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The Relationship Between Poverty and Student Achievement

Kelly J. Huettl

St. Cloud University, kjhuettl@stcloudstate.edu

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The Relationship between Poverty and Student Achievement

by

Kelly Huettl

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Starred Paper Committee:
Stephen Hornstein, Chairperson
Martin Lo
Mary Beth Noll

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the start of every school year, I thoughtfully put together my classroom. I prepare the learning environment and lessons for the year ahead. I know I will have a wide array of students who come from diverse homes. Although it seems like I can effectively reach 90% of my students, one or two cause me to lose sleep at night and wonder what more I can do to help them learn.

After observing these students, I have become curious if what I am seeing is one small piece of the much larger puzzle, the achievement gap. Children from low socioeconomic status homes experience reduced academic achievement (Milne & Plourde, 2006). If this is indeed the case, my drive in learning more is to better understand the problem and find out what I can do to reach these students.

The main objective of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is, “To close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind” (NCLB, 2001). There are many well-documented studies that explore the achievement gap that exists in American schools today. Studies have shown that poor children from financially disadvantaged homes begin school academically and behaviorally behind their more affluent peers, and the gap continues to widen over the school years (Duncan, Kalil, & Ziol-Guest, 2013). Parental involvement has also been studied and researched as a way to help aid academic achievement in students. In my experience all of these things come together as pieces of the puzzle. Within the Pine City School District where I teach, we serve a relatively low number of minority students, but serve a large number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, whose parents work long hours, work a shift opposite of the school day, or are unable to work.

Many of these students struggle academically and have less parental support than their financially stable peers.

Research Question

Does the research indicate a relationship between financial stability of families and increased student achievement?

Definition of Terms

- Achievement gap: occurs when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (National Association for Educational Progress [NAEP], 2014).
- English Language Learner (ELL)/Limited English Proficient (LEP): a term used to describe students who are in the process of acquiring English language skills and knowledge. Some schools refer to these students using the term limited-English-proficient (NAEP, 2014).
- Ethnicity: a particular ethnic affiliation or group (Merriam Webster, n.d.).
- Free/reduced lunch rate: an indicator of poverty. Federal guidelines have qualification requirements of income at or below 130% the poverty level for free lunch, and between 130-185% of the poverty level for reduced price lunch (Ohmstede Beckman, Messersmith, Shepard, & Cates, 2012; Rabiner, Murray, Schmid, & Malone, 2004).
- Low-SES homes-Low socioeconomic home: For the purposes of this research topic, this will refer to homes qualifying for free/reduced lunch.

- Poverty: an annual family income of approximately \$23,850, or less for a family of four (healthcare.gov, n.d.).
- Standardized test: tests used to measure student proficiency as mandated by state and federal government.
- State proficiency standards: representing solid academic performance for area tested (NAEP, 2014).
- Summer setback: learning loss that occurs in the summer when school is out of session (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007).
- Title I: additional funding given to schools with a high number of low-income students to assist students in meeting high academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The United States has a reputation for being the “Land of Opportunity.” For years, Americans have worked hard, paid their dues, and held the belief that to do so could bring prosperity and happiness, even for those born without privilege or status. However, for some, this dream is becoming ever more difficult to achieve.

The Achievement Gap

There is an ever-growing gap in the achievement of students from varying walks of life (Neuman, 2013). Studies show that students of ethnicity tend to achieve lower proficiency levels on standardized tests (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002), as well as students living in poverty (Duncan et al., 2013). A myriad of research-based practices have recommended strategies to help close the achievement gap, including parental involvement (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011), increased school resources, better nutrition, and reading in the summer (Allington et al., 2010; Basch, 2011; Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010). Studies show a variety of factors that contribute to this achievement gap and what helps close it. This paper covers these reasons in detail.

Ethnicity and English Language Learners (ELL)

Race is strongly correlated with poverty. Minorities such as African-Americans, Hispanics, and new immigrants are overrepresented among those who suffer severe poverty (Mishel, Bernstein & Allegretto, 2005). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2007) reported that Black and Hispanic Americans on average have a lower median income in comparison to Caucasian Americans. They have a much higher free/reduced lunch rate than their White peers (NCES, 2009). The number of students receiving free/reduced lunch serves as

an alternative measure for students of low-socioeconomic (SES) status because in order to qualify for free/reduced lunch, a family has to meet certain financial requirements based on the federal poverty income level.

Family income increases with the level of educational attainment. However, Black and Hispanic Americans are less likely to graduate high school and even less likely to pursue postsecondary education when compared with their White counterparts (NCES, 2015). Learning disabilities are another large contributing factor to educational attainment. In 2013, nearly 12% of children living below the poverty line were identified as having a learning disability (Child Trends Databank, 2014). The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2014) reported that minority students are overrepresented in special education programs, and a disproportionate number of students are identified as having learning disabilities (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Some professionals argue that minority students do not have learning disabilities; rather, teachers are insensitive to the needs and cultural norms of minority students. According to Hughes (2003), “Ineffective teachers tend to use the most common pedagogy in U.S. schools, which assumes that the dominant white middle-class cultural way of school is universal, or should be universal and most appropriate for all” (p. 6). Hughes explained that teachers need to be sympathetic to the needs, motivations, and social and cultural preferences of their students in order to provide engaging and meaningful learning experiences. It seems like a simple idea: if one’s students are disengaged from the lesson, one needs to adjust the lesson to meet the needs of all learners.

Family income combined with cultural differences between these groups and their styles in parenting may also influence student achievement. Parental involvement strategies are largely

based on school cultures that are from middle-class, European-American cultural norms (Bower & Griffin, 2011). This makes cultural differences in parenting of significant importance. The traditional definition for parent involvement includes activities in the home and in the school (Epstein et al., 2009; Hill & Taylor, 2004). This could be any number of things including, but not limited to, volunteering in the school, attending parent/teacher conferences, communicating with the teacher, helping students on their homework, or encouraging other academic activities. African-American and Hispanic parents who do not engage in these activities can appear from the side of the school to have low parental involvement (Gaetano, 2007). Some families do participate in these activities; however, not all of these activities are visible by the school. African-American families tend to do more in-home activities with their children than parents of White children. Hispanic families tend to respect the role of the school and teacher, and as a result they contact the school less frequently with regard to academic or social concerns. However, this can sometimes be seen by the school as indifference (Barbarin, McCandies, Coleman, & Hill, 2005).

Stereotypes may also play a significant role in the achievement gap that exists between White students and minority students. Stereotype threat is a factor that inhibits an individual or group from performing at their highest ability (Appel & Kronberger, 2012). Some minorities are perceived as less intelligent. When these false ideas and biased attitudes are present within the learning environment, whether purposely or not, students may underperform. Appel and Kronberger found that when stereotyping cues were present, the experimental group tended to shy away from the given activity, and those who did participate received a lower score than the control group who was not receiving the stereotype cues. If minorities are made to feel less

racially vulnerable and feel less stereotype threat, they have a greater chance of overcoming substantial learning obstacles (Hughes, 2003). Stereotyping and prejudice are also present for minority students in racially diversified, affluent communities. In the book *Our Kids* by Putnam (2015), a Black boy with a 4.0 grade point average was encouraged to pursue trade schools or 2-year colleges as opposed to 4-year universities. The student also described feeling singled out by teachers who had a preconceived opinion of him based upon his race. Putnam also contended stereotypes about poverty prevented capable students from greater opportunity for academic achievement.

Language barriers and poverty can also be a contributing factor to minority students struggling to achieve academic proficiency. Data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2005 showed that people who speak a language other than English at home were less likely to find full-time, year-round employment and had lower median earnings than those who speak only English (Cheeseman Day & Shin, 2005). Furthermore, those with the lowest English speaking abilities also experience the lowest employment rates and lowest median earnings. Research has shown that English Language learner (ELL) students are more likely to score below proficiency levels than their English-speaking peers (Fry, 2008). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires that ELL students meet state proficiency standards, although some argue this is an unfair requirement. Students learning English may not know the language well enough to understand all of the test questions (Petterway, 2006). Language barriers may further hinder parents from initiating contact with the school or responding to paperwork sent home by the school (Bower & Griffin, 2011). One study in Nebraska showed that ethnicity combined with limited English proficiency is a very strong predictor of lower standardized test scores

(Ohmstede Beckman et al., 2012). This research shows that the combination of language barriers and poverty hinder student success.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement has been hailed as a major component to closing the achievement gap for underperforming students (LaRocque et al., 2011). Parental involvement is seen as a practical and necessary strategy for ensuring student success, which at least in theory, leads to academic success for students. Parental involvement has been linked to higher graduation rates, increased attendance, and fewer discipline problems (Larocque et al., 2011).

In an age of greater school accountability, much of the academic burden has been placed on parents and has taken on many forms. Schools expect parents to fulfill the traditional duties of attending parent-teacher conferences and helping students with homework. In addition, many schools are asking for parental help in volunteering in the school, or shouldering the responsibility of providing extra supplies for the classroom or items for school fundraisers and events (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). This places a financial burden on families, and for those who are unable to provide such resources, they may be viewed as “uninvolved.”

Low-income parents face a number of obstacles that may affect student achievement. One such obstacle may be the hours a parent works. Many parents who struggle financially may work jobs in the service industry, labor, or clerical jobs that may require hours that fall outside of the school day (Kyle, 2011). Parents in this situation who wish to be involved in their child’s education may find it difficult to participate at the level the school requests. Low SES can also limit what educational resources parents can afford to offer their children. In the homes of low-SES students who are succeeding academically, parents ensure that students have access to

books and writing materials (Milne & Plourde, 2006). However, other obstacles may present themselves in the way of transportation, childcare, preschool expenses, and other academically engaging activities (Duncan et al., 2013). Low-income parents may be unable to attend conferences, but may stop in for unscheduled visits and have informal conversations with the teacher (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Both of should be welcomed forms of parental communication.

There are also differences in parenting styles among poor and middle/upper class parents that may impact academic achievement. Well-educated, affluent parents aim to raise children who are independent learners who have high self-esteem. They tend to use more encouraging language. When they discipline their children, they tend to use reasoning and guilt. Low-income class parents, on the other hand, tend to focus on obedience and compliance from their children, have a higher ratio of discouraging remarks, and are more likely to use physical forms of punishment and discipline (Putnam, 2015). Putnam claimed these approaches to parenting are a practical response to environmental factors. When placed in a safe environment, parents can encourage their children to pursue their strengths and interests. However, in low-income areas where dangers outnumber opportunities, parents use discipline as a preventative strategy for keeping their children safe in rough neighborhoods and out of trouble (Putnam, 2015).

School Resources

Children spend many hours a day in the classroom, and this academic setting is an important aspect that should not be overlooked when considering the effect of poverty on the achievement gap. The money that schools have to spend on resources comes from a variety of sources. A small portion of the funding comes from the federal government, but the majority of

the money comes from state and local property taxes, with additional money coming from grants, parent organizations, and local businesses (Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010; Woodruff, 2008). The monies that schools receive often have stipulations regarding how it can be spent. For example, Title I gives funding to schools who have a large number of students that qualify for free/reduced lunch. This money is allocated to schools with the intention of aiding schools in helping reach students who are failing or at risk of failure. However, schools that run a school-wide Title I program may find it difficult to find effective teachers. In a 2010 study of a school district in southern California, Title I schools had a higher teacher turnover rate and more emergency-credentialed teachers. Principals complained of a higher rate of teacher burnout when compared to non-Title I schools (Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010). The same study also showed that in comparison, non-Title I schools had teachers with more years of experience who take pride in perfecting their craft

More affluent or non-Title I schools also have greater parental support organizations. Parent organizations often plan school events and coordinate fundraisers for the school. The money raised can be spent where the school needs it most, as deemed by the principal and teachers. Title-I schools often struggle to obtain this kind of parental support, perhaps due to the nature of their jobs, financial hardship, or other barriers such as childcare or transportation (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010).

Jimenez-Castellanos (2010) found that the school buildings that served more low-income students tended to be older, with less space per pupil in common areas, and more portable classrooms. These schools had lower daily attendance rates than the newer, more spacious facilities of the schools that served wealthier neighborhoods. All of these factors indicate that

the school itself, the programs it offers, and the building staff have a tremendous effect on students. Jonathan Kozol studied these disparities in several of his books, particularly *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (1991) and *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (2006). He discussed the widening of opportunities afforded to students of wealth compared to poor students. Kozol described visits to a number of schools in both affluent and poor areas. He interviewed teachers, administrators, and students. As the titles of the books imply, schools in poor areas experience severe segregation, overcrowded classrooms, buildings in disrepair, and grossly reduced resources. He described how the use of high-stakes testing in America has harmed urban schools. Schools are forced to teach only the content that will likely appear on the test. Showing inadequate growth on standardized tests may mean reduction of funding and in some cases closing the school all together. This fear of failure causes schools to impose strict rules and take harsh disciplinary measures against students who cause any form of distraction. His research began 30 years ago, and the current state of Detroit Public Schools would demonstrate that his findings are still valid today (Gross, 2016).

Summer Setback

Students living in low SES homes experience substantial learning loss in the summer months when school is out of session. Summer setback appears to be more pronounced for children of poor families than for more affluent families (Allington et al., 2010). In Allington's 3-year study of reading loss over the summer, he learned that economically disadvantaged children fell the equivalent of 2.5 months behind their more affluent peers. This is supported by the results of a meta-analysis by Cooper and Nye (1996) when research found at best,

disadvantaged students' growth stagnated over the summer and at worst, they lost between 1 and 3 months of learning (Cooper & Nye, 1996). Other research shows that affluent children actually continue to grow during the summer, even without summer school, widening the achievement gap between the poor and affluent (Alexander et al., 2007). This may occur for a number of reasons. Affluent parents may have performed better in school, and they stress the importance of academic skills with their own children. Conversely, poor parents may not have performed well in school and may suffer low literacy levels or feel insecure in their own abilities to pass along knowledge to their children (Alexander et al., 2007).

Affluent parents may have more money to spend on educational resources and experiences such as books and writing materials. They are also more likely to have access to transportation that poorer children may not have. These benefits allow wealthier students to visit the local library or participate in educational and academically engaging summer activities outside of the home (Allington et al., 2010).

Allington et al. (2010) conducted a study with a group of economically disadvantaged children who chose a selection of books. The free books were sent to the students during the summer months while they were not in school. In the autumn, reading scores were compared to a control group. The results showed that the experimental group had higher scores than the students in the control group. The implications of this study is that poor children can improve their reading skills over the summer when relevant educational resources are made available to them.

Effects of Poverty on Student Achievement

The common thread among all of the aforementioned issues is poverty, which has a strong correlation to reduced academic achievement for students (Berliner, 2006). In 2011, over 16 million children were living in poverty in the United States (Duncan et al., 2013). Poverty during the first 5 years of life appears to have a stronger effect on children than when poverty is experienced later in life and has lasting, negative, long-term effects (Duncan et al., 2013). Students living in low-SES homes experience increased rates of high school dropout, increased risk of committing crime, decreased college attendance, poorer health, and overall lower lifetime earnings than children who live in high-SES homes (Alexander et al., 2007; Duncan et al., 2013). Some researchers speculate this may be because poor children lack the access to educational or academically stimulating resources that wealthier children have. Wealthier children tend to be privileged in many areas of life, live in wealthier neighborhoods, and attend wealthier schools (Alexander et al., 2007). Alexander et al. also noted that wealthier parents tend to spend time reading to their children and practice early reading and math skills. These early educational experiences may help explain why wealthier children are more educationally advanced than their less affluent peers. Home education may be more difficult in poorer homes if parents suffer low literacy levels or if work hours are incompatible with their child's schedule.

Child development is influenced more by the environment than the family (Berliner, 2006). The neighborhoods where children live establish social behavioral norms, and these norms have a tremendous effect on student achievement. Berliner contended poverty traps parents in bad neighborhoods that negatively affects children beyond home and school. Well-functioning adult role models are necessary in the lives of children in low-income neighborhoods

and demonstrate more positive social behaviors (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993). Putnam (2015) eloquently showed how the socioeconomic segregation of neighborhoods in the United States has had a positive effect on affluent children and a negative effect for poor children. He shares stories of children who fall into the “in-between” category and how poorer children benefit from socioeconomic desegregation (pp. 160-173).

Poverty has a strong association with health problems in children. Berliner (2006) discussed how poor young children are less likely to be treated for common childhood illnesses such as ear infections than children with health insurance. Inattention to such health problems can result in significant issues such as hearing loss and delays in language development, which negatively affects student learning. He explained that inadequate health care causes American children to miss 21 million days of school each year due to asthma, and the majority of those days are missed by students from low-income homes. Lead exposure found in low-income, inner-city housing is a serious concern due to its link with learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, increased aggression, and decreased cognition.

Allington et al. (2010) reported that 77% of economically advanced fourth-graders achieved above a basic level of reading proficiency, whereas only 46% of poor students (based upon receiving free/reduced lunch) had the same modest level. Other studies have also shown that low SES is a strong predictor of lower math scores. For example, Okpala, Okpala, and Smith (2001) demonstrated that students living in low-SES homes had significantly lower scores in math than their more affluent peers. The study indicated that as socioeconomic status increased, math scores improved dramatically.

Although it is clear that poverty has significant effects on student achievement, it is also clear that when parents are given a little more money, several positive results occur. Akee, Costello, Copeland, Keeler, and Angold (2010) reported the findings of a study in which a casino was built on an Indian reservation in western North Carolina. In this study, each qualifying tribal member over the age of 18 was given an additional \$4,000 a year in payments from the casino, and those who did not qualify for the payments were given no additional income. Results revealed the children who benefited from the payments were reported to have increasingly positive personality traits such as agreeableness and conscientiousness. Children who initially had higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems experienced the greatest reduction of their symptoms. The children in the study reported more positive relationships with their parents and fewer parent/child arguments. Parental supervision of children increased when the casino payments began, and parents experienced less stress and less dissatisfaction with a spouse. Parents also showed a reduction in drug and alcohol consumption in the home, fewer arguments in the home, fewer arrests, and they were less likely to need to seek help for mental illness and occurred in the home. Another positive effect of the payments was that parents were more likely to move to better neighborhoods where schools had better reputations and educational attainment was higher. In the end, the study determined that parents who received the payments and experienced greater income made increased investments in their children (Akee, Simeonova, Costello, & Copeland, 2015). Duncan, Morris, and Rodrigues (2011) reported similar findings from their Canadian research in the 1990s. They found that a \$3000 annual increase in income was associated with improved math and vocabulary test scores for low-income students. Grinstein-Weiss, Williams Shanks, and Beverly (2014) wrote that family assets contributed to

positive educational outcomes by way of positive parent child interactions, fewer behavioral problems in school, attendance in postsecondary education, protection from severe financial crisis, better health, and less family stress.

Chapter 3: Recommendations

Based upon the literature review, it is my belief that there is a strong relationship between poverty and student achievement. This relationship has many facets and can be looked at from many angles. Action research of Chapter 2 topics could be conducted to explore facets of the relationship in greater detail. It is also important to note that the results of any action research data may be dependent on a variety of other factors. It would be difficult to isolate poverty as the only variable, since poverty is so closely associated with other factors, such as ethnicity as described in Chapter 2. It is also important to note that even if action research shows favorable results in one area, it may be difficult to reproduce the same result in a different area due to other variables.

Poverty is a societal problem that creates disparities in learning for students within the public school system. If the problem is societal, the solution also needs to be societal. The larger fix cannot fall primarily on the schools, although the schools can help. Based on the research regarding how socioeconomic status correlates to academic achievement, I have many recommendations for how society and schools should proceed, as well as some recommendations for my classroom and school district. I realize that my many recommendations will carry monetary cost to taxpayers and my recommendations may be limited by my White, middle-class interpretation of the problem and what is required to fix it.

Addressing Poverty

A great deal of research shows that poverty has severe and lasting effects when it occurs in the first few years of life. For this reason, the government needs to find ways to reduce the number of children living in poverty. This could be done in a variety of ways. The poverty

situation could be improved by making viable changes to health care. Only the poorest of families qualify for health care assistance, and the cost of practical coverage is outrageously expensive. Our government needs to find a way to redistribute spending to help provide better healthcare to low income families. Government-assisted health care needs to start with low income pregnant women to help reduce health problems during pregnancy. It should continue through high school, as long as the student attends school. This would be a positive investment, as good health contributes to student learning. Starting life with quality health care will help reduce a multitude of childhood illnesses that lead to learning difficulties down the road and will relieve one of the financial burdens to poor families. By providing basic and affordable health services, all students can start school on a more level playing field and increase the number of days they are present at school during the year.

Changes also need to be made to the current welfare system. Rather than a system that perpetuates poverty, the welfare system should offer support for finding work and food benefits should encourage healthy eating. I do not have an easy answer for how to accomplish this, but perhaps welfare programs could include staff or volunteers that help recipients write letters and resumes, find affordable childcare for working parents, and providing public transit to get to work.

While some methods of reducing poverty are immediate, others would happen over generations. One such way this might occur would be to require low income housing in more affluent, suburban areas. This is a controversial topic, but the effects and benefits to poor children would be significant. As was stated in Chapter 2, the neighborhoods where children live dictate norms for social behavior and have a tremendous effect on student achievement.

Poverty traps parents in bad neighborhoods that affect their children beyond home and school (Berliner, 2006). There would be several benefits to providing opportunities for families to move out of the inner city. New housing would reduce the number of children being exposed to hazardous material such as lead. Affluent role models in the schools and in the community would set an example for positive social behaviors. Students attending schools in affluent communities would receive better advice from guidance counselors, teaching staff, and be exposed to stronger educational opportunities.

School Support Systems

If poverty affects children the most in their youngest years, then it is logical to follow that student lives outside of school during the preschool and elementary years account for nearly almost all of the achievement gap between high and low-SES homes (Alexander et al., 2007). The achievement gap is the narrowest when students enter Kindergarten. Therefore, states should require that local school districts do more to promote early childhood education in conjunction with other local agencies. This would be even more crucial in poor, urban areas. This could be done in a variety of ways. Clinics, food shelves, libraries, and churches can work to distribute books to parents of young children. Our local teachers' union has recently begun the work of collecting books to donate to local clinics for distribution to elementary school students. Clinics, food shelves, libraries, and churches could also distribute literature about parenting and early childhood programs offered by local school districts. If schools offered a free meal for families who attend their early childhood classes, low-income parents might be more likely to participate with their children.

Because work schedules and transportation can be a concern for poor parents, schools can work to bring the classroom to the children. Repurposing old school buses into mobile classrooms could prove to be very valuable. Volunteers would work with school employees to paint and stock old school buses, and early childhood teachers would plan age appropriate lessons. The mobile classroom would then maintain a schedule and park in public places such as library, hospital, and parks. Mobile classrooms could also visit home daycare centers. These buses could work in conjunction with the public library system to distribute books to children in these communities. Pine City Public Schools has one mobile classroom that visits local parks in the summer, however bringing it to local daycares during the school year may help children gain access to early childhood educational experiences they would not otherwise have.

Preschool programs and full-day kindergarten can be effective at closing the achievement gap. However after students enter first grade, additional resources need to be made available to low SES families to continue closing the gap (Alexander et al., 2007). It is of the utmost importance that schools to reach out and make families feel welcoming of this help. When students have a supportive home environment, a good working relationship with the school, and have access to necessary help, students' achievement soars for all students regardless of their family's socioeconomic status (Milne & Plourde, 2006).

Once students enter kindergarten, the schools should work tirelessly to create a partnership with parents and continue to make progress in closing the achievement gap. In order for this to happen, schools need to put less focus on standardized tests and more emphasis on the whole child. This can only be done if states stop spending money on standardized tests and improve school funding for resources such as reducing class sizes and increasing support staff

such as psychologists, social workers, and nurses. Instead of standardized, high stakes tests, students should take a test that measures their specific growth. The test could be used to diagnose gaps in student learning and knowledge, which would be more efficient in helping students make progress in meeting academic standards. Teams of teachers and school support staff would work together to analyze the data from their students and work to build curriculum that could best close learning gaps with their students. The utilization of support staff would also help the school identify non-academic areas in which students need assistance.

Year-round schooling in urban areas would eliminate the summer learning loss that occurs for poor children. It would also decrease the amount of exposure to negative environmental factors during the summer months. This could happen in conjunction with summer reading programs. Helping students gain access to educational materials may help narrow the achievement gap. This is something that I may pursue in my own classroom in the future. Scholastic Book Clubs provide free books and resources to teachers. I could collect the free books during the school year and send them to incoming students during the summer months to encourage summer reading. Offering quality field trips to high school students may also be beneficial. Middle-and upper-class children are exposed to educational experiences outside of the home that low-income families may not be able to afford. Taking low-income students to museums, concerts, businesses would allow them to get ideas and opportunities for future employment, inspire autonomous learning and interest in topics not typically taught in a traditional school. Pine City Schools could offer enrichment of this variety as part of the summer recreational program as well as educational field trips during the school year. Lastly, I think it would be beneficial to offer parenting classes and community education for inner city

families. Often, these families lack knowledge for how to break free of the poverty cycle that holds them prisoner. If education is power, the schools can educate parents on how to help their kids rise above adversity and look to a brighter future.

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