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District Improvement Plan for Developing the Pedagogical Skills to Effectively Meet the Academic and Social-Emotional Needs of Low SES Students

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District Improvement Plan for Developing the Pedagogical Skills to Effectively Meet the
Academic and Social-Emotional Needs of Low SES Students

By

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CAPSTONE

For the Degree of Doctorate of Education, Ed.D.

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Capstone Committee

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Abstract

Worth School District 127 is located in the south suburbs of Chicago and maintains a K-8 student population of approximately 1,100. Sixty percent of Worth School District 127's student population are considered to be of low socio-economic status (low SES) with the rate steadily increasing over the course of the last five years. Consequently, the growing number of students coming from low income backgrounds enrolled in Worth School District 127 has created a scenario where teacher exposure to the challenging academic, behavior, and social emotional scenarios that accompany the enrollment of this student demographic has increased. As a result, there has emerged a significant need to support District 127's teachers in a manner where they develop the appropriate strategies necessary to face the unique challenges that come with meeting the needs of low SES students. Therefore, the following capstone served as a framework in the development of a district improvement plan comprised of goals that strive to provide the educational staff of District 127 with the support they need to effectively meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

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Governors State University
Doctorate of Interdisciplinary Leadership Program

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

School districts today are faced with many challenges from a variety of sources. Despite the increasing number of governmental mandates, state and federal budget cuts, and financial challenges that are the result of property value stagnation, schools are still expected to find ways to ensure that all students are learning and growing successfully. One of the biggest challenges that many schools face is the growing number of students of low socio-economic status (low SES) enrolled who lack the academic resources that their peers from higher income backgrounds have at their disposal.

In the present day United States, income inequality has grown significantly over the last few decades, subsequently causing the gap between high-income and low-income families to grow substantially. The aggressive increase in income disparity between high-income families who have more resources available to them versus low-income families who do not has facilitated a growing achievement gap between students from the different demographic groups (Reardon, 2013). To add, the typical characteristics of American families that have transformed significantly over the course of the last forty years have also facilitated a bigger gap between high-income and low-income family structures (Reardon, 2013).

Consequently, McLanahan (2004) and Schwartz & Mare (2005) highlighted that students coming from high-income backgrounds are typically raised by two parents with college degrees; in contrast to low-income students who are more likely to be raised by single mothers with lower levels of educational achievement. Ormrod (2007) pointed out that many of these students face a number of unique challenges to their academic success. These challenges include having learning disabilities and emotional issues which impede their academic progress,

coming from cultural backgrounds that do not easily assimilate into the dominant culture within their schools, and living in home settings where academic success is not a priority.

In addition, students from lower income backgrounds have historically been less successful than their peers on most measurements of academic success such as test scores and grades (Reardon, 2013). To add, Saez (2012) stated that economic inequality represents the main source of academic inequality between students of high and low socioeconomic status in the United States. Putnam, Frederick, and Snellman (2012) pointed out that students from this demographic also typically shy away from extracurricular activities, sports, community activities, formal academic groups, and volunteer activities that would connect them to a school community in a positive manner.

The combination of the above mentioned trends in schools and society play a significant role in influencing academic success for students. The growing level of uncertainty regarding children's chances in moving up the social ladder and the necessity of education for career advancement has created a trend where parents are increasingly anxious about their children's academic experiences (Reardon, 2013). Subsequently, leading to intensified competition among families in the interest of their children's academic success (Reardon, 2013). A resulting consequence of this competition is a statistic highlighted by Kornrich and Furstenberg (2013) which pointed out that high-income families spend approximately seven times more on their children's academic development than their low-income counterparts. Therefore, facilitating the trend of growing academic inequalities between students living in high-income settings versus those in low-income homes regarding the time and money devoted toward providing children with the necessary resources to help them learn and grow successfully (Reardon, 2013).

Subsequently, educators are forced into scenarios where they are required to seek out ways to help low income students confront the aforementioned challenges in order to have a chance to successfully learn and grow. Regardless of the number of low SES students present in a school as well as the unique academic and social-emotional needs they present, it is the responsibility of educators to help all students become confident, productive, and successful learners (Pransky & Bailey, 2002). Schools and/or school districts that are successful in addressing the needs of these students do so as a result of being populated with educators who are committed to equitably meeting the educational needs of every student (Parrett & Budge, 2009).

In order to successfully address the academic needs of low SES students, educators must develop and maintain a stronger understanding of the true characteristics associated with the culture of poverty (Gorski, 2008). It starts with dispelling the myths that exist regarding poverty. Gorski (2008) described these myths in the following manner: poor people are unmotivated and have weak work ethics, are uninvolved in their children's learning because they do not value education, are linguistically deficient, and tend to abuse drugs and alcohol.

Gorski (2008) dispelled these myths by providing the following data. First, eighty-three percent of children from low-income families have at least one parent working. Second, low-income parents are just as concerned about their children's academic experiences as wealthy parents. However, they do not have the ability to become directly connected with their children's schools because they are most likely working multiple jobs at odd hours and are not able to afford to take time off from work in order to do things such as meet with teachers or volunteer for school activities. Third, every language, regardless of social constructs, contains complex structures and grammatical rules. Finally, research shows that wealthier people are

more likely than poor people to abuse drugs and alcohol. The aforementioned myths regarding poverty detailed by Gorski's (2008) work highlight that if the right pedagogical strategies are implemented, educators and schools have the capacity to help low income students successfully learn and grow.

As the trend toward greater school accountability for the academic success of all students regardless of their academic and social backgrounds has grown in recent years, so has the research regarding strategies schools should employ in order to effectively support low SES students. In order to develop a systemic approach that addresses the unique needs of low SES students, educational leaders must find ways to provide their teachers with the support they need to help these students overcome the impediments to academic success they typically face. This approach must include helping educators develop the strategies and professional perspectives necessary to effectively work with low income students in a way that helps them have the best chance of reaching their full potential (Simons & Friedman, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Worth School District 127 is located in the south suburbs of Chicago and maintains a K-8 student population of approximately 1,100. The district consists of two elementary schools and one middle school. The district is not immune to the growing enrollment of higher concentrations of low SES students as well as the need for its educators to understand and confront the aforementioned myths about poverty. Sixty percent of Worth School District 127's student population qualify as low SES with the rate steadily increasing over the course of the last five years. A trend that is also prevalent throughout most of the south suburbs of Chicago.

Living in low income settings exposes families to stress which can affect childhood development (Haig, 2014). Examples of stress associated with low income backgrounds include

lack of food, uncertain housing, crime, and high risk pregnancies which are all factors research shows impacts cognitive development in children (Willingham, 2012). In addition, students who experience these difficult life situations respond with a typical survival mindset which include withdrawing, acting out, or going numb which align with the survival modes of flight, fight, or freeze (Souers & Hall, 2016). Consequently, the growing number of low SES students enrolled in District 127 has created a scenario where there has been a steady increase of teacher exposure to the challenging academic, behavioral, and social emotional scenarios that accompany the enrollment of students from this demographic. Although most of the teachers in District 127 have been trained to differentiate their instruction in order to meet the varying academic needs of students, there is an additional need to support teachers in a manner that helps them utilize specific pedagogical strategies that effectively work with low SES students.

The goal of such professional development should therefore focus on helping District 127's teachers understand the strategies and perspectives necessary to face the challenges that come with meeting the needs of low SES students who tend to come to school behind their peers as it relates to their academic progress (Petrilli, 2013). Therefore, district improvement goals are needed in order to provide the educators of Worth School District 127 with the support and subsequent professional development they need to successfully meet the academic and social-emotional needs of low SES students enrolled in the district.

Significance of the Need for a District Improvement Plan

The educators in the two elementary schools as well as the middle school in Worth School District 127 consist of highly dedicated individuals who work hard to do their best to meet the needs of all students. However, the growing percentage of low SES students with multiple learning and emotional needs has reached a tipping point within the organization. This trend has caused a

growing number of educators throughout the district to question their efficacy as teachers and administrators as a result of facing greater barriers in helping these students learn and grow successfully. Consequently, there is a need for the leadership of Worth School District 127 to conduct a meaningful analysis of what is needed in order to provide its educators with the support necessary to effectively meet the needs of low SES students.

An organizational challenge that the staff of Worth School District 127 faces is the need to develop an understanding of how to best meet the needs of the increasing number of students from low income backgrounds. Although a strong majority of District 127's staff strive to do whatever is necessary to meet the needs of all students, many of them struggle to understand the specific strategies and perspectives needed in order to effectively work with low SES students. Bradford, Duncan, and Tarcy (2000) stated that before an organization can develop a strategy for success, it needs to know its potential and take advantage of its strengths while avoiding its weaknesses.

However, this is not easy as a result of the additional time and effort that is required to respond to and meet the needs of lower income students who typically come to school without an adequate understanding of how to speak, behave, and learn in a manner that is appropriate for a typical school setting (Payne, 2008). Consequently, there are a growing number of teachers in Worth School District 127 who either feel that they are no longer capable of meeting the needs of these students and/or who have grown frustrated in their attempts to do so. The frustration and lack of confidence that District 127's teachers feel is due to inadequate exposure to the support, information, and knowledge they need to develop and implement the strategies required to effectively work with low income students. Consequently, the need for Worth School District 127 to develop a district improvement plan consisting of goals that will strive to address this problem is critical. It is important because the increasing enrollment of more low income

students is a trend that is here to stay and represents an essential component of what teachers are required to do in their work with young people.

The relevant data needed to develop meaningful district improvement goals in this area was obtained through the administration of anonymous on-line surveys to forty-one certified teachers in Worth School District 127 who administer grades to students and consented to participate in the study. In addition, follow-up interviews with teachers who volunteered were conducted in order to obtain an in-depth analysis regarding their perceptions of low SES students as well as what they feel they need to effectively work with students from this demographic. In order to ensure that student perspectives were part of the process of understanding how to best meet the needs of low SES students, 144 randomly selected students were provided with the opportunity to anonymously complete on-line surveys.

The objective of the teacher on-line surveys, supported by information derived from the student surveys, was to obtain data that identifies the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of teachers regarding low SES students as well as the support they believe is necessary to help these students learn and grow successfully. In addition, the goal of the teacher interviews was to obtain first-hand accounts of their perceptions regarding the needs of low SES students along with the support they feel they have and need in order to utilize pedagogical strategies that work best with low SES students.

The information gathered from both the teacher surveys and interviews, supported by data collected from the student surveys, guided the development of a district improvement plan made up of goals that strive to provide the educators of District 127 with the support they need to effectively meet the needs of low SES students. Additional information discussed in the

following review of literature provided a relevant framework, in conjunction with the data collected for this study, in the development of district improvement goals for District 127 that focus on supporting educators in their work with low SES students.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The review of research provides a more in-depth understanding detailing the challenges students of low socio-economic status (low SES) face as well as what educators can do to help them. Parrett and Budge's (2009) study provided examples of schools that successfully helped students overcome the negative impact poverty typically has on learning and growth. A common agenda of the educators in these schools focused on goals that strived to successfully teach every student. Subsequently, the following research discussed in this section also provides information detailing effective pedagogical and programmatic strategies schools have utilized successfully in working with students from low income backgrounds. Therefore, the research summarized in this section served as a guiding component in the development of a district improvement plan for District 127 that contains goals which seek to provide teachers with what they need in order to effectively work with low SES students.

The district improvement goals developed in this study included a focus on addressing conflicting viewpoints regarding teacher perceptions about the academic experiences they provide students in comparison to their perceptions about the performance and motivation of low SES students. In addition, the need for additional professional development to help District 127's staff develop the perspectives and strategies they need to meet the unique needs of low income students was an important factor. Finally, the implementation of strategies that help low

income students feel more positive connections with the teachers and schools of District 127 was also a relevant priority in the development of district improvement goals associated with the focus of this study.

As a result of student achievement being the product of how well a school operates (Chrisman, 2005), the review of literature includes an examination of the pedagogical and programmatic strategies schools have effectively utilized in order to meet the needs of low SES students. In addition, the impact of student/teacher relationships was also a component of the research highlighted for this study because as students work through the expectations and social pressures of school, the support they receive via adult connections is relevant (Tillery, Varjas, Roach, Kuperminc, & Meyers, 2013). Finally, research detailing leadership strategies that effectively support teachers as they confront the challenges associated with meeting the needs of low income students was discussed because active administrative support is important in ensuring teachers are satisfied in their work environments (Albrecht, Johns, Mounstevan, & Olorunda, 2009).

The research reviewed for this study facilitated a better understanding of the relevant components necessary for the development of a district improvement plan for District 127 that focuses on goals which strive to provide its educators with the support they need to best serve low SES students. Although it has been well documented that inequitable funding, poor facilities, and inadequate resources impact the growth of students from low income backgrounds, an examination of teacher expectations and attitudes toward students is necessary (White-Clark, 2005). In addition, Almy, Theokas, and Education Trust (2010) stated that among the variables that impact the academic success of students, the quality of teachers is the most important. Therefore, reviewing research that focuses on the role teachers play in meeting the needs of low

income students represents a logical place to begin for the review of the relevant literature for this study.

The Role Teachers Play in Meeting the Needs of Low SES Students

As a result of the steady increase in the number of students from low income backgrounds enrolling into schools, it has become imperative for educators to develop and implement pedagogical strategies that effectively meet the unique and challenging needs of these students. Teachers working with low SES students need to develop classroom-level responses to the stresses children living in poverty experience which impact their ability to succeed in school (Cettina, 2015). Examples of applicable strategies include but are not limited to creating time for students to make up schoolwork, creating procedures where students clearly understand expectations, making time to listen to what students say they need, connecting curriculum to their interests (Landman, 2014), and avoiding punitive measures for poor behavior or poor school performance (Cettina, 2015).

Regardless of the number of low SES students in a school as well as the many challenges they face that inhibit academic and social emotional growth, educators need to be prepared and motivated to address the challenges of working with students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Schaffer, 2011). Subsequently, it is crucial for educators to be exposed to professional development opportunities that will allow them to help students from low-income backgrounds develop and maintain the resilience they need to be successful in school (Masten, Fiat, Labella, & Strack, 2015).

In addition, a school that is successful in addressing the needs of low SES students must also employ educators who demonstrate the empathy these students need in confronting the economic hardships that impede their attempts to be successful in school as well as in life (Paik

& Claremont Graduate University, 2006). The results of Fymier and Houser's (2000) research indicated that when students feel closely connected to their teachers, they maintain a more positive mindset toward their classes and the content they are learning. Therefore, teachers who work with students from low-income backgrounds need to develop an empathetic understanding of the roadblocks such as unstable housing, food insecurity, loss of utilities, lack of access to healthcare, school disruption, and exposure to community hardships (Cettina, 2015) that low income students typically face.

Educators who work with low-income students need to develop an understanding that these students come to school confronting personal challenges that inhibit their chances of being successful in school. In general, these students live in homes where academic development is stymied because their parents have low-wage jobs or are frequently out of work. Consequently, generating stressful disruptions such as frequent moves, switching of schools, and loss of continuous instruction (Rothstein, 2008). In addition, these students have fewer positive role models in their lives and receive less adult attention (Rothstein, 2008). To add, low SES students typically go on fewer cross-country trips, fewer visits to museums and zoos, and are less involved in organized activities that could help develop their ambition, cultural awareness, and self-confidence (Rothstein, 2008). Consequently, the aforementioned disadvantages collectively facilitate the development of achievement gaps for these students because of the aforementioned dynamics that accompany their lower socio-economic status (Rothstein, 2008).

In addition to achievement gaps, when students from low-income backgrounds consistently confront the type of personal and educational challenges that were discussed earlier in this section, it impacts their emotional well-being. Pasi's (1997) study determined that emotional well-being is an important factor in the facilitation of academic achievement. A key

factor that helps young people living in low-income settings to overcome the recurring threats to their academic success and personal well-being is strong relationships with the teachers they interact with on a daily basis (Sadowski, 2013). Constructive student/teacher relationships have been shown to impact student learning in a manner that effectively fosters learning and growth (Eiss, 1969). Subsequently, in order for low SES students to have a chance to overcome the challenges they face to their learning and growth, positive relationships with their teachers are a prerequisite. Therefore, a study of the research discussing the impact of student/teacher relationships on academic achievement was a relevant component in the development of school improvement goals for Worth School District 127.

Skills That Foster Positive Student/Teacher Relationships

Positive relationships with teachers represents an important factor that helps low SES students overcome the personal, family, and societal challenges they face on a daily basis. It is not enough for educators to promote better relationships with students, proven strategies must be utilized that foster student success (Sterrett, 2012). Strategies promoted by Sterrett (2012) that would benefit low income students in District 127 emphasize relationship building versus discipline in a manner where teachers reflect on their vision, actions, and assumptions about students. Such strategies include the use of language that reinforces a positive vision and expectations, the creation of supportive classroom communities as well as supportive relationships with individual students (Sterrett, 2012). Teachers who successfully develop positive relationships with low SES students through the utilization of the aforementioned strategies maintain and utilize specific skills that facilitate the process.

To start, teachers who are successful in establishing strong relationships with their students make it a priority to listen to them in order to learn where they are coming from and

what they need in order to be successful. Siegel and Hartzel (2003) describe these teachers as the ones who are empathetic listeners who have the ability to consider a student's point of view without neglecting their own. Research has demonstrated that cultural differences between teachers and students does have a negative effect on student achievement (White-Clark, 2005). Therefore, when teachers make it a priority to listen to students from low-income backgrounds in order to develop an understanding of who they are as well as their unique needs, they increase the probability of developing strong relationships with students that facilitate academic and social emotional growth.

In addition to being good listeners, teachers who are generally adept at fostering positive relationships with students also demonstrate a high degree of flexibility in their professional approach. Teachers who are flexible and have the ability to adapt what they are doing in order to meet the needs of their students have a greater chance of successfully connecting with them. They do so by constantly paying attention to how their students feel, determining the reasons behind their behaviors, and finding ways to keep them engaged by always making them feel they are understood as young people (Warshof & Rappaport, 2013). In addition, adolescents want to be seen as the people they are with real-world problems, concerns, and dreams for the future (Sadowski, 2013). Subsequently, teachers who maintain a flexible, open-minded approach in their interactions with low income students are better equipped to develop strong student/teacher relationships in a manner that facilitates effective learning and growth.

In addition to the aforementioned strategies teachers must utilize to foster good connections with students, there are a series of additional skills they should strive to employ if they are dedicated to developing positive relationships with their students. The first skill is playfulness, where teachers are able to remain lighthearted during difficult situations which helps

to reduce the intensity of such moments (Hughes, 2007). To add, teachers who demonstrate the art of acceptance in their interactions with students make it clear that they understand that their students come from difficult situations but do not judge them as human beings even though they may have made some bad choices (Warshof & Rappaport, 2013).

In addition to being playful and accepting in their interactions with students, teachers committed to developing positive relationships with them are continuously curious about students and consistently ask the essential questions that help them discover and explore what makes students tick (Hughes, 2007). To add, teachers who demonstrate high levels of empathy for their students continuously strive to develop an understanding of their life experiences (Warshof & Rappaport, 2013) in a manner that facilitates strong student/teacher connections.

In order for low SES students to have the best chance of overcoming the roadblocks they typically face, they need teachers who are playful, accepting, curious, and empathetic. Their teachers also need to be intrinsically driven to develop positive relationships with them as a means of facilitating learning and growth. Low SES students therefore must have educators who are motivated by the belief that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, are entitled to the same educational experiences as their peers (Simons & Friedman, 2008). These are teachers who successfully utilize the strategies necessary to construct positive relationships with students. Thus, the employment, development, and retention of teachers who understand the importance of developing positive relationships with students from low income backgrounds should be a major priority of schools.

Low SES students need teachers who are willing and able to professionally grow in a manner that provides them with the best chance to be successful in an educational setting. In order for schools to be successful in meeting the needs of lower income students, they must hire,

develop, and retain educators whose actions provide the layers of support low SES students need in order to maximize their learning (Sterrett, 2011). These are the type of teachers that continuously seek to provide students in this demographic with the guidance and support they need in order to mitigate the impact in which the challenges they face can have on the level of effort they devote to their academic growth (Croniger & Lee, 2001). These teachers maintain a clear understanding that professional growth is critical in order to successfully work with low SES students because it is a complex endeavor that involves the need to address a myriad of challenges. In addition to the importance of hiring, developing, and retaining teachers who are able and willing to professionally grow in a manner that best meets the needs of low income students, schools must also have in place structures that assist teachers in their attempts to provide the support these students need in order to successfully learn and grow (Sterrett, 2012).

There are a number of programs and activities schools can employ in order to facilitate effective relationship building between teachers and students. Sadowski (2013) described some examples of the types of school-based programs that effectively serve this purpose. Advisory programs where teachers work with small groups of students over several years such as gay-straight alliances and immigrant student clubs, represent some examples of how schools can create safe situations where students can discuss their frustrations, concerns, and successes in a setting where they engage in trusting, positive interactions with adults. When schools employ more formalized programs that facilitate positive and constructive interactions between students and caring school personnel, it becomes easier for teachers to make positive connections with students. These are the type of connections with adults who are not their parents that Garnezy (1993) and Rutter (1987) state can protect low SES students from the variety of risks to their well-being that they regularly confront.

In order for schools to maintain educational settings that foster strong connections between students and teachers, a culture where teachers prioritize the development of positive student/teacher relationships must be in place. In addition, since schools are places where the emotional disposition of students plays a significant role in their success, schools need to make it a priority to focus on this area of student life in order to ensure they are successful in the educational process (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2003). Therefore, in order for schools to effectively meet the academic and social-emotional needs of low SES students, it is imperative for them to employ, develop, and retain teachers who have the caring, flexible mindsets necessary to facilitate positive student/teacher relationships, while at the same time developing effective programs that support teachers in their attempts to do so.

In summary, it is important for low SES students to be in classrooms where teachers connect with them using methods that show they are aware of the unique challenges the students face and subsequently demonstrate a proactive interest in facilitating successful learning and growth (Warshof & Rappaport, 2013). However, even the best of teachers cannot meet the needs of their students in an optimal manner without adequate support from the leadership within their schools and/or districts. Therefore, schools and/or districts need leaders who actively support teachers by continuously striving to do whatever it takes to support them in their work toward meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of low SES students (Chenoweth, 2010).

Leadership Traits that Support Teachers Who Work with Low SES Students

Low SES students need educational leaders who are passionate about supporting teachers in their efforts to help low income students overcome the challenges they face. Schools that effectively meet the needs of low SES students are led by administrators who understand that equitable and relevant student learning will not occur without strong leadership (Kose, 2007).

Educational leaders committed to meeting the needs of low SES students typically align their professional practices with Duncan-Andrade's (2009) and Wood's (2011) ideas which stated that the key to transforming schools and communities in distress is creating and facilitating a genuine sense of hope among all its stakeholders.

In Lambert's (2005) study of schools where strong leadership facilitated effective and sustained school improvement efforts, she identified common characteristics. In each school, a culture of shared responsibility and distributed leadership among the staff facilitated the development of a culture that focused on a vision for school improvement that concentrated on students first. Consequently, it is imperative that educational leaders in school settings make it a priority to ensure that a student first mindset is paramount in order to effectively meet the unique academic and social emotional needs of students from low income backgrounds.

There are a number of identified characteristics that school leaders are required to demonstrate in order to foster an organizational culture that effectively supports teachers in their efforts to meet the needs of lower income students. Lambert's (2005) study identified common characteristics among educational leaders who successfully lead their schools in meeting the needs of low SES students. These leaders had a clear understanding of themselves and their values; a strong belief in equity and a democratic process; consistently were strategic in their approach to the school improvement process; maintained a strong knowledge of effective pedagogy; and knew how to effectively empower the people around them as well as the organization as a whole. For these reasons, schools and districts that are successful in working with low SES students typically employ leaders who establish organizational cultures in which students know their teachers care enough about them to make sure they know how to survive in

school (Payne, 2008). These leaders do so by making it a priority to influence and guide their teachers' professional growth in a manner that allows them to best serve low income students.

Subsequently, strong educational leaders continuously focus on developing the professional talents of all the educators in their buildings. They create systems that build the capacity and problem-solving skills of their teachers while establishing a professional culture in which many opportunities occur where collective knowledge and experiences are shared (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). Educational leaders who do so make it a priority to always provide teachers with the support and professional development they need to successfully carry out their jobs (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). These leaders also understand the importance of ensuring that their teachers are consistently doing what is expected of them in order to effectively meet the needs of their students with fidelity.

Educational leaders who are successful in supporting teachers in their work with low SES students are ones who foster organizational climates that encourage teachers to do whatever is necessary to help all students learn and grow. School administrators who are successful leaders in high need schools consistently monitor what creates successful situations in their schools and ensure that failures are learning opportunities for them and their staff (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). These are leaders who inspire and lead new and challenging innovations while demonstrating empathy with teachers and staff on a personal level (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004) as they navigate through the complex waters of figuring out what works best in meeting the needs of low SES students.

In these scenarios, school leaders consistently utilize data driven evidence in order to determine which initiatives and strategies successfully meet the needs of students and which do not. They ensure that teachers are aware of the most current educational theories and practices

and facilitate conversations about these practices that become an integral component of the school culture (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). At the same time, they make sure to support their teachers in utilizing these empirically based methods in a manner that effectively helps low income students learn and grow successfully.

In addition, effective educational leaders are always aware of what is going on in their schools and utilize the subsequent information they have to address current and potential problems (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Consequently, if evidence does not support continuing various school programs and/or initiatives in meeting the needs of students, effective school leaders steer their staff away from these programs and support them in finding ones that work (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013). Educational leaders who ensure that their schools always research and employ new strategies and programs that help low income students learn and grow when existing strategies and programs are ineffective, oversee schools that provide low income students with optimal chances to be successful in school.

The leadership traits listed above represent the common characteristics that Chenoweth and Theokas (2013) found reside in many successful educational leaders who preside over schools with continuously growing percentages of low SES students. These are educational leaders who believe that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have a right to a high quality education. As a result, these leaders continuously analyze the processes and programs they have in place within their schools in order to ensure that the needs of individual students are met (Simons & Friedman, 2008). These educational leaders effectively promote and model to all the educators in their buildings the professional approach required to effectively meet the needs of low SES students. In addition, they continuously provide the support their

staff need in order to develop the professional strategies and mindsets necessary to effectively work with students from this demographic.

In order for schools and districts to be successful in meeting the academic and social emotional needs of its students, strong leadership must be in place. Successful educational leaders continuously strive to provide teachers the support they need in order to successfully execute their jobs in helping students to learn and grow (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, Anderson, and Service Educational Research's (2010) research demonstrated that school leadership is key to school improvement. More specifically, effective leadership is the most important variable that determines how successful a school is in addressing the challenges that accompany meeting the needs of disadvantaged students (Rice & National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Educational Research Urban Institute, 2010). Educational leaders must set the tone and model the way in order to ensure that their schools are constantly finding ways to help low SES students find success in their buildings. Therefore, educational leaders must always make it a priority to provide their teachers with the support they need in order to develop and maintain the pedagogical strategies necessary to make this happen.

Summary

With the ever-increasing number of low SES students attending Worth School District 127, it has become critical for educators in the district to utilize pedagogical strategies that are proven to help these students learn and grow successfully. In addition, research has shown that in order to effectively impact the learning of low SES students moving forward, it will be essential for District 127's teachers to develop constructive personal connections with them. The pedagogical strategies teachers utilize and the development of strong student-teacher

relationships represent important variables in the process of meeting the needs of low income students. However, the research shows that in order for both students and teachers to have the best chances to reach their full potential in educational settings, the effectiveness of school leadership is also a critical component.

In addition to working with teachers who are dedicated to their responsibilities of finding ways to help students overcome the roadblocks they face to academic success, low SES students need educational leaders who maintain the same level of dedication. Consequently, the leadership practices of District 127's administrators will need to align with the typical practices shown by research to foster school climates that best support teachers in their work with low income students. Such practices, when implemented, facilitate a culture where the needs of students are the main priority while educators are provided the professional growth and support they need to do their best in their work with low SES students.

As a result, the parameters in developing district improvement goals for Worth School District 127 were twofold. First, identify the support teachers need to ensure that effective pedagogical strategies and professional perspectives are employed which foster positive, effective educational settings that benefit low SES students. Second, guide the leaders of District 127 in a manner that ensures they provide the support and professional development teachers need to effectively meet the unique academic and social-emotional needs of low SES students throughout the district. In addition to the research discussed in this section, the following research methodology was employed in order to obtain relevant data that guided the development of a district improvement plan for District 127 comprised of specified goals that strive to support teachers in their objective to better meet the needs of low income students.

Chapter III

Methodology

There is a need in Worth School District 127 for district improvement goals that provide teachers with the support they need to effectively work with students of low socio-economic status (low SES). Therefore, this study utilized data from teachers and students to identify the support teachers in District 127 need in order to successfully work with low SES students. Once the collection and analyzation of data for this study took place, the creation of a district improvement plan containing goals that seek to provide this type of support for teachers in their work with low SES students took place. This work was important and necessary because Worth School District 127 is facing the trend that is prevalent throughout suburban Cook County where a growing number of low income students continue to enroll at a steady pace.

Subsequently, in order for low SES students to have a chance of overcoming the many challenges that impede their academic growth, schools need to make it a priority to analyze the unique needs of students from this demographic and then imbed what is learned into the school improvement process. It is a school's responsibility to meet the needs of low SES students through the development of school improvement initiatives that address the socioeconomic inequalities that negatively impact the academic progress of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Rothstein, 2008). Consequently, leadership is key in facilitating the classroom support and school settings necessary for stakeholders within a school community to maintain a unified and inspired sense of purpose (Albrecht et al., 2009). Therefore, as a member of District 127's administrative team, the researcher who constructed this capstone felt it was imperative to conduct a study that identified the support teachers need to best serve the entrenched and growing population of low SES students enrolled in the district.

Objective of Research and Subsequent School Improvement Goals

This study quantitatively and qualitatively identified the support the educators of Worth School District 127 need in order to develop the pedagogical strategies and professional perspectives necessary to best meet the needs of low SES students. In order to gather the relevant data needed to identify those support systems, anonymous on-line surveys were completed by forty-one certified teachers at all grade levels who issue grades to students. Twenty-three of the respondents were from Worth Junior High School, eleven from Worthwoods Elementary School, and seven from Worth Elementary School. Ten certified staff members who completed the surveys volunteered to participate in one-on-one follow-up interviews in order to expound on their thoughts.

In addition, 144 randomly selected students from grades 4th through 8th were provided the opportunity to complete anonymous on-line surveys under teacher supervision while in class. The on-line surveys, along with the voluntary follow-up one-on-one interviews with teachers, facilitated the accumulation of data from teachers and students that identified common attitudes, beliefs, and practices that exist regarding the experiences of low SES students. Consequently, the quantitative and qualitative data obtained for this study facilitated the identification of support teachers in District 127 need in order for the academic and social-emotional needs of low SES students to be effectively met.

Research Design

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative research protocols were utilized to obtain the viewpoints of educators in Worth School District 127 who issue grades. The data collected for this study detailed teacher perceptions of low income students, the instruction and support systems that are utilized to aid these students, and the support teachers believe is still needed in

order to do so. In addition, quantitative measures were utilized to facilitate the accumulation of data detailing student perceptions about their connections with their teachers, the instructional approach of their teachers, and the climate of their schools. The collected quantitative data, as well as the qualitative data, served as foundational components in the identification of district improvement goals that aim to provide District 127's staff with the support they need to effectively work with low SES students. What made the data relevant and foundational in the development of district improvement goals for this study was that it was collected from two of the most important stakeholders in the educational process, teachers and students.

Methodology

The target populations for this study were members of Worth School District 127's K-8 teaching staff who issue grades to students as well as randomly selected 4th through 8th grade students enrolled in Worth School District 127. Approximately seventy teachers were asked to anonymously participate in a 23 question on-line survey. The forty-one teachers who took the on-line survey were provided the opportunity to voluntarily participate in follow up interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes. Ten of the teachers who took the on-line survey subsequently participated in follow up interviews. In addition, a randomly selected group of one hundred forty-four 4th through 8th grade students anonymously took a 27 question on-line survey.

The aforementioned research strategy represented a convergent parallel mixed methods design which utilized the collection of quantitative data and qualitative data at the same time (Creswell, 2015). This facilitated the merging of both data sets where the results were used to understand the research problem (Creswell, 2015). The mixed methods research design represented the best fit for this study because it allowed for the incorporation of a deeper analysis of the collected quantitative data (Creswell, 2015) via the inclusion of anecdotal information

provided by District 127's teachers; the stakeholders most responsible for implementing school improvement goals.

Biesta and Burbules (2003) stated that regardless of researcher bias for either quantitative or qualitative research, all research in the social sciences strives to develop a stronger understanding of human beings and the environments in which they live and grow. In this case, the researcher needed to develop a comprehensive understanding of how District 127 can best meet the needs of low SES students. Therefore, an analysis of quantitative data identifying trends within the district regarding teacher and student experiences along with qualitative data from teachers that provided a more in-depth understanding of those trends was essential for this study.

In the development of a district improvement plan consisting of goals focused on supporting teachers in meeting the needs of low SES students, it was necessary to incorporate a quantitative process of collecting meaningful data that identified teacher and student perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the district in meeting the needs of students from this demographic. Researchers who are strong proponents of the quantitative approach to research believe that research in the areas of social sciences should be objective (Johnson & Onwuebuze, 2004). The utilization of anonymous on-line teacher and student surveys for this study allowed for the collection of relevant, objective quantitative data regarding current trends within District 127 in relation to the experiences of students from low income backgrounds.

The quantitative data collected allowed the researcher to identify research problems via identified trends (Creswell, 2015) that facilitated the development of relevant district improvement goals for District 127 that aim to support teachers in meeting the unique needs of

low income students. As important as it is to utilize valid quantitative data as part of the process in the development of school improvement initiatives, it is equally important for educational leaders to obtain the input of their staff because they are directly impacted by any decisions related to school improvement. Therefore, qualitative research methods were utilized in conjunction with quantitative measures in order to ensure that teachers in District 127 were given the opportunity to provide direct input in the development of district improvement goals related to this study.

The incorporation of voluntary teacher interviews which allowed teachers to expound on the trends identified within the quantitative research conducted for this study ensured that a comprehensive collection of information was gathered as part of the development of district improvement goals. This mixed-method approach was appropriate for this study because in the area of social and behavioral sciences, in order to develop an understanding of trends and possible solutions to problems, an examination of different perspectives such as stakeholder intentions, experiences, attitudes, and cultural awareness are essential (de Jong, 2003). Therefore, the inclusion of anecdotal data from the voluntary teacher interviews served as an effective accompaniment to the quantitative data that was also collected because it facilitated the type of mixed-methods research which fostered the identification of applicable techniques and strategies that are aligned to the professional practice of the researcher (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The on-line surveys as well as the follow-up teacher interviews allowed the educational leader in District 127 who conducted this study to utilize both quantitative and qualitative data in a manner that supported the development of district improvement goals. These goals will strive to effectively meet the needs of students from low-income backgrounds. School/district

improvement goals that subsequently strive to identify and provide educators with the support to develop the pedagogical strategies and professional perspectives are necessary to best meet the needs of the district's low SES students.

Sampling Plan

In order to obtain the necessary data that facilitated the development of district improvement objectives for Worth School District 127, the use of non-probability sampling, where a researcher chooses research participants who are available, convenient, and represent specific characteristics was utilized (Creswell, 2015). In this study, the research sites were the three schools of Worth School District 127 where a growing number of low SES students who present teachers with unique challenges in meeting their academic and social-emotional needs are enrolled. The target populations were educators from all three schools within District 127 who issue grades to students as well as a typical-case sampling of students from grades 4th through 8th.

In situations of typical-case sampling, the goal of researchers is to obtain information that describes a typical case in which a program has been implemented (Mertens, 2010). Since one of the objectives of the research conducted for this study was to obtain student perspectives regarding how their schools are doing in meeting their academic and social-emotional needs, typical-case sampling was utilized in the selection of students who took on-line surveys. Subsequently, the selection of 4th through 8th grade students who took the on-line surveys was carried out by the researcher with input from District 127 teachers in a manner where the students selected were enrolled in classrooms populated by heterogeneous groupings. The obtained data facilitated an analysis of the common attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of students

from throughout Worth School District 127 regarding the support they feel currently exists and is still needed in order to meet their academic and social-emotional needs.

Data Collection

Once again, a convergent parallel mixed method design which involved collecting quantitative data as well as qualitative data simultaneously (Creswell, 2015) represented a natural fit for the problem addressed in this study. Creswell (2015) stated that with this type of research methodology, quantitative data offers a general idea of a research problem while additional analysis through the collection of qualitative data provides a more in-depth, anecdotal understanding of the results. Subsequently, facilitating the type of research that Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) stated offers strong promise for practicing researchers who are seeking to establish applicable practices, such as district improvement goals, for the areas which are the focus of their research. As a component of utilizing a mixed-methods design, student and teacher perspectives regarding how well District 127 is doing in meeting the needs of students as well as the support systems teachers feel are necessary to effectively work with low SES students were quantitatively collected in order to identify trends within the district.

In order to collect quantitative data for this study, anonymous on-line surveys were administered via Survey Monkey, an on-line survey development platform, to forty-one District 127 staff members who issue grades, as well as to one hundred and forty-four randomly selected 4th through 8th grade students enrolled in the district. Survey instruments provided to District 127's staff members who elected to participate in the study were distributed via email. Educators were provided a link and instructions on how to complete the survey using the online software program, Survey Monkey. A cover letter was distributed to survey participants that stated the purpose of the survey and ensured confidentiality. Students who were selected to

participate in the survey were provided with the opportunity to do so while under the supervision of a certified staff member in selected 4th through 8th grade classes at each of the research sites. Parents of students in the classes that were selected at each grade level were provided with a cover letter permission form which informed them of the purpose of the study, ensured confidentiality, and asked them to notify the researcher if they wished for their children to not participate in the study. During the selected class times in which students were asked to complete the anonymous on-line surveys, students were provided with specific instructions by supervising certified staff members regarding how to access the link on Survey Monkey in order to complete the survey.

The qualitative component of the research conducted involved voluntary follow-up teacher interviews which facilitated the collection of anecdotal accounts detailing teacher perspectives about their experiences in working with low SES students. The interviews of ten District 127 staff members lasted approximately 30 minutes each. In addition, the interviews provided teachers with the opportunity to discuss how they think they are doing in working with low income students as well as the support they believe they currently receive and still need in order to effectively to do so.

Once again, the utilization of a mixed-method research design for this study represented the best fit for the purpose of developing a district improvement plan consisting of goals for Worth School District 127 that will strive to help its teachers best meet the needs of the district's low SES students. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) stated that mixed methods research is an effective strategy because it attempts to piece together the insights generated by qualitative and quantitative research into workable solutions. As a result of the utilization of mixed methods research in this study, a meaningful and comprehensive analysis of the collected quantitative and

qualitative data fostered the development of a district improvement plan for Worth School District 127 comprised of goals that seek to provide its educators with the support they need to best meet the needs of low SES students.

Data Analysis

An analysis of the collected quantitative and qualitative data served as the foundation for this study in the development of district improvement goals for Worth School District 127. During the spring of 2017, data for this study was collected using a convergent parallel mixed method design which involved the collection of quantitative data as the main source of data along with the collection of a smaller sample size of qualitative data in order to expound on the quantitative results (Creswell, 2015). An anonymous on-line survey was administered via Survey Monkey, an on-line survey development platform, to forty-one District 127 staff members who issue grades as well as to one hundred forty-four randomly selected 4th through 8th grade students enrolled in the district.

The utilization of on-line teacher surveys facilitated the collection of data that assessed teacher perceptions. These perceptions were in regards to the academic experiences of low SES students as well as the support teachers currently receive and continue to need in order to be successful in working with students from the same demographic. In addition, student surveys distributed via Survey Monkey generated supporting data that was analyzed in gauging student perceptions regarding how their schools are doing in meeting their academic and social-emotional needs.

In order to analyze the collected data from both the teacher and student on-line surveys conducted for this study, quantitative descriptive research was utilized. The surveys were designed using interval scales which provided “continuous” response options to questions with

assumed equal distances between options (Creswell, 2015). Likert item response options were assigned numerical values which facilitated the tabulation of percentages connected to the varying responses for each question asked. The instrument used to create both the teacher and student surveys, Survey Monkey, provided a complete summary of collected data. Additionally, Survey Monkey allowed the researcher to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis related to teacher and student perceptions regarding academic and organizational trends within Worth School District 127.

The interviews with certified teaching staff in District 127 who volunteered to participate, facilitated the accumulation of qualitative data that identified various teacher viewpoints regarding low income students as well as how they feel they are doing in meeting the needs of these students. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions that were recorded and did not include pre-established response options (Creswell, 2015). The focus of the questions allowed for the analyzation of teacher perspectives in three relevant areas. First, the current perspectives District 127's educators hold regarding low SES students and their potential for academic success. Second, how the educators of the district feel regarding their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the students in question. Finally, an understanding of the support the educators of the district feel they both have and need in order to pedagogically meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students from low income backgrounds.

In the process of conducting interviews with District 127 staff members who volunteered to participate, an analysis took place that aligned with Creswell's (2015) idea of developing a good sense of the data through recurring themes and thoughts of those staff members who were interviewed. The subsequent analysis of the recurring themes adhered to protocols detailed by Creswell (2015) via the identification and exploration of common perceptions District 127

teachers hold about low SES students, as well as the support they feel is needed in order to be most effective in working with these students. All the recorded information was transcribed and organized into common, general themes. The focus was to identify and sort any recurring statements, among teachers who agreed to be interviewed, which described common beliefs regarding low income students as well as the support they feel is needed to develop the strategies and professional mindsets necessary to best meet the unique needs of students from this demographic (Creswell, 2015).

An analysis of the collected quantitative and qualitative data which served as the foundation for the development of district improvement goals in this study was conducted in the Spring of 2017. The data was gathered using a convergent parallel mixed methods design which involved the collection of quantitative data along with the collection of a smaller sample size of qualitative data which expounded on the quantitative results (Creswell, 2015).

As a result of the utilization of mixed methods research for this study, trends regarding teacher and student perceptions about the efficacy of Worth School District 127 in meeting the needs of low SES students were comprehensively identified and analyzed. Along with the analyzation of the quantitative data collected from teacher and student on-line surveys, qualitative measures were utilized in order to obtain teacher perceptions regarding their effectiveness and the district's effectiveness in meeting the needs of low income students. Through the process of analyzing trends highlighted in the collected quantitative data along with the common themes identified in the qualitative data gathered from the teacher interviews, a comparison of results from the analysis of both data sets allowed for a meaningful convergence of both data sources (Creswell, 2015) which was key in the development of district improvement goals related to the focus of this study.

Ethical Considerations

The level of confidentiality related to the quantitative data collected for this study was reasonable as a result of both student and teacher surveys being conducted anonymously by the subjects who participated. Slight limitations existed as a result of students being required to identify their grade levels and schools as well as teachers being required to identify the general span of grade levels they teach; grades K-3, grades 4-5, and grades 6-8 along with the school in which they are employed. In addition, this method of collecting data differentiated the information collected from the elementary schools of District 127 from data collected from the middle school based on the unique academic and social-emotional dynamics of students enrolled in each of the entities.

To add, teachers were provided with the opportunity to voluntarily participate in follow up interviews in order to provide qualitative information. These interviews sought to provide a more extensive description of their belief systems regarding low SES students as well as the support they feel is necessary in order to best meet their needs. However, in the analyzation of the accumulated quantitative data as well as the qualitative data obtained from the voluntary interviews that drove the development of a district improvement plan for this study, all attempts were made to ensure that published information that contributed to the identification and presentation of the relevant goals associated with the plan did not identify any of the teachers who volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews. Although there were slight exceptions due to the unique differences that exist when working with elementary school students versus middle school students, throughout the process of summarizing all quantitative and qualitative data as well as the publishing of data in the presentation of district improvement goals, at no point was there a specifically identified staff member directly associated with any of the

discussed information. Finally, all recorded notes from any of the teacher interviews that were part of the process in the development of a district improvement plan made up of goals seeking to provide the support District 127's teachers need to best serve low SES students were destroyed.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This chapter contains the results of an investigation into teacher perceptions regarding the academic and social-emotional experiences of students in Worth School District 127 who are of low socio-economic status (low SES). In addition, data highlighting the perceptions of a randomly selected number of students regarding their overall experiences in Worth District 127 was also included within this study. The purpose of this study was to obtain data that would facilitate the development of a district improvement plan consisting of goals that focus on providing District 127's teachers with the support they need to effectively work with low income students. The data gathered served as a foundation in the development of school improvement goals that District 127's educators will focus on in order to develop an understanding of the appropriate strategies and perspectives necessary to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of low SES students.

The initial set of data for this study was obtained from an anonymous on-line survey that was administered, via Survey Monkey, to forty-one District 127 staff members who issue grades. The objective of the survey was to obtain data that assessed their knowledge and beliefs regarding the unique needs of low SES students as well as their thoughts about the support they receive in their work with these students.

Forty-one out of sixty-eight possible teachers consented and completed the on-line survey for a response rate of 67%. Teachers from all three schools in Worth School District 127 participated in completing the survey. Table 1 summarizes the number of teachers and related

percentages from the primary, intermediate, and middle school levels in the three schools within Worth School District 127 who took the on-line survey.

Table 1

The Instructional Levels and Numbers of Teachers From Each Grade Level Who Completed the Survey

Grade Level	Number of Survey Participants	Percentage
Kindergarten through Grade 3	9	21.95%
Grades 4 & Grades 5	9	21.95%
Grades 6 through Grade 8	23	56.10%

Table 1 illustrates that a smaller percentage of teachers from the elementary schools in District 127 (43.90 %) took the on-line survey in comparison to the percentage of the district's teachers from Worth Junior High School (56.10 %). However, due to the smaller size of District 127, the difference in percentages in this case does not represent a significant gap between the number of elementary teachers versus the number of junior high teachers who participated in taking the on-line survey.

Teachers who consented to take the survey were given eight calendar days in the early part of February 2017 to do so with an e-mail reminder sent two days prior to the completion of the survey window. The purpose of the on-line teacher survey was twofold. One, to assess the knowledge and beliefs of District 127's teaching staff regarding the unique academic and social emotional needs of low SES students. And two, to ascertain teacher beliefs regarding the

effectiveness of the support they are given in order to meet the needs of students from this demographic.

On-Line Teacher Survey Results

Fourteen of the twenty-two questions asked in the on-line teacher survey facilitated the accumulation of data which focused on teacher perceptions regarding low SES students as well as their beliefs regarding how these students are currently performing within District 127's school community. Table 2 provides information that details the thoughts and perceptions of District 127's teachers regarding the levels of ability and motivation they feel their students from low income backgrounds demonstrate.

Teacher Perceptions Regarding Academic Ability and Motivation of Low SES Students

Table 2

Perceptions of District 127's Teachers Regarding the Academic Ability and Motivation of Low SES Students

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All students, regardless of their academic background, can achieve academically in my classroom.	51.22%	46.34%	2.44%	0.00%
Students from low socio-economic backgrounds in my school do not care about learning.	0.00%	17.07%	78.05%	4.88%

(Continued)

Table 2

Perceptions of District 127's Teachers Regarding the Academic Ability and Motivation of Low Income Students

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social class is a factor in a student's ability to be successful in school.	2.44%	53.66%	36.59%	7.32%
There are some students from low socio-economic backgrounds who just cannot be motivated to do the work expected of them.	17.50%	55.00%	22.50%	5.00%

In the area of student ability and motivation to learn, the survey results show that a strong majority of teachers in Worth School District 127 (97.56%) believe that all students, regardless of their economic backgrounds, have the ability to be academically successful in their classrooms. A significant majority of teachers (82.93 %) also believe that these students do care about learning. However, a relevant percentage of District 127's teachers (17.07%) believe students from low income backgrounds do not. In addition, a significant percentage of teachers (72.50%) believe that some low SES students do not have the capacity to motivate themselves to do the work that is expected of them in school. To add, the data shows that just over half the teachers in District 127 believe that social class is a factor that influences a student's ability to be successful in school. Therefore, the aforementioned data illustrates conflicting viewpoints on the part of District 127's teachers regarding their general beliefs in the potential of all students and the realities they claim to confront when working with low income students. Conflicting

perspectives were also apparent in the data generated for this study which presented the viewpoints of District 127's teachers regarding student behavior.

Teacher Perceptions Regarding Behavior of Low SES Students

Table 3 highlights the perceptions the teachers of Worth School District 127 hold regarding the behavior of low SES students.

Table 3

Perceptions of District 127's Teachers Regarding the Behavior of Low SES Students

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel respected by students from low socio-economic backgrounds.	9.76%	73.17%	17.07%	0.00%
Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are well-behaved.	0.00%	43.90%	53.66%	2.44%
I spend too much of my teaching time disciplining students.	9.76%	34.15%	48.78%	7.32%
Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to misbehave in school.	0.00%	4.88%	87.80%	7.32%

In terms of teacher perceptions regarding the behavior of students from low-income backgrounds, although the majority of District 127's teachers (82.93%) feel respected by low

SES students, over half of them (56.1%) do not believe that students from this same demographic are well-behaved. Additional examples of conflicting teacher perspectives presented in Table 3 are the split among District 127's staff about whether or not they feel they spend too much time disciplining low SES students. Although this split highlights that 56.1 % of teachers surveyed do not feel they spend too much time disciplining low SES students, a strong majority (95.12%) of the same teachers surveyed stated that students from the same demographic are more likely to misbehave in school. In addition to collecting data regarding the perceptions of District 127's teachers about the behavior of low SES students, data was also collected in order to analyze teacher beliefs regarding how these students are faring in the school environments that exist within the district.

Teacher Perceptions Regarding How Students Fare in School Settings

A significant number of questions were presented to teachers in order to obtain information regarding how they feel students from low income backgrounds are faring in their schools. Table 4 presents the first set of data points detailing how District 127's teachers feel they, as well as their schools, are doing in meeting the needs of low SES students.

Table 4

Perceptions of District 127's Teachers Regarding How They and Their Schools are Doing in Meeting the Needs of low SES Students

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Teachers at my school build strong relationships with students.	39.02%	56.10%	4.88%	0.00%

(continued)

Table 4

Perceptions of District 127's Teachers Regarding How They and Their Schools are Doing in Meeting the Needs of low SES Students

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The achievement gap continues to widen between students from low income backgrounds and their peers.	9.76%	75.61%	14.63%	0.00%
My school does a good job of providing low income students with a quality academic experience.	9.76%	75.61%	14.63%	0.00%
I feel I do a good job of providing low income students with a quality academic experience in my classroom.	32.50%	67.50%	0.00%	0.00%

Table 4 illustrates that all of the teachers surveyed for this study believe they are successfully providing low SES students with quality academic experiences in their classrooms. In addition, the majority of District 127's teachers surveyed (85.37%) believe that their schools are doing a good job of providing low-income students with quality academic experiences. A strong majority (95.12%) of these same teachers also stated that they feel that teachers in their schools are successful in establishing strong relationships with students as a whole. However,

despite such positive feelings regarding the academic experiences District 127's teachers feel their low SES students are receiving in their classes as well as in their schools, nearly two thirds of them feel that the academic achievement gap continues to grow between their low SES students and their peers. As a result of nearly two thirds of District 127's teachers believing that the achievement gap is continuing to grow between students from low-income backgrounds and their peers, data detailing the support they feel is needed to address this challenge turned out to be relevant information for this study.

Teacher Perceptions Regarding Available Support

Although the data demonstrated conflicting perspectives regarding how District 127's teachers feel they and their schools are doing in providing low income students with quality academic experiences in comparison to how they feel these students are responding, the data collected for this study regarding the support teachers feel they need in order to successfully work with low SES students presented consistent viewpoints. Table 5 presents data provided by District 127's teachers regarding the support they believe they have and still need in order to address the challenges associated with working with low SES students. Overall, the data appeared to present a consistent pattern among the teachers surveyed for this study about the current state of affairs in Worth School District 127 regarding the support they believe they are receiving.

Table 5

Perceptions of District 127's Teachers Regarding the Support They Believe They Need to Meet the Needs of low SES Students

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have access to the tools I need to do my job as an educator.	2.44%	31.71%	56.10%	9.76%
My teacher preparation courses adequately prepared me to teach low-income students.	0.00%	24.39%	68.29%	7.32%
My experiences growing up were similar to my students.	4.88%	12.20%	34.15%	48.78%
The school where I teach provides professional development to help teachers be more effective with low-income students.	2.44%	9.76%	80.49%	7.32%

With a significant percentage of District 127's teachers (82.93%) expressing that their experiences growing up were not similar to the experiences of their students, teachers surveyed expressed a clear need for additional support in order to help them develop strategies that are necessary to effectively work with low SES students. This need was also highlighted as a result

of 75.61% of teachers surveyed for this study stating that they do not feel that their teacher preparation courses adequately prepared them on how to effectively work with low-income students. An even greater percentage of District 127's teachers (87.81%) do not believe that their school and/or district provides enough professional development opportunities that would help them be more effective educators for low-income students.

Therefore, it is not surprising that nearly two-thirds of the teachers surveyed for this study feel they need more access to the tools that will help them successfully do their jobs as educators. The need to provide teachers with the support necessary to meet the needs of students falls primarily on the shoulders of school and district leadership. Subsequently, an assessment of teacher viewpoints regarding how their educational leaders are doing in providing them the support they need was also a focus of the on-line surveys distributed to teachers for this study.

Teacher Viewpoints Regarding Support of Educational Leaders

Table 6 presents data regarding how District 127's teachers feel the educational leaders they work with are doing in providing them with the support they need to be effective.

Table 6

Perceptions of District 127's Teachers Regarding the Support They Receive from School/District Administrators

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The school administrator(s) in my school support me when I need it in my work with students from low socio-economic backgrounds.	10.26%	79.49%	10.26%	0.00%
The school administration is aware of what goes on in the classroom in my school.	12.20%	68.29%	17.07%	2.44%
The district administration is aware of what goes on in the classrooms in my school.	2.44%	26.83%	51.22%	19.51%

Overall, the data presented in Table 6 highlights that the majority of teachers in District 127 (80.49%) believe they are supported by their school based administrators by expressing that their school administrators are aware of what goes on in their classrooms. In addition, 89.75% stated that the administrator and/or administrators in their schools support them when they need it in working with low SES students. On the other hand, the majority of District 127's teachers (70.73%) do not feel that district level administrators are aware of what goes on in the classrooms in their schools. This trend demonstrated a clear issue within District 127 that was a

factor considered in the development of district improvement goals that will strive to help teachers better meet the needs of low income students.

Summary of On-Line Teacher Survey

In summarizing the presented data collected from the on-line survey taken by the teachers of Worth School District 127 for this study, there were clear conflicts in teacher perceptions regarding low SES students as well as the academic and social-emotional support they feel students from this demographic need in order to be successful in school. Although a strong majority of District 127's teachers stated they feel that all students have the potential to learn and grow successfully, many of these same teachers believe that low SES students are inherently not motivated to learn in school. Similar contrasting viewpoints are present within the teacher survey data as a result of the majority of teachers feeling that students from low SES backgrounds respect them but are still more likely to misbehave in school regardless.

To add, the majority of District 127's teachers believe that they as well as their schools are doing a good job in providing students from low income backgrounds with quality opportunities to learn and grow. They feel they are doing so by providing students with quality academic experiences while at the same time building strong student/teacher relationships. However, despite the aforementioned positive experiences District 127's teachers feel their students are receiving in school, the majority of the same teachers surveyed believe that the academic achievement gap between low income students and their peers is continuing to grow.

In addition, a significant percentage of teachers in District 127 do not feel that they have all the training, support, and resources they need to effectively meet the unique needs of low SES students. Concurrently, although most teachers in District 127 feel supported by their school

based administrators in addressing the challenges low income students present, they do not feel the same way about district level leadership. Consequently, taking into consideration the conflicting viewpoints presented in the quantitative data collected from the teacher surveys was critical in the development of district improvement objectives relevant to this study.

Along with the teacher survey results, ten voluntary follow-up teacher interviews were conducted to gain more insight into why teachers have certain perceptions of low SES students and their experiences in District 127's schools. These interviews facilitated the obtainment of relevant qualitative data regarding teacher perspectives about students from low income backgrounds and the support they believe is necessary in order to successfully meet the needs of these students.

Teacher Discussion Regarding Educating Low SES Students

Out of the forty-one District 127 teachers who completed the on-line survey associated with this study, ten volunteered to participate in follow up interviews. The teachers who volunteered were asked eight questions. Table 7 provides demographic information summarizing the schools the teachers interviewed work in, the grade level/content area they teach, and the number of years they have been employed in Worth School District 127.

Table 7

Demographic Summary of Worth School District 127 Teachers Interviewed

Teacher	Grade Level/Content Area	# of Years Taught in School
Teacher A	Kindergarten	12
Teacher B	Grade 4	6

(continued)

Table 7

Demographic Summary of Worth School District 127 Teachers Interviewed

Teacher	Grade Level/Content Area	# of Years Taught in School
Teacher C	Grade4	22
Teacher D	Grade 5	5
Teacher E	Grade 3-5 Special Education	24
Teacher F	Grade 8 Special Education	24
Teacher G	Grade 6 Language Arts	20
Teacher H	Grade 7 Language Arts	4
Teacher I	Grade 8 Social Studies	4
Teacher J	Grades 6-8 Physical Education	25

Table 7 illustrates that a cross section of teachers from District 127 participated in interviews for this study. Primary, intermediate, and middle school teachers were represented along with a healthy mix of veteran teachers and teachers who are still at the beginning stages of their careers. To add, a good mix of general education teachers and special education teachers volunteered to be interviewed.

In a similar manner as the on-line surveys, the teacher interviews focused on teacher perceptions of low SES students as it relates to their academic and social-emotional experiences in school. During the interview process, teachers were provided opportunities to express their

beliefs regarding how they feel their schools are doing in meeting the needs of these students. To add, teachers' beliefs regarding the support they receive through professional development as well as their personal and professional experiences as it relates to meeting the needs of low-income students were also discussed.

In order to obtain teacher perceptions and beliefs regarding the low SES students they work with, the teachers who volunteered to be interviewed were asked the following questions:

- How do you think perceptions regarding your students' socioeconomic status influence you as a teacher?
- How do your students' life stories connect with your own life experiences?
- What disadvantages do your students from low socio-economic backgrounds have and how do you address those disadvantages?

The majority of teachers interviewed expressed empathy and compassion for the students they work with from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Teacher C stated,

I have a softer heart for kids from low socio-economic backgrounds, I get them, I feel for them (personal communication, February 8, 2017).

Throughout the interview process, it was apparent that the empathy and compassion that teachers expressed for their low SES students was demonstrated in their pedagogical practices. Teacher D expressed,

I tend to have a little more sympathy when it comes to homework because I am aware of how their family life effects their ability to study (personal communication, March 15, 2017).

Teacher E and Teacher B also touched on the empathy they have for low income students and both detailed how they collect materials, supplies, and clothing to be provided for these students as the need arises throughout the school year.

Overall, the teachers interviewed for this study consistently expressed compassion and empathy for low SES students and claimed that they consistently make adjustments to their pedagogical approach as a result. Although there was a clear, overall expression of empathy for low income students from the teachers of District 127 who were interviewed, differences in being able to personally identify with these students were apparent. These differences are the result of the varying life experiences the teachers interviewed for this study described as their own when comparing them with the life experiences of their students from low income backgrounds.

Teacher A indicated that her life experiences were very different than students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as she stated,

I had the necessities of life that they don't have. I had all the necessities I needed in life and was able to do things that students from low income backgrounds can't and it is heartbreaking (personal communication, February 13, 2017).

Teacher's B, C, D, G and I all expressed similar perspective as Teacher A in this regard. In contrast, Teachers F, H, and J all expressed that they have an innate ability to relate to the struggles their students from low-income backgrounds experience as a result of being children of parents who divorced during their childhoods. Teacher F summarized this experience best by stating,

I can relate well with low income students because I've been there growing up in a single parent home where my mom had to work two jobs (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

In addition to being asked to express their perceptions regarding low SES students as well as how they feel their life experiences connect, teachers interviewed for this study were also asked to talk about their perceptions regarding the disadvantages these students have and what it is they do in their classrooms in order to address the resulting challenges.

All of the teachers interviewed for this study communicated that students from low income backgrounds face specific disadvantages that impact their ability to be successful in school. Teacher D highlighted many of the disadvantages low SES students face by stating,

A lot of them come to school tired, sometimes hungry, and sometimes angry and stressed out. It can be very hard for them to leave home at home and focus at school (personal communication, March, 15 2017).

Teacher G echoed similar perspectives by pointing out that low SES students do not have a lot of rich personal experiences in their lives to draw from which limits the background knowledge that can be helpful during the learning process. Consequently, teachers interviewed for this study expressed that the interactions students from low-income backgrounds experience in school as well as their innate abilities to learn and grow are negatively impacted by their unique life experiences. As a result, information gathered from the teacher interviews that focused on teacher perceptions regarding how their instructional practices impact low-income students turned out to be relevant data collected for this study.

Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Their Teaching Practices

The questions that were asked during the interview process which sought to obtain a better understanding of District 127's teachers' beliefs regarding their teaching practices and the impact

they have on the performance of students coming from lower income backgrounds were as follows:

- How does the socioeconomic status of your students guide your teaching practices?
- What expectations do you have for your students?
- Do you feel that the current curriculum you teach is useful to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds? Does it reflect who they are as students? Does it connect with their backgrounds and experiences?

The majority of the teachers interviewed for this study expressed that they make adjustments to their instructional practices when working with low SES students. Teacher D expressed this approach by stating,

I'm a little more compliant when it comes to homework with students who are coming from difficult personal situations (personal communication, March 15, 2017).

In addition to adjustments to homework expectations, teachers also detailed adjustments they make to their instructional practices in order to meet the unique needs of low SES students. Teacher E stated,

I try to bring it down to a level that might be relevant to them (personal communication, February 10, 2017).

Teacher B expressed,

I go over things like multiplication facts more at school because they will not be able to do it on their own at home because parents are not available to help them (personal communication, February 14, 2017).

Teacher C stated,

It forces me to have to slow down my instruction sometimes and go over things I assume they know but really don't (personal communication, February 18, 2017).

The aforementioned quotes illustrate a common theme among District 127 teachers interviewed for this study of an understanding for the need to make adjustments to their pedagogical approaches in order to meet the specific needs of low-income students. As a consequence of adjusting instructional practices to meet the specific needs of students, educators are generally required to assess their academic and behavioral expectations. Therefore, asking District 127 teachers to discuss how their expectations for low income students may be impacted was also an area of focus that was addressed during the interview process.

A common theme that emerged when teachers interviewed for this study were asked about the expectations they have for their students was that regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds, their expectations remained high. Teacher J stated,

I expect them all to do the best that they can within their abilities. No matter what their background, I expect them to strive to do the best they can. I don't like to take that they are from a poor situation and set them up for less (personal communication, February 15, 2017).

Teacher F expressed,

I think all students are capable of success and should be given the opportunity to reach their potential. Some may need extra support but they need to have the same access to the curriculum as all students, but the way they demonstrate their understanding needs to be a little bit different (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

The expectation that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, should be pushed to reach their full potential within the context of their individual needs was commonly expressed among the teachers interviewed for this study. Subsequently, as part of analyzing how well District 127 is doing in supporting teachers in their attempts to hold all students to these expectations,

teachers were asked to provide their thoughts regarding the efficacy of the district's curriculum in meeting the needs of low SES students.

Contrasting viewpoints regarding the efficacy of District 127's curriculum in meeting the needs of low income students were present in the information gathered during the interview process carried out for this study. Teacher C expressed,

Our curriculum is lacking in some respects. I've created my own curriculum in some areas because of the age of some of our books. We do our best with what we have (personal communication, February 8, 2017).

Teachers D and Teacher F communicated similar perspectives with Teacher F stating,

I wish that as a district, we had more opportunities to take kids out into the community in order to expose them to things (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

In contrast, Teacher I stated,

I think the curriculum is geared toward meeting the needs of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds but only because we have the autonomy to meet their needs. Teachers can make adjustments to their needs because of the flexibility of the administration (personal communication, February 13, 2017).

Teacher G communicated that she believes the curriculum she presents to low income students meets their needs because,

Since it is writing, they are able to express themselves (personal communication, February 16, 2017).

In addition to the varying perceptions expressed by the teachers interviewed for this study regarding their thoughts on how well the curriculum meets the needs of low SES students, there

also was a variety of responses regarding the support they feel they receive in order to be able to successfully work with these students.

Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Support They Need

The questions the teachers from District 127 who agreed to be interviewed for this study were exposed to that strived to ascertain their thoughts about the support they believe they need in order to effectively work with low SES students were as follows:

- What do you wish you had more of in your background that would help you connect with and teach your students from low socio-economic backgrounds better?
- How can the leadership of your school and the district best support you in your efforts to best meet the needs of students from low socio-economic backgrounds?

When teachers discussed how their personal and professional backgrounds have impacted their ability to connect with and teach low income students, the consistent response was that their personal and professional backgrounds failed to adequately prepare them. Teacher A expressed that she wished that student diversity and the varying unique needs of students from different backgrounds were addressed in her undergraduate studies. Teacher C stated,

I wish I had a better understanding of how their parents think. Although I know people personally from those backgrounds, I do not get their thinking. My parents didn't have a lot of money but they taught me that school is the most important thing and it is frustrating that parents don't teach these same lessons and I don't quite understand their thinking (personal communication, February 8, 2017).

Teacher D expressed similar thoughts by stating that she feels she needs to learn more about the needs of the community she serves as well as the challenges parents face in raising kids in order to better support students while they are at school. Teacher F and Teacher G's thoughts

aligned with the aforementioned perspectives as a result of wishing they were exposed to more information regarding the different cultures represented within the student population they serve.

In addition to teachers expressing that their personal and professional experiences have generally failed to provide them with sufficient background knowledge to best meet the needs of low-income students, some teachers communicated a desire to have better real time information regarding the needs of these students. Both Teacher E and Teacher J stated that they wished they had more knowledge of who the students from lower income backgrounds were in advance in order to be best prepared to meet their needs prior to them coming into their classrooms.

Teacher I communicated,

I wish I had more opportunities to observe and learn about kids with different needs before I made it into the classroom. I wish I would have been able to observe different programs that address those different needs. Being able to do so when I had the chance was more beneficial to me than just resources (personal communication, February 13, 2017).

It is clear from the information obtained from the teacher interview process conducted for this study that teachers in District 127 do not feel that their personal and professional backgrounds have adequately prepared them for meeting the unique needs of low SES students. For that reason, the next set of information obtained from the teacher interviews was significant because it focuses on the level of support District 127 teachers feel they are currently receiving at both the building and district levels.

The teachers interviewed for this study overwhelmingly expressed that they believe there is a need for more support, resources, and professional development in order to help them better meet the needs of low SES students. Teacher E captured this sentiment with the following statement,

I feel it is important for all staff to develop an understanding of what our children are going through. It breaks my heart to see a child yelled at everyday (personal communication, February 10, 2017).

Teacher I stated,

Something we can do more of is having a structured district policy providing guidelines on how to address the needs of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (personal communication, February 13, 2017).

Teacher I expounded on this thought by expressing that a stronger policy in this area is important because of his belief that the establishment of clear, expected routines related to behavioral expectations is important for students from lower income backgrounds. Along the same lines, teachers interviewed for this study consistently expressed their belief that more professional development was needed in order for them to learn about and implement specific strategies that would help them better meet the needs of low-income students.

The need for professional development and instructional resources in this area clearly came out as a common theme during the interview process that took place with District 127's teachers. Teacher F communicated that she would like to see the teachers of Worth School District 127 provided with more professional development opportunities in the areas of differentiated instruction as well as more opportunities for the incorporation of technology as a means of better meeting the needs of students. Teacher G communicated,

The world has changed a great deal and I feel I need to be updated as a result of the different cultural norms that are now present in our school. If I understand my students' backgrounds more, it will help me understand how to help them more (personal communication, February 16, 2017).

Teacher B expressed,

At the district level, they need to make sure we have all the leveled resources we need for our students (personal communication, February 14, 2017).

The theme of the need for additional resources and professional development opportunities in order to better meet the needs of low income students was consistently expressed throughout the interviews conducted with District 127's teachers who volunteered to be interviewed for this study.

In reviewing the aforementioned anecdotal information that discussed the experiences of District 127's teachers in their work with low SES students, it is apparent that the majority of the teachers interviewed maintain a high level of empathy and compassion for students in this demographic. In addition, teachers interviewed for this study expressed varying life experiences that impact their ability to personally relate to students from low income backgrounds. Regardless of the ability of District 127's teachers to relate to the life experiences of the low SES students they work with, all of the teachers interviewed expressed that the life experiences of their low SES students negatively impact their capacity to be successful in school.

To add, the majority of teachers interviewed for this study communicated that they make strategic adjustments to their instructional practices in their work with low income students. However, regardless of any adjustments to their instructional practices that teachers stated they make in order to meet the needs of low SES students, all teachers interviewed for this study expressed that their expectations for these students always remain high.

In addition, not all of the teachers interviewed expressed satisfaction in the ability of the curriculum they work with to effectively help them meet the needs of their low income students. Some teachers expressed disappointment in the curriculum's efficacy. In contrast, some teachers interviewed stated they were satisfied in their ability to utilize the curriculum in a manner that

best meets the needs of low SES students as a result of the autonomy granted to them regarding curriculum development and related instruction. Although some teachers feel that revisions to the curriculum they work with is key to helping them to better meet the needs of low SES students while others do not. District 127 teachers interviewed for this study overwhelmingly expressed the need for more support, resources, and professional development.

A limitation that needs to be addressed in relation to the data generated from the teacher interviews conducted for this study is that the ten teachers who participated did so on a voluntary basis. As a result, biases regarding teacher perceptions related to the topic of this study may have been present in the anecdotal data gathered. To start, teachers who volunteered to be interviewed may have had a personal interest in wanting to see the academic and social emotional needs of low SES students more effectively met. Subsequently, they may have been motivated to be participants in the process in order to help the researcher identify ways to do so. In contrast, teachers who maintain negative perspectives regarding low SES students most likely did not volunteer to be interviewed as a result of being fearful to express their thoughts to the researcher who is an educational leader within the district in which they work. Another possibility is that teachers who volunteered to be interviewed may have done so out of desire to personally support the educational leader carrying out the study as a show of professional respect and support. Therefore, it is likely that there were additional perspectives regarding low SES students and the experiences they receive in District 127 that could have been obtained but were not as a result of teachers not wanting to work with the researcher due to professional disagreements and/or disgruntlement with the researcher as an educational leader.

The aforementioned limitations expressed regarding the teacher interview process does not mean that the anecdotal data collected for this study is denigrated. However, the researcher

may not have obtained a completely comprehensive sense of teacher perspectives in District 127 as a result of the interviews being voluntary. Despite this limitation, as a result of the on-line teacher surveys being anonymous, the full range of teacher perspectives that were not included in the anecdotal data collected from the teacher interviews were more than likely incorporated in the quantitative data collected from District 127's teachers. An optimal range of teacher perspectives were eventually incorporated into the relevant analysis conducted for this study, despite the possibility of a limited range of perspectives generated from the voluntary teacher interviews.

In addition to obtaining the perspectives of Worth School District 127's teachers regarding how low SES students are performing as well as the support they believe is needed to meet the needs of students from this demographic, student input was also obtained as part of the process that facilitated the development of district improvement goals that focused on this area of concentration. Lansdown (2001) stated that taking into consideration student perspectives facilitates better decisions regarding how to best meet their needs because they maintain experiences and knowledge that are unique to their lives. Consequently, student input regarding how Worth School District 127 is doing in meeting their needs was obtained in order to develop an accurate picture of the effectiveness of the district in meeting the needs of low SES students.

Student Survey Results

An anonymous on-line survey consisting of 27 questions was administered via Survey Monkey to one hundred forty-four District 127 students in grades 4th through 8th. Of the one hundred forty-four students who took the survey, seventy-eight of them were qualified as low SES which represents 54% of all students who took the survey. As a result of 54% of the students who took the survey qualifying as low SES, the majority of the randomly selected

students surveyed were from low income backgrounds. This ensured that the student data collected served as relevant supportive data in relation to the information gathered for this study compiled from the teacher surveys as well as the teacher interviews. The objective of the student survey was to obtain student feedback that assessed their perspectives regarding how well Worth School District 127 is doing in meeting their academic and social-emotional needs. Table 8 summarizes the number of students and related percentages from each of the schools in Worth School District 127 who took the survey. Table 9 summarizes the number of students and related percentages from each grade level within Worth School District 127 who participated.

Table 8

Number of Students from Each of the Schools in District 127 Who Took the On-Line Survey

School	# of Students Who Took Survey	Percentage of Student
Worthwoods	34	23.78%
Worth Elementary School	47	32.87%
Worth Junior High School	62	43.36%

Table 9

Number of Students from Each Grade Level in District 127 Who Took the On-Line Survey

Grade Level	# of Students	Percentage
4 th Grade	43	29.86%

(continued)

Table 9

Number of Students from Each Grade Level in District 127 Who Took the On-Line Survey

Grade Level	# of Students	Percentage
5 th Grade	38	26.39%
6 th Grade	22	15.28%
7 th Grade	23	15.97%
8 th Grade	18	12.50%

Students whose parents consented took the survey in May of 2017 in their classrooms during designated class periods under the supervision of their teachers. The purpose of the on-line student surveys was to obtain student input regarding their perceived academic and social-emotional needs along with their beliefs regarding how Worth School District 127 is doing in helping them learn and grow successfully.

The questions students were asked while taking the on-line surveys facilitated the accumulation of data that focused on the following areas:

- Student perceptions regarding their school's climate.
- Student perceptions regarding the instructional practices of their teachers.
- Student perceptions regarding their teachers in general.
- Student beliefs about the connections they feel they have with their teachers.

The response options students who took the on-line survey were exposed to in answering the questions presented to them were formatted in the Likert scale model in order to ensure equal relevant distances among all options (Creswell, 2015).

Student Perceptions Regarding School Climate

One of the areas of focus for the student surveys was the obtainment of student perceptions regarding the learning environments they are exposed to within their classes and/or schools. Table 10 presents data detailing student perceptions regarding the learning environments they experience as students of District 127.

Table 10

District 127 Students' Perceptions Regarding the Learning Environment They Experience

Question	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Not at All
I have fun at school.	27.46%	26.06%	33.80%	12.68%
My teachers run classes where I am able to work and learn with few distractions.	31.91%	38.30%	24.11%	5.67%

The above presented data highlights that an overall majority of students surveyed expressed that they have fun in school on a consistent basis. However, the majority is not an overwhelming one with approximately 42% of students communicating that school is not a consistently fun place to be on a daily basis. A similar trend presented itself based on the data that assessed whether or not students believed they had choices on how they could successfully complete learning activities. In addition, a steady majority of students surveyed described the learning environments in their classrooms as places relatively free from distractions. However, a

significant percentage of students (nearly 30%) surveyed expressed that they did not feel they were in consistently optimal learning environments. In conjunction with assessing student perceptions regarding the school climates they are part of in District 127, students were also asked to provide their thoughts about the instructional practices of their teachers.

Student Perceptions Regarding the Instructional Practices of Their Teachers

In order to obtain a better grasp of how students feel regarding the instruction they experience in Worth School District 127, questions were presented in the surveys that sought to obtain their perceptions regarding the instructional practices of their teachers. Table 11 presents the relevant data gathered in relation to this topic.

Table 11

District 127's Students' Perceptions Regarding the Instructional Practices of Their Teachers

Question	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Not at All
Classroom rules and ways of doing this are fair.	52.78%	32.64%	12.50%	2.08%
My classmates and I know what we should be doing and learning.	27.46%	41.55%	26.06%	4.93%
My teachers help me when I need it.	48.59%	37.32%	12.68%	1.41%
My teachers make school work interesting	23.24%	33.80%	35.92%	7.04%

(continued)

Table 11

District 127's Students' Perceptions Regarding the Instructional Practices of Their Teachers

Question	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Not at All
My teachers assign homework that helps me learn.	42.96%	26.76%	23.94%	6.34%
The comments that I get from my teachers about my work help me understand how to do my work better.	39.44%	35.21%	21.13%	4.23%

Table 11 highlights that although a strong majority of students in District 127 (85%) feel the classroom rules and ways of doing things are consistently fair, a sizeable enough percentage (15%) do not feel the same way. To add, one third of the students surveyed expressed that they are frequently not aware of what they should be doing and learning in class. In addition, although the majority of students expressed that they felt their teachers consistently help them when they need it, a significant enough percentage (14%) do not feel the same way. The data also shows that approximately 43% of students generally feel that the school work they are exposed to is not interesting with nearly 30% expressing that the homework they receive generally does not help them learn. Finally, with just over 25% of District 127 students stating that their teachers do not consistently help them understand how to do their work better along with the previously cited percentages in this section, there are a significant number of students in

District 127 who do not feel the instructional practices of their teachers are consistently helping them to learn and grow. Making the next set of data presented even more relevant because it summarizes the perceptions of District 127's students about their teachers.

Students' Perceptions Regarding Their Teachers

Table 12 presents data collected for this study which summarizes the perceptions of District 127's students regarding their teachers.

Table 12

Perceptions of District 127's Students Regarding Their Teachers

Question	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Not at All
My teachers respect me.	60.42%	27.78%	9.72%	2.08%
My teachers care about me.	67.13%	23.08%	8.39%	1.40%
My teachers know when I work hard and am doing my best.	52.86%	30.00%	14.29%	2.86%
My teachers know a lot about the subjects they teach.	77.46%	18.31%	4.23%	0.00%

Although a large majority of students who took the survey for this study feel that they are generally respected by their teachers, a significant enough percentage (12%) do not feel the same way. In addition, just about 10% of the student population surveyed do not feel that their teachers consistently care about them which is also a significant enough percentage of students that needs to be taken into consideration. To add, although none of the students surveyed

expressed that their teachers are never nice to them, another sizable percentage (11.89%) stated that this only happens sometimes. To continue, a strong percentage of students (83%) believe that their teachers know when they are working hard and doing their best. However, another sizeable percentage of students surveyed (17%) do not feel that this takes place consistently, if at all. Consequently, the data presented in this section highlights that a statistically relevant number of students surveyed for this study do not maintain consistently positive perceptions regarding their teachers. The next section of data presented is therefore important because it focuses on students' perceptions regarding the personal connections they have with their teachers.

Student Perceptions Regarding Personal Connections with Teachers

Along with obtaining student perceptions of their teachers, students who participated in taking the on-line survey were also asked to answer a series of questions which sought to gauge the personal connections they feel they have with their teachers. Table 13 contains the results of the data collected that is related to this topic.

Table 13

Perceptions of District 127's Students Regarding the Personal Connections They Have with Teachers

Question	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Not at All
I have good relationships with my teachers.	34.72%	42.36%	20.83%	2.08%
I am comfortable talking to my teachers about my problems.	25.69%	18.75%	36.81%	18.75%

(continued)

Table 13

Perceptions of District 127's Students Regarding the Personal Connections They Have with Teachers

Question	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Not at All
The teachers in my school are respected by students.	19.15%	43.26%	34.75%	2.84%
My teachers are interested in me as a student and support me whenever they can.	50.35%	26.24%	19.15%	4.26%
My teachers are involved and support me and my classmates in my classes and throughout the school.	49.65%	27.66%	19.86%	2.84%

To start, although a healthy percentage of students surveyed (77%) expressed that they generally have good relationships with their teachers, there is a need to look into the reason why nearly 23% of students surveyed for this study do not feel the same way. An additional area of concern that was identified from the data in this section was that just over half of the students surveyed expressed that in general, they are not comfortable discussing any problems they may be having with their teachers. To add, another healthy percentage of students (88%) hold the belief that their teachers generally encourage them to do their best. However, with 12% of the students surveyed not feeling the same way, there is a need to explore why this significant percentage exists.

Another area of concern that the data pointed out was that nearly 38% of students surveyed do not believe that teachers in their school are consistently respected by students which undoubtedly impacts the development of positive connections between many students and teachers in District 127. In addition, the same trend as cited earlier in this section continued with a strong majority of students (77%) expressing the belief that their teachers are generally interested in them as students and support them whenever they can. This is in contrast to the 13% of students surveyed who do not feel the same way. Similar percentages presented themselves in the data highlighting student perceptions regarding the level in which their teachers support them and their classmates in their classes and throughout their schools.

In summary, the student survey results highlighted that there are a significant number of students in Worth School District 127 who do not believe that the schools they attend are the most optimal and enjoyable learning environments. In addition, a significant percentage of students do not feel that the instructional practices of their teachers consistently help them learn and grow. To add, although the majority of students surveyed maintain favorable perceptions of their teachers and the positive connections they are able to make with them, a statistically relevant enough minority percentage of students do not feel the same way. Finally, the same statistical trends in the accumulated data also exist as it relates to the perceptions District 127's students hold regarding the level of support teachers demonstrate toward students. Therefore, although the majority of students in District 127 maintain favorable perceptions regarding their teachers as well as the learning environments in their classes, a statistically relevant enough percentage of students do not feel the same way. With 54% of District 127's students who completed the survey qualifying as low SES, it is more than likely that the majority of students who expressed negative perspectives regarding their teachers as well as their schools are low

SES students. Consequently, connecting to the purpose of this study and warranting the development of school improvement goals for District 127 which focus on helping teachers learn and develop strategies that will address the needs of students who expressed negative perceptions regarding their experiences in school.

Summary of Conducted Research

Forty-one Worth School District 127 educators who issue grades to all students including but not limited to low SES students participated anonymously in taking on-line surveys. This process facilitated the accumulation of data that allowed for an assessment of their knowledge and beliefs regarding the unique needs of students from low income backgrounds. The results of the teacher surveys also provided information regarding the support District 127's educators either receive or feel they need in order to best meet the needs of students from this demographic. In addition, ten of the teachers who participated in taking the on-line survey volunteered to participate in a follow up interview where they were provided with the opportunity to provide more extensive perspectives regarding low SES students as well as the support they believe is necessary in order to effectively meet the needs of these students.

Along with obtaining the perspective of District 127's teachers who work with low SES students enrolled in their schools, student perspectives were also taken into consideration for this study. Subsequently, one hundred forty-four District 127 students from grades 4th through 8th, including but not limited to students from low income backgrounds, participated in the study. The applicability of the student data collected for this study was substantiated as a result of 54% of District 127 students who completed the survey qualifying as low SES. Students participated in this study by anonymously taking an on-line survey which sought to accumulate data detailing

how they feel Worth School District 127 is doing in meeting their academic and social-emotional needs.

In general, the data from the on-line teacher surveys shows that the majority of teachers in Worth School District 127 believe that all low SES students have the potential to be successful in school and in their classrooms. In addition, the majority of teachers who completed the survey believe that they and their schools are effectively providing low-income students with what they need to have a chance to successfully learn and grow. The aforementioned data is supported by data gathered from the teacher interviews where an overwhelming majority of teachers expressed that they maintain a high level of empathy and compassion for low income students. At the same time, the majority of teachers interviewed stated that they hold low SES students to the same level of academic and behavioral expectations as their peers while adjusting their instructional strategies in a manner that align with their unique needs. The results of the student surveys echo this trend with a consistent percentage of students expressing that their schools and their teachers are effectively meeting their academic and social-emotional needs, subsequently leading to a general satisfaction with their experiences in Worth School District 127.

However, in contrast, there is not a consensus among District 127's staff regarding whether or not students from low SES students have the capacity to be consistently successful in school due to the challenges they personally confront in their lives. Data within the results of the teacher interviews offers clues to why teachers in District 127 feel this way. Many of them expressed that their personal backgrounds do not align with the personal experiences of low SES students. Subsequently, this fosters situations where it is difficult to readily ascertain how to best connect with low SES students and figuring out the pedagogical strategies that are most effective in meeting their unique and challenging needs. Data gathered from both the teacher surveys and

the follow up interviews highlight the challenges District 127's teachers face in this regard with the majority of teachers expressing the need for more support and professional development that would help them better meet the needs of low SES students. The types of support and professional development needed would help District 127's teachers reach the significant percentage of students who expressed that their teachers and their schools are not successfully meeting their academic and social emotional needs, in contrast to the positive perspectives expressed by the majority of students who completed the survey for this study.

In reviewing the data from the student and teacher surveys as well as the teacher interviews compiled for this study, a clear need for the educators of Worth School District 127 to conduct a reflective analysis of how to better meet the needs of low SES students was apparent. Consequently, the data collected from both students and educators in Worth School District 127 served as critical components in the development of district improvement goals that will facilitate such an analysis. These school improvement goals will strive to explore and develop effective ways of providing teachers with the support they need in order to best meet the academic and social emotional needs of low SES students.

Chapter V

Discussion

The number of students attending Worth School District 127 of low socio-economic status (low SES) is growing at a steady rate. In 2011, the percentage of students in the district living in poverty was 31.8%. In five years, the percentage has grown to 60%. As a result of the steady increase of low SES students in District 127, teachers and administrators are facing a growing number of challenges that typically accompany meeting the academic and social emotional needs of students from this demographic. Consequently, this study sought to address this need through the development of a district improvement plan for District 127 consisting of goals that strive to help teachers develop a better understanding of the pedagogical strategies necessary to effectively work with low income students. Goals that were eventually identified through the examination of data provided by both teachers and students.

Discussion of Teacher Survey Results

This study incorporated quantitative teacher data, supported by quantitative student data, in a manner that helped to facilitate the development of district improvement goals for District 127. Goals that emphasize the importance of providing teachers with the support they need to effectively meet the needs of low SES students. Teacher input is a critical component of any school improvement initiative that strives to improve the learning experiences of students. Therefore, an analysis of the quantitative data provided by District 127's teachers, augmented by data collected from students, was essential.

Teacher Perspectives on the Academic Potential and Performance of Low SES Students

To start, data collected from the teacher survey conducted for this study exposed conflicting teacher viewpoints regarding the academic potential they feel low SES students have in comparison to how they feel these students perform in school. These conflicting viewpoints are supported by data that details how District 127's teachers feel about the academic experiences they provide students versus the manner in which they feel low SES students respond. Subsequently, in order to develop the district improvement goals necessary for District 127's teachers to be supported in their work with low SES students, a deeper analysis of teacher perspectives regarding the potential and performance of low SES students within the learning environments provided to them was necessary.

District 127 teachers who participated in this study expressed consistent viewpoints related to the potential they feel their students have as well as the quality of academic experiences their students receive. The results of the teacher surveys indicated that an overwhelming majority of Worth School District 127's teaching staff (97.56%) believe that all students have the potential to successfully learn and grow. In addition, the majority of District 127's teachers (75%) stated that they believe the school communities in which they work maintain high expectations for low SES students. A unanimous (100%) majority of the teachers surveyed expressed that they believe they are providing low SES students with the quality academic experiences they need within their classrooms in order to be successful. These teacher beliefs are supported by the student data which shows that 95.77% of students surveyed feel that their teachers demonstrate a strong knowledge of the subjects they teach.

However, 46% of students surveyed for this study expressed that school is generally not a fun place for them to be on a daily basis. In order for students to have fun in school, schools

need to take on a more positive atmosphere (Sheppard, 2013). When schools do so, they create supportive learning environments that increase student attachment to school, subsequently influencing their academic performance in a positive manner (Ostermann, 2000). With such a statistically significant percentage of students expressing that school is not enjoyable, it is more than likely that a relevant number of low SES students in District 127 do not feel their classroom experiences are as positive as their teachers think. An assumption supported by the fact that 12% of students surveyed communicated that they feel their teachers do not consistently help them understand things they need to know in order to successfully learn and grow. Subsequently, providing a possible explanation for why a significant percentage of District 127's teachers maintain negative viewpoints regarding the motivational levels and academic performance of low SES students. This group of students most likely represents the majority of students who expressed dissatisfaction with their experiences in school since 54% of students in District 127 who completed the survey qualify as low SES. These viewpoints were also reinforced by teacher data which shows that 65.85 % of District 127's teachers believe the achievement gap between their low income students and their peers continues to grow despite the quality of the academic experiences they are providing students.

Additional data collected from the teacher surveys also reinforced these conflicting viewpoints as a result of highlighting negative teacher perspectives regarding the academic performances and motivational levels of low income students due to their demographic status. To start, 17% of District 127's teachers stated that low SES students do not care about learning. In addition, over half of District 127's teachers (56.10%) communicated that they believe social class does influence a student's ability to be successful in school. This perspective may be a contributing factor to why a statistically significant 11% of District 127 students, whose majority

more than likely includes low SES students since 54% of students who completed the survey are low SES, expressed that they feel their teachers are generally not helpful to them when they need it. With feedback considered one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement (Skipper & Douglas, 2015), school improvement goals that focus on guiding teachers toward meeting the needs of the segment of the student population who do not feel supported by their teachers is imperative in order to ensure the needs of low SES students are met.

Consequently, the data collected for this study that focused on teacher perspectives regarding the academic potential and performance of low SES students exposed conflicting perceptions among District 127's staff. On one hand, District 127's teachers appear to universally believe in the potential for all students to be successful. Teachers also believe that the quality of the academic experiences they are providing students gives them optimal chances to successfully learn and grow. On the other hand, teachers feel students from low income backgrounds are not able to reach their full potential because their academic abilities as well as their motivational levels are impacted negatively by their socio economic status. Gorski (2008) calls on educators to reject deficit theory and help students as well as themselves to change their perceptions about the impact of poverty on academic achievement. The results of the data generated from the teacher survey demonstrated that the majority of teachers in District 127 appear to agree with Gorski's (2008) perspectives. In addition, District 127's teachers also appear to follow Tomlinson's (2013) call to believe without any doubt in the potential of every student. However, when teachers were asked to provide a more in depth reflection on students from low income backgrounds, these perspectives did not consistently hold up.

The conflicting viewpoints District 127's teachers maintain related to the potential they feel all their students have versus their thoughts regarding the academic abilities and

performance of low SES students need to be addressed. The challenge for teachers is to accommodate all the students in their classrooms in a manner where they all learn to work confidently, productively, and successfully (Pransky & Bailey, 2002). Therefore, a district improvement plan containing goals that focus on providing District 127's teachers with the professional development and support they need to understand how to help low SES students reach their potential, despite the challenges they typically confront, is critical. The same type of need and conflicting viewpoints also presented themselves in the data collected from the teacher surveys that focused on teacher perceptions regarding the behavior of low SES students.

Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Behavior of Low SES Students

In addition to the conflicting viewpoints District 127's teachers presented regarding the academic potential and performance of low SES students, the data collected from the teacher surveys also showed similar conflicts regarding their perceptions about student behavior. Although a strong majority of District 127's teachers (82.93%) stated that they believe they are respected by low SES students, a significant percentage (17.07%) did not share the same beliefs. In addition, over half of District 127's teachers (56.1%) do not believe that students from low income backgrounds are well behaved, while 43.91% expressed that they spend too much time disciplining these students. To add, despite the fact that 43.90% of teachers surveyed stated that low SES students are generally well-behaved, an overwhelming majority (95.12%) still believe these same students are more likely to misbehave in school.

The inconsistencies displayed in the data detailing teacher perceptions regarding the behavior of low SES students were also apparent in the student data detailing their perceptions regarding student management strategies utilized by their teachers. To start, in contrast to the perceived positive experiences District 127's teachers feel their students are exposed to in their

classrooms, only 25% of students surveyed expressed that the classroom settings they work in are generally free from the type of distractions that inhibit their learning and growth. To add, although a slight majority of students surveyed (52.78%) expressed that they felt classroom rules and related procedures are fair, the rest of the students surveyed stated they did not feel the same way, exposing a trend of inconsistent classroom rules and procedures throughout District 127. Additional student data highlighted inconsistencies on the part of District 127's teachers in the area of holding students to clear behavioral expectations as a result of 72.54% of students expressing that they are not consistently aware of what is expected of them in order to be successful in school. These type of inconsistencies can make it difficult for low income students to be able to develop a healthy understanding of what is typically expected of them in school in contrast to the typical expectations they face in other areas of their lives.

In general, there are unique actions and attitudes that help students from low-income backgrounds learn and grow within the unique cultural and community settings they live in. These actions and attitudes often clash with the requisite actions and attitudes that students must demonstrate in order to be successful in a typical school environment (Payne, 2008). Subsequently, in order for low income students to have the best chance to successfully learn and grow in District 127, both the teacher and student data demonstrates that there is a need for teachers to develop stronger organizational strategies that ensure that students clearly understand behavioral expectations. Such expectations are necessary to create classrooms settings where fair, consistent rules and procedures are the norm. Consequently, highlighting the need for the educational staff of Worth School District 127 to analyze what works in creating the tricky balance necessary in establishing effective classroom settings that also meets the basic needs of students as human beings (Landsman, 2014).

Therefore, the data collected from the teacher surveys that focused on teacher perceptions regarding the behavior of low SES students clearly exposed an organizational trend that needs to be addressed as a result of conflicting teacher viewpoints. Schultz (2008) emphasized the importance of advocating for students in a manner where they are consistently provided with effective classroom experiences in which they are required to take responsibility for their actions in supportive classroom settings. In order for District 127 to be able to move forward in the direction of better meeting the needs of low income students, these conflicting viewpoints among the teaching staff of Worth School District 127 regarding the behavior of low SES students will need to be addressed as part of the school improvement process.

The inconsistencies regarding teacher perceptions on the academic and behavioral potential and performance of low SES students was examined in order to develop district improvement goals that will better support District 127's teachers in meeting the needs of students in this demographic. Educators cannot just promote better relationships and stronger climates for students in situations like this, they need to learn about and utilize proven strategies that help all students successfully learn and grow (Sterrett, 2012). Therefore, school improvement efforts that foster teacher growth in a manner that facilitates the development of more consistent and constructive perceptions regarding the academic and behavioral potential of all students, regardless of their backgrounds, were an important component of this study. Consequently, an examination of the professional support District 127's teachers feel they need in order to effectively work with low SES students was critical in the process of developing district improvements goals that seek to do so.

Support District 127's Teachers Expressed They Need to Work with Low SES Students

The need for Worth School District 127's educators to reexamine what works in meeting the needs of low SES students is apparent by the fact that 82.93% of them expressed that they do not feel their experiences growing up were similar to the experiences of their students. This disconnect most likely explains why 10% of students surveyed do not feel they have a positive connection to their teachers while 20% expressed that they do not consistently have good relationships with them. Therefore, demonstrating the need for school improvement efforts in District 127 to incorporate a focus on guiding teachers toward following the premise of Pianta's (1999) work which emphasized the importance of teachers showing proactive, specific interest in all of their students as a means of establishing strong, sustained relationships. These kinds of relationships are important when working with troubled students who come from low income backgrounds.

In addition, a large percentage of District 127's teachers (87.81%) expressed that their schools and/or district should provide more professional development which would support them in their efforts to better meet the needs of low income students. Subsequently, the teacher data collected for this study pointed out that most of District 127's teachers believe that there is a need for district leadership to make changes in order to provide them with the additional support they need to effectively work with low SES students. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that 70.73% of District 127's teachers do not feel that district leadership is fully aware of what goes on in their classrooms while in contrast, the majority of teachers surveyed (89.75%) feel that building level administrators are aware.

The data obtained from the teacher surveys highlights that there is a need for the leadership of Worth School District 127 to focus on providing professional development for teachers in a manner that will help them develop a deeper understanding of the academic and

behavioral potential of all students, regardless of their backgrounds. In addition, as a result of the conflicting viewpoints between teacher perceptions regarding the academic experiences they are providing low SES students versus their views regarding how these students generally respond, there is a need for District 127's educators to analyze and adjust their pedagogical strategies toward low SES students. Finally, the teacher data clearly articulated that teachers in District 127 believe they need more support in order to better meet the needs of low SES students and that the leadership of District 127 needs to be more vigilant in the process of ensuring that it happens.

In addition to the quantitative data collected from the teacher surveys conducted for this study, voluntary follow up teacher interviews took place with ten of District 127's teachers. These interviews facilitated the accumulation of qualitative data that facilitated a more comprehensive examination of teacher perceptions regarding low SES students as well as what they feel they need to best work with students from this demographic. An analysis of teacher perspectives based on the interview results, augmented by relevant data collected from the student surveys, subsequently provided a deeper understanding of what District 127's teachers need to most effectively work with low SES students.

Discussion of Voluntary Teacher Interviews

As a result of the interviews conducted with teachers for this study, teachers were able to anecdotally elaborate on their perspectives regarding low SES students as well as the resources and support they feel are needed in order to effectively work with them. Therefore, obtaining anecdotal data regarding teacher perceptions of low SES students, the impact they feel their teaching has on students, as well as the support and resources they feel they need was an important process for this study. As a result of limitations which may have been present due to

the interviews being voluntary, the researcher may not have obtained a completely comprehensive sense of teacher perspectives in District 127.

Subsequently, there may have been teachers who were interviewed who either have a personal interest in helping low SES students succeed and/or a personal interest in wanting to support the educational leader who carried out the study. Therefore, meaning that perspectives from individuals who either have negative viewpoints regarding low SES students and/or are not interested in supporting the educational leader conducting the study were missing. Despite this limitation, as a result of the on-line teacher surveys being anonymous and including a greater sample size of teachers in District 127, a more comprehensive range of teacher perspectives that may not have been included in the data collected from the teacher interviews was more than likely obtained in the quantitative data collected from District 127's teachers. This most likely ensured that a full range of teacher perspectives were included into the relevant analysis conducted for this study. Consequently, information gathered from the interviews regarding teacher perceptions of low SES students was still a key element in the development of a district improvement plan consisting of goals that aim to support District 127's teachers in their quest to better meet the needs of low income students.

Teacher Perceptions of Students from Low Socio-Economic Backgrounds

In analyzing the results of the interviews conducted with teachers from District 127 for this study, there is no doubt that the majority of them are empathetic and compassionate toward the students they interact with who come from low income backgrounds. A common expression of this compassion was highlighted with multiple teachers stating that they go out of their way to provide students with school materials, supplies, and clothing when it is apparent that their families cannot afford to do so. However, when teachers were asked about how they feel their

own life experiences connect with those of their low SES students, many of the teachers interviewed expressed that their life experiences were very different. Most likely explaining why 10% of students who took the survey for this study, whose majority is more than likely comprised of low SES students as a result of 54% of the students who took the survey qualifying as low SES, expressed both a lack of connection with their teachers as well as a belief that they are not consistently being respected by them.

The exceptions to the teachers who stated that their life experiences do not generally connect with their low SES students were the teachers interviewed that grew up in homes impacted by divorce. These teachers felt stronger connections with low income students as a result of their experiences living under difficult financial circumstances due to growing up in divorced households. Landsman (2014) stated that teachers who grew up in economically secure circumstances typically do not understand the obstacles adults and children living in impoverished circumstances face on a daily basis. Therefore, although most of the teachers interviewed for this study were aware of the challenges their low SES students face, there is a need for many of them to develop a stronger, more intimate understanding of these obstacles in order to better relate and connect with these students. Student-teacher connections are needed in order to change the trend in the district where 23% of the student population surveyed expressed that they do not feel they have good relationships with their teachers. Concurrently, the development of a deeper understanding of how teachers in District 127 feel their teaching practices are impacting the learning and growth of low income students was also a relevant component examined for this study.

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Their Teaching Practices

The majority of teachers interviewed stated that they consistently make adjustments to their instruction when working with low income students. The types of adjustments teachers stated they make varied. Some teachers communicated that they make it a point to review content area more extensively because they know that such focus on school content is not able to occur in the home environments of their low income students. In addition, teachers communicated that when they present material to students, they do so in a manner that does not assume universal background knowledge due to the limited life experiences of their low SES students. Teachers also expressed that they are generally more flexible with students from low income backgrounds as it relates to work completion because they know these students live in home environments that do not facilitate strong support for school.

In addition, teachers interviewed consistently stated that they clearly communicate their academic and behavioral expectations to low SES students. Teachers also were consistent in expressing that they are always willing to help low income students as long as they do their best and show a desire to be successful. However, what appears to be missing is an understanding of how to provide low SES students who struggle with the typical structures and expectations of a school environment with alternative methods to demonstrate learning and growth. Only one of the teachers interviewed expressed that she seeks out ways to help low SES students demonstrate an understanding of what they are learning via alternate means based on their individual, unique needs.

This disconnect between the willingness of District 127's teachers to help low SES students versus their understanding of alternate methods these students may need in order to demonstrate learning and growth is supported by data collected from the student surveys. For

example, 11% of students surveyed for this study do not feel they receive the help they need in their classes while 12% expressed that their teachers do not consistently help them understand things they need to know in order to successfully learn and grow. In addition, 17.63% of students surveyed that their teachers do not consistently explain things in a different manner when they do not understand something presented in class. Once again, with 54% of District 127 students who completed the on-line survey for this study considered to be low SES, it is more than likely that the majority of students who expressed that they do not feel their teachers effectively help them in their academic pursuits were low SES students. Therefore, connecting to the relevancy of the need for District 127's teachers to develop a stronger understanding of alternate methods low SES students may need to utilize in order to demonstrate learning and growth.

To add, only 23.24% of students expressed that the school work they are exposed to is consistently interesting while just 42.96% of students stated that the homework they receive always helps them learn. Consequently, the challenge for teachers is to accommodate all the students in their classrooms in a manner where they learn to work confidently, productively, and successfully (Pransky & Bailey, 2002). Subsequently, school improvement efforts that focus on ensuring that District 127's teachers are provided the professional development and support they need to understand how to best meet the varying needs of all their students will ensure that low SES students are provided with opportunities to learn and grow successfully.

In continuing to analyze District 127 teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of their teaching practices on low SES students, there were additional inconsistencies in their responses when the focus of the questions centered on curriculum. Some of the teachers interviewed expressed that Worth School District 127 is lacking in providing adequate curricular resources

that effectively meet the needs of students. This may explain why the student data highlighted a consistent amount of disinterest and investment on the part of District 127 students toward the content area they are supposed to be learning. In addition, some teachers communicated that low SES students are not provided with enough exposure to real world learning experiences due to limitations facilitated by district policy that impact what they are able to do with their students. Skinner and Belmont (1993) stated that students are academically engaged when they are emotionally involved in the learning process and related activities. Therefore, in order to ensure that low SES students are successfully engaged, District 127's educators will need to develop techniques to make the learning process more meaningful and interesting for all students.

In contrast, there were a number of teachers interviewed that expressed that they are able to successfully meet the varying and unique needs of their students from low income backgrounds as a result of the flexibility their educational leaders demonstrate in overseeing the implementation of curriculum. Langhout and Mitchell (2008) stated that schools need to focus on establishing conditions that facilitate conversations about the purpose and goals of school in a manner that concentrates on organizational management, not just individual management. Consequently, these varying perspectives on how effective the curriculum is in meeting the needs of low SES students are inconsistencies that need to be rectified in Worth School District 127. One of the main ways to do so will be to ensure that teachers have sufficient support in their attempts to meet the needs of their low income students. Therefore, obtaining teacher viewpoints regarding the supports they currently receive in their work with low SES students was also a relevant topic examined for this study.

Teacher Views Regarding the Supports They Have in Working with Low SES Students

A consistent theme expressed by the teachers interviewed for this study was their desire to obtain more information regarding the unique challenges low SES students face which inhibits their ability to persevere and succeed in school. With only 27.46% of students surveyed expressing that they always know what is expected of them in order to be successful in school and 13% not feeling that their teachers are generally interested in them and support them whenever possible, the need for teachers in the district to learn more about meeting the unique needs of students such as those from low income backgrounds is clear.

In addition, teachers are generally aware that although all students have the ability to learn, some have a more difficult time as a result of living in challenging home settings. Failure to keep this truth in mind leads to the development of teacher cynicism and disillusion (Rothstein, 2008). Subsequently, teachers interviewed expressed that they want to develop a stronger understanding of the various reasons why students and families from low income backgrounds are not able to develop an appreciation for the value of education. Another concern that teachers expressed was a lack of prior information that would provide them with the heads up regarding low SES students coming into their classes. Many of the teachers stated that they believe if they had more of this type of information prior to students coming into their classes, they would be better prepared to work with them in advance which in turn would facilitate a greater probability of helping them be successful. Therefore, the data obtained from the teacher interviews clearly demonstrated the need for District 127's teachers to develop a better understanding on how to help students from low income backgrounds learn and grow in a manner aligned with their unique needs while holding them to the same expectations as their peers.

The lack of knowledge expressed by teachers regarding how to best understand and meet the needs of their low SES students is the result of not receiving optimal experiences in their training that would have allowed them to acquire the skills, knowledge, and pedagogy necessary to effectively teach diverse student populations (White-Clark, 2005). Subsequently, the prevailing opinion of the teachers interviewed for this study is that there is a significant need for the leadership of Worth School District 127 to provide more professional development opportunities that will help them learn how to best meet the needs of low SES students.

Some of the areas of professional development that teachers stated they feel the district should focus on in order to address this need are differentiated instruction, incorporation of more technological resources, and the acquisition and incorporation of leveled resources that ensure students from varying backgrounds and abilities are able to successfully grow both academically and social-emotionally. Professional development plays an important role in student achievement when it focuses on providing teachers with the essential knowledge, tools, and training they need to be successful by helping them learn to apply best practices in their pedagogy beyond basic expectations (“Oscar F. Smith Middle School,” 2012). Therefore, the incorporation of district improvement initiatives for Worth District 127 that strive to provide teachers with the professional development they need to understand how to best meet the unique needs of low income students will be essential moving forward.

The qualitative data obtained from the teacher interviews exposed that in general, teachers in District 127 need to develop a stronger understanding of the unique challenges their low SES students face in order to provide them with a better chance of being successful in school. In addition, the interview data highlighted that there are conflicting perspectives among Districts 127’s teachers that need to be addressed regarding the effectiveness of the district’s

curriculum in meeting the needs of low SES students. Finally, teachers interviewed for this study overwhelmingly expressed that there is a need for both school and district leadership to provide teachers with more professional development opportunities that will better support them in meeting the needs of low SES students.

Summary of Research Findings

The aforementioned quantitative and qualitative data obtained for this study highlights that Worth School District 127 is like many other school districts who are required to assume the greater challenge of developing systemic strategies in meeting the needs of vulnerable students, despite how it may be currently getting done (Simons & Friedman, 2008). To start, the teacher survey data exposed conflicting viewpoints that need to be addressed regarding the potential teachers feel all their students have versus their thoughts about the academic abilities and performance of low SES students. The data also highlighted conflicting viewpoints that need to be examined regarding teacher perceptions about the student management protocols they utilize in comparison to their beliefs about the innate capacity of low SES students to behave in school settings. In addition, the teacher survey data highlighted that the majority of teachers believe that district leadership needs to be more active in providing the necessary support that will help them better meet the needs of low SES students. The data collected from the teacher interviews provided a greater understanding of what this support may need to look like as part of a district improvement process.

Subsequently, although the majority of teachers interviewed expressed awareness of the challenges their low SES students face, they admitted that they need to develop a deeper understanding of these obstacles in order to better connect with their low SES students. In addition, although the majority of teachers interviewed stated that they do make adjustments to

their instructional practices in order to meet the unique needs of low SES students, many of them still require additional opportunities to increase their awareness of additional pedagogical strategies in which they can utilize. Finally, the data culled from the teacher interviews echoed data collected from the teacher surveys which highlighted the need for the leadership of Worth School District 127 to facilitate more professional growth opportunities which will provide teachers the support they need to work more effectively with low SES students.

Therefore, the teacher data gathered for this study, along with collected student data that served as supporting evidence, demonstrated that District 127's teachers need more support in order to develop a deeper understanding on how to meet the unique academic and social emotional needs of low SES students. Consequently, data collected from both the teacher and student surveys along with the voluntary teacher interviews provided relevant information that facilitated the development of a district improvement plan for District 127 made up of goals that focus on providing teachers with what they need to be more effective in helping low SES students learn and grow successfully.

Chapter VI

Recommendations

The data accumulated for this study demonstrated that teachers in Worth School District 127 are dedicated, thoughtful educators who strive to do what is best for students. They pride themselves on creating and maintaining academic settings that provide all students with optimal opportunities to learn and grow. However, there are conflicting viewpoints between the effort District 127's teachers believe they put forth in their work with all students versus their perceptions regarding the performance of students of low socio-economic status (low SES). The data collected detailing student perceptions regarding their experiences in Worth School District 127 supports this information. Within the context of these conflicting viewpoints, there is a need for Worth School District 127 to develop school improvement initiatives which strive to assure that teachers are provided adequate support in order to ensure that the unique needs of low SES students are effectively met.

Moving forward, District 127's school improvement efforts should address the conflicting viewpoints that exist between the opportunities teachers feel they are providing students versus the innate abilities and motivations they believe low SES students demonstrate in their academic pursuits. Students in our society frequently come to school with a variety of social and behavioral challenges as a result of coming from difficult home situations. As a result, they are impacted by the negative personal, familial, and cultural influences that typically accompany such situations. Consequently, teachers must view their professional roles as more than just academic instructors. Therefore, a district wide initiative in District 127 that focuses on ameliorating these conflicting viewpoints by providing teachers with the professional development they seek that will help them develop a better understanding regarding how to best

meet the unique academic and social emotional needs of low SES students is necessary. Professional development of this nature should subsequently help teachers develop pedagogical practices that include the implementation of research based strategies that are known to be successful in helping low SES students to learn and grow successfully. In order for this goal to be successfully achieved, effective and targeted professional development will be necessary. The goal of this type of professional development should be to help District 127's educators make adjustments to their pedagogical strategies with low SES students in a manner that will bridge the gap between the academic experiences they believe they provide students in comparison to the manner in which they feel low SES students respond.

Additional data collected for this study demonstrated that the educators of Worth School District 127 need to develop a deeper understanding of the unique, personal challenges low SES students face that inhibit their ability to form positive and productive bonds with their teachers and their schools. Teachers who work with low SES students who are traumatized by their life circumstances are most effective when they are able to develop positive relationships with these students that foster academic and social emotional growth. Therefore, in order to ensure that low SES students develop stronger, more positive connections with their teachers and their schools, District 127 should focus on a district improvement goal that provides teachers with professional development that will help them develop a better understanding of the unique challenges low SES students face that inhibit their ability to form positive connections in school settings. Professional development in this area should focus on helping teachers learn and develop strategies that facilitate the development of stronger, more positive connections between teachers and low SES students.

Development of a District Improvement Plan for the 2018-2019 School Year

The data accumulated for this study pointed out that a district improvement plan in Worth School District 127 should be developed that includes a goal that focuses on providing teachers with support that will help them be most effective in their work with low SES students. The focus of this plan will aim to incorporate professional development opportunities as the main means of providing teachers with support that will help them develop and implement pedagogical strategies that work effectively with low income students. Subsequently, as an educational leader in Worth School District 127 who carried out this study, the plan will be to utilize the data collected which identified district wide issues related to supporting teachers in their work with low SES students as the impetus for the creation of a District Improvement Team that will address relevant student, curriculum, and programmatic needs on an annual basis.

In the 2018-2019 school year, the main focus of this inaugural District Improvement Team will be to utilize the data collected and analyzed in this study as the foundation for the development of a district wide action plan that helps District 127's teachers better understand how to most effectively work with low SES students. The ultimate goal will be to ensure that the District Improvement Team and its work becomes an established, annual practice in Worth School District 127 where associated student, curriculum, and programmatic needs throughout the district are addressed. In order to ensure that this initiative gets off to a strong start in the 2018-2019 school year, an effective District Improvement Team will be convened.

Convening a District Improvement Team for Worth School District 127

During the spring of the 2017-2018 school year and the fall of the 2018-2019 school year, a selected District Improvement Team Chair will work with District 127's administrative team to form the District Improvement Team whose inaugural mission will be to study ways to help teachers be more successful in their work with low SES students. The research conducted for

this study will serve as a guide for this work. The District Improvement Team should be comprised of stakeholders whose main agenda is always to do what is best for students. Members of the team will be individuals who are willing to dedicate themselves to working hard in a collaborative, honest, and genuine manner to ensure that meaningful district-wide goals are developed and addressed strategically.

The District Improvement Team will consist of 18 members comprised of 2 teachers from each of the three schools in District 127, all three building principals as well as the junior high assistant principal, District 127's Superintendent, District 127's Director of Special Services, and 2 parents from each of the three schools. The Chair of the District Improvement Team will collaborate with district and building administrators in order to identify the teachers and parents who will be invited to be members of the team. The Chair will ensure that administrators recommend teachers and parents who they feel would serve as valuable contributors to the District Improvement Team based on the desired characteristics expressed earlier in this section. In regards to teacher and parent composition of the team, efforts will be made to ensure that equitable representation of primary, intermediate, and middle school level educators and parents are represented. The goal of this equitable representation will be to ensure that meaningful input from all instructional levels represented in the district are part of all initiatives facilitated by the District Improvement Team.

In order to make it applicable for both parents and teachers to participate as members of District 127's Improvement Team, meetings will be held once per quarter for a total of four times a year from 6:00 p.m. till 7:30 p.m. District 127 teachers who agree to be members of the team will be compensated for their attendance to these meetings at the contractual hourly rate of

\$28 per hour. Therefore, the district will need to budget for paying 6 teachers \$42 per meeting for a total of \$252 with the final total being \$1,008 for the year.

In order to ensure that this inaugural District Improvement Team is in place and ready to proceed in an effective manner starting in the 2018-2019 school year, the team's Chair will work with District 127's administration in order to form the team in the spring of the 2017-2018 school year. This will ensure that the District Improvement Team will have sufficient enough time in the 2018-2019 school year to address its initial mission of utilizing the data from this study that calls for the development of district wide initiatives that will help educators develop the pedagogical strategies necessary to better meet the needs of the established and growing population of low SES students in District 127.

The Mission of Worth School District 127's 2018-2019 District Improvement Team

To start, District 127's District Improvement Team in the 2018-2019 school year will review and analyze the data compiled from the study carried out for this capstone that identifies the conflicting viewpoints between teacher perceptions about the academic experiences they believe they provide students in comparison to their perceptions regarding how low SES students respond. Subsequently, the team will be given the responsibility of identifying professional development opportunities that focus on helping District 127's teachers develop and implement strategies that facilitate adjustments to their instructional practices that will better support low SES students. In addition, the team will also focus on studying and incorporating professional development opportunities that will concentrate on helping teachers to develop and implement strategies that foster more positive, constructive connections with low SES students.

The objective of this goal will be to help District 127's teachers develop a stronger understanding of the unique, personal challenges low SES students confront that make it difficult for them to establish positive connections with their teachers and their schools. Such connections are known to facilitate learning and growth in school settings that help low SES students overcome the innate academic and social emotional challenges they typically face. Therefore, the District Improvement Team will seek out and facilitate the deployment of professional development opportunities that will focus on helping District 127's teachers learn and implement effective strategies that will help low SES students develop more positive, productive bonds with their teachers and their schools.

Strategies to Explore in order to Support Teachers Working with Low SES Students

A main objective for District 127's Improvement Team in the 2018-2019 school year will be to analyze ways in which teachers can be better supported in meeting the unique, challenging needs of low income students through the identification and deployment of meaningful professional development opportunities. An initial strategy the Chair of the District Improvement Team will utilize will involve guiding the team to explore and hire reputable guest speakers to make presentations to District 127's teachers during at least two Institute Days during the 2018-2019 school year. These presentations will focus on helping teachers develop a stronger understanding of the unique academic and social emotional needs that low SES students demonstrate as well as the specific pedagogical strategies necessary that ensure these students receive optimal chances to learn and grow successfully. An example of a credible speaker for the team to consider recommending for hire is Dr. Ruby Payne whose well known book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* provides the foundation of her message which seeks to provide educators with practical, real-world support and guidance to improve their effectiveness

in working with students from all socioeconomic backgrounds (Payne, 2005). In order to bring in professional speakers of this stature in the 2018-2019 school year, the district will need to budget approximately \$10,000-\$15,000.

An additional, more personalized strategy the Chair will recommend the District Improvement Team consider is the incorporation of a district wide book study, facilitated by members of the team which would help teachers think about and consider pedagogical strategies that will help them develop a better understanding on how to best connect with their low SES students. An example of a relevant book for the team to consider is *Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* written by Kristin Souers and Pete Hall. With the understanding that trauma is a consistent component in the lives of low SES students, this book would be a relevant read for teachers because it conducts an in-depth analysis of how trauma hinders the learning, motivation, and success of students in the classroom while making recommendations on how teachers can build strong relationships with students that create safe educational settings that enable them to learn at high levels (Souers & Hall, 2016). In order to incorporate a district wide book study in this manner, the district would need to budget approximately \$1400 in order to purchase enough books for every staff member in District 127 who works with low SES students.

A final task that District 127's newly created District Improvement Team would need to carry out during the 2018-2019 school year will be an assessment of how effective the professional development opportunities provided to teachers were in supporting them in their efforts to better meet the needs of low SES students. District 127's Improvement Team will carry out such an assessment through the development and administration of student, teacher, and parent surveys that will generate data which will focus on the impact of the professional

development opportunities on the pedagogical practices of teachers in their work with low SES students. In addition, building level administrators will also be tasked to solicit teacher feedback for the District Improvement Team that will contribute in the assessment of the professional development provided to teachers that focused on helping them in their work with low SES students. The combination of the qualitative and quantitative data gathered as part of the assessment process should provide the District Improvement Team with the comprehensive data needed in order to conduct a meaningful analysis of whether or not the team's efforts to provide District 127's teachers with the professional development they need to effectively assist low SES students were successful.

Conclusion

The data collected and analyzed for this study exposed the need for the leadership of Worth School District 127 to create a District Improvement Team that will be tasked to develop a district-wide plan containing goals and strategies that focus on supporting teachers in their attempts to meet the unique academic and social-emotional needs of low SES students. Due to the continuously growing number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds who are enrolling in Worth School District 127, meeting their specific educational needs will remain a priority moving forward. Consequently, the need for District 127's inaugural District Improvement Team during the 2018-2019 school year to facilitate a plan that provides teachers with professional development that ensures low SES students have optimal chances to learn and grow successfully is paramount. Carrying out such a district wide initiative that consequently facilitates the creation of a permanent District Improvement Team whose annual mission will be to address student, curriculum, and programmatic needs, now and in the future, will ensure that

Worth School District 127 remains a viable educational entity that successfully meets the needs of its student population.

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Appendix A

Grades 4-8 Student Survey

The purpose of this survey is to give you the chance to tell the principals and administrators of Worth School District 127 your thoughts regarding how you feel your teachers are doing in meeting your needs as a student. I will take you about 20 to 25 minutes to do this survey. You can stop answering questions and taking the survey if you want at any time. If you do not finish the survey, you will not get in trouble and it will not affect your grades. However, you will not be able to let us know your thoughts regarding how you feel your teachers are doing in meeting your needs as a student.

Directions: Please put an X on the line next to your answer for each question. (*On Survey Monkey, students will be asked to click on the box next to the item that is their answer for each question*).

1. I am in the following grade:
 4th Grade 5th Grade 6th Grade 7th Grade 8th Grade
2. I go to the following school:
 Worthwoods Worth Elementary Worth Junior High School
3. My teachers respect me.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
4. My teachers care about me.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
5. My teachers listen to me.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
6. My teachers are nice people.

- Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
7. I have good relationships with my teachers.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 8. I am comfortable talking to my teachers about my problems.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 9. My teachers encourage me to do my best.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 10. My teachers are helpful when I ask questions.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 11. My teachers help me understand things when I make mistakes.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 12. Classroom rules and ways of doing things are fair.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 13. The teachers in my school are respected by students.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 14. My classmates and I know what we should be doing and learning.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 15. My teachers are interested in me as a student and support me whenever they can.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 16. My teachers help me when I need it
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 17. My teachers explain things another way if me or my classmates do not understand something.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 18. The comments that I get from my teachers about my work help me understand how to do my work better.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 19. My teachers know when I work hard and am doing my best.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
 20. My teachers make school work interesting.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always

21. I have fun at school.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
22. I get choices on how to complete activities.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
23. My teachers assign homework that helps me learn.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
24. My teachers know a lot about the subjects they teach.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
25. My teachers run classes where I am able to work and learn with few distractions.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
26. My teachers communicate with my parents about how I am doing in school.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always
27. My teachers are involved and support me and my classmates in my classes and throughout the school.
 Not at all Sometimes Usually Always

Appendix B

Teacher Survey

The information from this survey will provide me with relevant data that will help me construct a district-wide school improvement plan that provides you with the resources and supports you need in order to best meet the needs of the students in our district who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It will take you approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete this survey. You are free to discontinue completing this survey at any time. If you choose to discontinue completing this survey, data from your survey will not be included in the data that will serve as a guide in the development of the district-wide school improvement plan.

Directions: Please click on the box next to the item that represents their answer for each survey question.

1. School where I work.
 Worthwoods Worth Elementary Worth Junior High School
2. Grade Level I teach
 K-3 4-5 6-8
3. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds in my school are well-behaved.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds in my school do not care about learning.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. The school community has high expectations for all students from low socio-economic backgrounds.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. There are some students from low socio-economic backgrounds who just cannot be motivated to do the work expected of them.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. I have access to the tools I need to do my job as an educator.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. I am satisfied with opportunities for my professional growth.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. I spend too much of my teaching time on disciplining students.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. Teachers at my school build strong relationships with students.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
11. I feel respected by students in my classes who come from low socio-economic backgrounds.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. Social class is a factor in a student's ability to be successful in school.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
13. The academic achievement gap continues to widen in my school between students of low socio-economic backgrounds and their peers.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
14. My teacher preparation courses adequately prepared me to teach low-income students.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
15. My school does a good job of providing low-income students with a quality academic experience.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
16. I feel I do a good job of providing low-income students with a quality academic experience in my classroom.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
17. Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to misbehave in school than their peers.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
18. My experiences growing up were similar to my students.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
19. All students, regardless of their economic backgrounds, can achieve academically in my

classroom.

___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

20. I feel comfortable interacting with the parents of my students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds.

___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

21. The school where I teach provides professional development to help teachers be more effective educators for low-income students.

___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

22. The school administrator (s) in my school support me when I need it in my work with students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

23. The school administration is aware of what goes on in the classrooms in my school.

___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

24. The district administration is aware of what goes on in the classrooms in my school.

___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

Appendix C

Voluntary Teacher Interview Questions

1. How do you think perceptions regarding your students' socioeconomic status influence you as a teacher?
2. How does the socioeconomic status of your students guide your teaching practices?
3. How do your students' life stories connect with your own life experiences?
4. What expectations do you have for your students?
5. What disadvantages do your students from low socio-economic backgrounds have and how do you address those disadvantages?
6. Do you feel that the current curriculum you teach is useful to students from low socio-economic backgrounds? Does it reflect who they are as students? Does it connect with their backgrounds and experiences?
7. What do you wish you had more of in your background that would help you connect with and teach your students from low socio-economic backgrounds better?
8. How can the leadership of your school and the district best support you in your efforts to best meet the needs of students from low socio-economic backgrounds?

Appendix D
Teacher Consent Form

Governors State University

Research Information and Consent for Participation in Research Study

The Resources and Supports the Educators of Worth School District 127 Need to Develop and Maintain the Pedagogical Skills and Professional Perspectives Necessary to Effectively Meet the Needs of Students from Low Socio-Economic Backgrounds

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Joe Zampillo, doctoral student

Department and Institution: College of Education,
Governors State University

Address: 1 University Parkway
University Park, IL 60484

Sponsor: Marlon Cummings, PhD, Capstone Chair

Why am I being asked?

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about your belief systems regarding students from low socio-economic backgrounds and the supports and resources you feel you need in order to successfully meet their needs. My objective is to obtain information from classified teaching staff in District 127 who issue grades to students.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.**

Approximately 70 District 127 staff members may be involved in this research. The final number of participants will be determined by the number of teachers who agree to participate, complete the consent form, and who take an on-line survey.

What is the purpose of this research?

The consistently growing number of students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds enrolled in the school district has created a scenario where there has been a steady increase of teacher exposure to the challenging academic, behavioral, and social-emotional scenarios that accompany the enrollment of students and families from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Although most of the teachers in District 127 have been trained to differentiate their instruction in order to meet the individual learning needs of a wide variety of learners in their classrooms, there has emerged a significant need to support District 127's teachers in order to expand their pedagogical skills in a manner that helps them effectively meet the needs of lower income students.

The goal of this research will be to help District 127's staff develop the pedagogical skills and professional perspectives necessary to cope with and take on the challenges that come with meeting the needs of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who tend to have a more

difficult time conforming to the expectations and structures that are part of a typical school environment.

The data obtained from this research will help facilitate the development of a district wide school improvement plan that will seek to provide the educational staff of Worth School District 127 the professional development, supports, and resources they need in order to successfully find ways to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of lower income students enrolled in the district.

What procedures are involved?

This research will be carried out in Worth Junior High School, Worth Elementary School, and Worthwoods School. All K-8 teachers in Worth School District 127 who issue grades to students will be asked to take an on-line survey during the 2016-2017 school year.

Prior to taking the on-line survey, teachers will be asked to sign this consent form to participate in the study. This research will utilize on-line surveys for the primary purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of teachers' belief systems regarding students from low socio-economic backgrounds as well as the supports and resources they feel they need in order to best meet their academic and social-emotional needs.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

To the best of my knowledge, participating in this study will carry minimal risk to you or your well-being. A possible risk of this research is that the information obtained in the interview could result in a slight loss of privacy because you will be asked to reveal the age range of students (K-3, 4-5, or 6-8) you teach as well as the school in which you are employed.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

Taking part in this research study will help the leadership of District 127 develop a stronger understanding of how to best support you in meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

When taking the on-line survey, you will not be required to identify yourself by name. However, you will be provided the opportunity to engage in a follow up interview to provide anecdotal information related to the topic of this research. If you choose to do so, information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law

Information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you will be looked at and/or copied for review by: the researcher, my advisor, Dr. Marlon Cummings, and/or Governor State University's Institutional Review Board. When the results of the research are published or discussed, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

- I take the protection of your information very seriously.
- If you volunteer to participate in a follow up interview with me, information from the interview will be transcribed and analyzed. Transcribed data will be saved and stored on my computer and then deleted once the information is detailed and published as part of my Capstone project.
- Interview data will be transcribed verbatim into a word document that I will use to explore the research topic, along with other similar interviews.
- Research participants will be given the opportunity to review and examine the written transcripts if they wish.
- If you choose to participate in a follow up interview following the on-line survey, your name will be removed from any of the related data discussed in my Capstone project.
- I also will be careful to change or mask names and any other identifying information that might give away your identity to a reader.

- The interview data is for my Capstone project. It is also possible that the research results may be published in the future.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. The researcher also has the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if they believe it is in your best interests.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researcher Joe Zampillo at [REDACTED] or via email [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about this study or your part in it or if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research. If you have any issues or questions that you don't feel comfortable discussing with Joe Zampillo, please contact his Capstone Chair, Dr. Marlon Cummings at [REDACTED] via email at [REDACTED]

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Worth School District 127. You are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Signature of Subject or Legally Authorized Representative

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix E

Parent Consent Letter

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Governors State University. I would like your child to take part in my research. During the months of January and February, I will be surveying a randomly selected group of fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in Worth School District 127 to learn more about the supports and resources students who may come from lower socio-economic backgrounds need in order to successfully learn and grow. Your child has been randomly selected to take an on-line survey that will help me obtain the information I will need in order to conduct my research. Your child was randomly selected in order to help me obtain the perspectives of students from all backgrounds as an overall component of my research. Therefore, his or her selection was determined as a result of being enrolled in a randomly selected class period, not due to any prior knowledge of your family's socio-economic status. If you and your child agree that your child may participate in the study, he or she will be asked to complete an anonymous on-line survey during a scheduled class period that will aim to discover his/her perspectives regarding how the educators of Worth School District 127 are doing in meeting his/her academic and social-emotional needs. Completion of this anonymous on-line survey is estimated to take no more than twenty to thirty minutes of class time under a teacher's supervision.

All of the information I obtain from your child will be kept confidential. Your child's name will not be used on any of the forms they complete, and no information about your child will ever leave school premises with a name attached. The survey that your child completes will be taken on-line and will be completely anonymous.

The information collected from this study will be utilized in a manner that will help me develop a district-wide school improvement plan that will aim to provide the educators of Worth School District 127 with the resources and supports they need to effectively meet the needs of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The school improvement plan will not contain any INDIVIDUAL information about children. It will describe information provided by groups of students. For example, I might describe information provided by specific grade levels but I will NOT detail what any individual student discloses while taking the anonymous on-line survey.

Dr. Rita Wojtylewski, Superintendent of Schools, has approved the survey. However, your child does not have to participate in the survey and participation or non-participation will not affect your child's grades. If your child does not want to do the on-line survey, or wants to quit after starting, he/she will be provided with other work to do during the class period until all of the students in the class who are taking the survey have finished. Teachers must be present in the classroom during the survey because of district policy. However, they will not be involved in the student survey process except to provide students with information regarding what they need to do in order to complete the survey successfully.

The information from the survey should help me learn more about student perceptions regarding what they believe the educators of District 127 need in order to best meet their needs as well as how they feel their teachers and their school is currently doing in meeting their academic and social-emotional needs. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study, and most students enjoy the opportunity to express their opinions.

Governors State University appreciates the participation of people who help it carry out its function of developing knowledge through research. If you have any questions about the study that your child will be participating in, you are encouraged to contact me at (708) 671-3947.

If you do not want your son or daughter to participate, fill out the information below and ask your child to return this form to the main office by **Wednesday, April 19, 2017**.

Sincerely,

Joe Zampillo

Principal

Worth Junior High School

School Name: _____

(please print)

I **DO NOT** want my child, _____ to take part in the survey.
CHILD'S NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

Printed Name of Parent

Signature of Parent

Date