitigating factors of the learner so that they have more freedom to live the life they value as the barriers of achievement are removed.

Critics of the capability approach argue that it will not support long-term and wide-ranging societal change due to the static nature of capabilities. Binder and Witt (2012) preferred the framework of sustainability economics for consistent change in society because capabilities can change over time and possibly co-evolve with the growth of the economy. Sen (2009) argued the focus should not be on sustaining a certain environment, but should be the value of environmental conditions according to the opportunities they offer to people.

Others have suggested the capability approach is more philosophical than practical in its implementation and is by nature theoretical rather than operational (Sugden, 1993). Alkire (2005) suggested the solution to this argument is further and deeper collaboration between researchers and practitioners to build up consistencies and momentum in applying the concepts of capability approach. Alkire admitted that applying the capability approach is a monumental task, but one that can be done with collaboration and diligence. It “is not a modest task, nor is it nearly accomplished. But it is a task well worth continued attention” (Alkire, 2005, p. 130).

Clark (2005) agreed that the capability approach can be operational and argues the large number,

along with the quality and diversity, of practical applications that have occurred in recent years should discredit any remaining concerns about the possibility of making the capability approach operational (Clark, 2005).

This study is aligned with the capability approach as it focuses on education as a way to build capacity and promote freedoms among families living in low SES. Ideas on poverty, education and achievement will be thoroughly examined in order to document the most effective ways for schools to build capacity in students living in poverty and narrow the achievement gap. Thus, this study that searches for measures to mitigate the disadvantages of poor students to adequately represent their well-being from deprivation will argue that freedom to achieve and the capabilities of the learner to good life is dependent on normative elements—happiness and socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **Poverty, Education, and Achievement**

Using the capability theory as a framework, this section will delve into the subjects of poverty and its effect on those living in poverty to reach their capabilities in educational achievement.

**Poverty and rights *in* education.** Poverty can be a barrier to accessing human rights, including right to education, or expanding opportunities (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012; Sen, 1999; Tomasevski, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Uvin, 2004), including the right to education. Poverty of families can also lead to academic poor performance, readiness, and behavioral issues culminating into poor academic achievement. But disadvantaged even before birth in a way that affects learning is rarely discussed as an education issue in human capital theory. These that are prevalent in low-income household and affects standardized test scores is the focus of this dissertation. As education amplifies capabilities, the lack of education could decrease, or deprive,

capabilities. Babaci-Wilhite et al. (2012) discussed capability deprivation of citizens living in poverty as loss of access to human rights. Sen (1999) suggested poverty (lack of basic health, education, shelter, nutrition, clean water, etc. ) as capability deprivation in the sense that these poverty indicators *deprive* poor people not only of achieving prosperity but of being able to make choices and thus being *capable* of leading a life of dignity and good quality. Sen further noted that “there are influences on capability deprivation other than lowness of income or lowness of resources” (p. 5). In order to increase capabilities, especially for those living in poverty, we must ensure people have their needs met through protecting rights in education in order to fulfill their capability and achieve success in academics, career aspirations, and life in general. The protection of rights in education can be addressed by policy makers across the political divide ensuring people living in poverty their rights by seriously looking at how poverty affects education rather than attention on increased testing and results-based evaluation of teachers and schools which is the center of human capital theory.

Rights *in* education are vital rights for individuals in order to reach his or her capacity. This idea was supported by Chief Justice Warren as he delivered the opinion of the Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U. S. 483 (1954):

Today [education] is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. (p. 493)

It is necessary to provide educational opportunity equally in order to give every child an opportunity for a successful life. This opportunity to build choice and capabilities is the focus of rights *in* education and is the basis for providing other human rights. “There is thus a large number of human rights problems which cannot be solved unless the right to education is addressed as the key to unlock other human rights” (Tomasevski, 2001c, p. 9). Education is vital for people living in poverty as it is the foundation to other rights and its potential to eliminate poverty.

Rights *in* education are important, especially to families living in poverty because “education is a primary vehicle by which all people can be lifted out of poverty, as well as being an instrument for the achievement and enjoyment of many other human rights” (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012, pp. 12–13). As education is a way to rise from poverty, it is imperative that education reforms impact people living in poverty must include consideration for less verbal exposure, poor sense of agency, low executive function, misleading comparison, targeted intervention, and disadvantaged even before birth. In short, education remains the key to escaping poverty, while poverty remains the biggest obstacle to education. Millions of people are deprived of educational opportunities as a result of poverty (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012). The government plays a key role in promoting and protecting rights, especially the right to practical strategies for teaching students of poverty or hiring teachers who teach with poverty in mind. This is the only way to promise children a future and make it attainable. As education is a human right, it is the government’s obligation to protect that right for the children residing in its country. “The right to education by its very nature requires regulation by the state because the state is responsible for ensuring that all educational institutions comply with prescribed standards” (Tomasevski, 2003, p. 28). Chief Justice Warren stated a similar opinion in *Brown v. Board of*



*Education of Topeka*, 347 U. S. 483 (1954) when he said education is the “most important function of state and local governments” (p. 493). He continued by stating the great expenditures for education demonstrate the recognition and importance of education to democracy in the United States. “It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities. . . . It is the very foundation of good citizenship” (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U. S. 483 1954, p. 493). The assumption of Chief Justice Warren seems to be a recognition of the definite needs for education for more adaptable and acceptable quality education options for children in poverty in order to help break the intergenerational cycle. The time, effort, and funds put towards education show the priority of protecting rights *in* education for society. “Respecting all citizens’ rights is only possible when a government chooses an [educational] approach which focuses on basic rights, social justice and dignity” (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012, p. 16). Honoring rights *in* education is the responsibility of governments who benefit as its citizens consume quality education. As society benefits from education, it is prudent for governments to provide good quality education for their children. Quality education promotes not just the right of education, but rights *in* education where capabilities and opportunities of the students are explored and enlarged. As powerful as education is in helping individuals reach their capabilities, any barriers to it should be eliminated. Obviously, as learning rates are affected by poverty and poverty as a general term impact school attendance thus the targeted intervention of Title I program.

**Effects of poverty on educational achievement.** Living in poverty can affect a child’s opportunities to achieve his or her capabilities. Beyond being without money, food, shelter, and other basic needs that follow those that live in poverty, low SES families have a variety of challenges that build and escalate to effect behavior, lives, and academic achievement. “School is often a particularly emotional (and frightening) place for students who are already living under

considerable stress outside of the classroom because of socioeconomic difficulties” (Mayes et al., 2007, p. 106). The stress of living in poverty creates barriers to rights *in* education. The effects of poverty on families, especially children, are complex and far-reaching. “The aggregate of risk factors makes everyday living a struggle; they are multifaceted and interwoven, building on and playing off one another with a devastatingly synergistic effect” (Jensen, 2009, p. 7). Narayan et al. (2000) determined “poverty never results from the lack of one thing, but from many interlocking factors that cluster in poor people’s experiences and definitions of poverty” (p. 12). Narayan et al. reviewed 81 Participatory Poverty Assessment reports, which describe an outlook on the world from the perspective of the poor. They concluded:

While poverty is material in nature, it has psychological effects—such as distress at being unable to feed one’s children, insecurity from not knowing where the next meal will come from, and shame at having to go without food—that have strong symbolic value. . . . Poor men and women speak of the shame, stigma, and humiliation of poverty. (pp. 17–18)

Being poor means much more than a lack of income and material possessions. The effects of poverty are multifarious (Mayes et al., 2007). Chambers (1995) described the deprivation of people living in poverty as “more than being income-poor” (p. 188). He noted deprivation of the poor also includes social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonal deprivation, powerlessness, and humiliation. These characteristics have an effect on scholastic performance.

Atzaba-Poria et al. (2004) studied 125 children in England to determine the effects of risk factors (including poverty) on children. They noted, “risk factors acted in a cumulative manner—the more risk children experienced, the more problem behaviors they exhibited” (p. 707). These

factors affect the ability of children to learn and grow academically. The difficult characteristics that come from living in poverty are intertwined and result in more challenges that build upon each other. “Advantages accumulate; so do disadvantages” (Heckman & Masterov, 2007, p. 447). The difficulties for poor families are numerous, mounting, complex, and have far-reaching effects in many areas of life including educational achievement.

Children living in poverty may have barriers that keep them from receiving rights *in* education. Poverty, in its specific and broad terms, “has direct health and indirect physiological and psychological consequences that inhibit the capacity to learn” (Fullan, 2006, p. 13). The disadvantages of living in poverty are not specific to achievement, but they are barriers that could keep students from the attainment of rights *in* education.

Poor children encounter obstacles that often adversely affect their development and learning outcomes. To ignore this reality and make bold assertions that all children can achieve while doing nothing to address the outside-of-school challenges they face is neither fair nor a sound basis for developing public policy. (Noguera, 2011, p. 10)

Kahlenberg (2013), in a meta-analysis of U. S. schools and districts concluded that as the poverty level rose, the achievement level went down. Researchers agree that living in poverty affects scholastic achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Fullan, 2006; Jensen, 2009; Kahlenberg, 2013; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Noguera, 2011; Walberg, 2010).

In 2014, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs of the Maine Legislature wanted to investigate the correlation between poverty and student achievement. They asked the Maine Education Policy Research Institute to conduct an analysis of poverty and achievement among all students residing in Maine. Using Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility to identify students living in poverty and correlating it to student performance on the New England

Common Assessment Program, they found “in the majority of cases, as the poverty level increases, achievement decreased” (Silvernail, Sloan, Paul, Johnson, & Stump, 2014, p. 6). Reardon (2011) conducted a study to investigate if the income-related achievement gaps have narrowed or widened over time. He conducted a meta-analysis of 12 nationally representative studies to determine the relationship between academic achievement and family income in the United States over the last 50 years. Reardon’s findings include the presence of an achievement gap and also that it has grown significantly in the last 5 decades. Among children born in the 1950s the gap in achievement among rich and poor students was approximately 0.75 of a standard deviation. Among children born in 2000, the gap has increased to “roughly 1.25 standard deviations—forty percent larger than the gap several decades earlier” (p. 11).

According to Noguera (2011), three adverse social conditions affect the academic performance of students living in poverty: external support, environmental obstacles, and negative social capital. External support addresses the issue that academic and social support outside of school is less available to students living in poverty. The environmental obstacles refer to adverse living conditions that affect students’ health safety, and well-being, all which influence learning. The last social condition, negative social capital, focuses on adverse conditions that “undermine the ability of parents and schools to influence the character of schools and ensure that they serve their interests” (p. 11). For children, the effects of poverty can be lifelong and life-defining.

Students living in poverty are often low-achieving which results in academic remediation, but research shows that slowing down the curriculum is sentencing students to an educational career of being perpetually behind their peers and not achieving grade-level standards (Levin, 1994). “Although the effects of poverty are not automatic or fixed, they often set in motion a

vicious and stubborn cycle of low expectations” (Jensen, 2009, p. 38). This denial of access to grade level material is a violation of learners’ right to quality education as it hampers their opportunities to rise above the station to which they were born. Torff (2011) called this the “rigor gap” (p. 22):

A rigor gap emerges in which disadvantaged students are judged to require less rigorous curriculum than that afforded their more privileged peers. A self-fulfilling prophecy may result: The disadvantaged receive watered-down lessons that limit students’ academic growth, resulting in additional impoverished curriculum in subsequent lessons; conversely, the advantaged received challenging lessons that boost students’ academic performance, leading to additional rigorous curriculum down the road. It’s easy to see how this rigor gap could fan the flames of the achievement gap. (p. 22)

Low expectations in education widen the achievement gap and perpetuate the cycle of poverty as children experience a loss of opportunity to their right *in* education.

### **Dimensions of Education and Achievement**

As students living in poverty are at risk for academic failure, educators must be aware of their unique needs in order to provide them access to rights *in* education, or quality education, as it is in this study. This section examines the achievement gap and what elements could increase achievement for students living in poverty.

**Achievement gap.** Achievement gap is the difference in academic performance between students living in poverty and their mid- and high-income counterparts or in the alternative that between students in the classroom. Researchers show that family economic status correlates to academic achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Fullan, 2006; Kahlenberg, 2013; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Noguera, 2011; Walberg, 2010). A possible cause for low achievement was uncovered in a

U. S. study conducted by Levin. Levin (1994) suggested low achievement may be caused by a lack of experience of children living in poverty. He stated:

When students are born into different racial and socioeconomic groups, some will have far more of the experiences and resources in the home, family, and community that lead to educational success. In particular, non-Whites and immigrants and the poor are less likely than native Whites and the non-poor to have access to these experiences. (p. 170)

Other researchers agree that lack of experience and lack of exposure attribute to the achievement gap. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to describe home environments for children in the United States, Bradley et al. (2001) concluded children living in poverty were less likely to be exposed—inside or outside the home—to developmentally enriching experiences and resources as well as own approximately 10 less developmentally appropriate books than their non-poor counterparts. They were also less likely to have a family member read to them, teach them school-related concepts, and provide them with special lessons to increase their skills. On the other hand, the non-poor families surveyed showed among all ethnic groups, their children were approximately twice as likely to be taken to the museum or to other externalities impacting academic experiences. “Results from this study show that being poor affects nearly every aspect of children’s home lives” (Bradley et al., 2001, p. 1863). This study, which illustrates the impact of poverty on the home environment, indicates that being poor and the quality of a student’s environment affect the level of stimulation for learning.

Kahlenberg (2013) conducted a study on schools that integrated students from various SES levels; the researchers found that the environment of the school has an impact on the achievement of students living in poverty. “It is because poor kids can learn that it’s important to provide them with the right educational environment” (Kahlenberg, 2013, p. 3). The study results

showed that low-income students attending more affluent elementary schools (and living in more-affluent neighborhoods) significantly outperformed low-income elementary students who attend higher-poverty schools with state-of-the-art educational interventions.

Researchers have found evidence of the achievement gap early in a child's life. Hart and Risley (1995) found in a previous study a discrepancy among 3-year-old children's vocabulary level according to the families' SES. In order to discover the cause of that discrepancy, they recorded, transcribed, and observed 42 families of various socioeconomic backgrounds for 2.5 years. They observed interactions between parents and children aged 1- and 2-years-old. "The data showed us that ordinary families differ immensely in the amount of experience with language and interaction they regularly provide their children" (Hart & Risley, 2003, pp. 4–5). They found that 3-year-old children from families from lower SES backgrounds had a lower vocabulary than higher SES counterparts, and were adding new words at a slower pace. The authors found that the average child from a professional family would accumulate 45 million words in 4 years. In the same time span a working class child accumulated 26 million words and an average child in a welfare family accumulated 13 million words, which creates a gap of over 30 million words between the lowest and highest SES families. Dale Walker continued the study with 29 of the original 42 families and measured school performance of the children in third grade (Hart & Risley, 2003). They found the level of accomplishment at age 3 was an accurate predictor of academic success at ages 9–10. The results of this study are not that children from poor families cannot learn, but that they lack opportunities for rich language.

Bridges et al. (2004), in a study of 2,314 California students on school readiness, found that the achievement gap is evident and significant before children enrolled in schools. They indicated in their study that:

The gap in children's pre-reading skills between low-income children and those in the middle class is almost one-third of a standard deviation, or equal to normal rates of growth over two months of kindergarten. The gap between children in the poorest and most affluent fifth of the families is almost one standard deviation, meaning the former group is entering kindergarten already six months—or two thirds of the school year—behind the latter group. This chasm is even wider for children's early knowledge of numbers and mathematical concepts. . . . Almost 90% of the mathematics gap we observe in eighth grade is already apparent at entry to kindergarten. (Bridges et al., 2004, p. 6)

The achievement gap is present in early education and often continues throughout a student's educational career.

Lee and Burkam (2002) in conducting an analysis of the data from the U. S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), observed variances in young student's achievement scores in literacy and mathematics as children began kindergarten as well as a strong relationship between SES and cognitive skills. An early intervention strategy to promote achievement is full-day kindergarten for students living in poverty and are at risk for academic failure. This strategy has met with mixed results. Chang and Singh (2008) also conducted a study using the data from the ECLS-K to ascertain the effects of all-day kindergarten on first grade achievement. They looked at achievement of children beginning of kindergarten, second term of kindergarten, and first term of first grade. The results show that "all-day kindergarten children began [first grade] with significantly higher scores and showed faster growth rates in both reading and math compared with half-day kindergarten children" (p. 35). The researchers did not measure achievement after the beginning of first grade. Other effects of all day programs were seen as Community Preventive Services Task Force



(2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 30 reports focused specifically on low-income and minority students. The study was centered on full-day kindergarten programs and the effect on improved kindergarten academic and social achievement as compared to half-day kindergarten programs. They found improvements in academic and social-emotional skills as well as “more individualized instruction, easier identification of and referral for problems, and improved nutrition” (p. 325). In a meta-analysis of 40 reports, Cooper, Allen, Patall, and Dent (2010) examined the benefits of all-day kindergarten. They confirmed academic benefits for students enrolled in all-day kindergarten, but found those benefits are diminished by third grade. Nonacademic benefits include attendance, increased self-confidence, and ability to work and play with others. In contrast, a detriment to all-day kindergarten programs is that children may not have a positive attitude towards school and may experience more behavior problems as compared to children enrolled in half-day kindergarten. Academic results of all-day kindergarten are confirmed, but are not visible after second grade. Social-emotional benefits are evident with varying results.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (The Nation’s Report Card, 2014) in an achievement study, compared standardized test scores between students eligible and not eligible for the Free and Reduced Priced Lunch Program. Figure 1 shows data from the years 2003 to 2013 in mathematics and reading for fourth and eighth graders nationwide. Figure 1 illustrates a gap of achievement exists and that it has persisted over time with little to no improvement in closing it.

The nation’s report card shows a persistent gap in achievement which represents many students in diverse living situations. To narrow the population and focus on the people involved in this study, Figure 2 illustrates the achievement gap in Idaho over the last 10 years as measured

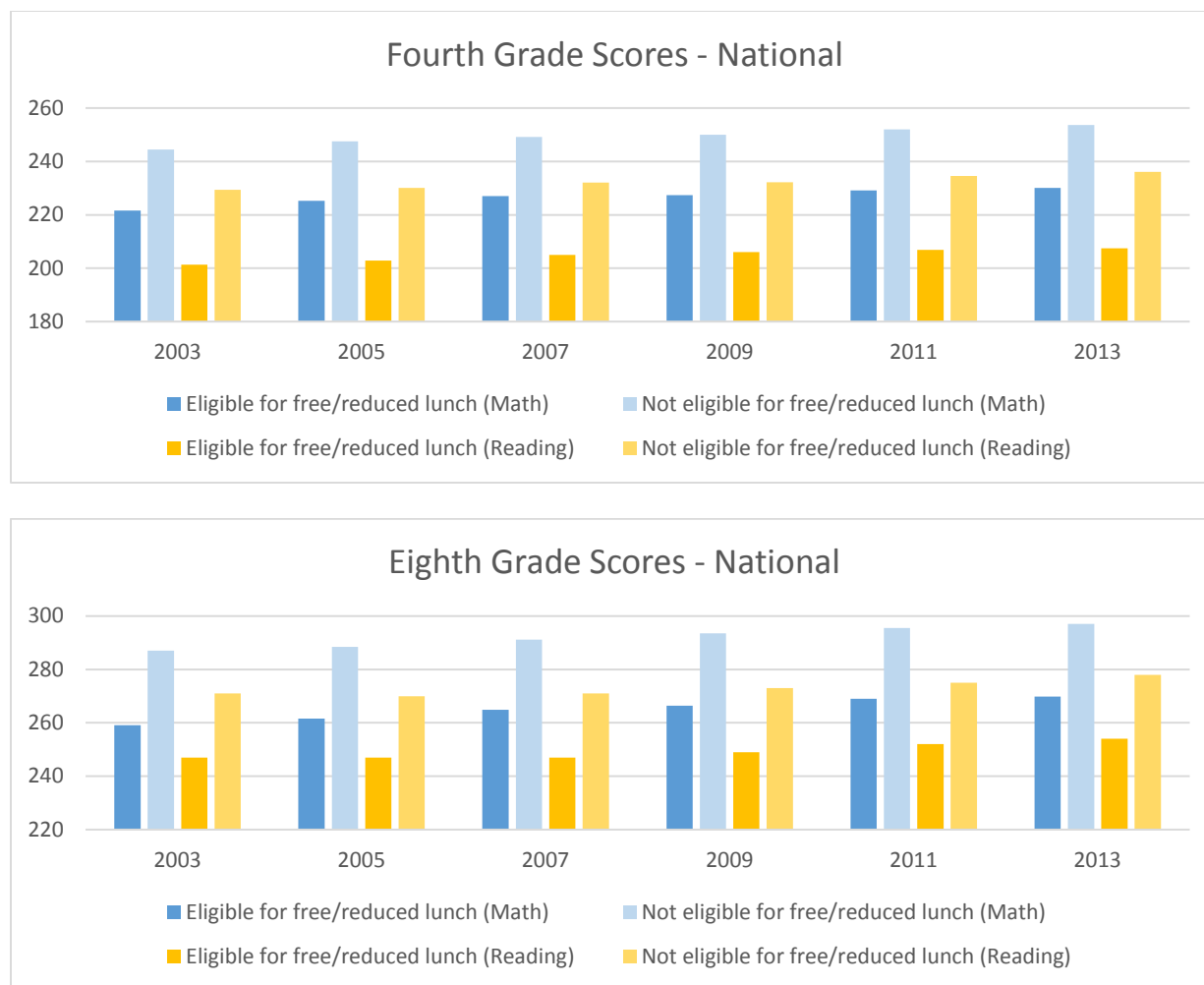


Figure 1. National fourth- and eighth-grade achievement gaps.

by standardized test scores collected by National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

In comparison to the achievement gap at the national level, the size of the gap in Idaho is reduced. Idaho's students eligible for free and reduced lunch are performing a few points above the nation's average of other students eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP). Idaho's scores for non-eligible students are consistently below the nation's average which lessens the achievement gap. As mentioned previously, education in Idaho is in crisis with more than 60% of Idaho's fourth and eighth graders not proficient in math and reading (Students First,

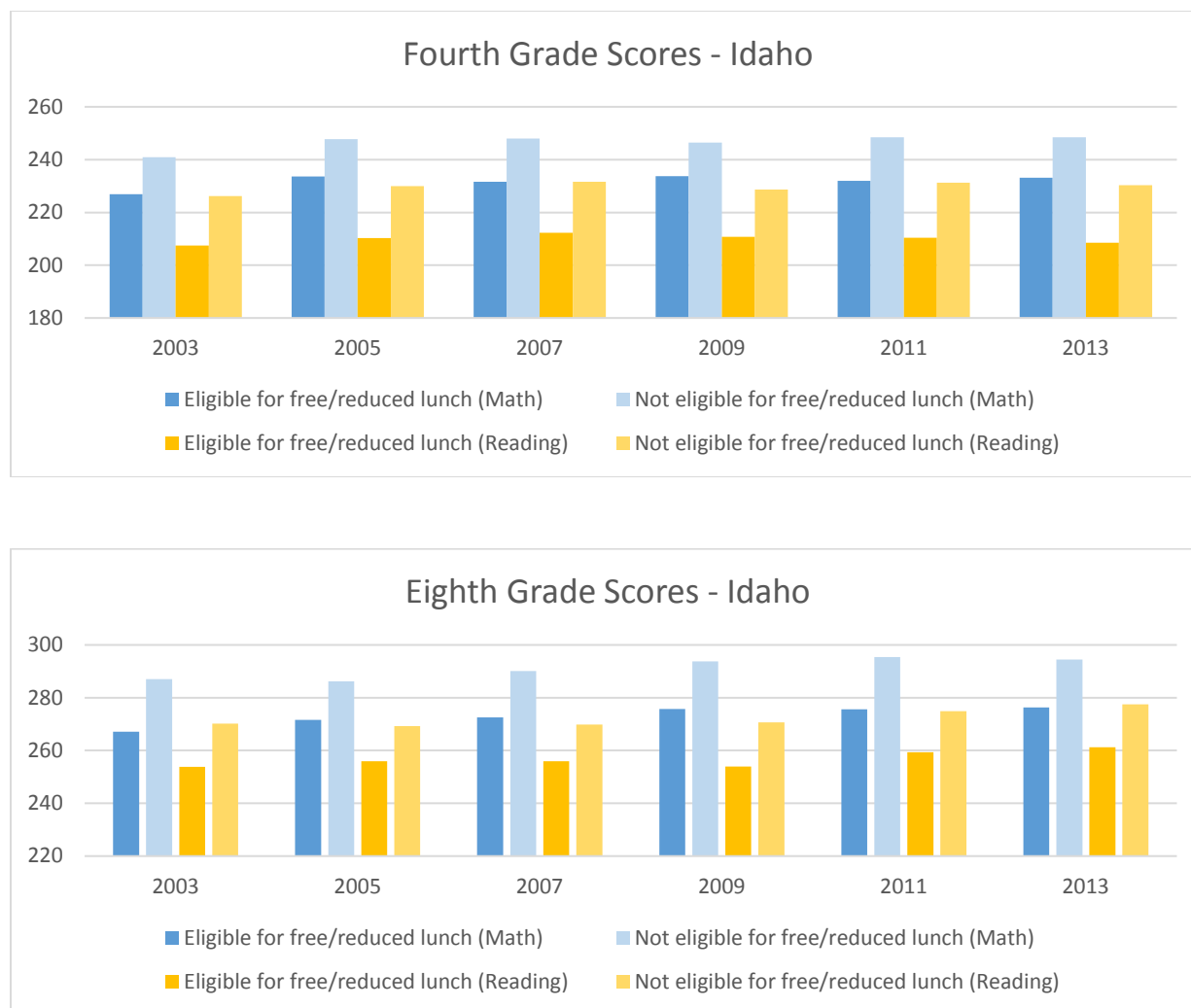


Figure 2. Idaho fourth- and eighth-grade achievement gaps.

2013). Lowering the performance of non-eligible students is not an effective way of decreasing the achievement gap, and regardless, a discrepancy still exists. A gap in achievement is evident and a need to improve education for students living in poverty across the nation and in Idaho, particularly, is apparent. The latter is that which informs understanding this dissertation to fill the void.

**Teacher characteristics and achievement gap.** Researchers argue against remediation as the main practice of boosting student achievement for at-risk students. According to Levin

(1994), remediation slows down academic progress and puts students farther behind the mainstream and would not be included in a quality education for students living in poverty.

Murphy and Johnson's (2009) study shows that China's approach to quality education was inadequate as it did not focus on the whole child and ignored the physical, emotional, and academic development of some students. It was suggested that schools foster problem-solving skills, creativity, and innovation. Educators were encouraged to implement more engaging activity-based teaching methods and to help students learn teamwork skills, civic responsibility, and emotional coping skills. An et al. (2007) outlined quality education in Gansu, China, with the teacher promoting higher-order thinking skills in students and maintaining high expectations for academic achievement. In turn, a quality education leads to higher student engagement.

While specific results varied across the engagement measures, there is evidence that students who perceived that their classrooms were more interactive, that their teachers treated students fairly and cared for them, and who reported less homework and fewer disciplinary problems showed higher levels of engagement (An et al., 2007, p. 331). An et al. were generally positive about the new curriculum in China because they found that it enabled "teachers to create classroom environments where students feel that they are treated fairly, cared for and able to engage in a rich variety of interactions with their teachers and classmates, students may indeed exhibit higher levels of engagement" (2007, p. 333). They believed educational engagement through promoting higher-order thinking skills increases the quality of education provided for students, but also that teachers need to create an environment where students feel safe and cared for. In that safe environment, students' creativity and higher ordering thinking can be nurtured and encouraged. Teachers need to move beyond basic skills and promote higher-order thinking skills through problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity is quality education (Brown,

2011; Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Haberman, 1991; Hattie, 2009; Slavin, 1987; Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Fashola and Slavin (1998) showed that school reforms focused on content areas that were delivered in ways designed to increase student engagement through effective instruction is what makes quality education for students living in poverty.

According to An et al. (2007), the rural schools studied in Gansu, China, implemented practices that increase interactions between students and teachers. Brock (2009) reviewed a project in the same area of Gansu Province in China focused on rural educational reform. The Gansu Basic Education Project worked with a team of consultants focused on the poorest four of Gansu's 84 counties. They worked with educators and officials on the counties' participation, equity and processes of change, and external support as a necessary factor in equity of education. Success of the project was measured through elements that show rights *in* education were provided through in an increase in overall enrollment and specifically in girls' enrollment, decrease in dropout rates in Grade 1, school renovations, and training of teachers. According to Brock (2009), schools focused on *soft* achievements which relate to the quality of the education as teachers adopted and mastered a child-centered methodology which connected schools and community, and put children's own lives in their learning. The planning and organization of the educational system had improved as data had been collected and used to better understand the needs of the poorest and most disadvantaged.

The project's conception of equity is rooted in an understanding of equity as it relates to individual choice and opportunity. It is based on the understanding that to achieve equity in deeply inequitable circumstances requires righting historical disadvantages. Therefore, some groups and some individuals need to be prioritized. (Brock, 2009, p. 460)

This focus, according to Brock, represented a shift by educators to center on the child and the child's background and abilities and provided quality education to the poor and disadvantaged students.

These studies indicate that improving education for children in poverty depends on increasing the capacity of educators to deliver consistently high-quality instruction. Slavin et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 96 studies in the United States to ascertain effective programs and methods in working with students at-risk for academic failure. Their results included one-to-one tutoring (targeted especially in first grade), small group tutoring (but not as effective as one-to-one tutoring), and classroom instructional process approaches (especially cooperative learning and structured phonetic models). In a similar study, Slavin and Madden (1989) found the most effective way to decrease the number of children who need remedial services is to provide the best possible classroom instruction in the first place. The researchers agree that quality education includes quality instruction, meaning that "improving the quality of classroom instruction is the best and most cost effective means of improving overall student achievement and preventing at-risk students from falling behind" (Fashola & Slavin, 1998, p. 376).

A strategy that has been implemented for students living in poverty in order to provide small group instruction and increase student achievement is extending the school day and providing after school tutoring. This strategy has been met with mixed results. James-Burdumy, Dynarski, and Deke (2007) evaluated 12 school districts and 26 after school learning centers. They found that students received care and supervision after school that helped the students feel safer during after school hours, but no academic outcomes were affected and more incidents of negative behavior were reported. Conversely, Leos-Urbel (2015) examined 29 after school

programs to ascertain the relationship between program quality, attendance, and academic outcomes among participants who were living in poverty. Leos-Urbel found that elementary students' attendance was not dependent on program quality, while the opposite was true of middle school students. For elementary students, greater academic growth was seen in after school programs with a more supportive environment. The author suggested that a program that offers "positive interactions and relationships that foster development" (Leos-Urbel, 2015, p. 703) provide a means for academic success. He suggested the social-emotional, as well as academic needs need to be met in a quality after school program.

Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 75 reports on 68 different after school programs. They found that after school programs "had an overall positive and statistically significant impact on participating youth" (Durlak et al., 2010, p. 302). The changes in students occurred in three areas: "feelings and attitudes, indicators of behavioral adjustment, and school performance" (p. 302). Specifically, the authors stated significant growth in self-perceptions, bonding to school, positive social behaviors, grades, and achievement test scores (Durlak et al., 2010). Lauer et al. (2006) also conducted a meta-analysis of 371 articles regarding the effect of after school programs on math and reading achievement for at-risk students. They found that after school programs "can have positive effects on the achievement of at-risk students in reading and mathematics" (Lauer et al., 2006, p. 307).

Other studies in the United States focus on characteristics of high-poverty, high-achieving schools. Trimble (2002) conducted a study from 1997 to 2000 to examine the policies, practices, and procedures of five high poverty middle schools in Georgia in order to answer the question, "In these schools, what practices are associated with higher student achievement?" (p. 9). The five schools selected for this study had test scores that surpassed the scores of other

schools with similar demographics. Data were collected through observations, questionnaires, examination of school documents and reports as well as interviews of students, teachers, and administrators. The researcher identified three common elements across all five schools. These elements are “(a) acquiring grants and managing money well, (b) using a variety of team configurations to do the work of the school, and (c) concentrating efforts on data-based goals and programs that affected student performance” (Trimble, 2002, p. 10). A study of six benchmark schools located throughout the United States was conducted by Cawelti (1999). Common characteristics of these high-achieving schools were clear and high standards, strong leadership, collaborative teams, and committed teachers.

Kearney et al. (2012) conducted a case study of an elementary school in Texas termed 90/90/90 (Reeves, 2004) for having at least 90% of the student body classified as in poverty, at least 90% non-Anglo, and at least 90% of the students performing at the 90th percentile or higher on state or national standardized tests. After interviewing administration, teachers, and staff as well as conducting classroom visits, they identified key characteristics to the school’s success: (a) support structures which includes professional development opportunities, significant reliance on teacher and staff input, strong leadership, and effective hiring practices; (b) relationships with supportive and caring adults and evidence of mutual trust among school personnel, students, and parents; and (c) consistency as demonstrated in people, pedagogy, and programs of the school. The second key characteristic, relationships with supportive and caring adults, agrees with the work of John Hattie (2009) as he conducted a meta-analysis of over 800 influences on achievement in school-aged students. He found that teachers have the greatest social impact on students’ learning and motivation. In Hattie’s meta-analysis, he stated the relationship with



teachers was more influential than peer relationships, class environment, and influences of parents.

Raufelder et al. (2016) studied the effect of students' relationships with teachers and the resulting impact on motivation. They questioned 1,088 students aged 12–15 years from public school in Brandenburg, Germany, regarding the students' "academic self-regulation, their intrinsic motivation, the quality of their relationships with their teachers, and the impact their well-liked teachers have on their motivation" (Raufelder et al., 2016, p. 740). The authors found that when students had at least one positive relationship with teachers then students' intrinsic motivation increases. The authors recommended teachers to be competent in pedagogy and content but also to "pay particular attention to the interpersonal relationships that they are fostering with their students. . . . It is crucial for teachers to form emotionally connected relationships with the young individuals they teach" (Raufelder et al., 2016, p. 746). They asserted that creating relationships is especially important for students in poverty due to the lack of meaningful relationships they have with adults. This research supports the statement from Fullan (2003) that "Quality relationships, are even more powerful than moral purpose" (p. 35). Caring relationships between students and teachers can impact student achievement.

Not only do teachers need to possess characteristics that increase their quality and effectiveness, but a structure and culture of collaboration within a school has been found to increase student achievement and result in quality education. Rubinstein and McCarthy (2016) studied six high poverty schools in Southern California to ascertain the effects of school-level teacher collaboration, along with union management partnerships, on student achievement. They found schools with higher partnerships and greater collaboration among staff had higher test scores on the California achievement test. "Whereas poverty remains a key predictor of student

achievement, our data suggest that student performance can be significantly improved by institutional union–management partnerships and the increased school-level collaboration that results from them, even in high-poverty schools” (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016, p. 1128). The authors found that school improvement is based on improving instruction, curriculum, analyzing student performance, and making adjustments to improve learning. This is best accomplished through “input, cooperation, and coordination—in essence a highly collaborative organization” (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016, p. 1118).

Rubinstein and McCarthy’s (2016) work is supported by Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) who studied 47 schools in the midwestern United States that showed a significant and positive correlation between greater collaboration of teachers and student performance. Leana and Pil (2006) studied 88 urban, high-poverty elementary school environments and found that internal (relationships among teachers) and external (relationships between principal and external stakeholders) social capital are impactful factors of student achievement. Along with a school culture that encourages collaboration, teachers need to feel that the collaborative decisions they make have impact on school systems and environment. Moolenaar, Daly, and Slegers (2011) studied schools in Netherlands and found that teachers felt their school environment was innovative and supportive when teachers were involved in decision making. A quality teacher does not stand alone, but is part of his or her school environment. An environment rich in collaboration and decision-making among quality teachers will be most effective in supporting students as they achieve their capabilities.

The environment of a school is impacted by the mobility of educators and staffs. Recent studies indicate that school districts are facing increasing rates of teachers and principal turnover, which is argued to deprive schools of the leadership stability they need to succeed, disrupt long-

term school reform efforts, and lower levels of student achievement (Miller, 2013; Murnane, 2007; Partlow, 2007). Research also show that this presents serious challenges for schools. A challenge for schools serving at-risk students or that have low achieving students tend to have less desirable working conditions or inferior workplace conditions. Fuller and Young, (2009), concluded that schools with inferior working condition as well as a high concentration of at-risk students tend to have higher rates of teacher turnover. Partlow (2007), in studying 109 suburban, rural, and urban elementary schools in Ohio from 1997-2003, concluded that regardless of variables, the frequency of principal turnover in urban and rural schools (including those in poverty communities) was higher than that of suburban and higher SES communities. This also applies to principals as it is common to have high rate of principal turnover in schools with low achieving students with less desirable working conditions, schools with high concentration of poverty, and schools with more minority and second language students (Card & Krueger, 1996b; Miller, 2013). More importantly, principal turnover that compounds the problems of attracting and retaining the best teachers denies schools the leadership stability they need to increase student achievement, generate parent involvement, and support teachers (Fuller & Young, 2009; Partlow, 2007; Weinstein, Jacobowitz, Ely, Landon, & Schwartz, 2009). The results of these further studies show that constant mobility of principals prevents constructive improvements from taking hold within individual schools; linkage between principal stability and student outcomes (Fuller & Young, 2009), as well as high correlation between principal and teacher turnover (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001). In other words, schools with high levels of principal retention tend to have higher levels of teacher retention (Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2009; Weinstein et al., 2009). In sum, frequent principal and teacher's continuous change of employment from at-risk schools, deprive schools of the leadership stability they need to

succeed, disrupt long-term school reform efforts, and may even be linked to increased teacher turnover and lower levels of student achievement.

These studies reflect the common characteristics that contribute to quality education which will improve the capabilities of children living in poverty. These characteristics include collaboration among staff, strong leadership, and caring teachers who fosters relationships with students as well as delivers effective instruction. This study will examine a high-poverty, high-achieving elementary schools in Idaho in order to uncover similar characteristics or discover new elements that contribute to the academic success of students living in poverty that will add to this field of study. “Schools can make an enormous difference despite the challenges presented by poverty and family background” (Noguera, 2011, p. 10). Providing quality education will enable schools to protect children’s rights *in* education as well as combat the effects of poverty.

**Closing the achievement gap through quality education.** The achievement gap among students illustrates a lack of access to the right *in* quality education for children in poverty. “A reasonable criterion is that we have obtained educational equity when representatives of different racial, gender, and socioeconomic origins have about the same probabilities of reaching different educational outcomes” (Levin, 1994, p. 168). In a study focused on at-risk students, he suggests equity occurs when all students have equal chance at achieving in school and, consequently, the gap of academic performance closes. An equal chance for all to achieve in school occurs when access and right to quality education or interventions that mitigate adaptability and acceptability to education is provided (Tomasevski, 2001b).

Geographically, the gap varies from state to state and community to community in the United States, but the gap is evident nationwide. At the 10th anniversary of the UDHR in 1958, Eleanor Roosevelt, chairperson of the 1948 UDHR committee, stated:

In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world. (United Nations, 1996)

The gap exists and educational opportunity is not made equal. Lindqvist stated, “It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions” (p. 172). Examining what is, knowing what can be, and then providing action towards improvement is a courageous yet necessary task I undertake in this study to give all Idaho children the right to a quality education.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explains that education is a human right and enables individuals to develop their capabilities. The right *in* education is the foundation on which many other rights are built on. For families living in poverty, education is a route to improved living conditions as long as the education provided is of a high quality. The literature shows that students living in poverty are not performing as well as their higher SES peers, but high-poverty, high-performing schools are in existence and show that closing the achievement gap for students living in poverty is imperative.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology used for this study and how it has guided data collection, analysis, and conceptualization of the dissertation. It describes the analytical approaches as well as the procedures for collecting data. This chapter is segmented into two sections. The first section describes the research design which focuses on a mixed-method, or Q-squared, approach used in this study. It also illustrates how schools and interview participants were selected for the study. The second section explains the data sources and how the data were collected, organized, and analyzed. This section also describes how qualitative data were analyzed using the grounded theory method in order to see themes and patterns emerge from the data.

This research is a case study of three schools considered high-poverty located in rural Idaho, but distinctively different in academic achievement. These high-poverty schools serve students in kindergarten through third grade. The researcher obtained Intuitional Review Board (IRB) approval to analyze the existing data and to interview the participants. Participants gave signed consent for their contributions to be used in this study (see Appendix D). The comparison of these schools will help to identify best practices and lessons learned to bridge the gap for students living in poverty.

#### Research Design

The schools were examined through the collection of data using a case study approach. Case studies are a means to closely examine people, issues, or topics and seek to answer focused questions “by producing in-depth descriptions and interpretations over a relatively short period of time” (Hays, 2004, p. 218). The three schools selected for the study are located in rural Idaho

in cities with similar demographics, but differing achievement scores. This does not allow generalizations of success for students living in poverty, but it does allow identifying elements of success, if any exist, specific to high-achieving school with their student population. According to Hays (2004), “generalization is not a goal in case studies . . . because discovering the uniqueness of each case is the main purpose” (p. 218). It is the belief by certain scholars that “case study researchers examine each case expecting to uncover new and unusual interactions, events, explanations, interpretations, and cause-and effect connections” (Hays, 2004, p. 219). Uncovering the unique elements of the high-achieving, high-poverty schools was the main goal of this study. This is that which inform the use of mixed-methods and grounded theory that not only is a method for understanding research participants’ social constructions but also a method that researchers construct throughout complex inquiry.

The Q-squared method was employed in this research data collection as it collects both qualitative and quantitative data. The intention here is not to look at the different interpretations of the qualitative and quantitative distinction or to focus on competing typologies of mixed-method approaches. Rather the intent is to note that over the last decade, there has been a marked increase in the combined use of Q-squared method in the analysis of poverty and to acknowledge the prominent number of research projects and quite sizeable body of work that now exists (Shaffer, 2013).

The advantage of this method comes from the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collected in order to broaden and deepen the analysis. Mixed-method approaches have not only shown a high degree of methodological innovation, making use of varied information types and unbiased data collection techniques, it also provides an entry point to address both foundational issues and underlying approaches to poverty while also addressing applied issues

about the strengths and limitations of different research methods and the ways they may be fruitfully combined (Kanbur & Shaffer, 2007; Shaffer, 2005).

The quantitative data collected for this study was from state testing achievement provided by the school districts via Idaho State Department of Education (ISDE). The qualitative data were collected from interviews that employed open-ended questions (see Appendix B). The use of more than one method to collect quantitative and qualitative data broadens the range of information gathered as well as reduce bias that might be experienced in a single method of data collection. “Recognizing that all methods have limitations, researchers felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). The gathering and organizing of demographic and testing (quantitative data) information was the first step of data collection, this helped to develop and inform the interview questions (qualitative data). This two-stage sequential procedure allowed the researcher to elaborate or expand the findings of one method with another method, thus either neutralizing or minimizing the inherent biases in single method approach. The interview questions are outlined in a protocol to ensure consistency throughout the interview process (see Appendix B).

The main source of quantitative data consists of state testing scores from the ISAT administered each spring in the subjects of mathematics and reading. The ISAT scores for each school were collected and sorted by achievement according to overall school performance for both mathematics and reading tests. Scores were also sorted by achievement for the subpopulation of economically disadvantaged. Obtained data were organized in an Excel spreadsheet in order to view information in a variety of forms. Tables and graphs highlighted areas of strengths and challenges among variables considered strong drivers of student achievement.



The main source of qualitative data was from certificated staff interviews. Additional data were collected through the researcher's own notes and observations. "The use of multiple methods and multiple sources as forms of triangulation makes case study findings not only more comprehensive but also more complicated because so many perspectives are represented" (Hays, 2004, p. 228). State testing data revealed some very interesting overall trends in student achievement. The researcher's journal created additional insight in the staff and school environment, and the participant interviews provided specific details that more fully identified significant factors to student achievement. Unique in comparison to other qualitative approaches within case studies, the researcher collected and integrated qualitative and quantitative data, which facilitated reaching a holistic understanding of the study objectives.

Each case study school employs a large staff of teachers, para-educators, and various other members. Interviewing each staff member would have enriched this study, but for reasons pertaining to time limitations and to minimize the data to a practical quantity, the interviews of staff members were limited to a sample group of participants. Participants for this study were selected through a structure already in place at the three case study schools. Each school has a leadership team which consists of the building principal, a representative from each grade level, and certified intervention teachers, if employed at the school. Their main responsibility on the leadership team is to represent the other teachers on their grade level team. They were selected as participants in this study to continue that representation. The members of the team at each of the case study schools are asked to participate by the building principal for possessing qualities of commitment, dependability, leadership, and effectiveness in his or her teaching. Team members are presumed to be quality teachers who are dedicated to student achievement and are exemplification to other members of their grade-level team. In order to allow variety of

responses, but still maintain deep understanding to the interviews, the sample has been narrowed from the entire staff to the leadership team members who are all certified teachers and administrators. Although the educational inputs of para-educators are an important element of serving students, especially in low SES settings, certified staff members have the central responsibility to deliver quality instruction for student achievement. This informs the reason why the researcher focused on this target population for in-depth interviews regarding successful elements of student achievement for children of poverty. Interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face with the leadership team in each of the schools in order to allow the educators to identify elements that contribute to the success of the school.

### **Characteristics of Schools and Location Setting**

Harvest Elementary School is part of an agricultural community in rural Idaho which serves students from kindergarten through third grade. The school staff consists of one principal, a part-time vice principal, part-time counselor, 25 certified teachers, 16 para-educators, and other classified personnel to total a staff of 51 members. Bounty Elementary School is located in the same town as Harvest and also serves students from kindergarten through third grade. The school staff consists of one principal, part-time counselor, 25 certified teachers, 17 para-educators, and other classified personnel to total a staff of 50. Orchard Elementary School is located within 60 miles of Harvest and Bounty schools and also serves students from kindergarten through third grade. The school staff consists of one principal, one part-time counselor, 28 certified teachers, 14 para-educators, and other classified personnel to total a staff of 39. Table 2 illustrates the demographics of the two communities that contain the three case study schools according to data from the 2010 U. S. Census (AreaVibes, 2016).

Table 2

*Community Demographics*

Demographic	Community A (Harvest/Bounty) (population = 10,157)	Community B (Orchard) (population 10,757)
English speaking	81.00%	75.00%
Spanish speaking	19.00%	24.00%
Caucasian	86.59%	84.69%
African American	1.06%	0.29%
Asian	0.73%	0.00%
American Indian	0.96%	1.75%
Native Hawaiian	0.00%	0.00%
Mixed race	3.25%	2.14%
Other race	7.40%	11.14%
Hispanic or Latino	33.50%	35.10%

Table 3 shows the demographics of the three case study schools in the 2011–2012 school year. The demographics among the two communities and three schools are similar with the exception of Community B having a larger percentage of adults speaking Spanish. Orchard has a higher percentage of Hispanic students than Harvest and Bounty, but the percentage of students who speak Spanish (labeled *limited English proficient* in Table 3) is lower at Orchard than Harvest with Bounty having the lowest percentage. Although Orchard has a higher percentage of Hispanic students, the language skills of students is comparable to Harvest and Bounty. This may be due in part to the employment at Orchard of a full-time, certificated English language teacher who would be solely focused on helping the children of Community B to learn and retain English language skills. Tables 2 and 3 summarize school demographics and illustrate similarities among the communities and case study schools making them a comparable sample set.

Table 4 shows the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees at each of the case study schools (Idaho State Department of Education, 2017) as well as participants' number of years in

current position and in education overall. Table 4 shows that Harvest has the highest percentage of teachers with advanced degrees as well as experience.

Table 3

*School Demographics*

Demographic	Harvest (Enrollment 602)	Bounty (Enrollment 571)	Orchard (Enrollment 615)
White	55.6%	62.6%	46%
Black	1.2%	1.4%	1.0%
Asian	0.1%	0.9%	1.0%
Indian	1.2%	0.8%	1.0%
Pacific Islander	0.3%	0.2%	1.0%
Two or more races	12.4%	10.9%	0.0%
Hispanic	41.7%	34.1%	52%
Free/reduced lunch	65%	65%	73%
Homeless	1.3%	1.9%	1.5%
Limited English proficient	27.9%	12.1%	20.1%
Migrant	5.8%	3.4%	3.4%

Table 4

*Teacher Education and Experience*

Characteristic	Harvest	Bounty	Orchard
Master's degree or higher (whole staff)	65.5%	59.3%	58.6%
Average years in current position (participants)	15.4	7.8	6.3
Average years in education (participants)	21.4	15.6	11.3

Furthermore, Table 4 illustrates that Bounty and Orchard are more similar in teacher education and experience although the data regarding Bounty's teachers are slightly higher than Orchard. A corollary of this finding is that student achievement between Bounty and Harvest are comparable with Orchard being lower. The results presented here are consistent with the literature stating that certain teacher characteristics – experience and education – have a positive impact on student achievement (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007;

Croninger, Rice, Rathbun, & Nishio, 2007; Jacob & Lefgren, 2008; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005).

Harvest Elementary was chosen for this study due to the lack of gap in achievement within their standardized test scores. In 2012, they were recognized as a Distinguished School by the state of Idaho and the National Title I Association. This recognition is given to schools that show exceptional student performance for two or more consecutive years and have been successful in closing the achievement gap between student groups. The success at Harvest Elementary has been long standing.

Bounty Elementary is located in the same community as Harvest and is similar in demographics and achievement to Harvest. Bounty was given the Idaho Distinguished School Award in 2011. This award is given by the Idaho State Board of Education to schools who show high achievement and lack of gap in achievement among subpopulations with consistency. The success of Bounty in student achievement as documented has been consistent over time.

Orchard Elementary is located within 60 miles of the other two schools. The demographics of Orchard are similar to the other two schools, but achievement fluctuates and is lower overall in comparison to the other case study schools. Orchard was chosen as a contrast school that has seen successes and failures with regards to student achievement without consistency. The gap of achievement is small at Orchard for the economically disadvantaged students, but the overall scores are lower than Bounty and Harvest. This study examined these three schools and compared data as well as perceptions of teachers and administrators to determine differences or commonalities that might contribute to one school's success over the other.

## Data Sources

As this study employed the Q-squared method, data sources were mixed with both quantitative and qualitative information. Quantitative data were represented through the collection of ISAT scores and the qualitative data were represented through interviews of certified staff members.

### Quantitative Data Source: ISAT Scores

The ISAT is a tool for accountability for Idaho teachers and students and is used in this study to measure achievement of the case study schools. “The ISAT summative assessment is an important component of the statewide student assessment system as stated in the board rule 08.02.03-Rules Governing Thoroughness” (Idaho State Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). Students in Idaho in Grades 3–10 are given the ISAT in order “to provide ongoing monitoring of individual, school, district, and state progress” (Idaho State Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). The test is divided into the subtests of mathematics, reading, and language arts with a science test for students in fifth, seventh, and 10th grades. ISAT is a high-stakes test with proficiency on the 10th-grade math and reading tests being a requirement for high school graduation. “Proficiency on the 10th grade ISATs verifies that an Idaho student has met Idaho Core Standards in these content areas” (Idaho State Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). The goals of the ISAT are to measure student achievement and growth in the Idaho Core Standards, demonstrate students’ progress towards college and career readiness, and to provide accurate, valid, reliable, and fair information as part of program evaluation and school, district, and state accountability system. The math and reading ISAT scores of the students at Harvest, Orchard, and Bounty are used in this study to measure academic achievement. The language ISAT scores are not used as there is some overlap between the content of reading and language tests. The

language test is often used as a “third indicator” of achievement with options of other indicators to be used by schools whereas math and reading are reported without any other option. Within the state, the greatest emphasis is placed on math and reading scores so this study will do the same.

This study is focused on schools serving kindergarten through third grade. This is due to the choice of the researcher to concentrate on early intervention and primary grades where impact on student achievement in younger years influences students’ educational career (Bridges et al., 2004; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Slaby et al., 2005). As a consequence, the ISAT test is administered only to third grade students and it may appear to evaluate only a small portion of the schools’ population. But the ISAT measures cumulative knowledge. Therefore, the content taught and the efforts of teachers Kindergarten through third grade are measured and accounted for within the ISAT administered in third grade.

Scores from the most recent ISAT administration were collected from the ISDE website. The data from ISDE were incomplete with missing scores, but still served a purpose to illustrate strengths, challenges, and patterns among the three case study schools in order to create the interview protocol. When permission was given to contact and work with the school more directly (see Appendix C), more complete ISAT data were obtained from the district testing coordinators from the school districts. The districts provided scores for both math and reading ISAT tests from Bounty, Harvest, and Orchard schools. Despite the limitations of missing data from the ISDE website, the data collected from the districts offered a complete and accurate picture regarding student achievement. Districts receive their data directly from ISDE so the disconnect between the ISDE website and the districts’ information is concerning, but as the

district had complete data with no missing scores, the information used in this study represents the data received from the school districts.

ISDE delivers the testing data electronically to the district with individual student achievement as well as overall school data. Summaries of subpopulation data are also given to the schools by the ISDE. The researcher had access to overall school data and subpopulation data, but not individual testing achievement because of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974).

### **Qualitative Data Sources: Interviews of Certified Staff**

As stated previously, the interview participants were the members of the leadership team at each school which includes an administrator and a grade level representative from each grade the school serves. Every member of the leadership team was interviewed which included five participants from Harvest, five participants from Bounty, and seven participants from Orchard. At Orchard, the leadership team also included two intervention teachers: Title I certified teacher and a certified English language teacher. Interviews took place at the school during times that were most convenient for the teachers to ensure their full attention, comfort, and ease. The interview was introduced to potential research subjects by the principals and then the researcher arranged the interviews. During the interview, a protocol was followed (see Appendix B) in order to ensure the same experience for all participants, thus the same open-ended questions were asked at every interview. The questions were designed for the purpose of creating a framework for educators to discuss specific elements of effective practices at the school but still allow freedom for them to speak openly and freely about their own perspective of academic success. The interview was structured not only to enable and empower, but it was also structured



to give voice to participants in the study. Through this study, presumed effective educators were able to share their voice regarding student achievement and quality teaching.

**Qualitative data collection.** Interviews followed a protocol in which the researcher introduced the research topic, asked the teacher to sign a form granting permission to be recorded, and then a series of questions were asked (see Appendix B). The questions in the protocol were created and structured according to results of research that has been outlined in Chapter 2 as well as the preliminary school achievement data extrapolated from the Idaho State Department of Education website. Also of use in the design of the questionnaire was the experience of the researcher as well as the consultation of experts in the field. The main research question was included among three sub questions that were broken down into more detailed questions. The design of questions was to allow the participants to express their thoughts and experiences in order to more fully answer the research questions which are outlined below.

- Question 1: From the perspective of the teachers and administrators, what are the characteristics of quality education for a student living in poverty?
  - Q1.1 From your understanding, experience, and background, how would you describe poverty?
  - Q1.2 In your opinion, what are the characteristics of quality education?
  - Q1.3 In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a quality teacher?
  - Q1.4 In what ways do you feel these characteristics differ for students living in poverty and those living in a higher socioeconomic level?
- Question 2: What *new* strategies, innovations, and methods were implemented and found to be effective in attaining high academic success for students living in poverty from the perspective of the teachers and administrators?

- Q2.1 Why do you think your school is successful in narrowing the achievement gap for students living in poverty (if a prompt is needed, say, “such as teacher quality, curriculum, instruction, professional development, school leadership, relationships, consistency, etc.”)?
- Q2.2 Within your realm of responsibility, what organizational changes would you suggest to further improve student achievement?
- Q2.3 What do you attribute to the differences in math and reading achievement for students living in poverty?
- Question 3: What resources do teachers and administrators value as vital contributors to the success of students living in poverty?
  - Q3.1 What are influential resources that affect achievement for a student living in poverty? (If a prompt is needed, say, “such as financial, people, time, family background, family partnerships, etc.”)
  - Q3.2 What other resources would you like to have and how would they contribute to eliminating/bridging the achievement gap?

The participants’ interviews were recorded and transcribed as well as documented with the researcher’s notes taken during the interviews.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet in order to organize information as well as look for patterns that might inform interview questions. The spreadsheet was prepared with overall percentages of students achieving the ratings of *Advanced* and *Proficient* for all students as well as broken down into the subpopulation of *Economically Disadvantaged* (ED). The data were entered in Excel and then organized into tables and graphs in order to allow analysis of

patterns and trends. Scores were examined to find similarities as well as differences within each case study school as well as among the three schools. The study focused on the ED scores and seeking patterns and connections as they are compared to the scores of all students in order to analyze the data to see a clearer picture of the school's student achievement in each specific school as well as to provide a comparison of the three schools.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The data gathered from interviews was analyzed through the grounded theory approach. The purpose of the grounded theory design is to ensure findings are grounded in data as well as to generate a theoretical understanding about the research. It is “a systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic” (Creswell, 2002, p. 439). The grounded theory approach was chosen for this study because it allows the theories to form from the data rather than comparing the data to a theory as in other methodologies. The purpose of this research is to allow educators a voice in order to develop a theory regarding quality education for students living in poverty and their voice is best documented when using the grounded theory approach. The voices of the participants becomes the theory to answer the research question rather than the researcher starting with a preconceived theory. This methodology was chosen for this research above other methods because it serves as a means to explain the processes of schools that were successful in narrowing the achievement gap for students living in poverty.

The grounded theory methodology provides a way to learn about the perceptions of individuals, their thoughts and feelings, regarding a specific topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). “Quantitative data may be useful in measuring attitudes across a large sample, but grounded theory offers a powerful methodological framework if the aim of the study is to learn about

individuals' perceptions" (Gorra, 2007, p. 86). As learning the perceptions of the participants is the main goal of this study, grounded theory is an appropriate methodology for this research.

The significant advantage of grounded theory is the convergence of data which adds strength to the findings as different data sources are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case study. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described grounded theory as a methodology that is "designed to guide researchers in producing theory that is 'conceptually dense'" (p. 169) with several conceptual relationships. The relationships among the theories and concepts are the focus of a grounded research study as well as the patterns that emerge as relationships are examined. "Grounded researchers are interested in *patterns* of action and interaction between and among various types of social *units*. . . . So they are not especially interested in creating theory about individual actors as such. They are also much concerned with discovering *process*" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 169). Furthermore, this methodology was selected for this study to aid in the discovering and identifying the processes of successful educators and their perceptions of poverty and how to bridge achievement gaps which was the focus of this study. It was also utilized to organize the interview responses into themes that will generate concepts and contexts that could improve education for children living in poverty, so as to decrease the achievement gap.

While basic theories of poverty and education have been studied, and presented in Chapter 2, the final propositions and conclusions of this research do not depend on theories already in existence, but will endeavor to either support, extend, or develop new notions regarding rights *in* education for students in poverty. It was anticipated that through this unique context in which the data were collected, in conjunction with the specific questions of interest, a modified model unique to this research would emerge. As such, this research was largely guided

by what the data said, rather than preconceived theories and established relationship of educating low-income students. While specific research questions and potentially important variables based on existing literature have been noteworthy, it was likely that new variables and relationships would emerge (Eisenhardt, 1989). Such modified theories and notions would result in a theory dependent on a particular data set. However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated, “insofar as theory that is developed through this methodology is able to specify consequences and their related conditions, the theorists can claim predictability for it, in the limited sense that *if* elsewhere approximately similar conditions obtain, *then* approximately similar consequences should occur” (p. 169). While the grounded theory derived from this research is relevant to and representative of this particular set of data, it may also have relevance for theories of education for low-income students.

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) included open-ended questions that allowed the educators freedom to tell his or her story but were specific enough to ensure responses were centered on the research questions. The data gathered were analyzed through NVivo to facilitate the grounded theory design which ensured the findings were grounded in data and that they generated theoretical understandings to address the research questions.

NVivo software was used to support the sorting and organizing of information in a way that emerging themes could be easily discovered. The use of software to analyze quantitative data is beneficial to researchers as it can increase methodological rigor, dependability, credibility, and confirmability (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Oliveira, Bitencourt, Zanardo dos Santos, & Teixeira, 2016). NVivo is designed to aid in organization and analysis of data in order to find insights in unstructured or qualitative data (QSR International, 2016).

Grounded theory advocates using coding techniques to examine interview responses. Opening coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), or line-by-line coding, provides a starting point to identify initial phenomena and produce a list of themes of importance to the interview participants. Conceptual labels were attached to almost every line of the transcript in order to capture what was said in the participants' own words. Codes were assigned to participants' words and statements to develop concepts, constituting the first stage of the analytic process (Gorra, 2007).

The purpose of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the next stage of coding, is to find patterns or relationships among the themes. It helps to identify how themes differ from other themes. This stage of coding required the researcher to assign codes to several lines or paragraphs in the transcripts. The researcher was required to choose the most telling codes to represent the voice of the participants. At this point, the open coding was compared to axial (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) coding to ensure accuracy to the participants' voice. After coding several interview transcripts, the researcher began to identify ideas and issues that are of importance to the respondents. These concepts or codes shared similar characteristics and were pulled together and interlinked to build the basis for theory.

In the last stage of coding, theoretical coding, the researcher explored the relationships that have been established between categories. Comparison among and within interviews were completed at this stage in order to solidify emerging themes. According to Glaser (1978), several rules or coding families are developed as an advanced analysis of the subject through the process of constant comparison. Theory development within grounded theory methodology relies largely on comparisons made during analysis through the use of the constant comparative method

(Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Tesch (1990) explained why comparison is so important to the analysis stage of grounded theory methodology:

The main intellectual tool is comparison. The method of comparing and contrasting is used for practically all intellectual tasks during analysis: forming categories, establishing the boundaries of the categories, assigning the segments to categories, summarizing the content of each category, finding negative evidence, etc. The goal is to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns. (p. 96)

Boeije (2002) pointed out that while the benefits of the constant comparative method seem to be rather straight forward, the implementation of the constant comparison is not as clear. The analysis in this research followed the first three basic steps presented by Boeije (p. 395):

- Comparison within a single interview.
- Comparison between interviews within the same group.
- Comparison of interviews from different groups.

Through this constant comparison, the theoretical properties of the category emerged. This emergence occurred as the data from the interviews and the researcher's journal notes were coded, compared, and theories formed.

In this study, transcripts of the 17 interviews were imported into NVivo and open, axial, and theoretical coding was completed by the researcher as the transcripts were read, compared, and analyzed multiple times. NVivo aided in organizing and seeing patterns in a consistent and valid way. "The searching tools in NVivo allow the research to interrogate her or his data at a particular level" (Welsh, 2002, p. 5). The data were organized and stored in NVivo in a way that aided in seeing and organizing the data into themes.

The Q-squared method (Shaffer, 2013) was employed by comparing the patterns and trends of the achievement data (quantitative data) to the patterns and trends of the interview data (qualitative data). Triangulation occurred as those results were then compared to the findings recorded in the researcher's journal. Through comparing and contrasting of different sets of data, findings were either supported or discredited. Through the use of a mixed-method approach, similarities and differences among the schools were identified, resulting in findings grounded in both qualitative and quantitative data. As data were collected, organized, and analyzed, the literature as outlined in Chapter 2 was found to either support or contradict the research findings. These comparisons with the literature deepened the understanding of how best to provide students living in poverty with quality education.

### **Validity and Credibility**

Validity in qualitative research means appropriateness of the tools, process, and data. Validity of design in the context of methodology requires that the sampling and data analysis is appropriate and that, finally, the result and conclusions are valid for the sample and context.

Credibility involves establishing that the research results are believable and credible from the perspective of the subject in the research. The use of Q-squared method, which involved the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data lent credibility to the study as the theories produced were grounded in both types of data (Kanbur, 2003). Triangulation of data also lent credibility to the study by comparing and contrasting data so the resulting theories and findings were based on data rather the bias of the researcher. Rigorous techniques and methods for gathering and analyzing qualitative data and perceived trustworthiness of the researcher established credibility of this study.



## Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the research methodology employed in this study and why. This study was centered on a case study of three schools in rural Idaho: Bounty, Harvest, and Orchard Elementary Schools. All schools had a student population that was high-poverty, but only Bounty and Harvest were consistent in their high-achieving student scores. Data were collected using Q-squared method (a mixed-method approach), which enable gathering both qualitative and quantitative data that was analyzed and compared to support the conclusions.

The quantitative data came from the state testing (ISAT) results and was used to measure and compare achievement of students living in poverty as well as their higher SES counterparts. Data were collected and sorted on tables and graphs created on an Excel spreadsheet in order to organize, categorize, and analyze the data.

The grounded theory method was employed to analyze qualitative data as data were constantly compared and themes emerged from the responses within participants' interviews. This method was chosen in order to allow the data to create theories rather than comparing data to preexisting theories. This allows the voice of the participants to be the guiding forces of qualitative data analysis. This aligns with the purpose of this study which is to obtain the perceptions of educators at the case study schools. Qualitative data were represented through the researcher's journal and interview transcriptions. These two sets of qualitative data, along with the ISAT quantitative data set allowed triangulation of the data analysis to ensure credibility and decrease bias. The researcher's journal included overall thoughts and impressions throughout the data gathering process. The researcher was able to document sights, sounds, and impressions in the journal in order to start comparing and seeing patterns and differences during the interview stage of data collection. The main piece of qualitative data was the transcripts of the interviews

of the certified staff. This is where the researcher gained knowledge of educators' opinions, perceptions, and practice. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, then uploaded and stored in NVivo software in order to conduct analysis for common themes among all the interviews. These themes guided the conclusions of this research as well as created possibilities for further research.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

This chapter contains a detailed account of the findings from data collection of this mixed-method study. The chapter is structured in two main parts with the first section explaining the analysis of quantitative data collection of ISAT scores. The second section details the results of the qualitative data collection in the form of interview responses. The methodology for this study, which has been discussed and explained in the previous chapter, has guided the data collection as illustrated in this chapter.

#### Quantitative Data

Quantitative data, in the form of ISAT scores, were collected from the two districts for the three case study schools. While compiling data, it was discovered that data in recent years (after 2013) were unavailable due to the transition of ISAT to a new format provided by Smarter Balance in 2013. School year 2013–2014 was a benchmark and norming year. Results were compiled by the ISDE but not distributed to districts and schools. Spring of 2014 was a pilot year and the 1st-year districts and schools received data. Through this testing transition, ISDE, district, and school data were inconsistent and incomplete. For the purposes of this study, the most comprehensive data available was used, which included assessment results from 2009 to 2013. Although it is not the most recent, it is accurate and complete data that show patterns and trends regarding student achievement in the three case study schools.

#### ISAT Data and Analysis

Table 5 contains the ISAT testing data from the three case study schools in the years 2009–2013, including targets set by the state and state averages. The percentage of students who achieved “Advanced” or “Proficient” is recorded in the chart for the general population as well

as those students who are identified as (Economically Disadvantaged (ED) due to their eligibility in the Free and Reduced Priced Lunch Program. For the purposes of this study, a gap in achievement is considered slight if it is equal to or below 3%.

Table 5

*ISAT Reading and Mathematics Results 2009–2013: State and School Average Scores*

	2009	2009 - ED	2010	2010 ED	2011	2011 ED	2012	2012 ED	2013	2013 ED
Reading										
State Goals	85.6%	85.6%	85.6%	85.6%	85.6%	85.6%	85.6%	85.6%	85.6%	85.6%
State Averages (grades 3-8,10)	91.9%	87.2%	92.3%	88.3%	92.7%	89.1%	93.2%	90.0%	90.0%	85.1%
School Averages (grade 3)										
Harvest	89.4%	88.1%	93.5%	91.0%	93.5%	90.9%	95.7%	95.4%	86.2%	79.2%
Bounty	89.5%	87.1%	97.2%	96.8%	97.0%	96.3%	93.5%	91.9%	88.8%	86.3%
Orchard	85.1%	79.0%	91.0%	87.7%	81.9%	76.3%	85.1%	80.9%	77.4%	72.5%
Mathematics										
State Goals:	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%	83.0%	8.03%	83.0%	83.0%
State Averages (grades 3-8,10)	88.0%	82.3%	88.2%	83.2%	88.4%	83.6%	87.9%	83.3%	82.2%	75.3%
School Averages (grade 3)										
Harvest	93.1%	89.8%	96.0%	94.1%	95.3%	93.3%	96.9%	96.2%	89.8%	87.8%
Bounty	92.0%	92.7%	93.5%	90.9%	95.9%	95.7%	94.0%	93.0%	93.3%	91.6%
Orchard	70.0%	70.0%	84.7%	83.8%	90.1%	82.7%	82.6%	79.8%	80.7%	77.2%

Table 5 shows that scores for each school remained fairly consistent until 2013. In 2013, schools saw a decline in scores among all students in both tests except Bounty's math test results. Although the overall scores decreased, the gap in achievement between all students and ED students stayed constant despite the lower scores. Overall, Bounty and Harvest were

consistently above the targets set by the state. Orchard occasionally met the target set by the state but not on a regular basis. The gap between all student scores and ED students remained in all schools through all years recorded and among all subjects. The exception is Orchard's math scores from 2009 which were well below the target but have no gap between all students' and ED students' achievement.

Figure 3 shows a comparison of all students and ED students' achievement in math ISAT achievement, and Figure 4 shows reading ISAT achievement results from 2009–2013 in the three case study schools. Both figures also include the target set by the state; the ability of the schools to meet that target is indicated in the figures.

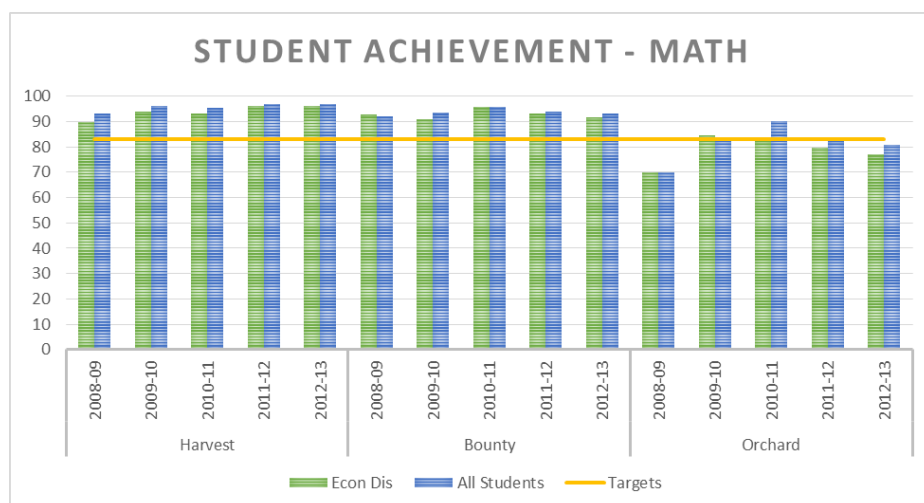


Figure 3. Student achievement—math ISAT scores.

Figure 3 shows that Harvest and Orchard are consistently above the state target in the subgroups of ED and all students in math ISAT scores. Orchard's achievement is generally below the state target with achievement in 2008-09 the lowest but showing no gap in

achievement between all students and ED students. The exception is ED students perform slightly (0.9%) higher than all students and both groups perform above the state target in 2009–2010. A gap is evident in 2010–2011, but all students scored above the state target that year. All other years are below the state target with a gap in achievement between ED and all students.

Figure 4 reflects the schools' reading ISAT scores. Student achievement at Bounty is above the state target with very small gap in achievement each year. In the school years of 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 achievement is highest. Harvest is above the state average with slight gap in achievement all years except 2012–2013 when scores are below the target and have the largest gap in achievement between ED and all students. Orchard achieves the state target in 2009–2010 in both ED and all students. Orchard's scores are below the state target for both ED and all students every other year reported.

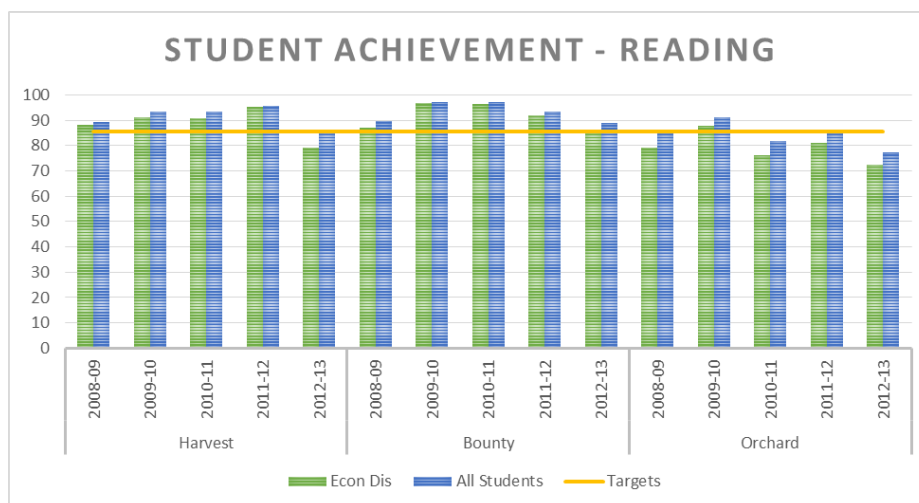


Figure 4. Student achievement—reading ISAT scores.

**Harvest Elementary School.** Math and reading achievement and gaps in achievement for Harvest from 2009–2013 are shown in Table 6. The math ISAT results for Harvest Elementary remain fairly consistent for all 5 years reported. The largest gap in math achievement

occurred in 2009 as the general population scored 3.3% higher than ED students. Table 6 shows that the other years remain consistent with a slight gap of less than 3%. The reading ISAT results for Harvest Elementary also remain fairly consistent for 4 of the 5 years reported. The year 2011 (2.6%) had the greatest gap and 2012 (0.5%) had the smallest gap between all student and ED students. The exception was 2013 with a drop in all students' scores from 96.9% to 89.8% in math and 95.7% to 86.2% in reading. The staff at Harvest attribute the drop in scores to the new formatting of the test, but as Bounty's scores did not drop that year so the cause for the drop is unknown. In 2013, the achievement gap was 2% for math but increased to 7% in reading.

Table 6

*Harvest Achievement Data*

Year	All	ED	Gap
<b>Math</b>			
2009	93.1	89.8	3.3
2010	96.0	94.1	1.9
2011	95.3	93.3	2.0
2012	96.9	96.2	0.7
2013	89.8	87.8	2.0
<b>Reading</b>			
2009	89.4	88.1	1.3
2010	93.5	91.0	2.5
2011	93.5	90.9	2.6
2012	95.7	95.4	0.3
2013	86.2	79.2	7.0

**Bounty Elementary School.** Table 7 illustrates achievement and gaps in achievement for Bounty Elementary from 2009–2013. The gap in achievement between all students and ED students remained under 3% in all subjects from 2009–2013. Math 2009 scores show that ED students outperformed the overall student scores by 0.7%. In 2013, reading scores remained above the state target with a gap of 2.5% which is significant since the scores at Harvest and Orchard saw a decrease in achievement and an increase of the gap that year. The greatest gaps in

achievement for Bounty in 2009–2013 were 2.6% in math 2010, 2.5% in 2013 reading, and 2.4% in reading 2009.

Table 7

*Bounty Achievement Data*

Year	All	ED	Gap
<b>Math</b>			
2009	92.0	92.7	-0.7
2010	93.5	90.9	2.6
2011	95.9	95.7	0.2
2012	94.0	93.0	1.0
2013	93.3	91.6	1.7
<b>Reading</b>			
2009	89.5	87.1	2.4
2010	97.2	96.8	0.4
2011	97.0	96.3	0.7
2012	93.5	91.9	1.6
2013	88.8	86.3	2.5

**Orchard Elementary School.** Table 8 shows achievement and gaps in achievement from 2009–2013 at Orchard. Assessment results for Orchard Elementary are less consistent than the other two schools. Math scores show no gap in 2009 and only a slight gap in achievement in 2010 (2.6%), 2012 (1.0%) and 2013 (1.7%). The largest gap in math of 5.4% occurred in 2011. Scores for all students are below the target set by the state with the exceptions of 2010 and 2011. Reading scores for Orchard Elementary are not high achieving with the target being reached only in 2010. The achievement gap between all students and ED students fluctuates over the 5 years under study with the greatest gap in reading of 6.1% in 2009 and the smallest gap in reading of 3.3% in 2010.

**Overview.** Table 9 indicates the gaps in achievement for all three case study schools in the subjects of ISAT reading and math from 2009–2013. The data indicate that the level of student achievement in Harvest and Bounty were above the state targets with the exception of



Table 8

*Orchard Achievement Data*

Year	All	ED	Gap
<b>Math</b>			
2009	70.0	70.0	0.0
2010	84.7	83.8	0.9
2011	90.1	84.7	5.4
2012	82.6	79.8	2.8
2013	80.7	77.2	3.5
<b>Reading</b>			
2009	85.1	79.0	6.1
2010	91.0	87.7	3.3
2011	81.9	76.3	5.6
2012	85.1	80.9	4.2
2013	77.4	72.5	4.9

Harvest's reading score of 88.8% in 2013. Comparatively, Orchard's achievement in both math and reading is lower with greater variance in scores. The gap in achievement between all students and ED students remained fairly consistent in Harvest ranging from 0.7–3.3 in math and 0.3–7.0 in reading and Bounty 0.2–2.6 in math and 0.4–2.5 in reading. Orchard's gap showing the most variance and greatest lack of consistency between all students and ED students ranging 0.0–5.4 in math and 3.3–6.1 in reading.

Table 9

*Summary of Achievement Gap among Case Study Schools*

Reading Achievement Gap					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Harvest	1.3	2.5	2.6	0.3	7.0
Bounty	2.4	0.4	0.7	1.6	2.5
Orchard	6.1	3.3	5.6	4.2	4.9
Mathematics Achievement Gap					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Harvest	3.3	1.9	2.0	0.7	2.0
Bounty	-0.7	2.6	0.2	1.0	1.7
Orchard	0.0	0.9	5.4	2.8	3.5

## Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were collected through 17 interviews of the leadership team at each case study school. Harvest and Bounty both had five members of the school leadership teams and all five members were interviewed. Orchard's school leadership team was the same as the other schools with the addition of the Title I Intervention teacher and the English language teacher bringing the leadership team members and interview participants to seven. The interview recordings and transcripts, along with the researcher's journal, makes up the qualitative data for this study. Data from the researcher's journal is threaded throughout this section with the bulk of the data coming from the leadership team members' interviews.

The data collected from interviews were entered into NVivo in order to conduct coding and define themes. Interview transcripts were read and open coded into 54 nodes. Another review of the coded transcripts was conducted, at which point themes began to emerge and develop. The 12 themes of significance from the data collected from the 17 interviews are:

- Basic needs/experiences
- Characteristics of poverty
- Family influence
- Instructional strategies
- Intervention instruction
- Outside forces on education
- School leadership
- School structure
- Social-emotional needs
- Student responsibility

- Teacher dispositions
- Teacher quality

These themes were present throughout all interviews in all three schools in varying degrees. The significance of the disparities and commonalities among the schools as well as the individual responses to questions is worthy of analysis in order to provide quality education for students living in poverty and probably to determine influencing factors that might have resulted in achievement gaps.

### **Interview Data Analysis**

Information can be gleaned from the interview data as the individual responses of the interview questions are analyzed and the emergence of the 12 themes is illustrated. This allows a comparison and contrasting of the responses among the staffs at the different schools in order to identify unique characteristics that are successful in narrowing the achievement gap for students living in poverty. The analysis of this study is organized in two parts to give clarity to the results. The first part focuses on analyzing the responses according to each question in the interview. This will give insight of the responses to the individual questions in order to illustrate the overall themes and to create a complete answer to the research question. The second part of the analysis is organized by theme. This enables comparing and contrasting the responses among the different schools. Together they create a comprehensive analysis of the 17 interviews.

**Questions.** Each of the participants' responses from every question was reviewed for themes and was analyzed by the frequency of references made by the participants. Frequency of themes were considered significant within a question if over half the participants (9/17; 53%) referred to the theme in their response. The themes found to be significant for each question were analyzed and the responses from participants from the three case study schools were compared

and contrasted. The interview questions were labeled in this analysis based on the three research sub questions (Question 1 = Q1, Question 2 = Q2, and Question 3 = Q3). The sub questions are divided again into more specific questions and labeled under the three main questions (e. g., Q1.1 is the first sub question for Q1, Q1.2 is the second sub question for Q1).

**Q1.1: From your understanding, experience, and background, how would you describe poverty?** The predominant themes among respondents to this question are basic needs/experiences and characteristics of poverty. Figure 5 illustrates that all 17 participants discussed these two themes in their responses to this question. Figure 5 also shows family influence, student responsibility, and social-emotional needs were discussed in interviews but not by over half the participants so the frequency is not significant for this study. Sixteen participants defined *poverty* as a lack of resources resulting in privation of basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing while only one participant from Harvest who did not recognize the lack of resources, felt poverty was closely linked to attitude. There was little variance among the three schools in the responses to this question as participants were in general agreement.

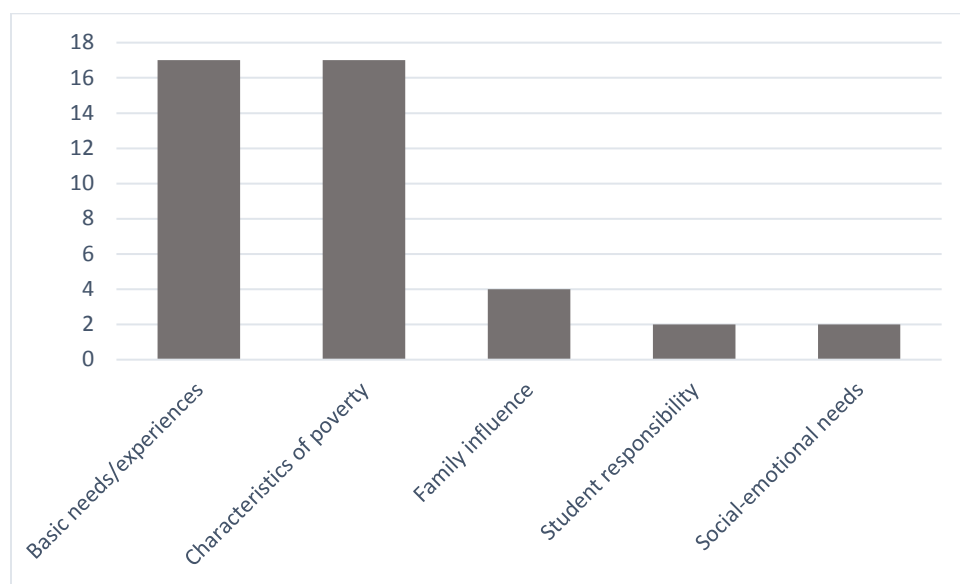


Figure 5. Q1.1: Frequency of responses by theme.

The following are quotes from the participants' interviews which illustrate their perceptions regarding the definition and description of poverty:

- “Not having what is essential or what is needed, not necessarily what’s wanted like, the very basics: food, shelter, I would even go [school] supplies” (Bounty, Interview 1).
- “Families that are having a hard time making the ends meet, paying the bills on time, putting a proper meal in front of their children” (Orchard, Interview 6).
- “Not having all the things that they need. Like food, housing, clothing. Their basic necessities are not all being met” (Orchard, Interview 4).

Participants also spoke of characteristics of poverty, mainly the lack of experiences and the effects on academic achievement.

- “Not being exposed to those things that they, families, need to be exposed to. You hear a lot of people, ‘oh we go on vacation and this is what we taught our kids’ but probably because of the money end of it they don’t get to have those experiences. So there is poverty not just because of that but because of all the things that go with it” (Harvest, Interview 2).
- “Very few enriching experiences. Not a lot of experience either besides their house and their TV going” (Bounty, Interview 2).
- “They don’t have experiences that our other kids do at a young age already having been at a restaurant or to the YMCA to swim or one of the museums at [local college]” (Orchard, Interview 5).
- “Not having the same access as to things that kids that don’t come from poverty that take for granted” (Orchard, Interview 6).

- “Family and children who are in need of things whether it be monetary things or even kids who don’t get those experiences and things outside of school before they come” (Orchard, Interview 1).

These responses support the work of Bradley et al. (2001), Jensen (2009), and Levin (1994) regarding the impact of experiences and resources in the home, family, and community on student achievement.

***Q1.2: In your opinion, what are the characteristics of quality education?*** This question refers to quality education for all children as defined in this study, not necessarily a focus on students living in poverty. The purpose of this question was to allow participants to define quality education for all students in order to be more specific to the needs of students in poverty in later questions. The themes discussed with the most frequency were teacher dispositions, social-emotional needs, teacher quality, and instructional strategies. The frequency of these themes among all responses is illustrated in Figure 6. Figure 6 shows teacher disposition was discussed by 13 participants (76%), social-emotional needs discussed by 12 (71%), teacher quality discussed by 10 (59%), and instructional strategies discussed by nine participants (53%). They are all considered significant as they meet the study requirements. Each of these themes is discussed in more depth below.

*Teacher dispositions.* The theme of teacher dispositions refers to the attitude of the teacher regarding students living in poverty. The responses centered on the idea that the teacher sees the potential of each student and consequently sets high achievement expectations for all students regardless of family income level or any other indicator that might label a child at risk of academic failure. The following responses are examples of the participants’ perceptions regarding teacher dispositions:

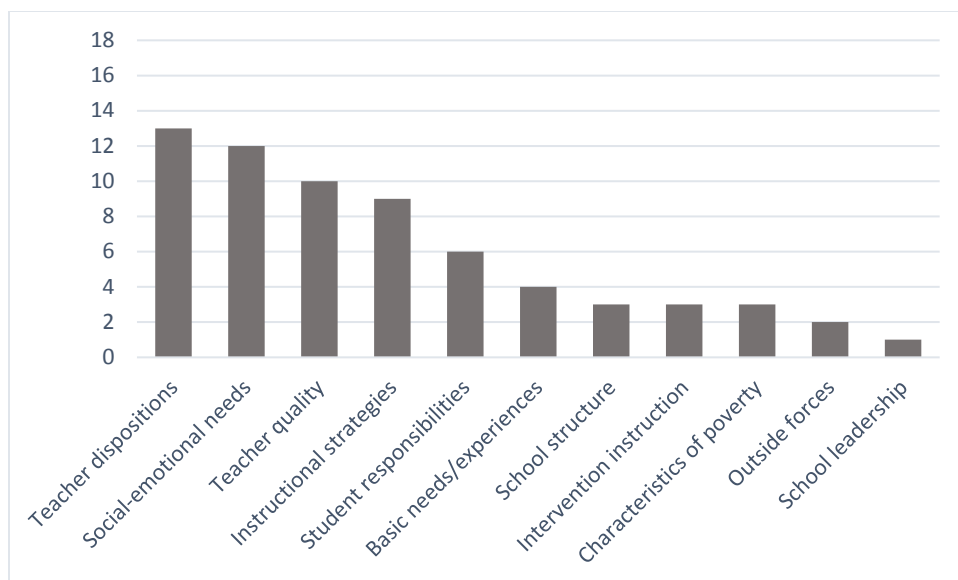


Figure 6. Q1.2: Frequency of responses by theme.

- “Quality education to me is an attitude—an environment where the children feel confident. They get established in their minds that if they work hard they can become, they can do . . . if they work hard” (Bounty, Interview 2).
- “I think it needs to be every child deserves that quality education. It doesn’t matter if they are poor or rich or what SES that they are but everybody deserves that same opportunity to learn” (Harvest, Interview 2).
- “Every kiddo should have high expectations from their teachers. Expectations should never be lowered especially because of the family or because of the circumstances that they come from. . . . And if expectations are high, then the teacher plans harder, they plan more content, they hit more standards. If you come in with expectations that are low, the teacher is not invested; therefore, the student is not invested” (Orchard, Interview 6).

- “Reaching all children and giving them an equal chance. To really pushing children to their limits” (Orchard, Interview 1).

These responses are further evidence for the studies reviewed in the literature regarding the power of a committed teacher who sets and maintains high expectations for all students, especially those who are at risk for academic failure due to circumstances received from living in poverty (Brown, 2011; Cawelti, 1999; Jensen, 2009; Levin, 1994; Torff, 2011). This finding from this study directly supports the work by An et al. (2007) as they defined quality education in Gansu China with a teacher who promoted higher-order thinking skills and maintained high expectations for academic achievement for his or her students. According to the authors, these strategies led to higher student engagement and, in turn, higher student achievement (An et al., 2007).

Table 10 indicates that teacher expectation is an important factor in student achievement. Responses to this question discussed teacher dispositions at a high frequency among all schools. As shown in Table 10, Orchard and Harvest had all but one participant (6/7 at Orchard; 4/5 at Harvest) discuss teacher disposition as a vital part of quality education. Bounty was slightly lower with all but two participants (3/5) discussing this topic. Overall, participants were in agreement that teacher disposition, including high expectations for students, is an important part of quality education.

Table 10

*Frequency of Responses for Q1.2 by Theme*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Teacher disposition	6/7	86%	3/5	60%	4/5	80%
Social-emotional needs	4/7	57%	4/5	80%	4/5	80%
Teacher quality	5/7	71%	2/5	40%	3/5	60%
Instructional strategies	4/7	57%	3/5	60%	2/5	40%



*Social-emotional needs.* The theme social-emotional needs refers to the need to feel safe and welcome in an environment. Participants felt students need to know they are part of a community of learners and have a place, responsibilities, and sense of belonging within the classroom and school. Below are responses that reflect the participants' perceptions of the connection between quality education and social-emotional needs:

- “Kids have a lot of baggage from home anymore. They just have a lot of needs” (Harvest, Interview 5).
- “You have to start with a welcoming environment. It has to be a warm, welcoming environment” (Bounty, Interview 5).
- “If you can give them what they don't have . . . that sense of belonging that sense of self-esteem, that confidence, motivation. If you can build all that in while you're bringing in the academics, it makes for a well-rounded student. A problem solver, and not just in academics, but give them some social skills” (Harvest, Interview 5).
- “They come to a place where they feel like they can get fed, they can get access to clothing, and they can get . . . maybe get access to unconditional love maybe for the first time in their life. My whole teaching philosophy revolves around making sure kids feel safe enough to take the risk necessary for learning. A quality education starts with providing that safety for the kiddos. And safety can be as simple as making sure their bellies are full, making sure that in the winter time they have warm clothing” (Orchard, Interview 6).

- “It starts with the teacher because a teacher has to first build an environment that is rich... rich in vocabulary, rich in literature,... rich in experience, and rich in care” (Orchard, Interview 7).

The responses from participants support the literature that the social-emotional needs of students living in poverty must be met in order for them to be successful in school (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Chambers, 1995; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Jensen, 2009; Mayes et al., 2007; Narayan et al., 2000). Researchers agree that poverty is not a cause of low student achievement (Fullan, 2006; Noguera, 2011), but the effects of the characteristics of poverty can add stress and anxiety that impairs a child’s ability to do well in school. The findings from this study support the notion that addressing social-emotional needs of students will improve student achievement.

Study participants discussed social-emotional needs at varying frequency among all schools. As illustrated in Table 10, Bounty and Harvest had all but one participant (4/5; 80%) who stated meeting social-emotional needs is a vital part of quality education. Orchard was lower with four out of seven (57%) participants discussing this topic. These data are consistent with achievement data illustrating Bounty and Harvest are similar with higher achievement and Orchard having differing and lower results. These findings lend support to the research stating the importance of meeting social-emotional needs in order to raise student achievement (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Chambers, 1995; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Jensen, 2009; Mayes et al., 2007; Narayan et al., 2000).

*Teacher quality.* Teacher quality refers to teachers who are qualified to teach, not just through state certification, but also through knowledge, course specific teaching, and experience. A valuable aspect for participants regarding teacher quality was a caring and compassionate

teacher who feels the responsibility to educate and move students forward academically. The responses below are indicative of the participants' views regarding the theme of teacher quality:

- “Teachers who are constantly questioning ‘what can I do better?’ and questioning the system of things. Like, ‘if this isn’t working what else can I do?’” (Orchard, Interview 2).
- “Talent and knowledge as far as the teachers need to be qualified. And I don’t mean that even so much by a piece of paper that qualifies them, that they are good, strong educators. People who care about kids and are able to teach” (Bounty, Interview 5).
- “You have to get training in the curriculum and standards” (Orchard, Interview 2).
- “If they are happy to walk through that door every day then I’m doing my job. Then if they didn’t want to walk through that door then the problem is mine” (Harvest, Interview 1).

These responses support the research studies that indicate the value of a quality teacher. There is some controversy regarding the effect of the teacher on student achievement among the literature particularly cited in this study. This study and other research does support the notion of a quality teacher having a direct impact on student achievement (An et al., 2007; Brophy, 2000; Card & Krueger, 1996a; Hanushek et al., 2004). A teacher who cares, who is knowledgeable, and willing to do whatever is needed in order to improve student learning is, as described by Brown (2011), “the backbone of any education system” (p. 25).

Participants discussed teacher quality at a varying frequency among all schools. Table 10 shows that 5/7 (71%) participants from Orchard and 3/5 (60%) participants from Harvest discuss

teacher quality as a vital part of quality education. Bounty was lower with 2/5 (40%) participants referring to this topic.

*Instructional strategies.* The instructional strategies theme is centered on the approach of teachers to instruct and teach concepts to students. This theme is related to teacher dispositions in that the teacher's attitude and beliefs affect the way they instruct and act towards students including their expectations for achievement. In relating instructional strategies to quality education, the participants focused on differentiating the curriculum and real life connections of the curriculum to real-world experiences. The responses below reflect study participants' perceptions regarding instructional strategies in answering this question:

- “I try to make their learning significant for life skills” (Orchard, Interview 4).
- “Education that needs to be meaningful . . . not a bunch of memorizing stuff that you are never going to use” (Bounty, Interview 3).
- “Basics of helping them be readers or writers. They would see that math can be fun and that it applies to something” (Orchard, Interview 5).
- “Quality education differentiates everyone's needs” (Bounty, Interview 2).
- “Every child comes in learning differently and so you have to adjust for each child. So that part of it . . . that have to be able to adjust for each child in their different circumstances” (Harvest, Interview 2).
- “Bringing in all the different levels, all the different tiers because quality education is also challenging the highs” (Bounty, Interview 2).

These responses support the results from the literature review which suggests that quality education is relatable to real life and is differentiated to meet the needs of individual learners (An et al., 2007; Brock, 2009; Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Murphy & Johnson, 2009). The research

completed by Brock (2009) directly relates to the findings of this study. He reported the importance of teachers using child-centered curriculum that directly relates to the lives of students and strives to meet the needs of each child.

Respondents to this question discussed instructional strategies at nearly the same frequency among all schools. As illustrated in Table 10, Harvest had the lowest frequency with 2/5 (40%) participants discussing instructional strategies as a vital part of quality education. Orchard had 4/7 (57%) of participants discuss instructional strategies and Bounty was slightly higher with 3/5 participants (60%) referring to this topic. There was little variance among the three schools in the frequency of discussing instructional strategies for this question.

*Overview of Q1.2.* The variance in responses of this question was not wide. Most participants agree that teacher disposition, social-emotional needs, teacher quality, and instructional strategies are key components of quality education. Table 10 shows that teacher disposition, teacher quality, instructional strategies have similar frequency in responses among the three schools. Social-emotional needs had the greatest variance with Orchard participants discussing it less than Bounty and Harvest. Orchard participants answered this question by defining quality education with a focus on the dispositions of teachers to provide equitable education rather than meeting social-emotional needs which is a discrepancy from the participants from Bounty and Harvest. As illustrated in Table 9, achievement at Orchard is less consistent than Bounty and Harvest. Consequently, any discrepancy of Orchard from Harvest and Bounty serve as a possible explanation of the higher achievement found at Harvest and Bounty. These findings are evidence that a focus on social-emotional needs of students may be a factor in higher student achievement.

**Q1.3: In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a quality teacher?** Similar to the question Q1.2, this referred to a general response, not specific to students living in poverty in order to differentiate students in poverty's unique needs in later questions. Figure 7 shows the predominant themes for this question were teacher disposition (13/17; 76%) and teacher quality (12/17; 71%). Both teacher disposition and teacher quality were significant themes as both had responses above the average.

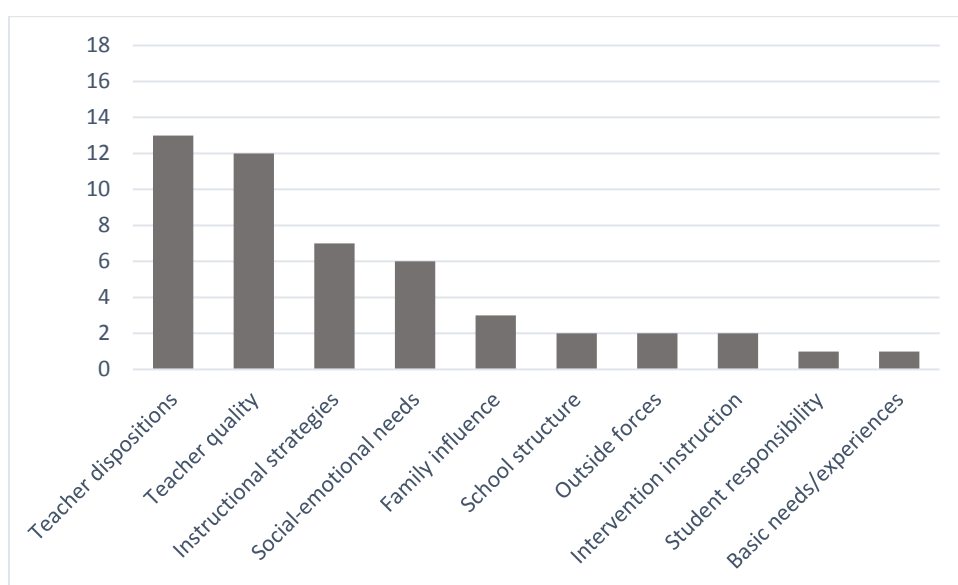


Figure 7. Q1.3: Frequency of responses by theme.

*Teacher dispositions.* As indicated in Q1.2, teacher disposition refers to the attitude of the teacher in regards to his or her expectations for students, regardless of their background. The responses to this question focused on a teacher's disposition as conceptualized as a teacher who sacrifices and does whatever is necessary to help students succeed. Below are examples of responses within the theme of teacher dispositions:

- “Not to label, not to judge, but to make sure that you’re giving them what they need. And a quality teacher does that. [He or she] doesn’t judge” (Harvest, Interview 5).
- “I tell a good teacher from a not very good teacher is that level of commitment. Do they treat this like a 9–5 job or do they treat this like your calling, something that you’re never off the clock with” (Orchard, Interview 6).
- “Someone who is willing to put in the time to do the things that need to be done” (Orchard, Interview 1).
- “Helping the child see they can be responsible, that they can accomplish, whether it’s on the teacher’s time and the child’s time. Recess, prep time, whatever. To get the child to understand what they need to do” (Harvest, Interview 4).
- “[Teachers need to] find the difference of learning in each child and being able to meet that need for that child. Because you can’t just teach, I am sure you know, you can’t just teach one way and expect every child to understand it. You have to be able to adjust for each child and how they learn and teach all these different ways” (Harvest, Interview 2).

Participants agree with the literature review regarding the powerful influence of a dedicated teacher who is committed to achievement, regardless of the students’ backgrounds (Brown, 2011; Cawelti, 1999; Jensen, 2009; Levin, 1994; Torff, 2011). In an early study, Hanushek (1996a) stated there was no evidence of teachers’ education, salary, or experience impacting on student achievement. However, An et al. (2007), Card and Krueger (1996a), and Hanushek et al. (2004) found a positive correlation between a quality teacher and student achievement.

Responses to this question discussed teacher dispositions at a similar frequency among all schools. Table 11 indicates that Orchard had 86% (6/7) of participants discuss teacher dispositions as a vital part of quality teaching. Harvest had 80% (4/5) and Bounty had 60% (3/5) of participants refer to this topic.

Table 11

*Frequency of Responses for Q1.3 by Theme*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Teacher disposition	6/7	86%	3/5	60%	4/5	80%
Teacher quality	6/7	86%	4/5	80%	2/5	40%

*Teacher quality.* As discussed in Q1.2, the responses regarding teacher quality referred to a teacher who is competent in curriculum, knowledgeable of subject matter, and cares about his or her students. The responses from this question are distinguishable from Q1.2. In Q1.3, respondents focused on classroom management and ongoing improvement as a professional educator. These responses illustrate the value assigned by the participants to the career and calling of an educator. Examples of this perception and commitment within the responses to this question are below:

- “You need to be always open to new learning because I’m not done. I’m a work in progress” (Orchard, Interview 7).
- “Someone who knows what they are doing is important. They have a very special and important job and take it very seriously” (Orchard, Interview 1).
- “Someone who likes their job. They enjoy working with kids and they have some insight as to motivate kids and they are pretty rigorous about understanding about curriculum and instruction” (Orchard, Interview 3).



- “[A quality teacher] would know the curriculum, would know instruction—how to work with the students, but at the same time she would have care about the students” (Harvest, Interview 5).
- “Caring, loving. . . . But I do think you have to be firm. Students have to know what—what your expectations are and that you are going to follow through” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “They’ve got to like kids! They have to not only like kids but have the understanding that liking kids doesn’t mean they’re your friends, but liking kids means that you care about them, you notice them” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “Someone who cares about their students” (Orchard, Interview 1).
- “It starts and ends with an ability to be around students, an ability and desire to be around kids, and to be invested in them, to know each one of their little stories” (Orchard, Interview 6).

The responses agree with the research regarding the importance of the value and influence of a teacher who is both competent and caring to a child, especially a child who is living in poverty (An et al., 2007; Brophy, 2000; Brown, 2011; Card & Krueger, 1996a; Hanushek et al., 2004; Kearney et al., 2012). The perceptions of the participants support the work of Raufelder et al. (2016) by asserting that teachers should be trained in content and pedagogy but also should focus on caring relationships with students in order to increase motivation and achievement.

Responses to this question refer to teacher quality at varying frequency among all schools. As shown in Table 11, Orchard and Bounty both had all but one participant (Orchard had 6/7; 86% and Bounty had 4/5; 80%) discussed caring, competency, ongoing professional

development, and classroom management as characteristics of a quality teacher. Harvest was lower with only 2/5 (40%) participants discussing these topics.

*Overview of Q1.3.* The variance in responses of this question was narrow across the three schools. Most participants seemed to agree on the characteristics of a quality teacher as a teacher who held high expectations for students. As seen in Table 11, the greatest variance was in the theme of teacher quality for the participants from Harvest. Orchard (86%) and Bounty (80%) had all but one participant discuss caring, competency, ongoing professional development, and classroom management as qualities for educators, but only two participants from Bounty (40%) discussed those characteristics.

This piece of data regarding the perceptions of the participants from Harvest is interesting in isolation, but as it is compared to other data it becomes informative. Q2.1 asked participants why their school is successful and 100% of Harvest participants credited their success to quality teachers and staff. Responses from Harvest for this question focus less on caring characteristics and more on the ability to set and maintain high expectations for student achievement. Q3.1 asked participants what resources they'd like to have in order to continue to improve student achievement. Responses to that question include 80% (4/5) of Harvest participants discussed the influence of the family on student achievement. These pieces of data combined lead us to believe the culture and perceptions of teachers at Harvest are in agreement with those of Coleman (1968), who stated the influence of home and family is more powerful than the influence of kind and caring teachers. The high achievement of the students at Harvest lend support to Coleman's theories although Bounty's high achievement and staff perceptions do not.

***Q1.4: In what way do you feel these characteristics differ for students living in poverty and those living in a higher socioeconomic level?*** Questions Q1.2 and Q1.3 asked participants

about their perceptions of quality education and quality teachers. Question Q1.4 narrows those definitions to students living in poverty. Participants were asked to reflect how their definitions of quality education and a quality teacher differ when thinking of functional and quality education for a student living in poverty. Figure 8 shows the predominant theme within this question was social-emotional needs with 65% of participants referring to this theme.

Participants feel the characteristics of quality education and quality teachers were important for all students, but participants see the unique need for students living in poverty as the need to feel safe, cared for, and loved. Participants also believe students in poverty need more quality time with the teacher in order to feel that love and kindness. Below are a sample of responses reflecting the participants' perceptions on this topic:

- “I think the biggest needs are... one-on-one socio-emotional needs” (Bounty, Interview 5).
- “If they can have a situation where they feel emotionally safe or educationally safe, ‘this is where I am here to learn. This is my job; the teacher is here to help me. This has nothing to do with home. This has nothing to do with where I’m going to after I leave here. This is my job here’” (Harvest, Interview 4).
- “I think that my lower SES kids need me more emotionally. It just seems like they need more emotional support and attention” (Bounty, Interview 3).
- “Sometimes the kids need to know that someone cares” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “I get them so they feel so safe that they have come to me before. They have cried. Like when we are going on a break or something because they’re not sure they’re going to have food. When they come to me then I can try and help them” (Orchard, Interview 4).

- “I would imagine that teaching at a school where kids are coming from a home life where they have a mom and dad, where they have the support at home, would be a little bit more. . . I could spend a little bit more time on content and a little less time on the safety factor and building the trust with the kiddos” (Orchard, Interview 6).

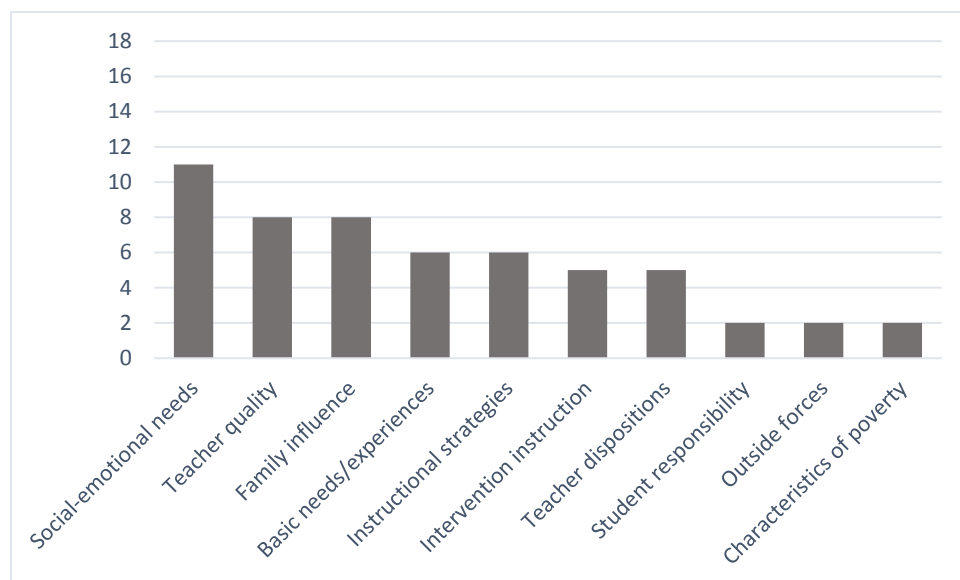


Figure 8. Q1.4: Frequency of responses by theme.

The responses from the participants support the research discussed in the literature review regarding students living in poverty and specific social-emotional needs that affect their ability to do well in school (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Chambers, 1995; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Jensen, 2009; Kahlenberg, 2013; Mayes et al., 2007; Narayan et al., 2000). According to the literature, most often this is met through a meaningful relationship with a teacher in order for them to be successful in school. Noguera (2011) asserted conditions that affect students' health,

safety, and well-being must be addressed in order for children to be able to focus and concentrate on curriculum and academic tasks. Findings from this study agree and support this research.

Responses to this question discussed social-emotional needs at varying frequency among all schools. Table 12 indicates that 80% of Bounty respondents discuss meeting social-emotional needs of students living in poverty as a unique characteristic of quality education that determine academic success. Participants from Harvest were slightly lower with 60% and Orchard the lowest with 57% of participants discussing this topic.

Table 12

Frequency of Responses for Q1.4 by Theme

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Social-emotional needs	4/7	57%	4/5	80%	3/5	60%

***Q2.1: Why do you think your school is successful in narrowing the achievement gap for students living in poverty (if a prompt is needed, say, “such as teacher quality, curriculum, instruction, professional development, school leadership, relationships, consistency, etc.”)?***

This allowed the participants to identify specific elements they implemented at their school that facilitate academic achievement for students living in poverty. In Q1.4, the participants stated the greatest needs of children living in poverty were social-emotional needs. It is significant to note that only 47% of the participants discussed social-emotional needs as something they did well in their school. Figure 9 illustrates the frequency of responses as they relate to themes within the responses to this question. This question received a large variety of responses fitting into several themes, as shown in Figure 9, but the significant themes were teacher quality (76%), instructional strategies (65%), and intervention instruction (53%).

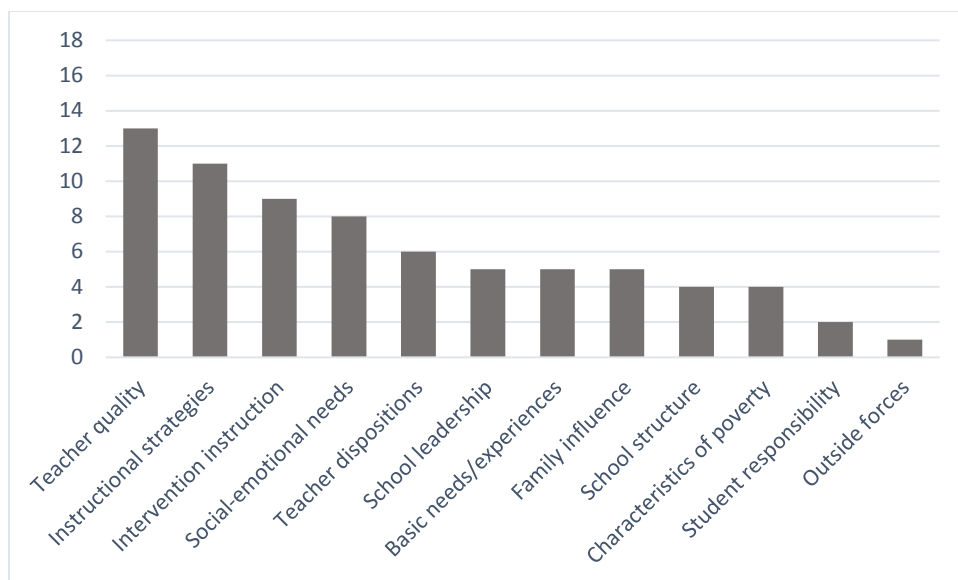


Figure 9. Q2.1: Frequency of responses by theme.

*Teacher quality.* As was articulated in Q1.2 and Q1.3, teacher quality refers to a teacher who is competent in curriculum and classroom management, cares about his or her students, and strives for continual professional development. The responses for this question differ from Q1.2 and Q1.3 as the participants extended their responses to include the entire staff of caring, hard-working individuals who act as a team for the common goal of student success. Below are sample responses showing the participants' perceptions of teacher quality as it relates to elements they contribute to success at their school:

- “We have really strong teachers. We have a very strong faculty. . . . It’s everybody in the school . . . the secretaries, the janitors, the administration. Everybody has to work together. The hot lunch program. I mean just everybody” (Harvest, Interview 3).
- “I think because we try to think outside of the box, like pair students up with one of the para-professionals in the morning for homework help or being willing to

give up our preps or recess time to work with the kids and to help them” (Bounty, Interview 4).

“I think we do a really good job of educating, I think our job is to educate all children and that is what we do. It doesn’t matter the color of their skin, it doesn’t matter the economics. We educate all children and we try, I know we try really hard, and I think we do a pretty good job of it. We try not to hold those judgments: ‘well, he can’t learn.’ And I think we do have high expectations” (Bounty, Interview 1).

- “Everybody’s got those high goals: ‘I don’t care where you came from, and I don’t care what you go home to at night. When you’re here, this is where you’re at and this is what we’re doing.’ I think that just that belief in the kids” (Harvest, Interview 5).
- “Before I got here, some SIOP training [occurred], but when you get the turnover and roll over with staff then you’ve lost that muscle memory for your building. It wasn’t just a few people, it was a lot of people each year that were leaving. Some of them to other schools in the district, the stronger ones, because people knew who they were and when they wanted to transfer they could. But then you have brand new teachers and so you’re reinvesting all that again” (Orchard, Interview 5).
- “It truly does start and end with a teacher. We can put the fanciest curriculum in front of a kiddo. If it’s not taught well or if it’s not taught with passion or enthusiasm, it doesn’t matter how shiny it is” (Orchard, Interview 6).

The responses to this question are supported in research discussed in the literature review stating the importance of a quality teacher and support staff (An et al., 2007; Brophy, 2000; Brown, 2011; Card & Krueger, 1996a; Hanushek et al., 2004). These findings support the work of Brophy (2000) regarding quality teachers having high expectations for growth of their students. “Teachers are likely to be most successful when they think in terms of stretching students’ minds by stimulating them and encouraging them to achieve as much as they can” (Brophy, 2000, p. 32). Researchers agree that a key characteristic for quality teachers is to set and maintain high expectations for students.

Responses to this question discuss teacher quality among the entire staff as something the schools felt that contributed the academic success for their students living in poverty. These responses vary in frequency among the three schools. As shown in Table 13, all participants from Harvest (100%) refer to this quality. Orchard had 5/7 (71%) and Bounty had 3/5 (60%) of participants discuss the contribution of the whole staff in aiding academic success for students living in poverty.

Table 13

*Frequency of Responses for Q2.1 by Theme*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Teacher quality	5/7	71%	3/5	60%	5/5	100%
Instructional strategies	5/7	71%	3/5	60%	3/5	60%
Intervention instruction	4/7	57%	3/5	60%	2/5	40%

*Instructional strategies.* As was discussed in Q1.2, instructional strategies focuses on the methods the teachers used to deliver instruction and teaching concepts. The responses to this question vary distinctively from Q1.2 as the participants are more focused on collaboration



among teachers and using data-based decision making to guide instruction. Responses reflecting these ideas are below:

- “We meet together as a team! We are always tracking students now so it’s hard for them to slip through the cracks” (Bounty, Interview 2).
- “We have teams put together, like the RTI [Response to Intervention] team is put together and so we can do all the things in our classroom. We can document everything that we are doing. We take it to the team so we have it there so they can refer them if they need that help . . . have those referrals. If we aren’t documenting then the teacher next year has to start all over. I think that is one thing we are really striving to do right” (Harvest, Interview 2).
- “We were . . . discussing this as a team today and we kind of roll with the punches. When we see something that’s not working, we are willing to make changes” (Bounty, Interview 3).
- “I think individual teachers have their strengths and they do what they are willing to do. I think we work well together as a staff. I think we have teachers that team well together” (Harvest, Interview 4).
- “I think we have some strong collaborative teams in our school, so teachers are working together to help each other’s students because it’s not just my kid, it’s *our* student” (Orchard, Interview 7).
- “Because we share those students . . . all of the teachers are very familiar with all the students so any time I might have a problem with them I can go to that group and they know exactly who I am talking about. They may have even seen them in

their classroom and they have suggestions and help for things we could try with them improving and moving forward” (Orchard, Interview 1).

- “We identify all kids as to where they are academically at the beginning of the year. And we keep pretty constant record about their growth and whether they are making growth. Every teacher is checking that on a regular basis and by looking at data regularly we can tell if our instruction is working for children especially our more high risk children” (Orchard, Interview 3).
- “[We have] multi-tiered systems of support, or RTI. We’re doing that through data teams and progress monitoring of all students and trying to keep that at the forefront of everybody’s brain” (Orchard, Interview 5).

Responses to this question support the research discussed in the literature review regarding teacher collaboration, professional learning communities, and data-based decision making (Cawelti, 1999; Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Goddard et al., 2007; Kearney et al., 2012; Leana & Pil, 2006; Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016; Trimble, 2002). These findings support the work of Moolenaar et al. (2011) and expands their work in the Netherlands to schools in the United States. Both Moolenaar et al. and this study found that teachers feel supported and innovative in an environment that allows and encourages teachers to collaborate in order to make and carry out decisions that affect curriculum, instruction, and student performance.

Responses to this question referenced instructional strategies, specifically collaboration and data-based decision making among the staff as something the schools felt contributed to academic success for their students living in poverty. These responses are similar in frequency among the three schools. As shown in Table 13, all participants but two in every school discussed collaboration among teachers and making decisions based on data as things they felt

contributed to student achievement and decreasing the achievement gap for students living in poverty.

*Intervention instruction.* Intervention instruction responses focused mainly on small group instruction in regards to this question. A smaller percentage (24%) of the participants discussed wanting smaller class size but a greater portion (82%) were less concerned about smaller classes and more concerned about adding an adult to the existing classes in order to decrease the student teacher ratio. The majority of participants discussed wanting to lower the student teacher ratio in order to provide small group and/or one-on-one instruction for struggling students. Sample responses illustrating the participants' perceptions are below:

- “[I would like] a well-trained reading/math interventionist at every grade level” (Orchard, Interview 5).
- “We redistribute the students according to skill and it is small group because we also have some para professional help and Title teachers that come down also” (Orchard, Interview 1).
- “More help in the classroom. And if you could have the dream thing, you could have people come in and be here and [provide] individual help for kids. Individual help makes a huge difference” (Harvest, Interview 3).
- “I would like to have an aide that would be in here to run centers, to pull kids and be doing sight words with them, the ones that were struggling” (Harvest, Interview 2).
- “More people just everywhere - more paras to help with small group instruction” (Harvest, Interview 5).

- “It would be nice to have more paras so you are able to do small groups in your classroom and reach more children” (Bounty, Interview 4).

The responses for this question support the research discussed in the literature review regarding the effectiveness of small group instruction (Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Slavin et al. (2011) showed that one-on-one tutoring is most influential in raising achievement for students living in poverty with small group tutoring following in effectiveness. This study supports the work of Slavin et al. (2011) and other researchers discussed in the review of literature (Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989) by illustrating the need for more adults to deliver intervention in a small group setting as an effective strategy for students living in poverty and at risk for academic failure.

Responses to this question discuss intervention instruction among the entire staff as something the schools felt that contributed the academic success for their students living in poverty. Specifically, participants referred to small group instruction as an intervention. These responses are similar in frequency among the three schools. As shown in Table 13, Bounty has the highest frequency with 60% of participants referring to small group intervention instruction as something that has contributed to their success in decreasing the achievement gap. Orchard has similar frequency (57%) and Harvest was the lowest with 40% of participants contributing small group instruction to their students' success.

*Overview of Q2.1.* The responses to this question varied little across the three schools. Most participants seemed to agree on the elements of their success when working with children living in poverty as impacted by teacher quality, instructional strategies, and intervention instruction. As illustrated in Table 13, the teachers at Harvest were unanimous in their

perceptions that the quality of the teacher as it relates to all staff members was vital to academic success of students. Orchard and Bounty had a high frequency of 71% and 60% respectively, but impact of teacher quality is more significant at Harvest as all participants indicated the same within their interview responses. These data are curious when compared to responses to Q1.3 where Harvest participants had the lowest frequency in describing caring and compassion as necessary characteristics for a quality teacher, but responses to this question were more about high expectations and the value of the entire staff rather than kindness, caring, and compassion. As discussed in the overview of Q1.3, the data in isolation is not as enlightening as when the data are compared across questions. The lack of importance of caring in teachers for Bounty participants (seen in responses to Q1.3), along with an importance of a teacher who maintains high expectations (seen in responses to Q2.1), combined with the importance of family influence (seen in responses to 3.1) illustrate the culture and philosophy of the educators at Bounty to support Coleman (1968) in that the influence of the family has greater impact than the influence of a caring teacher. The high achievement of Bounty supports this research.

The contribution to student achievement of instructional strategies—referring to teacher collaboration and data-based decision making—were assigned equal weight among all schools as it was discussed by all but two participants at each school. Perceptions on intervention instruction, specifically small group instruction as a contributor to student achievement, varied more with Bounty participants with the highest frequency (60%), then Orchard (57%), and Harvest is lowest with 40% of participants.

***Q2.2: Within your realm of responsibility, what organizational changes would you suggest to further improve student achievement?*** There is a direct connection between this question and Q2.1. Q2.1 showed that 53% of all participants felt intervention instruction was

effective in raising student achievement in their respective school. When asked in Q2.2 what changes they'd like to implement, 71% of all participants said they would like to increase the number of interventions. Figure 10 shows that no other theme was referenced by over half of the participants so the theme of intervention instruction is the focus among participant responses for this question. Specifically, small group instruction was the center of the responses regarding needed interventions. Participants' responses are as follows:

- “Adding more math interventions” (Orchard, Interview 5).
- “To have that extra help during intervention time at the end of the day and that’s not when I get the help. I find it hard to get that pull-back time [small group instruction]” (Bounty, Interview 2).
- “I would love to have an aide in my class all the time. Yes, a full-time aide because where. . . It’s really hard to get to every student and help them” (Harvest, Interview 2).
- “Maybe more centers and stuff like that. . . . You would have a smaller group working on a selected skill” (Bounty, Interview 3).
- “All-day Kinder with paras” (Harvest, Interview 5).
- “I like small instruction because I feel like I get to know the kids a little bit better” (Bounty, Interview 1).
- “Continue this after-school program that we’ve got going on right now” (Harvest, Interview 5).

With a focus on small group instruction, the participants' responses agreed with research discussed in the literature review which concludes that effective instruction delivered in small groups positively contributes to academic success for students living in poverty (Fashola &

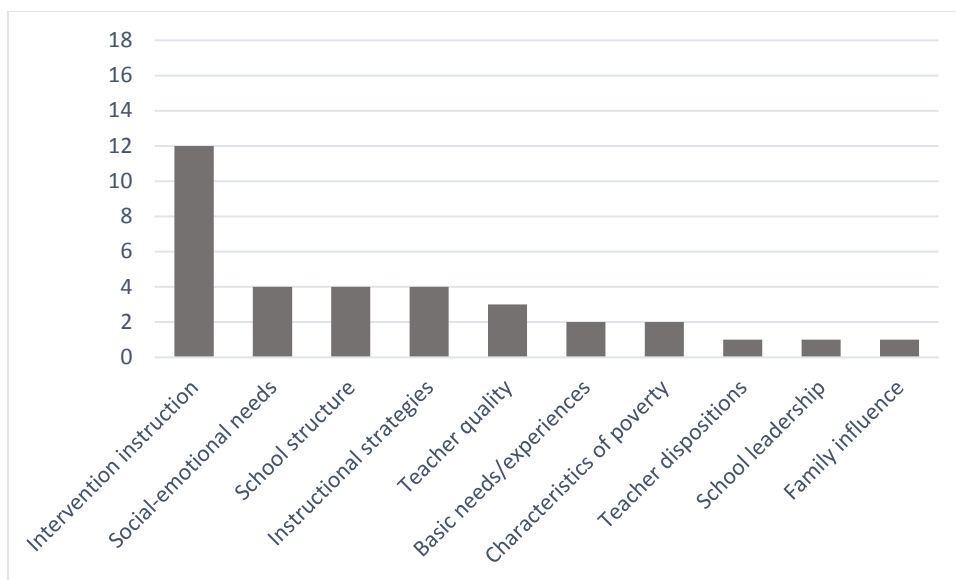


Figure 10. Q2.2: Frequency of responses by theme.

Slavin, 1998; Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Results of this study particularly support the work of Slavin et al. (2011). The researchers conducted a study specific to students at risk for academic failure and found that small group instruction was one of the most effective interventions, after one-on-one tutoring, to increase student achievement. Results of this study show the perceptions of teachers of the case study schools agree and support these findings.

Responses to this question discuss intervention instruction, specifically small group instruction, as something they would like to implement more in their schools. The participants felt increasing the amount of small group instruction would make an impact on student achievement for students living in poverty. These responses are widely varied in frequency among the three schools. As shown in Table 14, Harvest has the highest frequency with 100% of participants discussing small group instruction as something that has and will continue to contribute to their success in decreasing the achievement gap. Bounty has similar frequency (80%), but Orchard was significantly lower with 43% of participants perceiving additional small

group instruction would contribute to their students' success. These results, when combined with achievement data show that the focus of Bounty and Orchard on small group instruction is an effective strategy when working with students living in poverty as they are higher achieving schools. The lower achievement of Orchard along with a lack of focus on small group instruction supports this finding.

Table 14

*Frequency of Responses for Q2.2 by Theme*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Intervention instruction	3/7	43%	4/5	80%	5/5	100%

***Q2.3: What do you attribute to the differences in math and reading achievement for students living in poverty?*** This question was asked as a result of the preliminary data gathered from the Idaho State Department of Education website which showed reading scores significantly higher than math. With more accurate data collected from the school districts after the interviews were conducted, the data showed little discrepancies between math and reading scores in the case study schools. Figure 11 shows that no theme was significant among the responses to this question as all themes are discussed by less than half of participants. However, responses from the participants were found to be useful as it gave an insight to the environment and culture of the schools and curriculum. The response below are reflections of the participants' perceptions of what improves student achievement and the impact of curriculum:

- “One of the problems is that the curriculum was not designed in the same way the kids were being tested. I think also they have got to have a chance to be thinkers instead of just solvers, I guess. They just solve the problems. They have to think and write. And that's what is on the test” (Harvest, Interview 3).



- “All the extra time was being given to reading. Everybody felt if we can improve their reading their math scores will naturally come up because they can read the problems, but the problem was we weren’t teaching them how to think and reason. We weren’t doing in-depth” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “They didn’t really say, ‘don’t do math,’ but we stopped doing the math interventions. This is our main focus and you can see, all of our SMART goals are all reading and there’s no math SMART goals up there” (Orchard, Interview 4).
- “Reading, we really focused our energies on it. To come up with methods to help the students to succeed. With math, we had such a poor curriculum and we didn’t have the extra time. With reading, we were always given an hour and a half to do the core curriculum and then another hour of Skills Shots time to work where we needed” (Bounty, Interview 4).

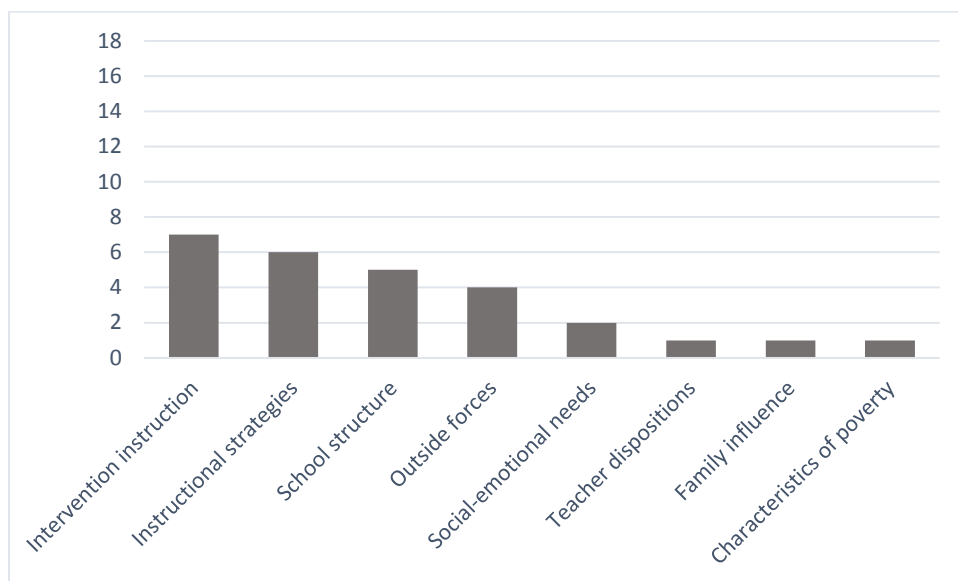


Figure 11. Q2.3: Frequency of responses by theme.

Participants noted that their schools have obtained low math scores and felt the challenges were due in part to the math curriculum. Participants stated failures in the math curriculum were the lack of encouragement for students to go beyond basic math facts and think deeply in order to problem solve and apply concepts. They felt the curriculum was not applicable to real-life situations in students' lives. These responses are supported by the work of several other researchers (An et al., 2007; Brown, 2011; Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Haberman, 1991; Hattie, 2009; Murphy & Johnson, 2009; Slavin, 1987; Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989) regarding the value of a curriculum that is related to real-life and goes beyond basic skills. Researchers agree that a curriculum that promotes higher-order thinking skills through real-world problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity is a means of providing quality education. The participants also seemed to note the effectiveness of staff (school and district level) when they focus on a single task. They felt reading was the focus for professional development as well as the dedication of time and funds to ensure interventions, longer reading instruction time, data collection and monitoring, etc. The participants recognized their efforts in reading helped them to improve student achievement in that subject. The work of Cawelti (1999), Kearney et al. (2012), and Trimble (2002) that show the importance of staff collaboration, data-based goal making, and consistency in pedagogy and its impact on student achievement supports these findings.

***Q3.1: What are influential resources that affect achievement for a student living in poverty (if a prompt is needed, say, “such as financial, people, time, family background, family partnerships, etc.”)?*** The theme within participant responses to this question with the majority of responses was family influence. As seen in Figure 12, 71% of participants stated that families

and their influence on students impacted their ability to do well in school. Below are a sample of responses to illustrate the perceptions of participants regarding this area:

- “I think consistent homework. I’m not saying you have to do a lot, but . . . in every grade . . . when you dedicate 30 minutes of home time that the child views it as something important because ‘Mom and Dad think it’s important so I think it’s important to do my homework. ’ Or the parents who don’t think it’s important then education becomes unimportant to [the children]” (Harvest, Interview 1).
- “Do their homework and give them experiences in different things. Read to them at night. Sit down and have a meal together. It doesn’t matter if it is a can of beans. It’s just that network, that love there that they need. They need to know that they are important” (Harvest, Interview 2).
- “Family is first. I don’t know if it applies, but I put the view of education of the family . . . and time that parents have to spend with their kids” (Bounty, Interview 3).
- “Literacy at home. Any kind of literacy at home. A relationship with an adult that’s invested in them, talking to them, working with them, supporting them” (Orchard, Interview 5).
- “To have office staff have a good rapport with the families, as well as teachers. I think that teachers need to have a good rapport [with families so] they can feel comfortable” (Orchard, Interview 4).

Completing homework, spending time together, and parents’ perception of education were discussed in responses to this question. Placing emphasis on the family’s influence is in agreement with Coleman et al. (1966) and multiple other researchers who found a correlation

between the influence of the family and student achievement (Bradley et al., 2001; Fullan, 2006; Kahlenberg, 2013; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Levin, 1994; Noguera, 2011; Walberg, 2010). These responses also correlate with Q1.1 regarding the family's influence and the lack of experiences for children living in poverty.

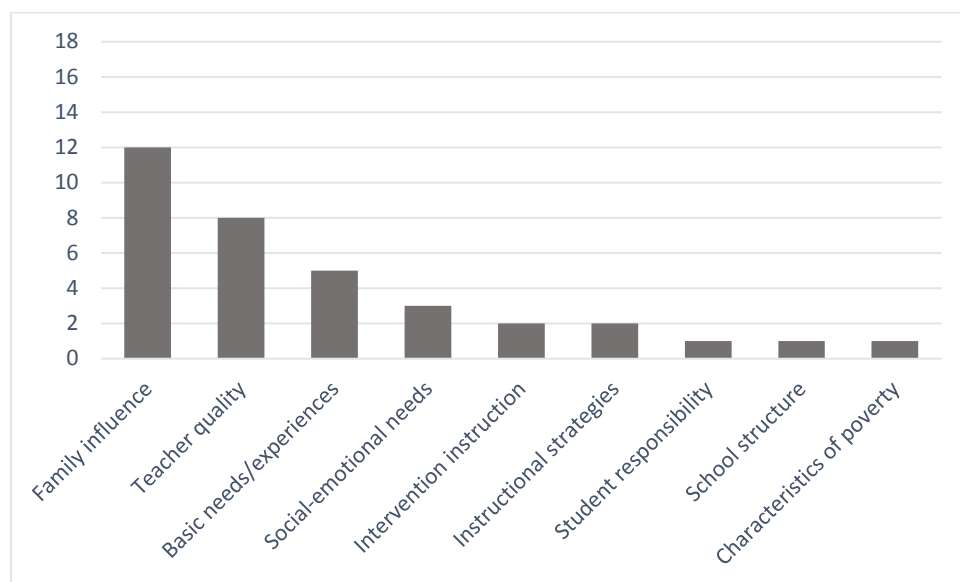


Figure 12. Q3.1: Frequency of responses by theme.

Responses to this question discuss family influence as the most impacting factor of student achievement. These responses vary in frequency among the three schools. As shown in Table 15, Bounty and Harvest have a high frequency with 80% of participants discussing family influence as an element that impacts student achievement for students living in poverty. Orchard was much lower with 57% of participants perceiving the influence of the family as an indicator for academic success. When asked in Q2.1 what they contribute to their success in student achievement, 5/7 (71%) of participants from Orchard stated quality teachers (see Table 13). By merging the responses from Q2.1 and Q3.1, it shows the culture and philosophy of Orchard relies more heavily on the influence of teachers rather than family and home environments which is a

contradiction of Coleman (1968). When the lower achievement scores of Orchard are combined with the qualitative data it supports Coleman's research regarding the tremendous influence of home and family on student achievement.

Table 15

Frequency of Responses for Q3.1 by Theme

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Family influence	4/7	57%	4/5	80%	4/5	80%

**Q3.2: What other resources would you like to have and how would they contribute to eliminating/bridging the achievement gap?** The purpose of this question was to discover what the participants would implement if there were no budgetary, personnel, or other constraints. As seen in Figure 13, the responses were generally focused on intervention instruction with 82% of participants referring to intervention instruction as something they would like to implement in greater scope in their schools. This theme focuses primarily on small group instruction, early intervention, and extended school day. The responses from Harvest and Bounty were similar in that they were focused more on early intervention and extended school day. Orchard did not mention those interventions, but concentrated their responses regarding intervention instruction on small group instruction. As only 43% discussed intervention instruction, the responses from Orchard were among a variety of themes, none with a significant frequency, with a focus on home literacy, supporting families, and increasing the number of books students had access to. The wide variety of responses show the staff at Orchard is not in agreement regarding resources that would be most effective in bridging the achievement gap.

Similar to earlier responses to Q2.1, small group instruction was important to the participants in this question as well. Participants viewed small group instruction as a way to

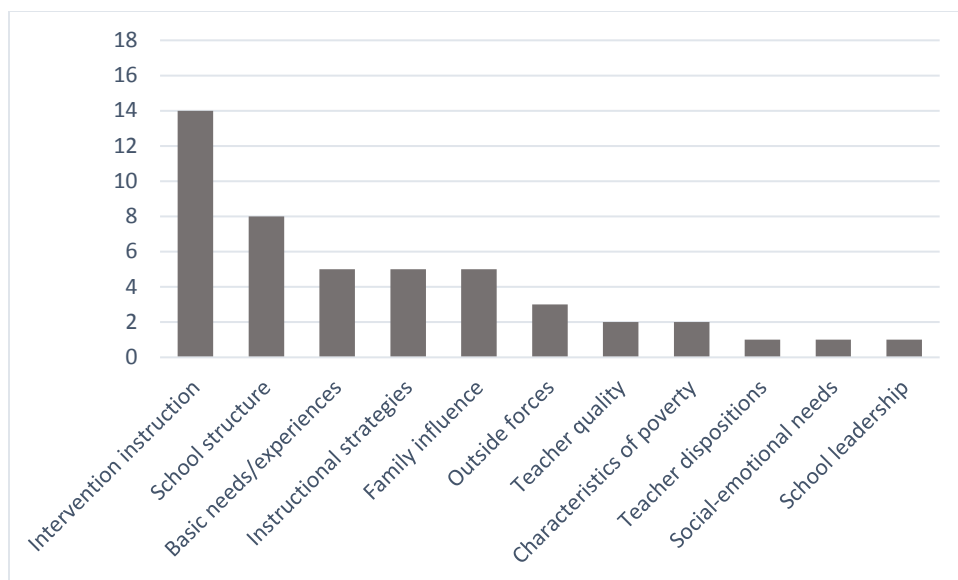


Figure 13. Q3.2: Frequency of responses by theme.

differentiate and meet the needs of all students. Participants noted the need to have more adults on staff in order to increase their ability to have small group instruction.

- “Small group instruction” (Orchard, Interview 1).
- “Smaller class sizes would be a resources” (Orchard, Interview 2).
- “A well-trained reading/math interventionist at every grade level. I would love to have at least one more, well-trained ELL teacher and a couple more bilingual staff” (Orchard, Interview 5).

Participants at Bounty and Harvest expressed the need for all-day kindergarten in the schools where the all-day kindergarten program had been cut in recent years due to budget restrictions. This was not discussed by participants from Orchard who did not have this program implemented. Responses below reflect the participants’ views:

- “[We need] all-day kinder to help to bring up the low students in the very beginning” (Harvest, Interview 5).

- “I think that we need full-day kindergarten. Looking at the curriculum—the things that they need to know at the end of kindergarten. . . . We need all-day kindergarten. Then we would have time to do it all” (Bounty, Interview 1).

The last identified intervention instruction is an extended-day program held after school for students at risk. All participants that discussed an after-school program were solely from Bounty and Harvest where their after-school program was ending for the school year at the time of the interviews. Participants from Orchard did not discuss this program at all and there was no evidence of an after-school program taking place. At Bounty and Harvest, administrators and teachers alike found value in the extended-day program which ran for just 6 weeks at the end of the school year (concluding at the time of state testing administration). Instruction during the after-school program is given in small groups with five to seven students per teacher. A suggestion was made at a conference attended by members of Harvest and Bounty faculties that an additional 6 weeks of extended-day program be administered with the first 9 weeks of school in order to combat effects of the *summer slide*. Members of the faculty from both schools referred to this program as something they would like to implement if funding was available. Their perceptions were demonstrated in the following responses.

- “Having that extra hour, this year, we did it for an hour and a half each night and we were able just to concentrate on the areas that we saw weaknesses in. We invited students to participate who had deficiencies in those areas and it was amazing the amount of growth we saw in 6 weeks, with those kids” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “If I had enough money I would do one in September-October for my really low, low strugglers. I would like a jump start. Take the really low ones and give them

that little jump start. . . . After that first 9 weeks, I could look to see who's really struggling. . . and do an after-school 1 month: high intense, high pace” (Harvest, Interview 5).

- “[I heard about an] after-school program for 6 weeks at the beginning of the school year to help with the summer slide and then at the end to help give them a boost. I would love to do that because it feels like you waste so much time at the beginning with those kids, catching them up, but if you could just do it right at the beginning. . . . You can give them a boost” (Bounty, Interview 4).

These responses validate intervention instruction and is supported by other studies discussed in review of literature. According to researchers, small group intervention instruction is found to be an effective strategy for students at risk for academic failure (Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989). The participants’ responses agree and support the work of Durlak et al. (2010), Lauer et al. (2006), and Leos-Urbel (2015), who concluded that quality after school programs will increase student achievement in students who are at-risk for academic failure. The participants’ perceptions do not agree with the literature regarding full-day kindergarten programs. Academic progress can be seen initially in students participating in all-day kindergarten, but benefits diminish by third grade (Cooper et al., 2010). Studies reflect some social-emotional benefits (Chang & Singh, 2008; Community Preventive Services Task Force, 2014; Cooper et al., 2010), but those benefits were not discussed by the participants as they focused mainly on academics. The participants may not be aware of the fading academic gains since they work with children kindergarten through third grade and the benefits fade primarily after students advance to a different school. Although the participants are



unaware, these factors would be significant to district personnel and those that make budget and policy decisions.

Participants indicated intervention instruction impacted student achievement and would like to increase the number of interventions in their schools. Participants focused on small group instruction, all-day kindergarten, and extended-day programs as that which is more significant to contribute to bridging achievement gap. These responses vary in frequency among the three schools. As shown in Table 16, Harvest has the highest frequency with 80% of participants discussing intervention instruction as an input that impacts achievement for students living in poverty. Bounty and Orchard attributed 60% and 43% respectively to implement more interventions in order to decrease the gap in achievement for students living in poverty.

Table 16

*Frequency of Responses for Q3.2 by Theme*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Intervention instruction	3/7	43%	3/5	60%	4/5	80%

**Summary of interview question results.** From participants' responses to the nine interview questions, 12 themes emerged. The 12 themes allowed the researcher to group responses into overarching inputs in order to see the priority of the participants regarding the research question, sub questions, and more detailed questions.

Q1.1 had two prominent themes in which all 17 participants referred to in their responses: basic needs/experiences and characteristics of poverty (see Figure 5). Participants were able to define and describe poverty as a lack of basic needs and experiences. There was little variance among responses among participants from differing schools showing participants had an understanding of poverty and how it might affect their students' lives.

Q1.2 allowed participants to define quality education using four main themes: teacher dispositions, social-emotional needs, teacher quality, and instructional strategies (see Figure 6). Participants stated the importance of knowledgeable teachers and identified the value of caring teachers. The latter is indicative of teachers who saw potential in each child and held high expectations for students, in order to help students achieve their potential. Such teachers ensure that classroom environments are safe and welcoming with a student-centered curriculum focused on real life experiences and connections to students' lives. The response frequency varied minimally among the three case study schools (see Table 10). Social-emotional needs illustrated the greatest variance among the case study schools as 57% of Orchard participants discussed meeting social-emotional needs as compared to 80% of participants at both Harvest and Bounty. When combining this data with quantitative data showing Orchard's lower achievement scores, these findings illustrate support for the research that concludes social-emotional needs must be met in order to increase student achievement (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Chambers, 1995; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Jensen, 2009; Mayes et al., 2007; Narayan et al., 2000).

Q1.3 asked the participants to describe characteristics of a quality teacher. Participants focused these characteristics on the themes of teacher disposition and teacher quality (see Figure 7). Respondents built on characteristics defined in Q1.2 which included a teacher with high expectations, a teacher who is knowledgeable and caring and added in Q1.3 the ability to effectively implement classroom management skills, learning continually to improve as an educator, and a teacher who is willing to do whatever is necessary to accomplish the goal of student learning and success. There was little variance among responses for this question (see Table 11). The largest variance is among teacher quality where Harvest had 40% of participants discuss the importance of a caring and knowledgeable teacher compared to Bounty (80%) and

Orchard (86%). The lower percentage from Bounty could be explained by integrating the results from Q2.1 (see Table 13) and Q3.1 (see Table 15) where Bounty participants showed a high regard for teachers with high expectations and high importance placed on family influence. These data points help to show the culture and philosophy of Bounty participants regarding the greater influence of the family rather than a caring teacher. These findings are supportive of the work of Coleman (1968).

Q1.4 discussed the ideas of quality education and quality teachers for all students and for the unique needs of students living in poverty. The emerging theme was social-emotional needs (see Figure 8). Participants felt that a safe environment, where students felt loved and cared for through spending time with the teacher, was a vital element in helping students living in poverty to be successful academically. As seen in Table 12, the frequency of discussing social-emotional needs of children living in poverty was close for Orchard (57%) and Harvest (60%), but Bounty participants perceived this theme to be of much greater importance as 80% of the participants assigned high priority as a factor that affects academic achievement for students living in poverty.

Q2.1 asked participants why they felt their school had seen success in closing the achievement gap. Contributors focused their responses to teacher quality, instructional strategies, and intervention instruction (see Figure 9). Participants indicated that the decreasing gap was achieved not by only caring and knowledgeable teachers (as mentioned in Q1.2 and Q1.3) but also through a kind, compassionate, well-informed, and dedicated support staff (para-educators, secretary, custodian, kitchen staff, bus drivers, etc. ). They valued teaming and collaboration among the staff as well as the ability to provide interventions in a small group instruction setting. The variance of frequency among responses for instructional strategies and intervention

instruction was minimal (see Table 13). Responses by participants from Orchard (71%) and Bounty (60%) were similar but Harvest had 100% of participants discuss teacher quality as an element that boosted student achievement and aided in decreasing the achievement gap in their school. This is interesting data compared to responses from Q1.3 where Harvest participants had the lowest frequency in describing caring and compassion as necessary characteristics for a quality teacher. As discussed in Q1.3 summary, these responses illustrate the perceptions of the educators from Harvest regarding the importance of a teacher with high expectations and knowledge, but the qualities of caring and kindness in teachers are not viewed as influential factors in student achievement. The data does not infer that teachers from Harvest are not kind and caring, but that they don't perceive those characteristics as ones that influence student achievement.

Q2.2 allowed participants to express what they would like to see more in their schools that will contribute to the success of students living in poverty. Their responses focused on intervention instruction (see Figure 10) particularly, and providing more small group instruction with the added element of data-based decision making to guide instruction of the interventions. This question directly relates to Q2.1 as the contributors noted small group instruction to be a key element of their success. They also desired to have more of it for future and continual success. As illustrated in Table 14, Bounty and Harvest participants were in agreement as 100% of Harvest and 80% of Bounty participants discussed small group instruction as something they would like to see implemented in their schools. Only 43% of Orchard participants identified this as a key contributor of success. These findings, along with achievement data, support the need for and value of small group instruction. Bounty and Harvest, the higher achieving schools

perceive small group instruction as vital to current and future success. Orchard, as the lower achieving school, perceive it as less important.

Q2.3 was a question formed from misinformation of the preliminary testing data, and no theme was found to be significant (see Figure 11). Participants were consistent with little variance in their responses among all three schools in relation to the power of staff focusing on a common goal to improve reading scores. Goals were set, support provided, and success was achieved as the staff worked together.

Q3.1 asked participants what resources most affect student achievement for students living in poverty. Participants supported the work of Coleman (1968) by indicating that family influence was the most significant factor (see Figure 12). Contributors discussed the need for families to complete homework and spend time with their children as well as the direct influence of parents' perception of education on students. Variances in frequency among the schools were visible as Orchard had 57% of participants refer to family influence as a factor that effects student achievement (see Table 15). Bounty and Harvest were higher with 80% of participants from each school discussing the effect of family influence. The interview data follows the trend of achievement data as Bounty and Harvest were in agreement and had the highest achievement and Orchard differs in perceptions and has lower achieving scores.

Q3.2 allowed participants to name resources they would like to have or implement in their schools that would improve success for students living in poverty. Participants focused on intervention instruction (see Figure 13) and responses centered on small group instruction, early intervention (in the form of all-day kindergarten) and extended school day (after-school programs for students at risk). The responses from Orchard focused primarily on small group instruction but were varied across the participants. Other responses included supporting parents

and families, encouraging home literacy, and making books more available to students. The wide variety of responses among the participants from Orchard illustrate the staff is not in agreement regarding what strategies, programs, or interventions to invest resources in order to improve student achievement. As illustrated in Table 25, variances of frequency are similar to Q2.2 and Q3.1 with Harvest and Bounty showing similar views among participants (80%; 60% respectively) and Orchard participants perceiving this topic will less importance (43%) which follows the trends regarding achievement data as well.

In analyzing the quantitative data, Bounty and Harvest's achievement scores were similar while Orchard's scores were lower than the other two schools. In analyzing the qualitative data, often the responses from Bounty and Harvest are similar in nature and frequency while the participants from Orchard demonstrated a different perspective. This observed pattern in the interview responses may be due to close proximity of Harvest and Bounty and the tradition of collaboration that has been established to share information, interventions, and strategies and consequently, improve student achievement. The greatest differences between Orchard and the other two schools were evident in Q1.2, Q1.4, Q2.2, Q3.1, and Q3.2. These questions had response centered on the themes of social-emotional needs, intervention instruction, and family influence. The most evident differences lie among the theme of intervention instruction regarding small group instruction, early intervention, and extended-day programs. Harvest and Bounty participants discussed these themes with high frequency and Orchard with lower frequency. The higher scores of Harvest and Bounty with the implementation of these strategies lend support and evidence to the effectiveness of these strategies.

**Themes.** Figure 14 shows the frequency of references of each theme at the three case study schools. When viewing frequency of themes overall in Figure 14, take note that the total

number of participants varies among the three case study schools with Harvest and Bounty having five participants and Orchard having seven participants. Five themes were discussed and noted by all 17 participants: characteristics of poverty, intervention instruction, resources, teacher dispositions, and teacher quality. These five and the remaining seven themes were analyzed below by comparing and contrasting the responses of the participants from the three case study schools.

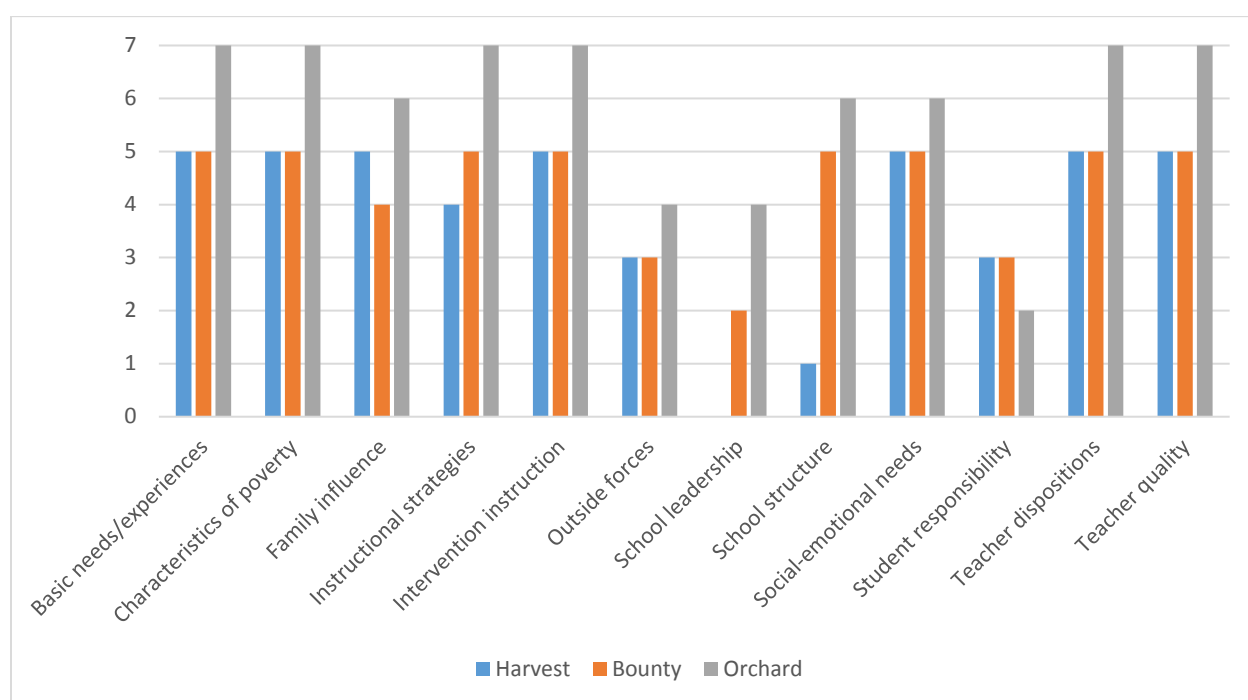


Figure 14. Coding by participant school.

**Characteristics of poverty and basic needs/experiences.** These two themes refer to the way participants defined poverty. A clear pattern is evident that all participants, with exception of one participant from Harvest, gave similar responses regarding the characteristics, definition, and ramifications of poverty. Participants agreed that the characteristics of poverty included a

lack of resources resulting in a deficiency of basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. This understanding and agreement was evidenced in a sample of their responses:

- “[I’d] describe it as being a lack, not having enough, whether be enough money, enough food, enough resources to get what they need” (Bounty, Interview 3).
- “They’re going to need transportation, shelter, food, a place to be . . . clothes . . . a knowledge or education of self-care” (Bounty, Interview 1).
- “Families’ inability to meet needs. It could be financial needs for housing, transportation, food, medical, or being able to access employment or services in their community” (Orchard, Interview 3).

Participants also spoke of a specific characteristic of poverty—the lack of experiences for students and families. This idea was most frequent in the responses from Orchard as it was discussed by 100% of the participants compared to 40% (2/5) of the participants from Bounty and Harvest (see Table 17). Responses below illustrate the educators’ understanding of students’ lack of experiences and its effect on academic achievement.

- “Students are impoverished in vocabulary. They just don’t have it. They don’t have the life experiences to build that vocabulary” (Orchard, Interview 7).
- “When I say lack of opportunity, probably here would be a person’s lack of exposure to enrichment” (Orchard, Interview 2).

Table 17

*Responses Regarding Characteristics of Poverty and Resources*

Topic	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Characteristics of poverty	7/7	100%	5/5	100%	4/5	80%
Basic needs	7/7	100%	5/5	100%	5/5	100%
Lack of experiences	7/7	100%	2/5	40%	2/5	40%



As illustrated in Table 17, little variation existed among schools within these themes except for responses focused on lack of experience for students living in poverty. There is consistency among the staffs at Bounty and Harvest as 2/5 (40%) participants found lack of experiences noteworthy enough to discuss during the interview. Orchard participants indicated this theme more frequently than the participants the other two schools. This theme was evidenced by all staff members interviewed at Orchard discussed it within the course of the interview. The educators interviewed appear to understand and agree with the work of Bradley et al. (2001) and Levin (1994) regarding the impact of experiences and resources in the home, family, and community on student achievement. Their understanding and agreement on these concepts illustrate an understanding of poverty and the living circumstances of the students they work with. This understanding does not appear to affect student achievement as Orchard has the highest frequency of this topic, but the lowest achievement scores. Possible explanations are that students at Orchard were more lacking in experiences than students at Harvest or Bounty although the demographics are similar. It may be that the teachers at Orchard believe their students are lacking more and as a result focus more on experiences rather than academics. Data from this study do not show a correlation between teachers' awareness of this topic and student achievement.

***Intervention instruction.*** The theme of intervention instruction is possibly the most important factor among the participants. All educators from all schools discussed aspects of this theme within their interview responses. This theme refers to designing and delivering interventions to students who are at risk for academic failure. This theme is centered on three subcategories: small group instruction, early intervention, and extended day.

*Small group instruction.* As participants were discussing interventions, small group instruction became a focal point. All the participants from Bounty and Harvest referred to the effectiveness of small group instruction, but only 4/7 (57%) of the Orchard participants discussed small group instruction as a means to improve achievement for students living in poverty (see Table 18). The following responses represent the value the participants attach to small group instruction:

- “One thing that has helped is when they have been able to pull students and level for math or reading” (Harvest, Interview 4).
- “Not only are they getting more instruction they are getting more of that emotional one-on-one time with the teacher. And typically you get nine kids and then a teacher and an aide and so you are looking at better than one to nine. . . more of a one to four, one to five and it’s much better. Those kids get more of those needs met” (Bounty, Interview 5).
- “Taking kids based on . . . skills, and putting them in classes based on that and just trying to hit the skills that they need” (Bounty, Interview 3).
- “I really feel like the small groups that we have work very well. To have that extra help in the classroom as a resource is very important in how I teach” (Orchard, Interview 1).

Table 18

*Responses Regarding Intervention Instruction*

Intervention Instruction	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Small group instruction	4/7	57%	5/5	100%	5/5	100%
Early intervention	0/7	0%	1/5	20%	3/5	60%
Extended day	0/7	0%	2/5	40%	4/5	80%

Overwhelmingly, teachers and administrators from Bounty and Harvest discussed the need for more qualified staff members in order to implement additional small group interventions which they found to be a vital element to success when working with students living in poverty. These perceptions are supported by the research cited in the review of literature regarding interventions. Providing interventions through small group instruction is an effective strategies for students at risk for academic failure (Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Participants from Orchard discussed small group instruction with less frequency than the participants from Harvest and Bounty. This lack of mention of small group instruction from Orchard participants is surprising because a full-time reading interventionist is employed at Orchard and works with children solely in small group settings. The lack of responses on this topic might be explained as the system is already in place and teachers do not recognize its effectiveness or value. As research and both qualitative and quantitative data from Bounty and Harvest support the effectiveness of small group instruction, the results from Orchard are made more curious. Combining these results with the results from Q3.2, a pattern emerges regarding the perceptions of the participants at Orchard. Q3.2 asked participants what resources, programs, etc. they would like to implement in their school in order to continue to improve student achievement for students living in poverty. The responses from Orchard varied widely among the participants showing they are not united and possibly are unsure of what will have the greatest impact on student achievement, including the further implementation of small group instruction.

*Early intervention.* Another focus within the intervention instruction theme was early intervention. Bounty and Harvest had an all-day kindergarten program in the past which was discontinued due to budget restraints. The participants from those schools felt the program was

effective and had a strong desire to reinstate the program. No all-day kindergarten was discussed among the participants from Orchard and no evidence of an all-day kindergarten was seen. The number of participants whose comments focused on early intervention was varied among the three schools: 3/5 (60%) Harvest; 1/5 (20%) Bounty; 0/7 (0%) Orchard (see Table 15).

Participants from Harvest and Bounty agree with research cited in the literature review regarding the value of intervening early for students at risk of academic failure (Bridges et al., 2004; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Slaby et al., 2005). The response below is a sample of the responses that describe the importance the participants held to early intervention/all-day kindergarten in providing quality education to students living in poverty:

- “I also think that we need all-day kindergarten. In today’s world those kindergarteners are expected. . . . It’s not kindergarten anymore. Kindergarten is now first grade. What they expect those kids to know they don’t have enough time in a half a day to teach them. They need to have them all day and if you start out below where you need to be it is so hard to catch up. It takes a long time. A very long time” (Harvest, Interview 3).

This aspect of intervention instruction was not discussed as frequently as the other two parts, but the significance is that the schools that previously had a program in place and then lost it had a higher frequency than the other school. The lack of responses on this topic from Orchard may be an indicator that they place little value in early intervention or that they see other strategies as more effective. Likely, the program is not and has not been in place; consequently, it is not in the minds of the staff.

The review of literature did not support the intervention of all-day kindergarten and does not agree with the results of this study. Current research shows academic gains in children who

attended all-day kindergarten until second grade but those gains diminish by third grade (Cooper et al., 2010). The case study schools enroll students through third grade. Consequently, the participants may not be aware of the fading academic gains as the benefits fade primarily after students leave the case study schools. Further research regarding longitudinal achievement data of add-day kindergarten students specific to that school district may be beneficial to prove or disprove the effectiveness of all-day kindergarten for Harvest and Bounty.

*Extended day.* Extended day is another feature within the intervention instruction theme. Harvest and Bounty each held an after school program for students at risk during the last 6 weeks of school before state testing occurred. Consequently, the highest frequency of responses regarding extended day came from participants from Bounty and Harvest. This topic was discussed by 4/5 (80%) from Harvest and 2/5 (40%) from Bounty (see Table 18). The participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of an extended-day program is illustrated in the following responses:

- “This after-school program that we’ve got going on right now. We hit it right before the end of the year to give those kids that big push for the end of the year” (Harvest, Interview 5).
- “These kids have to go home and they are by themselves. So the teacher needs to offer after school programs to help with homework . . . after school things that can help them. Because they don’t have a parent that will help them because their parents are at work” (Bounty, Interview 1).

An extended-day program was discussed by the staff members at Harvest and Bounty only. The program that takes place in those schools was ending at the time interviews for this study were conducted. Orchard faculty did not discuss the possibility or value of an extended-

day program, and was not administering such a program at that time. The participants' from Bounty and Harvest support research regarding the effectiveness of after school program, especially for students living in poverty and others who are at risk for academic failure (Durlak et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 2006; Leos-Urbel, 2015). The extension of the school day, if the program is of quality, will result in higher achievement and academic success for students.

Although all participants discussed aspects of intervention instruction, the emphasis of the different aspects was not equal across the three case study schools. As shown in Table 18, the staff at Harvest placed the strongest emphasis on these three interventions as an element of success when working with students living in poverty. Bounty also showed these were important aspects of offering quality education, but not to the degree of Harvest. Orchard emphasized the value of small group instruction but had no responses in the areas of early intervention and extended-day. This is most likely due to the lack of these interventions taking place at Orchard. In all case study schools, small group instruction was strongly related to positive student achievement.

***Teacher dispositions.*** This theme refers to the views, attitudes, and expectations of the teacher regarding students living in poverty. The interview responses centered on two main parts of teachers' disposition: seeing potential in students to achieve and willing to sacrifice time or whatever necessary to help students succeed.

***High expectations.*** This area focuses on the idea that the teacher sees the potential of each student and consequently sets high expectations for achievement of all students regardless of family income level or any other indicator that might label a child at risk of academic failure. The participants were in agreement in this area with 16/17 (94%) of all participants discussing the strong influence of the teacher's attitude (see Figure 14). The only participant that did not

refer to teacher's disposition to set and maintain high expectations for students is from the staff at Bounty. The responses below illustrate the participants' perceptions of teacher disposition that are necessary to help students living in poverty achieve academically:

- “[An] educator that’s willing to pull the unwilling learners in on their time and on the educator’s time. Spend the extra time that is going to take is what’s going to get the education” (Harvest, Interview 4).
- “We do what’s best for the kids and we’re looking out for the kids” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “They all are encouraged to learn, no matter what their situation” (Orchard, Interview 4).
- “Your district, your school, your administration offers equal opportunities to every student. Regardless of ethnicity, regardless of economic status, regardless of learning disabilities, everyone should have . . . access to what is good education” (Orchard, Interview 7).
- “Sometimes I have to slow down, just slow down when you need to slow down. I don’t think kids in poverty are less. . . . I think they can achieve as much as a person that has a million dollars every week. I think the potential is there, sometimes they have a few more things stacked up against them so we can try to take those away” (Bounty, Interview 1).
- “Caring about each child, regardless of what their home life is like or their appearance. Quality education, I guess, that the teacher does whatever . . . does the best they can for each student. So tries their best to help each student to succeed” (Bounty, Interview 4).

These responses support the research discussed in the literature review regarding the power of a committed teacher (Brown, 2011; Cawelti, 1999; Jensen, 2009; Levin, 1994; Torff, 2011). The findings from this study as well as the literature review show a teacher who sets and maintains high expectations for all students, especially those who are at risk for academic failure, have a greater impact on students' achievement and lives in general.

*Willing to sacrifice.* This part of teacher disposition is conceptualized as a teacher who sacrifices and does whatever is necessary to help students succeed. Generally, the participants refer to the sacrifice of time in giving up recess and preparation time in order to work with students in small groups or one-on-one. Responses were fairly consistent among schools with Orchard having 5/7 (71%) participants discuss teachers' willingness to sacrifice (see Table 19). Harvest had 4/5 (80%) participants and Bounty had 3/5 (60%) participants discuss the importance of the disposition of teachers to sacrifice time or engage in whatever is necessary to help students succeed. The following responses are examples of the participants' views regarding this topic:

- “There has to be a complete investment from the teacher” (Orchard, Interview 6).
- “Making those adjustments like, ‘okay, eat your breakfast before you come down here and we will do sight words or we will run through this really quick [before school]’ or ‘stay in from recess and we will work on something.’ You hate to take away their preps or their recess time because that is very important for them to have, but sometimes you have to help them develop a little because they aren't getting the help at home and you have to do those things” (Bounty, Interview 2).

The participants' responses agreed with the research discussed in the literature review regarding the powerful influence of a dedicated teacher with is committed to students'



Table 19

*Responses Regarding Teacher Disposition*

Teacher Disposition	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
High expectations	7/7	100%	4/5	80%	5/5	100%
Willing to sacrifice	5/7	71%	3/5	60%	4/5	80%

achievement, regardless of the students' backgrounds (Brown, 2011; Cawelti, 1999; Jensen, 2009; Levin, 1994; Torff, 2011). The sacrifice of teachers resulted from their care for students and enhanced relationships which is one of the most influential factors on student motivation and achievement (Fullan, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Raufelder et al., 2016).

The respondents spoke of teacher disposition in two parts: the ability of the teacher to see potential in all students and consequently sets and maintains high expectations for student achievement and the teacher's willingness to sacrifice time or whatever necessary in order to help students succeed. Overall, all participants discussed at least one aspect of this theme in their interview responses. As illustrated in Table 19, all but one participant from Bounty discussed the importance of teachers seeing the potential in students. The frequency of comments regarding teacher's willingness to sacrifice was fairly consistent among the three schools, with Harvest having the highest percentage and Bounty the lowest.

**Teacher quality.** The theme of teacher quality refers to teachers who are qualified and certified to teach. The participants valued knowledge and experience when speaking of the quality of teachers. As seen in Table 20, these characteristics were viewed as important by participants from Orchard (6/7; 86%), Bounty (3/5; 60%), and Harvest (3/5; 60%). Another valuable aspect to the participants regarding teacher quality was compassion, kindness, and caring from the teacher. All 17 participants referred to varying aspects of a quality teacher as a

necessary component for students living in poverty to succeed academically. All participants from Bounty discussed caring as a specific characteristic of quality teacher. From Harvest, 3/5 (60%) participants discuss caring and 6/7 (86%) of the participants from Orchard discussed caring as a vital characteristic of a quality teacher (see Table 20). Harvest participants had lower frequency in this theme than the other case study schools which is further evidence, as discussed earlier, of the culture of Harvest. The culture of Harvest appeared to support and reflect the work of Coleman (1968) regarding the greater influence of home and family on student achievement rather than schools and teachers. The responses below reflect the perceptions of the participants regarding the topic of teacher quality:

- “Somebody who not only cares about kids, but can manage and differentiate some lesson pieces” (Orchard, Interview 5).
- “What it comes down to is if the child knows you’re interested and cares about them. They will tend to do a little bit more” (Orchard, Interview 2).
- “Caring is just a huge thing to me because I love all my kids, and I think they need that. Because parents are working all the time and sometimes they just need some love. So I think that’s important” (Orchard, Interview 7).
- “The most important thing is the teacher. Period. With a quality teacher who loves her students, those kids are capable of anything” (Orchard, Interview 7).
- “I am a knowledgeable teacher and have the background I need to provide them with an education that will help them throughout their lives and help them achieve their goals, reach [their] potential” (Harvest, Interview 3).

- “To care about the whole child. It’s not just what grade did they get. It’s the whole child. I know my job is to provide knowledge and a learning experience but it’s also to know the kids and to care about the kids” (Bounty, Interview 3).

Table 20

*Responses Regarding Teacher Quality*

Teacher Quality	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Experience of knowledge of content and pedagogy	6/7	86%	3/5	60%	3/5	60%
Caring teacher	6/7	86%	5/5	100%	3/5	60%

These responses provide support to literature regarding the value and influence of a quality teacher. Some researchers have argued against the influence of a quality teacher (Coleman, 1968; Coleman et al., 1966; Hanushek, 1996a; Xin et al., 2004), but others signify the importance of a dedicated, knowledgeable, and caring teaching regarding student achievement (An et al., 2007; Brophy, 2000; Brown, 2011; Card & Krueger, 1996a; Hanushek et al., 2004; Noguera, 2011). As the findings of this study are mixed, so too are the results of the debate regarding the greatest influence being home versus school. Rather than deciding which one is more important, it may be time to identify and establish partnerships between the two influencers in order to improve student achievement and student potential.

Participants were in agreement that teacher quality was vital in helping students living in poverty to succeed. As illustrated in Table 20, participants defined teacher quality as a person who is knowledgeable and trained in pedagogy, but the characteristic of caring became the major focus for most contributors. All the interviews at Bounty discussed caring as a vital characteristic for teacher quality. All but one of the Orchard participants (86%) and over half of the

participants from Harvest (60%) participants discussed caring as an important quality for teachers.

***Social-emotional needs.*** In each interview, participants were asked to reflect how their definition of quality education and a quality teacher differ when thinking of appropriate education for a student living in poverty. The predominant theme among the responses to this question was social-emotional needs. Social-emotional needs in this study was defined as the necessity of students to feel safe and welcome at the schools. Participants felt a school and classroom environment needed to help students feel safe, be responsible, and have a sense of community. As illustrated in Table 21, all participants from Harvest and Bounty (5/5; 100%), and all but one participant from Orchard (6/7; 86%) discussed social-emotional needs as a factor required in schools to address lower achievement. The following responses reflect the perceptions of the participants regarding the theme of social-emotional needs:

- “I believe that all kids can learn but I believe that they don’t always put it number one because their life . . . especially those kids. Because I get it. ‘My teacher wants me to read five more words a minute by the end of the month but I just want to make sure I have dinner or roof over my head’” (Orchard, Interview 4).
- “They’ve got so many things in there and you got to be able to. . . . I like to let my kids write. Anything they want, sometimes. I’ll give them 2 minutes [to write] . . . Sometimes I say, ‘free choice.’ It’s good for them. It’s freeing for them and they don’t have to share with anybody. Just getting it down on paper so it’s not always just there in the head. Then we do the next learning thing, they’ve let go of that for a few minutes. Then they can learn for a few minutes” (Orchard, Interview 4).

- “When I know the whole family situation I have a better prospective if the child had sleep the night before, had food in the morning, if I need to check for food, or if they are transient and they [changing] homes, or the parents are saying they are going to move because they don’t have money to pay rent this month. Or if they feel anxious for those reasons. I have to pay attention to that. I have to know how to calm a child, how to provide for that transition from home to school every day for those children” (Orchard, Interview 3).

Table 21

*Responses Regarding Social-Emotional Needs*

Social-emotional Needs	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Social-emotional needs	6/7	86%	5/5	100%	5/5	100%

The responses from the participants support the research discussed in the literature review, particularly the Coleman study of 1966. Coleman, et al. (1966) stated that students living in poverty have social-emotional needs that can affect their ability to succeed in school.

Researchers agree these needs affect student achievement, but as these needs are met, achievement can improve (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Chambers, 1995; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Jensen, 2009; Mayes et al., 2007; Narayan et al., 2000; Noguera, 2011). Social-emotional needs can be met in part through a meaningful relationship with a teacher and/or staff member and that relationship increases the chances for students to obtain high scholastic achievement.

Participants were in agreement about this theme. Table 21 illustrates the agreement among the participants that social-emotional needs, as a limiting factor to achievement, must be addressed to increase the success rate for students living in poverty. All participants (100%

Bounty, 100% Harvest), but one from Orchard (86%), specifically discussed these needs as those vital in attaining high achievement for students living in poverty.

***Instructional strategies.*** The theme of instructional strategies focused on teachers’ pedagogy and the methods used to teach and instruct content to students. This theme was connected to teacher dispositions—the outlook, beliefs, and disposition of teachers—that is directly related to the way they interact and instruct students. As seen in Figure 14, instructional strategies were discussed by 94% (16/17) of the participants, excluding one Harvest faculty member. Responses from the participants centered on two aspects of delivering instruction: differentiation and including real life connections to curriculum and collaboration among teachers in order to make data-based decisions.

***Differentiating curriculum and connections to real life.*** Within the theme of instructional strategies, the participants focused on differentiating the curriculum and making connections in the curriculum to real-world experiences. The frequency of responses among the three schools in this area was varied (see Table 22). All but one (4/5; 80%) of Harvest’s participants stated differentiation and real-life connections as a strategy they felt was significant to improve student achievement. Orchard and Bounty were lower in frequency with 2/5 (40%) of Bounty’s participants and 3/7 (43%) of Orchard’s participants stating these factors. The data shows that participants from Harvest valued differentiation and real-life connections as important factors for academic success. Below are the responses to reflect the participants’ perceptions:

- “[A quality teacher is] able to differentiate when needed with instruction” (Orchard, Interview 4).
- “[Quality education would be] a program that would give them the skills that they need to be productive in life” (Harvest, Interview 5).

Table 22

*Responses Regarding Instructional Strategies*

Instructional strategies	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Differentiating and connecting to real life	3/7	43%	2/5	40%	4/5	80%
Teacher collaboration and data-based decision making	4/7	57%	2/5	40%	2/5	40%

These responses give validity to studies reviewed in the literature that functional, foundational education and differentiated curriculum is imperative to meet the individual needs of learners' life experiences (An et al., 2007; Brock, 2009; Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Murphy & Johnson, 2009).

*Teacher collaboration and data-based decision making.* Another aspect of instructional strategies discussed by the participants is collaborating and teaming with other educators and having those teams use data to make decisions and guide instruction. This was discussed by participants most frequently at Orchard with 4/7 (57%) participants referencing collaboration and data-based decision making as an effective strategy when working with students living in poverty. Harvest and Bounty's participants referenced it less with 2/5 (40%) at each school (see Table 22). In preliminary discussions before the study began, all three administrators discussed their teaming procedures with the researcher so it is known that all schools meet regularly as grade level teams as time is set aside weekly for that purpose. The majority of participants did not state teacher collaboration and data-based decision making as important in improving the academic success of students living in poverty as only 47% of participants referred to this topic (see Figure 14). The responses below are a sample of these perceptions from the participants:

- “[We implement] multi-tiered systems of support, or RTI. We’re doing that through data teams and progress monitoring of all students and trying to keep that at the forefront of everybody’s brain” (Orchard, Interview 5).
- “So we identify all kids as to where they are academically at the beginning of the year. And we keep pretty constant record about their growth and whether they are making growth. Every teacher is checking that on a regular basis and by looking at data regularly we can tell if our instruction is working for children especially our more high risk children who may have come in a year behind just to make sure that they are making good progress. If they are, great. If they are not, we immediately change their instruction. We don’t leave [or continue] instruction no matter what, if it is not helping” (Orchard, Interview 3).

Research shows evidence that teacher collaboration impacts student achievement (Goddard et al., 2007; Leana & Pil, 2006; Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016) and the quantitative data of this study along with the knowledge of dedicated collaboration time at the case study schools support those findings. It is interesting to note that the participants did not recognize the impact of collaboration and did not credit it to their schools’ success. The reasons for this discrepancy in the study and current research would require further research. It may be due to the participants not experiencing the value in collaboration or benefits towards student achievement. Also, collaboration time may not be used appropriately or effectively. Another possibility is that dedicated collaboration time has been implemented for several years and it has become part of the school culture and not recognized as a new strategy, but has become regular part of the routine at the school.



Table 22 illustrates the frequency of responses regarding instructional strategies, specifically differentiating and connecting curriculum to real life and collaboration among teachers and basing decisions on data. Twice as many participants (80%) from Harvest stated differentiation and real-life connections to the curriculum compared to 40% from Bounty and 43% from Orchard. These findings, along with high achievement scores, give support to functional curriculum and teaching with appropriate pedagogy. Although the practices of all three schools is to have a weekly grade level team meeting, only 40% of Bounty and Harvest participants discussed collaboration as an effective instructional strategy. Orchard was slightly higher with 57% of participants discussing collaboration.

**Family influence.** The influence of the family was referred to by 88% of all participants (see Figure 14). As illustrated in Table 23, this theme was discussed by all of Harvest faculty (100%) and all but one from both Bounty (4/5; 80%) and Orchard (6/7; 86%). This theme, which included family literacy, parent training, and supporting families, was considered by participants as a significant factor. The responses below support this conclusion regarding the influence of the family on student achievement:

- “I think the families need to know how important it is to read with their kids every day. If we could get books in the homes” (Orchard, Interview 4).
- “Kids in poverty don’t have huge backgrounds on a lot of things that . . . some of them don’t even have books in their house to read. That’s something I always try to remedy” (Orchard, Interview 4).
- “Until we find a way to support families outside of school, it’s just going to be long term thing because it’s going to be a generational deal” (Orchard, Interview 5).

- “Support of their family at home. I think that is one of biggest things. To me you don’t need to go buy something to learn about it, but if they have that family support . . . someone to sit down with them and help them achieve it doesn’t matter whether they are rich or poor, to me if they have that support” (Harvest, Interview 2).
- “A big thing is parental training. So the number one would be to teach the parents how to help their kids” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “Parental training. Resources helping them to get help for their kids: get to the dentist, fill out paperwork, etcetera” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “Help the parents. Not giving them things but somehow help them feel confident in their own ability and how important it is to help their children out at home. To actually train the parents. To have parent training meetings” (Orchard, Interview 2).
- “They need a teacher to reach out to parents too because sometimes you can make a difference. Not always, but sometimes if you show parents that you care then they’ll respond to that. And I don’t think many of our parents don’t care. There are always some, but most parents want what’s best for their kids” (Orchard, Interview 7).

Table 23

*Responses Regarding Family Influence*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Family influence	6/7	86%	4/5	80%	5/5	100%

The majority of participants indicated that family influence has a strong effect on student achievement. Researchers have also found a strong correlation between the influence of the family and student achievement (Bradley et al., 2001; Coleman et al., 1966; Fullan, 2006; Kahlenberg, 2013; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Levin, 1994; Noguera, 2011; Walberg, 2010). These responses correlate with the theme basic needs/experiences regarding the family's influence and the lack of experiences for children living in poverty and the effect on academic achievement. The agreement between the results of this study and the literature review indicates this is a significant factor in providing quality education for students living in poverty and closing the achievement gap, which is the purpose of this study.

Table 23 provides data supporting research on the importance of the family on student achievement (Bradley et al., 2001; Coleman et al., 1966; Fullan, 2006; Kahlenberg, 2013; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Levin, 1994; Noguera, 2011; Walberg, 2010). Overall, a high percentage of participants (88%) saw a connection between families' influence and student achievement. Table 23 shows that all of Harvest participants discussed family influence and all but one at Bounty (4/5; 80%) and Orchard (6/7; 86%). The comments of the participants focused on family literacy, parent training, and supporting families. The majority of participants were in agreement that these are vital areas in order for students to achieve scholastically. The strong agreement of the literature and the results of this study illustrate the importance of families and their influence on student achievement, especially for students living in poverty. As the number of students living in poverty increases and the achievement gap continues to widen, the family influence is a vital component for schools to consider in their efforts to improve student learning and achievement.

***Outside forces on education.*** This theme focused on state standardized testing and other mandates given to teachers from sources outside of education. These outside forces are issues

that affected educators' responsibilities and day-to-day duties, but were concerns they felt they did not have a voice regarding the implementation of them. The following responses reflect the concerns of the participants regarding outside forces:

- “It’s horrible because the state/federal government where everything is content based and everything is standards base testing and that’s how you measure a teacher. . . . That measurement that we’re measured against is upside down” (Orchard, Interview 6).
- “All of a sudden the teachers feel so pressured to get to that what the state or government has said. With standardized testing they let other things go away because they are so focused on that because that means their job and I think sometimes the quality of education goes out with that” (Orchard, Interview 2).
- “I think the burnout comes because your voice isn’t being heard from the state, from the government” (Orchard, Interview 2).
- “Educator: I don’t know anything that I can do.  
Interviewer: Do you feel powerless?  
Educator: I do feel powerless!” (Harvest, Interview 1).

As shown in Table 24, outside forces on education was discussed by 60% (3/5) of the faculty from Harvest and Bounty and 57% (4/7) from Orchard which is fairly equal among the three schools. The percentage of frequency illustrates the impact of outside forces on education, but the lower frequency shows the participants did not see this topic to be significant regarding student achievement for students living in poverty.

***Student responsibility.*** The theme of student responsibility represented the educators’ emphasis on the students’ effort to learn and achieve their potential. The educators expressed the

Table 24

*Responses Regarding Outside Forces on Education*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Outside forces on education	4/7	57%	3/5	60%	3/5	60%

opinion that the student is his or her own best advocate and his or her attitude plays a significant role in student success. The responses below show the perceptions of the participants regarding the students' responsibility for their own educational success:

- “I also feel like it’s an attitude. So, not a lot of aspirations for big things or anything different from . . . oftentimes, there’s an attitude and that’s where you’ll always fit” (Bounty, Interview 2).
- “Poverty starts with your own feeling and accountability and your own ‘oomph’ and gumption and your goals to make your life better than it is” (Harvest, Interview 4).
- “In the very, very end the child is the most powerful advocate for themselves if they decide this is what I’m going to be this is how I want to be that somehow they have made that decision but they want to try, that they want to please, that they want to do their best” (Harvest, Interview 4).

As illustrated in Table 25, student responsibility was discussed by 60% of the faculty from Harvest and Bounty and 57% from Orchard. Similar to the outside forces on education theme, the responses focused on this theme are fairly equal among the three schools, but a lower percentage. The lower response rate illustrates the participants do not see this theme to be significant in helping students living in poverty to succeed academically.

Table 25

*Responses Regarding Student Responsibility*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Student responsibility	4/7	57%	3/5	60%	3/5	60%

***School leadership and school structure.*** Although the frequency of these two themes is low, the significance is illustrated in the discrepancy among the three case study schools. School leadership refers to the role and support of the principal. As seen in Table 26, school leadership was not discussed at all among the Harvest staff while 2/5 (40%) of Bounty participants and 4/7 (57%) of Orchard participants discussed the effects of school leadership. School structure refers to the stability of the schools' infrastructure as seen in teaming and collaboration of staff as well as staff turnover. School structure was discussed by one staff member at Harvest (20%), all the staff members of Bounty (100%), and all but one (86%) of Orchard participants. The responses below show the participants' perceptions regarding the value of a supportive administrator and a stable staff:

- “We’ve received a new principal. One of the first things they were trying to do is to stabilize the turnover. That’s starting to build up. That’s good” (Orchard, Interview 2).
- “Our principal is willing to give us anything we need, which is nice” (Orchard, Interview 4).
- “When you get the turnover and rollover with staff then you’ve lost that muscle memory for your building. It wasn’t just a few people, it was a lot of people each year that were leaving” (Orchard, Interview 5).

- “I think a big thing with [former principal], it was a big deal that the struggling students receive extra help” (Bounty, Interview 4).
- “I think our principal makes a difference. He or she is really students first” (Bounty, Interview 2).
- “[As a] staff, there may have been times that we were frustrated, but for the most part, we knew where we stood [with the principal]. We didn’t have to fight those other [issues]. We felt there was somebody fighting for us” (Orchard, Interview 2).

Table 26

*Responses Regarding School Leadership and School Structure*

Theme	Orchard		Bounty		Harvest	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
School leadership	5/7	57%	2/5	40%	0/5	100%
School structure	6/7	86%	5/5	100%	1/5	20%

The discrepancy among the three schools is noteworthy because the schools who have endured the most changes in recent years perceived the greatest value in strong leadership and a consistent school structure. These findings support the literature stating the value and importance of strong leadership and staff in a school (Cawelti, 1999; Kearney et al., 2012; Noguera, 2011). This also supports the work of Hanushek (1981, 1996b) and Levin (1994) that purport that money doesn’t matter but rather school or education reform is key. A focus on stability of staff and leadership, pedagogy and practice, along with systems within the school does not require additional funding and can greatly influence student achievement and begin to narrow the achievement gap. Orchard had seen the most change and was the lowest achieving of the three schools. It could be informative over the next few years, as the stability of staff increases, to take

note of student achievement at Orchard and measure the correlation between staff stability and student achievement.

The themes of school leadership and school structure were not the most frequently discussed themes by participants, but the importance comes in the discrepancy among the three schools. As illustrated in Table 26, Harvest participants did not refer to school leadership at all and 40% of Bounty and 57% of Orchard participants discussed supportive administrators as an important aspect to helping students living in poverty to succeed. Also shown in Table 26, school structure was discussed by one participant from Harvest, all participants from Bounty, and all but one participant from Orchard. The discrepancies are noteworthy because the schools with the greatest change in administration/staff value stability and perceive its value in helping students succeed. This pattern also exists in the quantitative data. Orchard, with the greatest challenges in staff and leadership stability achieved the lowest on state tests as compared to Harvest and Bounty. The changes in staff at Bounty are minimal with the exception of the principal. The staff changes at Harvest are almost nonexistent. Those schools with greatest stability achieved the highest on state achievement tests. As the purpose of this study is to identify elements of success within high-poverty schools, this is a significant finding.

**Overview of themes.** Table 27 illustrates the frequency distribution of themes and sub-factors by participants from the three case study schools. All participants discuss in high frequency aspects of the themes characteristics of poverty, basic needs/experiences, intervention instruction, teacher dispositions, and teacher quality. Although some participants gave higher priority to different aspects within these themes the frequency of responses centered on these themes showed participants felt they were contributing factors to student success. With one or two exceptions, the majority of participants stated the importance of meeting social-emotional



needs, using a variety of instruction strategies, and the importance of family influence on student achievement. Slight discrepancies were evident regarding the impact of outside forces on education (state and federal mandates and testing). Greater differences were seen regarding the level of importance of student responsibility. The most important discrepancies were on school leadership and school structure with the participants from Orchard and Bounty, who have experienced the greatest change at their schools, referred to it more often as an important element to student achievement.

When the themes are broken down, the discrepancies among the schools are more easily seen. As seen on Table 27, Harvest and Bounty are very similar in their perceptions of effective strategies for students living in poverty. The only areas where they varied in frequency of responses with a difference of more than one participant was early intervention (Bounty 20%; Harvest 60%), caring teacher (Bounty 100%; Harvest 60%), differentiating and linking curriculum to real life (Bounty 40%; Harvest 80%), school leadership (Bounty 40%; Harvest 0%), and school structure (Bounty 100% and Harvest 20%). It is not surprising to see the similarities between these two schools as they are located in the same school district and same community; their principals also work in close proximity. The differences that are noteworthy focus on school leadership and school structure which are, as stated above, most likely a result of the change of principal at Bounty and the many years of consistency among the staff and administration at Harvest.

Greater differences can be seen as Bounty and Harvest are compared to Orchard. As illustrated on Table 27, Orchard placed a much higher emphasis (100%) on the effects of the lack of experiences than the other two schools (40% each school). Conversely, Orchard placed a much lower emphasis on intervention instruction of small group instruction (57%), early

Table 27

*Summary of Participant Responses for All Themes*

Theme	Bounty		Harvest		Orchard	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Characteristics of poverty	5/5	100%	4/5	80%	7/7	100%
Basic needs/experiences	5/5	100%	5/5	100%	7/7	100%
Lack of experiences	2/5	40%	2/5	40%	7/7	100%
Intervention instruction	5/5	100%	5/5	100%	7/7	100%
Small group instruction	5/5	100%	5/5	100%	4/7	57%
Early intervention	1/5	20%	3/5	60%	0/7	0%
Extended day	2/5	40%	4/5	80%	0/7	0%
Teacher disposition	5/5	100%	5/5	100%	7/7	100%
High expectations	4/5	80%	5/5	100%	7/7	100%
Willing to sacrifice	3/5	60%	4/5	80%	5/7	71%
Teacher quality	5/5	100%	5/5	100%	7/7	100%
Experience/knowledge of content and pedagogy	3/5	60%	3/5	60%	6/7	86%
Caring teacher	5/5	100%	3/5	60%	6/7	86%
Social-emotional needs	5/5	100%	5/5	100%	6/7	86%
Instructional strategies	5/5	100%	4/5	80%	7/7	100%
Differentiating/connecting to real life	2/5	40%	4/5	80%	3/7	43%
Teacher collaboration/data-based decision making	2/5	40%	2/5	40%	4/7	57%
Family influence	4/5	80%	5/5	100%	6/7	86%
Outside forces on education	3/5	60%	3/5	60%	4/7	57%
Student responsibility	3/5	60%	3/5	60%	4/7	57%
School leadership	2/5	40%	0/5	0%	4/7	57%
School structure	5/5	100%	1/5	20%	6/7	86%

intervention (0%), and extended day (0%) than the other schools. This discrepancy is due, most likely, to the lack of an all-day kindergarten and after-school program at Orchard. Interventions in a small group setting do occur at Orchard, but are not often mentioned by the participants. Orchard is the only school of the three case study schools with full-time, certified intervention (reading and English learning) teachers among the staff. The lack of responses could be explained as the interventions are so ingrained that they are not thought of by the staff or the participants do not see the value and effectiveness of the programs. As mentioned previously, the greatest discrepancy is found in the themes of school leadership and school structure. Orchard

placed the highest regard (57% school leadership; 86% school structure), Bounty also emphasized their effectiveness (40% school leadership; 100% school structure), but little reference of these two themes from the staff at Harvest (0% school leadership; 20% school structure). Since little change in school leadership or structure has occurred at Harvest, the staff is likely not aware of the effect of these changes on student achievement.

### **Summary of Results**

This chapter details the findings from this mixed-method study made up of quantitative data from ISAT scores and qualitative data from interview responses. Interview responses were analyzed through grounded theory approach which illustrated the emergence of 12 themes that were used in the comparison of the three case study schools. Comparing and contrasting the qualitative and quantitative data through the lens of the 12 themes allowed the identification of effective strategies and structures used by the schools that have assisted them in narrowing the achievement gap for students living in poverty.

The quantitative data collection focused on ISAT scores and showed that Bounty and Harvest were comparable as they meet the state targets (with one exception of Harvest's reading 2013 scores). Also for both schools there exists little gap in achievement between all students and students living in poverty. Orchard's ISAT scores showed a greater variance as they occasionally met the state targets. It lacked consistency and had a greater gap in achievement for students living in poverty compared to Bounty and Harvest.

The similarity of Bounty and Harvest in the quantitative data along with the dissimilarity of Orchard's scores to the other two schools are also evident in the participants' responses to the interview questions. The questions with the greatest disparity between Orchard and Bounty/Harvest were Q1.2, Q1.4, Q2.2, Q3.1, and Q3.2. The themes most prominent in those

questions were social-emotional needs, instructional interventions, and family influence. The greatest differences are within the theme of intervention instruction which describes small group instruction, early intervention, and extended-day programs. Bounty and Harvest have these programs implemented and the participants saw the value of them while Orchard did not. The higher scores of Bounty and Harvest where these interventions are implement indicate the effectiveness of these strategies in narrowing the achievement gap for students living in poverty.

The similarities of Bounty and Harvest and the dissimilarity of Orchard are evidenced as the responses were analyzed by theme as well. Differences between Bounty and Harvest participants' responses are minimal, but Orchard's participants' responses have more discrepancies when compared to the other case study schools. The results of the data when analyzed by theme was similar to when it was analyzed through questions. The greatest difference between Orchard and the other two schools lie in the theme of intervention instruction (small group instruction, early intervention, and extended-day). The findings of this study suggest the use of these interventions may be a catalyst to the academic success of students living in poverty. There was also a difference within the theme of basic needs/experiences where the participants at Orchard were unanimous in discussing poverty as a lack of experience, not just basic needs. The participants at Harvest and Bounty had a much lower frequency (40% at each school). This finding suggests that knowing and understanding are useful for educators when working with students in poverty. However, the data shows that the interventions and implementations of programs had a greater impact on student achievement.

A notable difference, where Orchard is not the outlier, is between Harvest and the other two schools in the themes of school leadership and school structure. Few faculty from Harvest referred to these themes. Harvest and Orchard educators stated them with high frequency as they

are the two schools that have seen greater changes within their school structure and school leadership. The results of this study illustrate the perceptions of educators who have experienced changes see the value of consistency and stability within a school as a way to increase student achievement.

Similarities among all three case study schools are the themes of characteristics of poverty, teacher disposition, teacher quality, social-emotional needs, and family influence. The majority of participants defined characteristics of poverty as a lack of resources that meet the students' basic needs. Teacher disposition was perceived by most participants as a teacher who is willing to sacrifice time or whatever is needed to his or her students' success and sees the potential of all students no matter their background, SES status, or any other qualifier. Teacher quality was viewed by participants as a teacher with knowledge of content and pedagogy and possesses the characteristic of caring and compassion. Participants put high importance on meeting the social-emotional needs of children in order to allow students to focus on academics rather than the stresses related to living in poverty. The influence of home and family was discussed in high frequency in connection with social-emotional needs as poverty-related stresses that create social-emotional needs are often found at home. The influence of the family is not limited to stress. Also referred to with great importance is the family's perception of education, literacy at home, and the need to train and support parents regarding homework and other academically-related tasks that could be done in the home in order to help their children be successful in school.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion and Conclusions

Chapter 1 presented the need and purpose of this study which revolves around the growing rate of students living in poverty and their achievement. The gap in achievement between students living in poverty and their higher SES counterparts evidenced in the United States as well as Idaho and show that access to rights *in* education is unequal among students. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature regarding poverty, achievement gap, and quality education. Chapter 3 detailed the methodology used in this study. It was a mixed-methods approach centered on a case study of three high-poverty schools using state achievement and interview responses as data sources. Chapter 4 presented the findings and analysis of the data in order to answer the research question: How do teachers and administrators in high-poverty, high-achieving schools perceive quality education for students living in poverty?

This final chapter summarizes and discusses the study finding, highlighting the contributions of this study to society and humanity as well as making recommendations for educators, policy makers, and future studies regarding providing students living in poverty a quality education and narrowing, and eventually closing, the achievement gap. This study concludes that in the context of Tomasevski's 4As (2001b), students living in poverty retain the educational rights of *accessibility* and *availability* while higher SES students enjoy the educational rights of *acceptability* and *adaptability*.

### Summary of Findings

As the qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed, compared, and contrasted among the three case study schools, the data showed distinctive difference and similarities among them (as seen in Table 27). Harvest and Bounty were found to be similar in high student achievement

and interview responses with few exceptions. Orchard was the most unique of the three schools in that achievement scores were lower and less consistent than Harvest and Bounty. The similarities and differences in interview responses between Orchard, Bounty, and Harvest will be the focus of this summary of findings.

### **Similarities**

Findings from this study explicitly illustrated in Table 27 show similarities among the responses to interview questions from the three case study schools in themes. Table 27 indicates the themes the participants found to be vital to achievement and the success of students living in poverty. The themes in which all 17 participants agreed in high frequency were characteristics of poverty, teacher disposition, teacher quality, social-emotional needs, and family influence. The impact of these elements on achievement as demonstrated in this study is consistent with the findings from the review of literature.

Interview participants agreed with Bradley et al. (2001), Jensen (2009), and Levin (1994) who defined poverty as a lack of resources. Participants and researchers agree that the basic needs of children are a significant and necessary factor for students living in poverty to succeed academically.

Another area of agreement among participants and current research is the vital role of teacher quality and teacher disposition (Brown, 2011; Cawelti, 1999; Jensen, 2009; Levin, 1994; Torff, 2011). Participants stated the value and influence of knowledgeable and caring teachers who understand curriculum, learning, and classroom management. Much attention was given to characteristics of teachers regarding his or her attitudes and expectations for students. According to the participants, a quality teacher is defined as a knowledgeable person in both curriculum and pedagogy. He or she sees potential in each student, maintains high expectation, and is willing to

sacrifice time and effort in order to help students reach their potential. Also important to the participants were the characteristics of caring and kindness as well as a willingness of the teacher to sacrifice time and whatever is needed to help students grow academically. The participants agreed with authoritative teaching style which maintains high expectations and high level of caring from the teacher (Baumrind, 1973; Ertesvag, 2011; Hughes, 2002). The participants held themselves to the same high standards for learning and expressed the notion that a quality teacher would have an attitude of lifelong learning to improve him- or herself personally and professionally.

Educators noted unique socio economic characteristics of students living in poverty by discussing their social-emotional needs. They saw this as a characteristic that set low SES students apart from their higher SES counterparts. Participants concur with current research and recognized the stress students living in poverty endure on a day-to-day basis and felt it affected academic achievement (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Chambers, 1995; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Jensen, 2009; Mayes et al., 2007; Narayan et al., 2000). According to the participants, these needs can be filled with time, attention, love, safe environment, and caring from the school staff and faculty.

This study shows that not only were the participants concerned with the needs of the students, but they also put high priority on supporting the families of the children they worked with. Their perceptions agree with research findings regarding the strong influence of the family on student achievement (Bradley et al., 2001; Coleman et al., 1966; Fullan, 2006; Kahlenberg, 2013; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Levin, 1994; Noguera, 2011; Walberg, 2010). Educators were focused on the benefits of families who have the disposition and ability to help children complete homework as well as spend time talking and giving attention to their children. The families



without those dispositions and abilities were a great concern to the participants. Those concerns led to another priority of the participants, which was training parents to help their children to succeed academically and to know/have access to community resources to meet their basic needs. Meeting the needs of the families illustrates adaptability of education in order to provide the most effective educational experience for children and families.

### **Differences**

Although there were several areas of agreement, there were differences in responses as well. The most significant differences were found in the themes basic needs/experiences, intervention instruction, instructional strategies, school leadership, and school structure (see Table 27). Differences in these input factors were determined by the respondents to affect academic achievement in schools particularly for students living in poverty.

Within the theme of basic needs/experiences is the component of students lacking experiences and the effect of this on student achievement. All participants from Orchard identified this as a concern for the students living in poverty. Their responses are supported by the literature (Bradley et al., 2001; Jensen, 2009; Levin, 1994) but not by the responses from Harvest and Bounty where only 2/5 (40%) of participants at each school discussed the lack of experiences as a factor contributing to the achievement gap. The responses show a greater understanding of the Orchard staff to the lifestyle of students living in poverty. The results could also reflect that understanding student background is not required in helping students living in poverty to succeed academically since the responses from the higher achieving schools did not reflect this understanding.

The intervention instruction theme refers to the focus of the participants on small group instruction, early intervention, and extended-day programs. Bounty and Harvest's participants

agree with literature results (Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin & Madden, 1989) regarding the importance of these elements of intervention instruction. Participants from Orchard discussed these interventions as vital strategies at a significantly lower rate. The discrepancy among the interview responses in this area, along with the ISAT data showing Bounty and Harvest's achievement scores consistently higher than Orchard suggest this is a significant finding. These findings suggest that intervention instruction may be a factor in Bounty and Harvest's success in improving student achievement and decreasing the gap for students living in poverty.

The differences of perceptions in the importance of instructional strategies refer to the aspect of differentiation of instruction and linking curriculum to real life. Participants from Harvest held this in high regard as 4/5 (80%) of participants referred to it. Their responses support current research that suggests quality education is relatable to real life and is differentiated to meet the needs of individual learners (An et al., 2007; Brock, 2009; Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Murphy & Johnson, 2009). Linking curriculum to real life relates explicitly to rights *in* education (Babaci-Wilhite et al., 2012) and the 4As from Tomasevski (2001b), specifically *acceptability* and *adaptability* where curriculum is related to the students' lives, culture and language. Bounty and Orchard held this aspect of instructional strategies in lower regard with only two out of five participants from Bounty and three out of seven from Orchard mention instructional strategies as an important factor to student achievement. As Bounty and Orchard's ISAT scores do not show a relationship, this aspect is not fully credited or discredited by this study. Further study would need to be conducted regarding the implementation of instructional strategies in order to confirm its importance to the academic success of students living in poverty.

School leadership and school structure were themes that were not discussed in high frequency in all schools, but the importance lies in the discrepancy among the participating schools. Only one out of five participants from Harvest discussed school structure and no participants discussed school leadership. In Bounty the frequency was higher with 2/5 (40%) discussed school leadership and 5/5 (100%) discussed school structure, but in Orchard 4/7 (57%) discussed school leadership and 6/7 (86%) mentioned school structure as things that affect student achievement. The importance of these findings is that Harvest has had the same principal for over 20 years with very little staff turnover. Bounty has also had minimal turnover among staff, but had a new principal assigned within the last 4 years. Orchard, the lower achieving school, has had three principals in the last 10 years and has seen a great deal of turnover. The schools that valued stability of leadership and staff are schools that have experienced the most change and feel it has affected the achievement of their students. As evidenced by Orchard's lower state achievement scores, instability of staff and administration could be a factor for academic success of students living in poverty. The review of literature revealed few studies regarding the stability of staff as a contributing factor to student success for students living in poverty. Although additional research in this area would be valuable to those who are responsible to make staffing decisions, this study showed stability of staff to be an important factor regarding achievement for students living in poverty.

Through an analysis of the differences among the case study schools, some strategies are shown to be effective by both of the higher achieving schools that are not in place at Orchard, the lower achieving school. Bounty and Harvest schools have the highest student achievement and have allocated more resources and extended effort to interventions which include small group instruction, extended day programs, and early intervention in the way of all-day kindergarten.

There was little evidence of these same interventions at Orchard school. This outcome is also demonstrative of the ISAT and interview data which show these interventions to be highly effective for students living in poverty.

### **Recommendations**

At the conclusion of this study, recommendations for policy, procedures, and further studies are evident. As mentioned previously in Chapter 1, the case ISEE V (*Idaho Schools for Equal Educational Opportunity v. State*, 129 P.3d 1199, Idaho 2005), resulted in the Idaho Supreme Court mandating the legislature to develop facilities funding system that would meet the requirements of the constitution's decree of a "uniform and thorough system" (Constitution of the State of Idaho, 1889, para.1). Very little from the court's decision has been implemented and the first recommendation of this study would be for state law and policy makers to abide by the court's decision in order to ensure equity of funding regarding facilities across the state of Idaho that will ensure equity in access to quality education for all.

All three high-poverty schools were focused on the themes of teacher disposition and teacher quality. This focus on characteristics of teachers as well as the agreement of current research show that teacher quality or characteristics is an area policy makers will need to focus on in order to improve students' achievement and decrease the gap for students living in poverty. Findings from this study inform the recommendation that professional development and teacher training programs concentrate not only on knowledge of content and pedagogy but also on the disposition of teachers towards being dedicated, willing to sacrifice, and having a caring and compassionate nature towards students.

As the study indicated that social-emotional needs were a common characteristic for students from poverty, and one that highly affected their achievement, another recommendation

is that these needs must be met in order for students to succeed academically. These needs, the study suggests, should be met through interactions with teachers and staff who provide love, attention, care, safety, and sometimes additional instruction. The case study schools felt they had success with small group instruction, one-on-one homework support before or after school, and the use of a counselor to provide additional support and guidance to students or teachers so they will better provide academically and emotionally for their students. In this vein, these findings support the recommendation that schools and district take note and make a priority of meeting social-emotional needs in order to better serve their students living on poverty.

As in similar studies, this study agrees that the influence of the family affects student achievement (Bradley et al., 2001; Coleman et al., 1966; Hart & Risley, 1995). As families are strengthened in their ability to meet the basic needs of their children and are trained in ways to help children in school, the chances of student success will increase. Findings from this study support the recommendation that schools and districts build their social capabilities in order to work with parents and connect them to community resources for employment, health care, food, and other resources to ensure the families' basic needs are met. Schools, districts, and teacher education programs need to train teachers in working with families to improve relationships and provide training for parents to help their children with homework and other dispositions that will help them succeed in school.

Harvest and Bounty mentioned specific interventions—small group instruction, early intervention (all-day kindergarten) and extended-day (after school) programs—that the participants felt were helpful in raising student achievement. Their ISAT scores and participants' responses are evidence that these interventions are effective and recommend that other schools implement. As literature results on all-day kindergartens disagrees with the findings of this study

(Chang & Singh, 2008; Cooper, et al., 2010), further research is recommended in this area as it would be helpful making decisions regarding the implementation of this intervention. The impact of small group instruction and extended-day programs is supported by the findings of this study. Based on findings from this study and current research, it is recommended for schools and districts to invest resources into intervention programs, especially in primary grades, in order to boost achievement for students in poverty.

The discrepancy among the three schools regarding school structure and school leadership leads to the last recommendation of policy and procedures. According to the findings, stability of staff and administration was found to be of great importance to the participants and ISAT achievement confirmed the schools with greater staff turnover achieved lower scores. The recommendation for schools and districts is to create and maintain stability among the staff at high-poverty schools in order to create a culture and environment that meets students social-emotional and academic needs.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Some discrepancy existed among Bounty and Harvest interview responses that could not be addressed based on quantitative data due to the lack of discrepancies among student achievement scores. The discrepancies were found when participants spoke within the theme of instructional strategies regarding the importance and value of strategies such as differentiation and connecting content/curriculum to real life situations. This study focused on teacher perceptions, but further study regarding the implementation of these strategies and the resulting impact on student achievement would help resolve this discrepancy. Therefore, future research should measure the effectiveness of these strategies rather than the opinions of the teachers would aide in identifying impactful instructional strategies.

Many of the participants discussed additional staff members as a solution for social-emotional needs. Further study regarding the use of para-educators and counselors and their effect on achievement for students living in poverty would be beneficial. This research would enable schools and districts to make informed decisions with their budgets regarding investing in additional staff and/or in alternative inputs so they are able to maximize the effect of their financial investments on student achievement.

Within this study's review of literature, very little research was discovered regarding the stability of staff as a strong contributing factor on student achievement for students living in poverty. This study showed evidence of its importance, but additional research on this issue would be beneficial to teachers, administrators, and policy makers. An extension of this study could be conducted at Orchard Elementary to examine the correlation between school structure, leadership, and student achievement through the years of change versus stabilization.

It would also be beneficial to extend this study by viewing and analyzing the perceptions of participants according to various characteristics related to job experience. Perceptions and viewpoints appeared to vary based on time teaching, time in current position, and variety of grade levels taught. Years of experience had also appeared to have some impact on interview responses as participants with more depth and breadth of experience found the questions easier to answer. More impactful than years of experience was the type of experiences the teachers had within the school structure. Teachers who stayed in the same grade level without changing grade levels, even if they had been teaching for a long period of time, appeared to have fewer experiences to draw from and had a more difficult time answering the interview questions. This pattern was not the case among all teachers, but it was evident enough for the researcher to take note. The same variance did not seem to be evident among administrators as more experienced

principals had similar ideas to newer principals. An extension of this study could be beneficial to schools and districts to ascertain the effect of movement of faculty within a school has on broadening teacher experience, knowledge, opinion, and practice on teacher quality and student achievement.

This and other studies have shown the importance of family influence on student achievement. A beneficial future study would be to examine and analyze effective family supports that schools, districts, and communities have implemented, especially in a rural setting where community resources are limited. This type of study would be useful for rural schools in helping them as they create and maintain relationships that will support parents and families and ultimately improve student achievement.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of this study is providing rights in education to students living in poverty in order to actualize their full potential and gain access to life opportunities. Katrina Tomasevski's 4 A's is the yardstick used to measure if the rights *in* education of students living in poverty are being met (Tomasevski, 2001b). Indeed, the study shows that the rights of availability and accessibility are fulfilled in the United States as resources are allocated to provide all students with seating times in schools. This fulfills the children's right to education, while rights *in* education focused on acceptability and adaptability is not evidentially supported in all case study schools. In terms of this study, the latter rights reflected as a quality teacher – who is caring and compassionate to his/her students – differentiates individual students' needs to ensure increases in student achievement. In the context of curriculum, it is localized to students' environments and real life, and thus becomes applicable to their world and the world around them. Such education which is more than schooling allows children to grow and develop and reach their full



capability as human beings. Another aspect of quality education relates to the stability of the principal and teachers. Results from the literature as well as this study agree that student achievement is affected by the stability of principals and teachers. This study support the literature results that quality educators and professionalism make a difference in the life of a student, but still greater improvement is needed. From the data and qualitative analysis, it is hard not to claim that schools and districts have been skimping on education for students living in poverty. In both expenditure and real resources (qualification of the teachers force), there have been declines. There is ample evidence provided in this study that schooling is not related directly to the success of student living in poverty nor did it ensure equality of educational opportunity to all students. This study casts doubt on the efficacy of current interventions in schools to improve at-risk students' performance. Therefore, suggested is that "The whole school faculty and school community – not the individual teacher – must be the unit of change; and there must be patience and persistence of application" (Haberman, 1991, p. 292). In order to see long-term and widespread effects of school resources on achievement of students living in poverty, required is a comprehensive bottom-up approach to resource distribution and organizational reform that includes a focus on rights in education for every child. Above all, decentralization will mitigate the consequences of top-down organization restrictions currently embedded in the school system.

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## APPENDIX A:

## Poverty Threshold Chart

Poverty in the United States is measured through a poverty threshold chart (see Table A-1). The poverty thresholds were developed in 1963 by Mollie Orshansky, who worked for the Social Security Administration as an economist (Fisher, 1992). The thresholds were developed by estimating the amount of food families of various sizes would need. Poverty is defined from the chart as families with an income-to-poverty ratio of less than 100%. “An income-to-poverty ratio of 100 to 124 percent indicates a family’s or person’s income is at or no more than 24 percent above their poverty threshold. An income-to-poverty ratio of 50 percent indicates a family or person is living with income that is half of their poverty threshold; that is, they are living in deep poverty” (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2014, "Depth of Poverty," para. 2)

Table A-1

Income/poverty chart to determine free/reduced lunch.

Family size	48 contiguous states and D. C.		
	Alaska	Hawaii	
1	\$11,670	\$14,580	\$13,420
2	15,730	19,660	18,090
3	19,790	24,740	22,760
4	23,850	29,820	27,430
5	27,910	34,900	32,100
6	31,970	39,980	36,770
7	36,030	45,060	41,440
8	40,090	50,140	46,110
For each additional person, add	4,060	5,080	4,670

Adapted from U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2014).

## APPENDIX B:

## Interview Protocol

<b>Administrator and Certified Teacher Interview Protocol</b>
<b>Informational Questions</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name:</li> <li>2. Experience: time in current position, in profession (if different)</li> </ol>
<b>Research Question 1: From the perspective of the teachers and administrators, what are the characteristics of quality education for a student living in poverty?</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From your understanding, experience, and background, how would you describe poverty?</li> <li>2. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of quality education?</li> <li>3. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a quality teacher?</li> <li>4. In what way do you feel these characteristics differ for students living in poverty and those living in a higher socioeconomic level?</li> </ol>
<b>Research Question 2: What <i>new</i> strategies, innovations, and methods were implemented and found to be effective in attaining high academic success for students living in poverty, from the perspective of the teachers and administrators?</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why do you think your school is successful in narrowing the achievement gap for students living in poverty? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (If a prompt is needed, say, “such as teacher quality, curriculum, instruction, professional development, school leadership, relationships, consistency, etc.”)</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Within your realm of responsibility, what organizational changes would you suggest to further improve student achievement?</li> <li>3. What do you attribute to the differences in math and reading achievement for students living in poverty?</li> </ol>
<b>Research Question 3: What resources do teachers and administrators value as vital contributors to the success of students living in poverty?</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are influential resources that affect achievement for a student living in poverty? (If a prompt is needed, say, “such as financial, people, time, family background, family partnerships, etc.”)</li> <li>2. What other resources would you like to have and how would they contribute to eliminating/bridging the achievement gap?</li> </ol>

## APPENDIX C:

## Letters of School District Support

From: Cassia Dist. #151

2088784231

02/19/2016 12:46

#842 P.001/001

Cassia Jt. School District #151  
3650 Overland Ave  
Burley, ID 83318

February 15, 2016

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects  
Brigham Young University  
A-285 ASB Campus Drive  
Provo, UT 84602

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects,

Christine Brown has the permission of Cassia Jt. School District #151 to recruit subjects and/or conduct research for her study on "Providing Quality Education in Idaho: Elements of Success in a Rural, High-Poverty Schools" through this agency. The details of this study have been explained to us and we support the research.

Please contact me for any further questions at 208-878-6600.

Sincerely,



Gaylen Smyer  
Superintendent  
Cassia Jt. School District

***Jerome Jt. School District No. 261***

District Office

125 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue West

Jerome, Idaho 83338

Telephone (208) 324-2392 • FAX (208) 324-7609

**Dale Layne, Superintendent of Schools**

February 15, 2016

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects  
Brigham Young University  
A-285 ASB Campus Drive  
Provo, UT 84602

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects,

Christine Brown has the permission of Jerome School District #261 to recruit subjects and/or conduct research for her study on "Providing Quality Education in Idaho: Elements of Success in a Rural, High-Poverty Schools" through this agency. The details of this study have been explained to us and we support the research.

Please contact me for any further questions at 208-324-2392.

Sincerely,

Dale Layne  
Superintendent of Schools

## APPENDIX D:

## IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board  
for Human Subjects



Brigham Young University  
A-285 ASB Provo, Utah 84602  
(801) 422-3841 / Fax: (801) 422-0620

March 24, 2016

Christine Brown  
953 S 2400 W  
Rexburg, ID 83440

Re: X 16125

Providing Quality Education in Idaho: Elements of Success in Rural, High-Poverty Schools

Dear Christine Brown

This is to inform you that Brigham Young University's IRB approval of the above research study is contingent upon the receipt of the following:

- approval letter from school district(s)

The approval period is from 3-24-2016 to 3-23-2017. Your study number is X16125. Please be sure to reference this number in any correspondence with the IRB.

Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements.

A copy of the Informed Consent Statement, approved as of 3-24-2016 is enclosed. No other consent form should be used. In addition, each subject must be offered a copy of the signed consent form.

All protocol amendments and changes to approved research must be submitted to the IRB and not be implemented until approved by the IRB.

The enclosed recruitment advertisement has been approved. Advertisements, letters, Internet postings and any other media for subject recruitment must be submitted to IRB and approved prior to use.

A few months before this date we will send out a continuing review form. There will only be two reminders. Please fill this form out in a timely manner to ensure that there is not a lapse in your approval.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

Robert Ridge, PhD., Chair  
Sandee Aina, Administrator  
Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects

## Consent to be a Research Subject

### Introduction

This research study is being conducted by Christine Brown at Brigham Young University, to determine effective practices of educators regarding quality education for students living in poverty. You were invited to participate because your school has a high poverty rate and a high rate of achievement for your students living in poverty. This study is conducted under the mentorship of MacLeans Geo-Jaja, a professor in Department of Educational Leadership and Foundation at Brigham Young University.

### Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- you will be interviewed for approximately one hour about quality education for students living in poverty
- the interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements
- the interview will take place at your school at a time convenient for you or it will take place at a time and location convenient for you
- the researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers for approximately fifteen (15) minutes
- the researcher will email you the completed transcript of your interview for you to peruse and clarify, as needed
- total time commitment will be 60-90 minutes

### Risks/Discomforts

The only risk is if you feel uncomfortable with the topic and the potential psychological risks that might entail. Potential risks to you are extremely low.

### Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you.

### Confidentiality

For the purposes of this study, your name and the name of your school will remain confidential. Faculty members will not be named and schools will be given a pseudonym in the final report. All notes and files will be kept confidential by being held in a password-protected computer as well as stored in a locked office or home.

### Compensation

Participants will receive a \$5 gift card for your participation; compensation will not be prorated.

### Participation

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without affecting your employment or standing at the school.

### Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact the following for further information:

Christine Brown  
208-431-6480

[missbrown\\_2cool4school@hotmail.com](mailto:missbrown_2cool4school@hotmail.com)

Dr. MacLeans Geo-Jaja  
801-422-6072

[geo-jaja@byu.edu](mailto:geo-jaja@byu.edu)



### Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; [irb@byu.edu](mailto:irb@byu.edu).

### Statement of Consent

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_