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Poverty and Eastern Kentucky School Districts: An Analysis of Effective Interventions that Lead  
to Academic Success

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Abstract:

Poverty is a persistent cycle that plagues the United States, but specifically Eastern Kentucky. This is especially evident within the school districts there. This data was collected in order to help highlight the magnitude of poverty within Eastern Kentucky and its' impact on the academic success of the students. When analyzing data from the Kentucky School Report Card from the 2016-2017 school year, twenty-four counties were identified as having at least 75% of the student population within the district qualifying for free & reduced lunch. After the identification of those twenty-four counties, the elementary K-Prep Proficiency and Distinguished scores for both Math and Reading for each district were collected. Then each school district was contacted by phone and asked a set of interview questions pertaining to poverty. After receiving feedback from an individual within the district, the answers to the questions were analyzed for trends. The data collected was compared and contrasted to the best research-based practices according to multiple peer-reviewed sources. Information from both the data from the school districts and the literature review were utilized to formulate the most effective interventions that schools should use to allow their students to be successful academically.

### **Introduction**

While growing up in the small Eastern Kentucky town of Monticello, I noticed the impact that poverty had on my community. There was a continuous lack of jobs, poor healthcare options, and inadequate housing. While poverty touched nearly each individual in Monticello in at least some small way, it had several families completely stuck within its' tight grip. The families that were completely engulfed within the throngs of poverty had many children that were classmates my age. I saw the impact that poverty can have on all aspects of a student. These students arrived many mornings with worn and tattered clothing that was often dirty. They scarfed down their breakfast and lunch within mere minutes because they hadn't eaten since lunch the day before. These students fell asleep in class. While this may not be the case for some of these students, many craved attention, regardless of whether it was positive or negative from teachers and administration. As a whole, this group of students were not involved in extracurricular activities and would verbally convey their negative feelings towards school through statements such as "I don't want to be here." or "This is stupid!" These students did not enjoy school; it was seen as an unnecessary evil in their lives.

However, a high-quality education helps students break the cycle of generational poverty. Once the school addresses the physiological needs of students that are not being addressed in their homes, students are free to think critically and creatively. They are not focused on what they will have to eat for dinner or wear to school tomorrow. They are focused on meeting those basic needs that are necessary to their survival. Once students from low socio-economic households are placed into an effective, high quality teacher's classroom, their opportunities become boundless. As an elementary education major, I take my opportunity to change my students' lives seriously. When I walk into my own classroom in less than a year as an elementary teacher,

approximately three-fourths of the faces looking back at me will be from low socio-economic households (*Wayne County Learning Environment*, 2018).

### **Methodology**

The process began by combing through numerous maps online. Out of a total of 10 maps, there were 41 counties that were commonly labeled as Eastern Kentucky. The counties on each map were written down and labeled on a separate, blank map of Kentucky. While most counties would have been labeled as Central Kentucky, every county possible was included in order to not skew the data. After the list of eastern counties was finalized, the list was then narrowed down to focus on the percentage of students within the district who qualified for free or reduced lunch. The percentages of students qualified for free and reduced lunch were found by going to the main home page of the Kentucky School Report Card website, selecting a specific district, going to the Learning Environment tab, and scrolling down to the designated section. The percentages of students' who qualified for free and reduced lunch were then added together for each county determined to be in Eastern Kentucky. Each county with their percentage is listed in Map 1. After analyzing the percentage of each county and looking at the region as a whole, the percentage utilized to narrow down the study was determined to be 75%. As seen in Map 1, nearly all of the counties fell between 65% and 85%. The percentage was determined by two main factors. First, the greatest concentration of poverty in the region, which is Southeastern Kentucky, hovered mostly between 76% and 81% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. By choosing 75% as the percentage of focus, counties with the highest percentage of poverty in the Eastern Kentucky region were sure to be included. Second, 75% was chosen due to the implications that it has in a classroom environment. If three out of four students in a classroom qualify for free and reduced lunch, then that teacher cannot treat students from lower

socioeconomic households like they are a small portion of the class that needs to differentiation. Nearly the entire class is made up of students from possible lower-income homes where their needs are not met. If an individual walked into one of these schools, there is only a one-fourth chance that they would be able to choose a student who did not qualify for free and reduced lunch. This high percentage has direct implications on a classroom which will be discussed later on.

After the school districts had been narrowed down to only ones that had 75% of their student population qualifying for free and reduced lunch, 24 school districts in Eastern Kentucky fell within the guideline percentage. The test scores of these twenty-four counties were then analyzed on the Kentucky Report Card. The test scores for standardized tests can found under the Assessment tab on the website. The elementary scores for the school district in the subject areas of reading and math on the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) tests were identified and placed in the Table 1. K-PREP is an assessment that is based on the Kentucky Academic Standards, which layout the curriculum that is to be taught in each grade for teachers throughout Kentucky. Along with the test scores in Table 1, the county name is found in the left-most column followed by the percentage of students that qualify for free and reduced lunch, and then the school district's elementary scores on the K-PREP in Reading and Math in the last two columns. When on the Kentucky School Report Card, percentage of students that scored Proficient and the percentage of students that scored Distinguished were added together and logged in Table 1. This process was done for both Reading and Math. After collecting and logging each county's test scores into the Table 1, the scores were analyzed based on which school district's scores stood out compared to the others. The category of high-achieving school districts was created to properly accommodate the interview questions later sent to each school.

Therefore, if a school district had 60% or above of its' students scoring Proficient in either Math or Reading on the K-PREP tests, it was considered high-achieving. There were five school districts that were identified as such and are in bolded text in Table 1.

After identifying all of the school districts and labeling them as average or high-achieving, six questions were given to the average schools and seven questions to the high-achieving schools. All of the questions were the same for both districts besides the seventh question (which was reserved for the high-achieving districts). These questions were given to form an idea of what poverty looked like within each district's populations, interventions they had tried for the physiological and academic needs of students, and what they would do if they had more funding to support this large group of students within their district. Additionally, on the seventh question was designed to investigate why the high-achieving school districts believed their students were doing better than the surrounding counties. In order to determine who to contact, each school district's central office phone number was collected. Each school district was called in order to reach the individuals working directly with curriculum. When the schools were contact, it was explained that I was a senior Elementary Education major from Eastern Kentucky University, and I was conducting undergraduate research into poverty and Eastern Kentucky school districts. If the administrators were willing to give feedback, their emails were used to send the central research questions. Notes were made of the high-achieving and average school districts. The questions for both the average and high-achieving school districts can be found in the Appendix. Out of the twenty-four school districts emailed, seven responded to the list of questions. Three out of the seven districts were considered high-achieving, so the feedback collected from the school was broad enough to able to identify certain trends that were similar and different between these school districts and average ones. The layout for the rest of the paper will consist

of a literature review from multiple scholarly sources followed by the trends found in the school data collected where both will be discussing the effects of poverty. There will then be a literature review of scholarly sources followed by a discussion of the trends found in the school data collected about the best interventions for students from low socioeconomic household. When the school districts are referred to in the school data trends sections, the schools are labeled as School A, B, C, D, E, F, or G. It is used to maintain confidentiality of the school districts and representatives that were utilized within this study.

### **Effects of Poverty (Literature Review)**

While there are many scholarly sources that discuss the effects of poverty on students, many of the effects are mentioned in isolation. However; the effects of poverty are intertwined and vary from community to community. Each one of them should be compiled and discussed together as a whole. From parental involvement to chronic absenteeism, the most frequently mentioned effects in scholarly sources will be discussed and then related to the school data that was collected in the following sections of this paper. Most of the sources that will be used for the literature reviews are based upon urban schools while the sections about school data trends are based solely on rural school districts in Eastern Kentucky.

When analyzing the impact that poverty has on the lives of students, there seems to be a strong connection between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. Some researchers in this field of study argue that early childhood education is one of the key parts in combatting poverty, but many families from low socioeconomic families do not have access to this support (Lamy, 2013). In turn, these students are more likely to start the first day of kindergarten already significantly behind their peers which leaves some students unable to catch back up to their classmates (Lamy, 2013). Students from low-income homes are susceptible to having



developmental delays from falling behind at such an early age (Suits, 2016). Some areas that low-SES students have particular trouble with include vocabulary, literacy, math, and social skills (Lamy, 2013). Because of the struggles in these areas, it often results in low scores on classroom summative assessments, as well as the standardized tests completed at the end of each year (Suits, 2016). Many of the students from these low-income households tend to have these lower test scores which results in an achievement gap nationwide between low-SES students and their middle-class peers (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, Van Horn, 2007).

Living in poverty also affects the home lives of these students. Overall, research does suggest that there is less parent engagement and involvement in the school life of the student if he or she is from a low-SES household (Morgan, 2012). Multiple reasons can explain this lack of involvement, beginning with a lack of time because of working numerous jobs while trying to provide for their family. They may have little patience for their child asking questions to build their general store of knowledge after a long day at work (Lamy, 2013). Additionally, a low level of education can also explain why parents are not as involved in the school life of their students (West, 2007). Some parents could be embarrassed because they do not have the confidence to help their students complete their homework or discuss their child in a parent-teacher conference-like setting. Building upon that, poverty can impact the amount of parental education that is available to parents (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, Van Horn, 2007). Parents may not be involved in their child's education because they may not know what exactly their student needs before starting kindergarten and throughout their K-12 schooling. The area that students grow up in can directly affect the resources available for promoting parent education. Though it is not the majority, there are some parents from low-income families who have such a negative view of education that it becomes evident within their child. This in turn can promote a disengaged

attitude from the student towards education which stigmatizes achievement (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, Van Horn, 2007). As a society, this ideology needs to be challenged.

Outside of the effects of poverty on the involvement of parents, there is also a lack of resources found within the home because of it as well. There is a shortage of educational toys and educational resources available such as books (Morgan, 2012). Furthermore, because some families live in rural areas, affordable technology and internet service may not be available to the student after school (Parrett, Budge, 2012). Academic resources are not the only type of resource not provided to these students within their home. A large number of students do not have access to adequate healthcare simply because their families cannot afford it (Gorski, 2013). Lack of preventive healthcare results in a low attendance rate for this group of students because of sickness (West, 2007). When students are constantly sick, it often leads to chronic absenteeism (Superville, 2017). Overall, the home lives of these students can sometimes leave them coming to school with a variety of physiological and academic needs that need to be fulfilled before learning can occur. It is hard for these students to learn if they are worried about where they will be sleeping the following night or eat after school (Superville, 2017).

When many low-SES students walk through the doors of a school, they are starting behind their peers or with a developmental delay. They need a variety of academic supports in the form of individualized instruction and high-quality resources to get back to grade level. Unfortunately, in these impoverished communities, poverty directly impacts the quality of the schools. These schools are less likely to offer extensive early childhood education support such as headstart or preschool (Lamy, 2013). Communities may also have trouble distributing information out to parents who have younger children, ranging from birth until age five which also leaves the child in need of support (Lamy, 2013). Once the child starts school in these high-poverty areas, the

quality of the schools may also be in question. Old computers and tattered textbooks are often the norm in these classrooms because the school cannot afford to upgrade technology due to low funding (Superville, 2017). The condition of these schools and their ability to provide for students is inadequate with the large number of student from low-socioeconomic families. Students who grow up in low-socioeconomic homes have innumerable obstacles after they reach adulthood as well. When compared to their classmates from higher-socioeconomic households, lower-SES students are more likely to drop out of high school (Morgan, 2012). This lower graduation rate ultimately results in a much lower probability of low-income students ever getting a college degree because they did not even finish high school (Prince, Pepper, Brocato, 2006). Families who have little to no income forces students to quit school to begin working full time to provide for their family. Also, this group of students is more likely to have an early pregnancy, specifically while still a teenager (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, Van Horn, 2007). Many times, because the teenager does not come from an area rich in prenatal access that she can afford, the baby does not get the proper care he or she needs before and after birth. This will then cause the cycle of need all over again for this new child in the community. Additionally, students from lower socioeconomic families are also more likely to become part of the criminal justice system because there is a higher chance of involvement with violence and delinquency among this group than their higher-SES classmates (Prince, Pepper, Brocato, 2006). Furthermore, students from these impoverished families who quit school to begin working end up with a higher rate of unemployment than their peers who have a high school diploma after several years (Prince, Pepper, Brocato, 2006). This situation is common in economically disadvantaged communities. When family member after family member gets caught in this cycle of poverty, it is considered generational poverty (Prince, Pepper, Brocato, 2006). Many of the students from

low-SES families live in families where decades have passed with each new family member unable to break the cycle. Generational poverty and its' impact on individuals is why it is imperative that school districts assist these students in gaining access to the necessary tools to help them break the cycle.

### **The Effects of Poverty (Trends in School Data)**

From the data collected from the seven school districts, several trends about the needs of students that were caused by poverty were found among the feedback. The home lives of students were one such trend. Even though the lives and needs of low-SES students range outside of outside of school, they are each placed in this group because of the economic income of their family. Therefore, their environments at home is more than likely going to result in some impact on their lives inside of the school. Each one of the seven districts mentioned that students from low-SES households need both food and clothing because they are not getting an adequate amount of either at home. The students' clothing is tattered and dirty, which is part of another problem discussed (School A, School D). Many of the students do not have access to the proper hygiene products. This ranges from shampoo and deodorant to feminine products. When a parent is given the choice between buying their child deodorant or food, the choice is easy for most parents: food. Hygiene supplies are so expensive that many families simply cannot afford them. This can leave students feeling embarrassed and uncomfortable during the school day, which makes it difficult for them to concentrate on learning.

Even if students from low-income homes are getting enough food and clothing, the stress of the finances was something else discussed among Schools C, E, and G. Students bring those worries to school and are unable to put them aside to focus on their academic work. All of the districts mentioned the impact that poverty has on the academic achievement of students from

low-socioeconomic households. These students are more likely to not have internet access or technology in their homes than their wealthier classmates. This can impair the student's ability to complete an online assignment. This group of students also often demonstrate a need for tutoring services because they are struggling with the content.

Some of the situations at home are unexpected impacts of poverty. For example, one district reported that over 50% of their students were being raised by grandparents, which they further explained was one of their biggest obstacles to the learning of students (School A). There are several reasons this could be happening according to the seven school districts that responded. An unstable parent because of drugs, divorce, or other family problems within these low-income households is sometimes an issue that leads to students not living with them anymore. On the other hand, some parents may have to leave their child to live with grandparents in order for them to go to a bigger city and earn money to send back home. The parent may be working to save up enough money to go back and provide a better life for their child. For some families, the parents may not be able to afford appropriate housing that accommodates all of the children, so they are forced to move in with their grandparents. It is important to remember that no matter the reason, being raised by grandparents can take a toll on students. If students are living with their grandparents, their parents are more than likely not around most of the time. This can leave students in a state of worry. Furthermore, some students are homeless and bounce from one housing situation to the next. There is no real consistency in their home lives. No matter the issue that students may have happening in their home lives, it can leave them anxious and agitated. Besides simply affecting the home lives of students, parents also play a major part in the school lives of their students. All of the school districts mentioned that there is a lack of parent involvement in the schools. One school district referred to it as the most challenging issue facing

this specific student population (School E). The district then went on to explain that the parents do not feel comfortable with school employees (School E). They are mistrusting because often they have had negative experiences as a student themselves. Also, three school districts reported that students from low-income homes may not be able to participate in extracurricular activities due to a lack of transportation after school (School A, B, F). The parents are not able to pick them up, so students are unable to take part in the meaningful afterschool activities. If they are not having fun and enjoying clubs or sports outside of school, students may lose the motivation to keep pushing through and putting forth effort. According to the school feedback received, low-SES students need every motivational push they can get. They already most likely struggle in school, so they frequently get upset and shut down when asked to complete tasks. These students also have a plethora of other things to worry about each day. Therefore, their education can be a low priority.

Low socio-economic students often come to school with incomplete homework because their parent either did not know how to help them or was working all night (Schools D, F).

Additionally, because school supplies costs can add up quickly, many parents cannot provide the proper materials for their children to be successful. Students from lower-income households are exposed to reading materials in their homes less than their wealthier classmates. In order to combat these issues, teachers are the first people to advocate for their students. Unfortunately, large class sizes in these economically disadvantaged areas is a big concern (Schools C, G). Many times, there is only one elementary school in a town which only leaves one option for every student in an area to attend. Teachers cannot know and address the obstacles standing in the way of success for each one of their students if they have nearly thirty students in their class. One school mentioned that lower-income communities can have a problem hiring capable

teachers unless they are already from that area (School F). Many highly-qualified teachers do not want to move to rural communities. However, these areas need high-quality teachers because they know a wide range of instructional strategies to help low-income students be successful. They also need to be able to monitor student progress and identify what students are lacking in, so interventions can quickly begin. However, the school districts interviewed pointed out that teachers being unprepared to assist this group of students is an issue that they have to address each year (Schools B, C, E).

### **Literature Review (Successful Interventions)**

For each obstacle that poverty creates in the lives of students, there is an intervention to help combat it. One quote that portrays the importance of successful interventions in schools says, “We can’t let another child begin a life in poverty without interventions that give him every opportunity for success” (Prince, Pepper, Brocato, 2006) If as an educational system, students needs are not met through the necessary interventions, the system is failing them. The effects of poverty impact every part of their lives, both at home and school. From the multiple sources used to create the literature review on the effects of poverty, interventions were specifically selected that could be of assistance when combatting poverty. There are numerous ways to help low-socioeconomic students be successful, but the issue is that the needs of students are met in isolation. Many times, students are given food or clothing to meet their physiological needs, but that is where the assistance stops. In order for students to be thoroughly successful from low-SES homes, the whole child needs to be served. According to Denise Superville, a journalist for Education Week, “You don’t ever give up on any community and any child... You have to serve the whole child. We are talking about social, emotional, academic learning—what we call the three pillars of education (2017).” To be effective at serving the whole child though,

certain steps need to be taken by the teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the school district as a whole, and lawmakers, to offer assistance to the students and their families.

### **School as a Whole**

At the school or district-level, there are certain interventions that should be put in place to assist low-income students on their way to success. Serving these students goes beyond just meeting their physiological needs for food and clothing, although those needs must be addressed. School districts need to get all of their students, but specifically low-SES students, engaged and excited about coming to school each day. One way that schools do that is by offering extracurricular activities. These activities are incentivized because for some of them, specifically sports, students cannot take part unless their grades are at least a high C. While these activities can serve as a motivational tool, there are not a lot of options available to students in impoverished communities. School districts need to work towards the implementation of meaningful extracurricular activities (Suits, 2016). Besides sports, schools could add activities for students interested in cooking, engineering, or even journaling. Schools can apply for grants that will supply students staying afterschool a meal each day. The extracurricular options are boundless, but these activities get low-SES students excited about coming to school. Another issue that needs intervention is the chronic absenteeism which is commonly found with students living in poverty (West, 2007). Absences are frequently caused by a lack of access to preventive healthcare and medicine when sick (Suits, 2016). Many students from low-income homes do not have access to the healthcare they need because of the cost. As a school district, connections with community agencies such as the local health department need to be utilized to help better serve these students and their families.



While physical sickness may be an issue for low-SES students, many of them struggle with mental health issues as well. Some of these illnesses stem from a constant state of worry about their home lives. These mental health issues are just as important to address as the physical ones. As a school, counseling is vital because “it’s providing them with support on that emotional level so that they can express themselves, let that information out, and then be able to go into the classroom and continue with their day, to continue with learning” (Superville, 2017). Better counseling services, specifically school psychologists, is vital in helping these students work through any anxieties or mixed emotions they may feel and then go back into the classroom to learn (Suits, 2016). It is difficult for students to learn if their home life is falling apart and leaving them with a constant sense of hopelessness. Counselors can help address the issues going on within the home while building a relationship of trust with the student.

### **Teachers**

The most effective intervention that a school can utilize to combat the effects of poverty on a student is an effective, high-quality teacher that understands the needs of each individual student (Morgan, 2012). In order to provide academic support interventions, teachers in economically disadvantaged communities need to be knowledgeable and up-to-date on the research-proven best practices and be utilizing them in their classroom (Superville, 2017). There needs to be high-quality materials without class bias and strong classroom supports put in place for students (Lamy, 2013).

A love of learning needs to be demonstrated and promoted each day a student walks into the classroom. Students need to be taught to persist when failure strikes instead of simply giving up. In the classroom, research-backed curriculum that requires higher-order thinking needs to be taught through the use of a mix of student-directed and teacher-directed activities that will

support and extend joyful learning (Lamy, 2013). One such intervention that can be implemented to make school joyful is the use of the arts and frequent movement during instruction (Gorski, 2013). It helps keep students engaged and gives them a desire to keep learning. Additionally, teachers of students from these homes need to be diligent about rejecting a deficit view of their students while utilizing pedagogy that is driven by high expectations and not lowered simply because of the economic status of the students (Gorski, 2013). Educators need to focus on student strengths in an intentional and meaningful way.

Instruction for these students from low-SES homes needs to be student-centered and individualized to their specific academic needs. Tutoring both during school and afterschool needs to be available to students who are struggling academically. Their progress in school also needs to be monitored closely in order for them to be successful. It is imperative that teachers of students from low-socioeconomic homes be diligent about staying up-to-date on exactly what each one of their students need. They cannot serve these students adequately if they do not stay knowledgeable on the lives of their students. All of the teachers on a team or that work with a student need to be interacting often in a professional learning community to determine the best course of action towards success for that student (Morgan, 2012). They need to be up-to-date on the best ways to help these students by attending professional development opportunities.

### **Parents**

In order to effectively address the needs of students within poverty, a necessary step is attempting continuously to bridge the gap between their home and school lives. This requires the teacher to reach out early and often to the parents or guardians of a student (Gorski, 2013). This means reaching out to them and demonstrating a desire to build a relationship with them, so they know their child is cared for outside of the home. This requires calling home when their child

does positive things in the classrooms instead of reserving the phone call for misbehavior. A lack of parental involvement is a massive issue that school districts who have a large percentage of low-income students are trying to overcome (West, 2007). Although a student's family may have several issues happening, it is vital to focus on the family's strengths (Gorski, 2013). It is easy to see them in a negative light at times, but this is not helpful to the student or the relationship the teacher should be trying to build with both.

As a teacher, it is vital to work alongside the school and district to connect the parents of low-SES students to resources they may need. Some parents may not have graduated high school and desire their GED in order to obtain a higher paying job. Schools need to be connecting them with the adult education centers in their area. If the student's parent from a low-income household is able to obtain their GED and step out of poverty, that directly impacts the student in a beneficial way (Superville, 2017). The student will then be able to get their physiological needs met and be at a lower risk of poverty impacting their life. Some parents are hesitant about taking part in their child's educational process because they do not feel like they can effectively discuss it with a teacher. Sometimes this is because of an educational barrier or a language barrier. For families who do not speak English, providing ESL (English as a Second Language) classes for interested parents or a translator to help parents feel more confident in fully participating in their student's education (Superville, 2017).

Before a child is even born, the school and community agencies need to be working together to ensure the child has every opportunity to start the first day of kindergarten ready to learn. Parents need to receive high-quality parent education ranging from how to avoid low birthweight to the proper nutrition for them and their child (Prince, Pepper, Brocato, 2006). Parents also need to know how to gain access to prenatal and postnatal healthcare if they cannot

afford (Prince, Pepper, Brocato, 2006). Schools need to be diligent about reaching out and connecting these families to the necessary programs to assist them. Overall when serving students, there needs to be a focus on building a stronger system of services and supports to assist both the child and their family's well-being (Fram, Cribbs-Miller, Van Horn).

### **Administrators**

Administrators in the schools, whether it be the principal of a building or a school official at the district's central office, play a critically important role in the overall environment of the school, which in turn, directly impacts the students. School officials need to work on lowering the student/teacher ratio in each classroom, so the teachers can have more time for individualized instruction and closer relationships with students (Morgan, 2012). School principals in particular play a role in working alongside teachers to lower disciplinary interventions, so they can be more effective at teaching. Also, administrators need to train teachers to better recognize signs that misbehaving students may need to take part in counseling services instead of just punishing the misbehavior (Superville, 2017). Teachers also require professional development in order to be knowledgeable on the best way to operate the classroom, so administrators need to provide those opportunities for them. Although school officials are vital in operating a successful school district, principals are on the frontline and know the needs of their students in each individual school. Therefore, when teachers are not doing an effective job addressing the individualized needs of the students in their classroom, they need to intervene and provide feedback for these teachers. They cannot stand idly by while their students are being neglected or not taught effectively. Principals are the ones in charge of making sure that their teachers are taking the necessary steps to assist each student in their class. They are the ones who make sure each teacher in their building is working diligently to address the needs of their students.

### **Policymakers**

In order for many of these low-socioeconomic schools to provide all of the necessary supports, more funding would be necessary. For each student that comes into a school, the district is given money for them to cover the cost of serving that student. Some students, specifically from lower-income families, need more funding to be spent on them because they are not getting their needs met within their homes. It costs more for the school to take care of them, but some schools are not receiving the necessary money to do so (Suitts, 2016). One such suggestion to help spread out the existing funding to all of the schools is to have better targeting of schools that require financial assistance (West, 2007). Some schools from wealthier districts are receiving money that they essentially do not need to serve their students well, while districts in economically disadvantaged areas cannot even afford textbooks. If the economically disadvantaged school district were given more money than the wealthier district, it would allow the district to provide a better chance of an equal educational opportunity, regardless of the student population that is being served.

### **Successful Interventions (School Data Trends)**

To compare and contrast how each of the seven school districts measured up against the literature reviews' suggested research-based interventions, each school district's answers were broken apart. In the first section, it is explained what average and high-achieving schools have in common. Then in the second section, the primary difference found between average and high-achieving school districts is discussed.

### **Average and High-Achieving Schools**

Each school district contacted provided examples of both physiological and academic supports that are provided for each student within their schools. Many of the schools utilized specific

grants or programs to provide for these low-income students (Schools A, B, F, G). For example, a couple of schools had applied and been given grants for homeless students to find housing and FRAM which helps provide free breakfast and lunch for all students (Schools A, F). Free supper was also granted for a few schools (Schools C, D, G). Backpack programs are utilized to send food home discreetly with students on the weekend. Most of the interventions are funded through programs such as Save the Children, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, or Gear Up. Other resources such as food and clothing can be provided through the Family Resource Youth Services Center (FRYSC) which can be found in every school district in Kentucky.

Interventions that are utilized to provide academic support to students from low-income homes come in a variety of ways. The FRYSC or community members provide free school supplies to students whose parents may not be able to afford it. It does not single a student out, but discreetly provides the necessary supplies. The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program provides both in-school and afterschool tutoring for many students within the seven districts that provided feedback (Schools, C, F, G). The in-school tutoring is provided for students who do not have the transportation available to be able to stay afterschool. Unfortunately, for some schools, they cannot provide in-school tutoring, so students only get access to tutoring when there is an extra bus available for transportation (Schools, C, E, F). Overall, most of the schools have some sort of improvement plan created and GAP goal for each low-income student. The school districts discussed the role differentiation plays in the classroom but suggested that it takes a capable teacher and time to provide students with the best support.

### **High-Achieving Schools**

While reading through all of the research on successful interventions for students struggling with the effects of poverty, one key intervention stood out: the relationship between the teacher

and the student as well as their family. While all of the other interventions are helpful and necessary to know, unless the teacher strives to build a relationship with their student and their family, it does not affect the academic achievement of students. When the three high-achieving schools were asked what they attributed their high test scores to, each school representative claimed that the relationship with their students helped them achieve better academic success. The School Representative for School A stated, “We put students first. Scores are important but the well-being and whole child is more important. Our students know we love and care for them...we do our best to offer them a way out of their current situation...through education.” Each of the school met the physiological needs of their students, but they also created a culture of caring within their school districts. Those relationships between the students and staff helped create an environment where students soared on test scores compared to nearby counties. These high-achieving schools took the time to truly know the needs of all of their students, had a plan on how to address them, and tried to meet them. They focused on helping the student on a personal basis then focused on their academic needs.

### **Conclusion**

Poverty is impacting the lives of students across the United States of America, but specifically in Eastern Kentucky. These students struggle learning each day because so many of their physiological needs are not being met. There are coming to school hungry with inadequate clothing and school supplies. For the most part, there is a large amount of research to suggest that a lack of parental involvement is also an issue that students from low-socioeconomic homes have. The situation may seem like a hopeless situation, but it is not. There are high-achieving schools in Kentucky. They are successful because they foster relationships between their teachers, students, and families. The successful schools work diligently to bridge the gap

between the home and school lives of each student, whether they are from a low-income household or not. Without a relationship, the teacher does not know what the student's individual needs are. These relationships are the key to success when trying to help students break the cycle of generational poverty. Educators must foster that trusting bond with the student in order to find out what needs that students truly have in order to utilize the correct interventions. They must reach out to parents and ask how they can assist them continuously. Some schools utilize mentors to foster more than one trusting adult relationship with students. Teachers talk to students and once they identify a potential obstacle that a student might be facing such as homelessness, living within poverty, or chronic absenteeism, they report it to the mentors (Superville, 2017). These mentors then reach out to the student and assist them in overcoming that potential obstacle before it even becomes an issue. It helps cut out a potential problem before it even occurs.

No matter what the student may walk through the school door dealing with, there should always be a trusting teacher there to help them fight past the problems that stand in their way. Students from low-socioeconomic households should have a trusting relationship with their teacher that allows an open dialogue between the two. Students should feel comfortable enough to open up to the teacher, so they can advocate for that student and their unmet needs. There is a plethora of possible interventions that assist students in meeting some of the needs that poverty causes in isolation. However; there is no intervention that is nearly as effective as a high-quality teacher who works diligently to build a healthy, trusting relationship with each of his or her student. In order to radically change the lives of thousands of students across America who are living within poverty, there will have to be a drastic shift towards fostering a strong bond



between teachers and students, teachers and parents, and teachers and the community in which they work.

**Results**

*Table 1:*

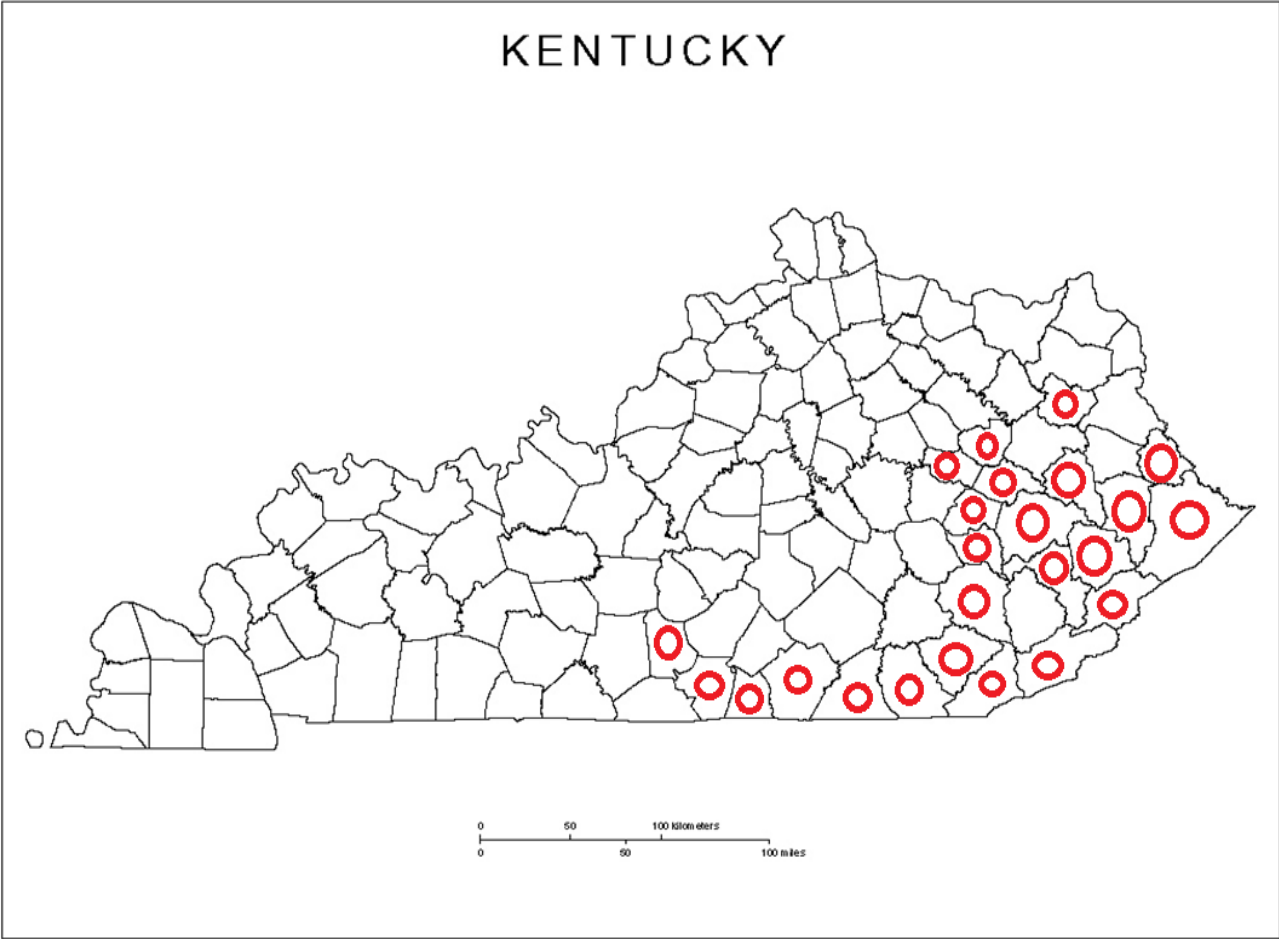
**K-Prep Scores (2016-2017):**

<b><u>County:</u></b>	<b><u>Free/Reduced Lunch:</u></b>	<b><u>Elementary Reading:</u></b>	<b><u>Elementary Math:</u></b>
Metcalfe	75.1	39.7	22.5
Cumberland	79.5	54.0	50.4
Clinton	77.1	42.1	42.1
Wayne	77.1	46.3	39.5
McCreary	83.1	53.5	49.8
<b>Whitley</b>	<b>80.7</b>	<b>64.3</b>	<b>56.9</b>
Knox	80.4	49.9	41.3
Bell	82.4	54.1	42.9
Clay	78.4	54.8	47.8
Harlan	82.8	54.5	37.2
<b>Knott</b>	<b>81.8</b>	<b>61.4</b>	<b>51.7</b>
Perry	77.7	56.7	48.5
Owsley	88.2	35.5	31.3

Lee	79.5	46.8	41.4
<b>Pike</b>	<b>75.0</b>	<b>63.9</b>	<b>55.1</b>
Letcher	76.0	53.6	42.4
Breathitt	78.5	44.8	43.3
Elliot	77.7	40.6	33.3
Menifee	75.5	37.5	20.1
Powell	75.7	52.2	43.2
Wolfe	82.4	45.8	32.5
<b>Floyd</b>	<b>78.4</b>	<b>76.2</b>	<b>67.4</b>
<b>Magoffin</b>	<b>78.3</b>	<b>58.9</b>	<b>61.9</b>
Martin	80.4	50.2	38.9

**Table 1:** The data collected in Table 1 was from the Kentucky School Report Card, which is an online database where information can be found about particular school districts across Kentucky. Each county that was selected for this study is listed in the left column. The percentage of students that qualified for Free & Reduced Lunch was found under the “Learning Environment” tab on the website. The K-PREP scores for the 2016-2017 school year was found under the “Assessment” tab on the website. The counties that are in bold are the schools that were considered high-achieving within this study.





**Map 2:** This map shows the twenty-four counties that were selected for this study. They each have at least 75% or more of the students in their school districts qualifying for Free & Reduced lunch.

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**Appendix:**Questions Asked of Average Schools and High-Achieving School Districts:

1. What are some of the needs of students from low-SES families look like within your school district?
2. Does the district or specific schools have any programs in place to help meet the needs that they may be struggling to have met at home?
3. Are there any academic supports in place to intervene for challenges that may arise in the classroom from their low-SES?
4. If you had more financial aid or resources, what would you like to have implemented in your school district for these students?
5. Have you tried something, and it was effective or not effective for this group of students overall?
6. Do you believe that there is a direct connection between socioeconomic status and academic achievement in your school district? Why or why not?

Question Asked of High-Achieving School Districts Only:

1. Your school has notable test scores that stood out when compared to the rest of Eastern Kentucky school districts. Why do you think that is? Do you have a strong focus on something in your school district that you believe explains that difference?