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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS FROM THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY IN THE SUBURBS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Sean Christopher Corey

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Leadership, Policy, and Development:
Higher Education and P-12 Education
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

May 2018

This Dissertation by: Sean Christopher Corey

Entitled: *Perceptions About Educational Supports From Those Living in Poverty in the Suburbs*

Has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Leadership, Policy, and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education.

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ABSTRACT

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Supporting children who are living in conditions of economic poverty has been an issue that educational leaders have attempted to solve for many years. Much of the research has focused on alleviating the conditions associated with poverty in urban settings. The share of the population living in poverty in the suburbs is increasing at a faster rate than the share of the population living in urban settings. The supports to alleviate suburban poverty that have been applied have generalized the response structures that were based on studies from urban and rural setting. The purpose of this study was to contribute additional understanding about the educational supports those living in poverty in the suburbs believe that they need in order for their children to succeed.

The goal of this study was to close the research gap and answer the following central question: What do suburban families who qualify for free and reduced lunch perceive they need to support their children's academic success in school? Additional research questions were related to the parents' definitions of success, what the parents hoped for their children, what supports that they have used, and what they saw as needs that could be addressed by the school.

This qualitative case study examined the perceptions of educational supports of parents in eight families. The case study method was used to

articulate stories and compare responses from varying family perspectives. Some of the limitations of this study were related to sampling size and regional nature of the sample. The themes that emerged were communication, an action orientation, and alignment of social-emotional needs. Close evaluation of these themes contributed to the development of an overarching concept about what parents need from schools and the ways in which school-building leaders can respond.

DEDICATION

To my wife, my teachers past and present, and my parents. Your belief in my abilities sustained me through this endeavor.

To the participants who shared their stories and experiences.

To all the school teachers who have committed their lives to forging strong bonds with families.

To Ginny and Bernard Cheney, in memoriam.

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CHAPTER I

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS FROM THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY IN THE SUBURBS

> We deny poverty because our definitions of it are stuck within history of bygone eras. This collective psychological black hole of fear threatens so deeply that it often results in moral failure and stalls our efforts to effectively address a potential national pandemic. (Smiley & West, 2012, p. 23)

Background of the Problem

Poverty is a systemic problem within society that affects many aspects of people's lives (Aber, Morris, & Raver, 2012; Payne, 2003; Rector & Sheffield, 2011; Smiley & West, 2012). Over the last 40 years, there has been little change in the percentage of people living in poverty in the United States (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Living in poverty affects the individual, family, and community (Aber et al., 2012; Books, 2004). A person born into poverty is more likely to have a learning disability, a criminal record, and a shorter life span than a person born into a more affluent economic status (Books, 2004; Duncan, 1999; Payne, 2003).

Problems associated with poverty have persisted throughout American history (Orshansky, 1965). In his 1964 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. identified poverty as one of the three evils facing the world.

> The poor in America know that they live in the richest nation in the world, and that even though they are perishing on a lonely island of poverty they are surrounded by a vast ocean of material prosperity. Glistening towers of glass and steel easily seen from their slum dwellings spring up almost overnight. Jet liners speed over their ghettoes at 600 miles an hour; satellites streak through outer space and reveal details of the moon. President Johnson, in his State of the Union message, emphasized this contradiction when he heralded the United States' "highest standard of living in the world," and deplored that it was accompanied by dislocation; loss of jobs, and the specter of poverty in the midst of plenty. (para. 22)

For many people, the far-reaching effects of this "specter of poverty" have continued to the present day. In the fall of 2011, the poverty rate was 15% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). From 2011 to 2014, poverty rate remained statistically unchanged (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). From 2014 to 2016, there was a decline in the percentage of people living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b).

Reviewing the statistics over a longer period provides a deeper picture. Taking the last ten years into account, the poverty rate peaked in 2010 at 15.1%, its highest rate since 1965. From 2010 through 2016, the poverty rate declined: "The poverty rate in 2016 (12.7 percent) was not significantly higher than the poverty rate in 2007 (12.5 percent), the year before the most recent recession" (Semega, 2017, p.5). Over the last 40 years, from 1976 to 2016, the poverty rate fluctuated between 11% and 15% (Hokayem & Heggeness, 2014). In 1976, the poverty rate was 12% and in 2016 the poverty rate was 12.7% (Semega, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a).

Statement of the Problem

When seeking to support those living in poverty, a two-fold problem exists. The first problem is a lack of a clear definition of what is meant by *poverty*. It is not universally agreed upon as to who is in the group labeled "poor" (DeNavas-

Walt & Proctor, 2014; Fisher, 1992; Orshansky, 1965; Rector & Sheffield, 2011). The second problem is the implementation of appropriate support (Smiley & West, 2012). Logically, if appropriate supports were implemented, the number of people living in poverty would decrease more drastically (Dudley-Marling, 2010; Horgan, 2009; Murphy & Wallace, 2010).

The school system can be one source of support. The completion of school has been demonstrated to help students overcome problems associated with poverty (Aber et al., 2012; Books, 2004; Haskins, 2012). Educational success, in the form of high school graduation, has a positive impact on income potential. In 2015, the difference in annual income between people who did not complete high school and those who had graduated was $10,300 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). Supporting children through education can be a method to help individuals move out of the condition of economic poverty.

Context: Defining the Poor

As a first step to fully understand the social group identified as the “poor,” a clear definition of terms is necessary. All of the ways that those living in poverty have been identified have been met with debate, and no definition or classification has been universally agreed upon (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014; Orshansky, 1965; Rector & Sheffield, 2011). The poor are identified by most statisticians using poverty thresholds defined by the U.S. Census (Chamberlin, 2004; Fryar, 2011; Payne, 2003). The thresholds for determining poverty rates have been debated among different agencies (Rector & Sheffield, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Beyond the statistical analysis of official poverty

measures, sociologists also identify sub-groups in other ways, ranging from conditional perspectives, such as generational poverty, to geographical perspectives, such as the urban poor (Burchell, Downs, McCann, & Mukherji, 2005; DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014; Payne, 2003).

Researchers and authors who have studied the poor as a culture have sought to identify areas of need (Corcoran, 1995; Payne, 2003). This research has influenced the way that poverty is discussed (Gorski, Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap, 2018; Payne, 2003; Smiley & West, 2012). These studies and authors have guided the development of supports and provided a vehicle for discussing the variables associated with poverty. Researchers have investigated the culture of poverty by describing the various types of poverty and including regional characteristics (Damore, 2002; Duncan, 1999). Despite all this research and focus, there was a 0.7% increase in the poverty rate over the 40-year period from 1976 to 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Problem Identification

While the characteristics and identification of the group were being studied and debated, the various programs implemented to reduce the problems associated with poverty were not achieving a lasting decrease in poverty across the total population (Haskins, 2012). Programs face barriers when seeking ways to help people living in poverty. A primary barrier is the identification of the population. Before we can allow the group to articulate what they believe they need, individuals, families, and communities struggling with poverty must be

allowed to define themselves and articulate what they believe they need (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2014). It is important to let the group that is experiencing the phenomena share its story so that support structures can be created and utilized. This study focused on the area of education and asked people in the suburbs experiencing poverty to articulate what kinds of support they need.

There are many studies of people living in poverty in which people have shared their stories (Chamberlin, 2004; Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Smiley & West, 2012). Through authors and researchers like Smiley and West (2012), Payne (2003), and Chamberlin (2004), first-hand accounts about living in poverty have been documented. These stories created a narrative about living conditions and identified areas for deeper investigation and support (Chamberlin, 2004).

These stories primarily focused on families living in poverty in urban centers or rural areas (Smiley & West, 2012). Examples of urban and rural foci are Duncan's (1999) book, *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persist in Rural America,* which focuses on the rural poor, and Payne's (2003) book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty,* which focuses on the urban poor. Yet problems occurred when using data from urban or rural areas to identify factors faced by suburban families. More recently, there has been an increase in academic texts that focus on poverty in the suburbs. Murphy and Wallace (2010), Kneebone and Berube (2013), and Smiley and West (2012) have shared insights into the condition of suburban poverty.

With regard to supporting students in the school setting, there are limiting factors associated with neighborhood economic status and policies regarding

identification (Gorski, Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap, 2018; Rothstein, 2004). Identification of the individuals in need of support is a primary obstacle, as families must self-disclose the information. School personnel are limited by policy (Aber et al., 2012; National Forum on Education Statistics, 2004):

> The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA), which has stricter privacy provisions than FERPA, restricts who may have access to records on students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. This includes student and household information obtained from the free and reduced-price eligibility process and the student's (free or reduced-price eligibility) status (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2004).

For many schools and school districts, information from the lunch program is likely to be the best and perhaps the only source of data available to schools on "economically disadvantaged" students (Colorado Department of Education, 2017). While it may be a source of general population data, it does not help with identifying individuals. "The NSLA strictly limits how school districts may use individual student and household information obtained as part of the free and reduced-price school meals eligibility process once students are identified to receive program services" (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2004, pp. 18–19).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to deepen the existing research on people who have experienced living in poverty in the suburbs. This study's focus was on one aspect of suburban poverty: perceptions regarding education. This study asked parents living in the suburbs whose children qualified for free or reduced lunch about their perceptions of educational supports. From a school leadership

perspective, the themes can provide direction for educational leaders to implement effective supports.

To adequately support any specific population requires extensive knowledge and understanding of that population. Increasing the knowledge base about suburban students living in poverty can increase the ability of school communities to provide resources to students—and their families—that could support their academic achievement (Damore, 2002; Murphy & Wallace, 2010). The guiding research question was:

> What do suburban families who qualify for free and reduced lunch perceive they need to support their children's academic success in school?

Importance of the Study

The data and conclusions of this study can contribute to the work of educational researchers by identifying information specific to suburban poor, thereby facilitating comparisons with research on other specific regional and demographic groups. This information can serve as a point of reference for past studies and generate questions to be explored in future studies.

Because one goal of this study was to identify support systems that work effectively or are necessary to address the educational needs of students living in poverty, the findings can help school leaders identify what their students need to succeed. This can provide opportunities for school-based leaders and school district administrators to examine the assumptions they have about existing support programs. Using the themes that emerged in this research, educational

leaders can enhance the existing educational support networks for students living in poverty in suburban areas.

Clarifying Terms

A key component in this research study was the definition of what is considered a suburb. For the purposes of this study, *suburban* was defined using a combination of the U.S. Census parameters, the Colorado Department of Education's classification of school districts, and research by social scientists. *Suburb* refers to areas with a population of 2,500–30,000 that exist outside central cities but in metropolitan statistical areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), and rely on neighboring cities for services and employment (Burchell et al., 2005). This definition accurately described the geography of focus in this study and served as a reliable sociological description. The definition used by Burchell et al. (2005) offers a social planning perspective that acknowledges the existence of the suburbs as a distinct area and sets clear criteria from which to work. The U.S. Census identifies the suburbs as areas that are neither urban nor rural, using the description "cities outside major metropolitan areas" (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014).

A clearly articulated definition of *suburb* is important to allow for some of the themes of this research to be applied to other suburban areas. Clear delineations exist between urban and rural areas, but there is less clarity around the definition of the suburbs (Damore, 2002; Duncan, 1999; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). In census data and city planning literature, municipalities outside metro

centers are considered as a sub-set of cities (Burchell et al., 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Poverty thresholds were another concept requiring clarification. There are varying perspectives on where the poverty line should be set. In the 1960s, poverty thresholds started from a minimum diet philosophy, and evolved over time to represent what families need to participate in society (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014; Fisher, 1992; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Since the inception of these thresholds, policy makers have debated how they should be defined in order to accurately define poverty (Orshansky, 1965; Rector & Sheffield, 2011). Widely accepted data have referenced those criteria used by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014). This study used the parameters that determine eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program.

Academic success also required definition. Academic success is an ambiguous term that could refer to any number of achievements, from passing a class to being on an honor roll. For the purposes of this study, “academic success” indicates that students are passing classes and on course for promotion to the next level with their peer group.

Assumptions and Limitations

As a researcher, my biases include perceptions and assumptions gained from my childhood, personal experience, and work history. I was raised in a small-town setting and attended a parochial school. I was the youngest of four children, and my parents had the resources to participate in my school life. I succeeded in school and participated in many extra-curricular opportunities.

I attended a small private college which afforded me opportunities that led to my work in education. College life was my first exposure to a wide range of economic diversity in a larger city. I worked at a daycare and participated in a mentorship program for economically disadvantaged youth. That experience led me to become a teacher. My first teaching job was working at a low-Socioeconomic status (SES) school where I worked closely with the parents. The school communities I experienced were in smaller systems, which created a bias about how a school community can support all students. Utilizing the strategies of member checking, the goal of this study was to minimize bias as much as possible to increase the study's reliability.

Summary

One of the major distractions to creating lasting support for change is the debate over the definition of poverty (Aber et al., 2012; Duncan, 1999; Smiley & West, 2012). If the desire is not only to study but also support, the dialectical hodgepodge of terms must be understood and contextualized. Statisticians have defined the poor from a quantifiable perspective (Fisher, 1992; Orshansky, 1965). The poor have also been studied from geographical perspectives and from various theoretical frames. No matter what filter is used to identify the poor—geography, sociology, or economics—ensuing debates about who they are remain (Aber et al., 2012; Books, 2004; Duncan, 1999; Murphy & Wallace, 2010).

There is no one solution that can permanently decrease the rate of poverty (Haskins, 2012; Rothstein, 2004; Smiley & West, 2012). Through various

studies and across areas of research, the poor have been categorized in many ways (Duncan, 1999; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). In the past, one population that has been under-represented in those studies and in resulting policy responses to poverty is that of the suburban poor. I propose to contribute to the body of data about this specific group of people experiencing poverty.

This study is intended to identify which supports could have the greatest impact on the educational success of children who experience suburban poverty by gathering perception data from a specific group. From there, the collected data identifying perceptions of those living in the condition of poverty in the suburbs can be compared to prior studies.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Macro Perspective

As I began researching individuals living in poverty, I was surprised how contentious opinions were in defining the population. I naively assumed that literature about people living in poverty was born of consensus and a desire to solve a social problem. In reality, “poverty” was a topic of debate (Fisher, 1992; Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Orshansky, 1965; Rector & Sheffield, 2011; Smiley & West, 2012). Whether looking at descriptors, physical regions, social-cultural identifiers, or poverty thresholds, there was limited agreement.

The analysis of the literature begins broadly and then becomes more specific. There must be a clear context from a statistical, historical, and sociological perspective. In that context, the rationale for further close study of poverty in the suburbs is articulated. The review begins from a macro-perspective to include historical data, economic thresholds, and some of the types of support offered.

Poverty Over Time

People who are experiencing poverty have been presented in terms of statistics. These numbers were generated using U.S. Census thresholds for what constituted poverty and, since they were standardized, worked to view poverty rates over time (Fisher, 1992). The thresholds varied according to multiple

factors, including the size of the family and the ages of the members (see Table 1). The United States Census Bureau uses consistent thresholds across the country to generate population data. For comparison, Table 1 presents poverty thresholds for 2009, and Table 2 presents poverty thresholds for 2017 by size of family and number of related children under 18 years of age.

Table 1

Poverty Thresholds for 2009 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years

Size of Family Unit	Weighted Ave.	None	One	Two	Three	Four
One person (unrelated individual).....	10,956					
Under 65 years	11,161	11,161				
65 years and over	10,289	10,289				
Two people	13,991					
Householder under 65 years	14,439	14,366	14,787			
Householder 65 years and over	12,982	12,968	14,731			
Three people	17,098	16,781	17,268	17,285		
Four people	21,954	22,128	22,490	21,756	21,832	

Table 2

Poverty Thresholds for 2017 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years

Size of Family Unit	Weighted Ave.	None	One	Two	Three	Four
One person (unrelated individual	12,488					
Under 65 years	12,752	12,752				
65 years and over	11,756	11,756				
Two people	15,901					
Householder under 65 years	16,495	16,414	16,895			
Householder 65 years and over	14,831	14,816	16,831			
Three people	19,512	19,173	19,730	19,740		
Four people	25,086	25,283	25,696	24,858	24,944	
Five people	29,731	30,490	30,933	29,986	29,253	28,805

Note. Adapted from U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b

In 2009, the threshold for a family of four with two adults and two children living in the household was $21,832; by 2017, that threshold was $24,858. This increase shows how the thresholds were updated to account for inflation using the changes in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2018b). In that 8-year period, the household income for a family of four increased by $3,026 or 13.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

The 2009 data gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) placed 43,600,000 people at or below the poverty line. Since 2009 was considered the end of the recession according to the National Bureau of Economic Research (Isidore, 2010), viewing the data from 2009 to 2014 showed shifts in the population through a period of varying economic conditions. From 2007 to 2014, after 6 years of increases in the percentage of people living in poverty, the percentage had decreased (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). By 2013, 45,300,000 people (14.5%) were living in poverty. The year 2013 represented a decrease of 0.5% from 2012—the first decrease since 2006 (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014). From 2010 to 2013, there was no statistically significant change in the number of people living at or below the poverty line (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014, p. 12).

From 2008 to 2009, the poverty rate increased for children younger than 18 by 1.8%, representing an increase of 1,400,000 children (Fryar, 2011). In 2012, 21% of all children living in the United States were classified as poor (Aber et al., 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). By 2013, the poverty rate for children under 18 decreased. (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014). In 2016, the poverty rate for children under 18 was 18% (The Children's Defense Fund, 2017).

Over a longer time span, there was an increase in the number of people living in poverty. Since 1973, the poverty rate has remained unchanged. Forty years ago, it was 15%, and in 2013, it was 15.8% (Wimer, Fox, Kaushal, & Waldfogel, 2013). From 1984 to 2014, the number of people living at or below the

poverty level increased at a faster rate than the general population growth (Chamberlin, 2004; Fryar, 2011; Payne, 2003; United States Census Bureau, 2018).

The constant measure over that time was the United States Census thresholds. These thresholds were the criteria used for work by other government agencies and departments. The Colorado Department of Education's Free and Reduced lunch criteria used the poverty thresholds as established by the Census Bureau (see Table 3).

Table 3

Income Eligibility for Free and Reduced lunch program 2016

Reduced Guidelines

Size of Family Unit	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Yearly	21,978	29,637	37,296	44,955	52,614	60,273

Free Guidelines

Size of Family Unit	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Yearly	15,444	20,826	26,208	31,590	36,972	42,354

(Colorado Department of Education, 2017)

The difference for a four-person household between free and reduced lunch is $13,365. Free lunch was equal to 130% of the poverty level, whereas for reduced lunch, the family income was equal to or less than 183% of the poverty threshold (Colorado Department of Education, 2017). School districts used free and reduced criteria to determine scholarship status for community programs, athletic

fee scholarships, and full day kindergarten programming (St. Vrain Valley Schools, 2016).

Regional Analysis

Using the threshold numbers and the classifications of poverty, people living in poverty can be described within geographical regions. Groups living in metropolitan areas are divided into two groups: one consisting of people living in principal cities and the other consisting of people living outside principal cities. The number of people living in poverty outside principal cities but in metropolitan areas represents families who are living in the suburbs. From 2008 to 2009, there was a 1% increase in the population of people living in poverty, bringing the total to 18.7% for those living inside principal cities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). In 2009, the group of people living in poverty in the suburbs increased 1.4% to a total of 11.1%. Over that same year, poverty in rural areas increased 1.5% to 16.7%. These numbers illustrate that the percentage of people living at the poverty level were increasing in all areas and suburban poverty rates were increasing at faster rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

As the statistics show, the numbers of people living in poverty has increased in rural and suburban areas more rapidly than in urban areas: “In cities, the poor population living in high-poverty neighborhoods grew by 21 percent to reach 5.9 million in 2008-2012, while in suburbs it more than doubled, growing by 105 percent to reach 4.9 million” (Kneebone, 2014, p. 31). This is a shift from previous decades, when urban poverty grew more rapidly (Corcoran, 1995; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). A substantial quantity of research has been

completed on urban poverty and rural poverty (Aber et al., 2012; Damore, 2002; Duncan, 1999; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). Kneebone and Berube (2013) stated, “Public perception still largely casts poverty as an urban or rural phenomenon. Poverty rates do remain higher in cities and rural communities than elsewhere” (p. 33).

These data trends are corroborated in *Sprawl Costs: Economic Impacts of Unchecked Development* (Burchell et al., 2005). As automobiles have dropped in price and access to transportation has improved, people living in poverty have had the freedom to move out of urban centers and commute to work. With the growth of suburban areas, there has been an increase in lower-paying service jobs (Burchell et al., 2005). Access to transportation and an increase in low-wage jobs has contributed to the increase in the number of people living in poverty in the suburbs (Burchell et al., 2005).

Increases in Colorado parallel those of the nation. In 2010, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Colorado had an overall population of 5,000,000 people, with a distribution of 687,000 people living in rural areas and 4,300,000 people living in urban areas. The poverty rate was 12.6% overall. The percentage of people living in poverty was higher in rural areas than in urban areas—13.8% and 12.4%, respectively (U.S Department of Agriculture, 2010). The overall population living in poverty increased in Colorado from 9.8% in 2006–2007 to 11.7% in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Colorado differs from the nation in that there is a higher percentage of poverty in rural areas, and the national poverty rate increased by 1.1% while Colorado’s rate increased by 1.9%.

The Colorado statistics identified people living in poverty in urban and rural areas (U.S Department of Agriculture, 2010). Because of the way the data were classified, the data had to be disaggregated to create a picture of Coloradoans living in suburban areas. In those suburban areas, from 2006-2008, the number of people receiving food stamps stayed consistent at 4%, receiving public assistance at 1%, living at the poverty level at 10%, and children living below the poverty level at 11% (Auge, 2009).

History of Poverty Thresholds

Since much relies on the statistics around poverty thresholds, it is important to have a context for the current thresholds. The population data used the standard poverty threshold from the United States Census Bureau. Those thresholds are a debated point of poverty (Fisher, 1992; Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Orshansky, 1965; Rector & Sheffield, 2011; Smiley & West, 2012). Identifying the different arguments serves to identify the context by which people living in poverty are identified and to understand the economic condition.

Until 1963, there was no standard definition of poverty. Starting in 1963, the poverty threshold began to be used to standardize the way data were collected (Fisher, 1992). Poverty thresholds used by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) were developed by Mollie Orshansky (1965), an economist working for the Social Security Administration who wanted to develop a measure to assess the relative risks of low economic status among different demographic groups of families with children (Fisher, 1992; Orshansky, 1965). According to Orshansky (1965), “The new poverty index represents an attempt to specify the minimum

money income required to support an average family of given composition at the lowest level, consistent with the standards of living prevailing in this country" (pp. 7–8). Within the thresholds, different breakout levels accounted for regional differences and comparisons in the United States versus other developed nations (Books, 2004; Fisher, 1992). The thresholds were not intended to account for everything a family might need, but more of the basics to provide for a family (Orshansky, 1965). Orshanky (1965) acknowledged:

> The standard used to define poverty is admittedly arbitrary, but, the differences in risks among certain groups are so great that an alternative criterion of need is not likely to erase them. With a different poverty threshold the indications of high vulnerability for the large family, the nonwhite family, the family headed by a woman might seem greater or smaller; they would hardly disappear altogether. (p. 3)

Different thresholds have been developed to argue different perspectives about living conditions. In more recent census data, the United States Department of Commerce created a measure to collect input from multiple agencies; the measure was "an additional indicator of economic well-being and provides a deeper understanding of economic conditions and policy effects" (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014, p. 10). In 1995, the National Academy of Sciences proposed additional measures that used "alternative poverty thresholds and an expanded income definition" (p. 19). Researchers outside the U.S. Census Bureau believe other measures should be used to generate the official numbers. Rector and Sheffield (2011) challenged that those living in poverty in modern times are better off than in the past. Their report asserted "the actual standard of living among America's poor is far higher than the public imagines and that, in fact, most of the persons whom the government defines as 'in

poverty' are not poor in any ordinary sense of the term" (Rector & Sheffield, 2011, p. 2). From the findings available on the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) site and contained in the reports, it is acknowledged the term *poverty* has no universal consensus.

The various thresholds and opinions expose a point of contention in trying to define who the poor are as a group. In the 1965 report, Orshansky ended with the sentence, "To end on a plaintive note, if we can seek bold solutions and dream big dreams we may be able to ease the problem of poverty even if we cannot yet agree on how to measure it" (p. 27). It is important to use standardized numbers to track changes across time. The poverty thresholds presented by the United States Census Bureau are used by government agencies and programs for economic classification, and are the most useful in identifying the group who are living in poverty.

Differing Social Perspectives

A component of the macro-view on poverty in the United Sates is the variety of ways in which researchers and sociologists have viewed those living in poverty. Some researchers have argued that poverty exists as a culture, while others have viewed it as a condition caused by a social situation. In 1968, Oscar Lewis introduced the concept of a culture of poverty in *La Vida*. Among modern authors, Ruby Payne (2003) has influenced popular dialogue and created professional development for educators about teaching children in poverty (Dudley-Marling, 2010). She sought to establish poverty as a culture with its own language and norms (Gorski, 2005). The debate about descriptors has given rise

to positions that counter those of Lewis (Corcoran, 1995) and Payne. As an opposing view to Payne in popular literature, Smiley and West (2012) presented a philosophy where poverty is a condition caused by social conditions.

Viewing the poor as a culture indicates that children learn hidden rules of poverty and their values shift (Jensen, 2009; Payne, 2003). An example of a culture value shift would be a belief that getting money for food is the most important focus, and families will trade in personal, moral values to provide for their family (Dudley-Marling, 2010; Payne, 2003). Payne (2003) describes an example in which a parent might begin working in nightclubs or even consider illegal activity to support the family. From within that culture, Slocumb and Payne (2011) assert that two types of poverty exist: situational poverty and generational poverty.

Situational poverty is a temporary condition, such as a lack of resources due to an event such as a death, divorce, or loss of employment (Payne, 2003). Generational poverty is a more pervasive problem in which the family has been in poverty for two or more generations. Generational poverty creates obstacles that can have a more lasting effect on the family (Aber et al., 2012). This type of poverty maintains components of a culture--it has its own rules, beliefs, and attitudes (Payne, 2003; Schwartz, 2010; Slocumb & Payne, 2011). Payne (2003) contends that the family experiencing generational poverty is more oriented on survival; the discussion of academic topics is not valued, and a job becomes about earning a living, not a career. Families experiencing generational poverty

live in a situation where higher learning has not been a part of the vocabulary of the family (Payne, 2003).

The ‘culture of poverty’ argument asserts that the poor live in a different culture than the rest of society, characterized by deviant values and behaviors, and that this culture is both “familial and intergenerational” (Corcoran, 1995, p. 237). Proponents of the culture of poverty theory claim that the move out of urban centers by poorer families spreads the characteristics of this culture into new geographic areas (Burchell et al., 2005), creating the same characteristics that exist in poor urban centers. Most importantly, this shift also reduces job-finding networks for mainstream jobs (Corcoran, 1995).

Other models disagree with Payne’s (2003) conclusion about cultural values. They propose that poverty is due to structures within a society and exists as a condition (Gorski, 2018). Dudley-Marling (2010) stated, “The claim that there is a culture of poverty that limits the academic and vocational success of poor people is based on a flawed theory of culture” (p. 364). They argue that other institutions exist that create a definition for the poor (Chamberlin, 2004; Murphy & Wallace, 2010; Smiley & West, 2012). These researchers assert that poverty is an economic situation caused by various factors including market conditions, education, and race. Structural poverty is defined as poverty that is caused by social, economic, and/or racial structures (Corcoran, 1995; Smiley & West, 2012).

Agreement of Needs

When examining the effects of living in poverty, it is important to move beyond the either/or construct of the structural argument versus the culture argument (Books, 2004; Chamberlin, 2004; Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Rector & Sheffield, 2011). Whether arguing to identify the poor as a culture as Payne (2003) did, or illustrating the causes of poverty as Smiley and West (2012) did, these varying perspectives arrive at some similar conclusions; some of these conclusions overlap. The points of agreement include that the condition of poverty has a negative impact on the health, development, and education of children (Books, 2004; Chamberlin, 2004; Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Rector & Sheffield, 2011).

The models about poverty align when drawing conclusions about growing up in poverty. According to Corcoran (1995), “It is very difficult to distinguish the ‘cultural story’ from a ‘structural’ one that posits that the poor economic prospects and constraints on the parents” were the factors that caused the family to be in poverty (p. 244). Families growing up in poverty are constantly in economic crisis and must concentrate on survival; they have less time, resources and energy to devote to “developing children’s capital or earnings potential, [parents] have little time for supervising children, and are less plugged into job finding networks . . . [they can] only afford housing in disadvantaged neighborhoods that provide lower quality schools, fewer good role models” (Corcoran, 1995, p. 242).

Obstacles facing children in poverty do not stop developing at birth; their environment compounds those obstacles. The environment in which they are

raised contains more dangers. There is a greater likelihood that poor children have been exposed to chemicals found in fertilizers, plastics, and herbicides that can affect hormone development (Slocumb & Payne, 2011). The increase in toxins has been linked to greater cases of asthma, attention deficit disorder, and brain defects (Chamberlin, 2004). The emotional environment in which children grow up alters their physiological responses to stress. This makes them more prone to frequent illness and emotional problems (Aber et al., 2012).

Those individuals born into and raised in poverty have compounding conditions (Aber et al., 2012; Chamberlin, 2004; Rothstein, 2004). These conditions place a more difficult burden on families who have experienced generational, long-term poverty. Before children are born, they suffer a variety of complications due to poor prenatal health: low birth weight, premature birth, and developmental problems (Books, 2004; Payne, 2003).

Educational impact. In the school setting, poverty creates specific difficulties for children from the beginning of their lives. From the availability of nutrition to living conditions, those living in poverty are exposed to factors that weaken the immune system and do not contribute to their education (Rothstein, 2004; Stein, 2009). A professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University, Professor Avshalom Caspi, stated: “one of the reasons that poverty does make such an important difference is that it affects many physiological systems and those systems, once stressed, may compromise brain development” (Stein, 2009). The prenatal cognitive development is impacted, setting up a higher chance of learning disabilities. As the children develop, more

complications manifest themselves such as asthma and weakened immune systems. These chronic health problems impact school attendance (Berliner, 2009; Horgan, 2009; Payne, 2003).

Poverty pervades schools and can become the culture of that school. Saporito and Sohoni (2007) found “neighborhood public schools are comprised of higher percentages of poor than their school attendance boundaries” (p. 1240). Statistically, the typical public school student has 37% poverty within his or her attendance boundary, yet the typical public school student attends a school where 60% of the children are poor (Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). Students who are from more affluent backgrounds are not attending their neighborhood public schools (Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). This trend magnifies the impact of poverty on a neighborhood public school. In the words of Corcoran (1995), “Children’s futures are clearly constrained by lack of economic resources. Growing up poor moderately reduces children’s schooling and substantially reduces men’s adult economic status” (pp. 249–250).

Students who grow up in affluent homes find more success in school (Horgan, 2009). A student coming from the highest 25% of family income is about seven times more likely to have completed high school as a student from the lowest quartile (Books, 2004; Chamberlin, 2004; Payne, 2003; Slocumb & Payne, 2011). Researchers agree that the education of children raised in poverty requires more resources than the education of more affluent students (Books, 2004; Horgan, 2009; Slocumb & Payne, 2011). A correlation exists between

poverty rates and lower academic achievement individually and collectively (Rothstein, 2004; Saporito & Sohoni, 2007; Schwartz, 2010).

The impacts of poverty affect both the individual student and the school community. In 1966, the Coleman report, one of the foundational pieces of work regarding poverty, indicated that the economic composition of a school negatively impacts the outcomes of students independent of their background (Kahlenberg, 2006). This conclusion is valid today because, even when isolating for other variables, the socioeconomic composition of a student's high school has as much of an impact on student's achievement as the student's individual background (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

Poverty is identified as a cause of learning gaps in schools, and compounds other educational variables such as transiency, dropout rates, and homelessness (Murphy & Wallace, 2010; Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). Schwartz (2010) explains, "The underlying cause of the achievement gap is poverty." The conclusion remains--growing up in poverty is an obstacle to success in schooling (Books, 2004; Coleman, 1966; Duncan, 1999; Horgan, 2009; Saporito & Sohoni, 2007).

On an individual basis, the longer a child lives in poverty, the more physical and emotional stress they experience. The stress on their developing brains has been shown to lower the child's working memory (Stein, 2009). In addition, a child's intelligence quotient (IQ) can be affected by growing up in poverty. According to Gronski, Niemann, and Berg (2012), persistent poverty can have detrimental effects on IQ, school achievement, and socioemotional

functioning. The education system can help children overcome these cognitive deficits through intervention programming and targeted instruction (Gronski et al., 2012; Haskins, 2012; White, Kim, Kingston, & Foster, 2013).

The relationship between poverty and education has been the focus of researchers and educators. Research has focused on systems that increase poor students' achievements, the relationships between money spent on students and students' achievement levels, identifying effects of poverty on dropout rates; and isolating poverty's contribution to human development (Berliner, 2009; Books, 2004; Chamberlin, 2004; Horgan, 2009). Through these data, a story of poverty has been shared.

System Responses. From the federal to the local level, programs have been implemented to mitigate problems associated with poverty. Government subsidies combined with local food banks have attempted to meet the basic nutritional needs (Books, 2004; Chamberlin, 2004). Clinics support the health and wellbeing of children who live in poverty (Duncan, 1999; Rothstein, 2004). On the state level, aid money is provided through organizations such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, with legislature-created rules governing the distribution of funds such as work requirements for adults in the household (Books, 2004; Rothstein, 2004; Haskins, 2012).

From 1964 to 2014, the numbers of children in poverty have increased and academic achievement in poorer neighborhoods has declined (Books, 2004; Saporito & Sohoni, 2007; Haskins, 2012). It follows that the programs that have been implemented have not drastically reduced the percentage of those

struggling (Smiley & West, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The numbers of children in poverty are growing, and more children are relying on a public school system to provide the tools for them to become productive (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014; Fryar, 2011).

On the federal level, legislation first took on the issues surrounding poverty in the 1930s with the New Deal and again in the 1960s with the War on Poverty (Coleman, 1966; Orshansky, 1965). The outcomes provided indirect policy support and involved guaranteeing a minimum wage and legal services (Chamberlin, 2004; Coleman, 1966). These programs supported, and continue to support, families to help alleviate the conditions of poverty, and offer an indirect support to the school environment (Wimer et al., 2013).

The conditions faced by people who grow up in poverty create compounding conditions for a school as well (Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). From an achievement perspective, at the beginning of their schooling, children raised in a condition of poverty are at a disadvantage. Preschool children from wealthy families entering kindergarten scored “60% higher than scores for children in the poorest families” (Books, 2004). There is a greater incidence of students’ having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) if they come from a home where they experience poverty (Berliner, 2009).

Educational programs. There are programs from the federal to the local level constructed to support children in the educational setting (Books, 2004; Damore, 2002). From the support of the home environment to identifying specific learning needs, organizations have attempted to support children in poverty

(Afterschool Alliance, 2010; Burchell et al., 2005; Gronski et al., 2012; Murphy & Wallace, 2010). Educationally, school districts offer support outside the traditional school day, such as providing after-school care, access to enrichment activities, and extracurricular activities (White et al., 2013).

The federal government has committed ongoing funds for the support of children through school breakfast and lunch programs and title funding (Colorado Department of Education, 2016a; Books, 2004; Colorado Department of Education, 2016b; Colorado Department of Education, 2017; Gorski, 2018). The federal government has continued to award title funds, acknowledging kids who are from an economically disadvantaged background and need more support (Damore, 2002; Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). The focus on funding is seen only as a first step in addressing the inequities faced by children living in poverty (Aber et al., 2012; Berliner, 2009). A layer of support during the school day is provided through the National School Lunch Program.

> The National School Lunch Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, operates in most elementary and secondary schools…. Students from households with incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for free school meals, and children from households with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price school meals. (Colorado Department of Education, 2017, p. 18).

On the state level, programming has focused on not only alleviating the conditions faced by children growing up in poverty but has also added funding for programs to help children as they grow to adulthood (Colorado Department of Education, 2016a; Gronski et al., 2012; Schwartz, 2010). One example is a

Colorado program targeted at early childhood education. The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) started in 1988:

> [In] recognition of the need to adequately prepare children who are at risk for future academic failure. The intent was that helping these children at an early age could result in lower dropout rates, less dependence on public assistance and less involvement with criminal activities . . . and to implement activities and supports to strengthen families and support them as participants in their child's education. (Colorado Department of Education, 2016a)

Colorado Preschool Program is an early childhood education state-funded program administered by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The program is for eligible children to attend "high quality early childhood programs." The CDE allows districts to manage the programs and allocates funds as districts meet requirements and identify children. Eligibility depends on the presence of risk factors; Children are determined to be eligible for CPP based on certain risk factors with the primary factor being economically based. The program started in 1988, serving 2,000 children in Colorado, and has grown to serve 20,000+ children in 2015 (Colorado Department of Education, 2016a).

Communities have organized resources to address many of the different obstacles faced by children growing up in poverty, such as programs that support students outside of the traditional school day (Sherman, Trisi, & Parrott, 2013). After-school programs, summer courses, and summer reading programs provide potential enrichment and safety (Afterschool Alliance, 2010; White et al., 2013). These programs are a response to the fact that "socioeconomic differences in reading growth rates are larger in the summer months than during the school year (White et al., 2013).

The demand for before- and after-school programs exceeds the supply. The percentage of students in afterschool programs is 5% greater in urban areas than for students in suburban centers (Afterschool Alliance, 2010). Research indicates that 46% of urban children, 33% of suburban children, and 39% of rural children would participate in an afterschool program if it was available (Afterschool Alliance, 2010). This shows that families are interested in expanding the support of an afterschool program and that those living in urban areas are most likely to participate (Gronski et al., 2012; Kneebone & Berube, 2013).

Due to perception, scarcity, and transportation, suburban children have different access to resources (Burchell et al., 2005; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). A perception exists that children who live in detached single-family homes do not need additional care (Burchell et al., 2005). When compared to children living in urban poverty, access to programming is not as abundant for suburban children and, at times, there are transportation concerns regarding getting to and from afterschool programs (Burchell et al., 2005). Students in suburban settings would be the least likely to take advantage of an afterschool program if it was available (Afterschool Alliance, 2010). Suburban students spend the largest amount of time in self-care situations (Afterschool Alliance, 2010; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). An analysis of availability and participation rates illustrates that expanding the “right programs” that help support education is critical (Chamberlin, 2004; Horgan, 2009; Rothstein, 2004). Data related to afterschool care illustrates the complexity of supporting children in different situations. Children in urban settings

spend 7.4 average hours in self-care whereas children in suburban settings spend 9.1 average hours in self-care (Afterschool Alliance, 2010).

Summary

Starting in 1963, the people in poverty were identified using income thresholds (Orshansky, 1965). That model provided a consistent method to measure poverty over time. Statistics indicate that the percentage of the US population in poverty has increased from 13.7% in 1970 to 14.5% in 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Whether poverty is viewed as a result of the deficit model or the structural model, it is acknowledged that children growing up in poverty require additional support (Aber et al., 2012; Coleman, 1966; DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014; Payne, 2003; Smiley & West, 2012). On the federal and state levels, government agencies have applied programs to support different aspects faced by people living in poverty (Berliner, 2009; Horgan, 2009; White et al., 2013). Support has been provided for food, health, and education (Books, 2004; Gronski et al., 2012; Rothstein, 2004). Even though different programs have been applied, the number of children living in poverty has increased (U.S.Census Bureau, 2014).

Supporting children in poverty in an educational setting is supported through federal and state initiatives that are enacted on the local level. Direct support is delivered on the small community level of the school (Afterschool Alliance, 2010; Books, 2004; Haskins, 2012). Due to policy and privacy laws, principals and school building leaders have difficulty connecting with all those who may benefit from the appropriate and available programs. They rely on

families to self-identify their economic status. The “hidden numbers” make it difficult to get broad program involvement to give children the tools they need so that they may achieve academic success.

Interviewing families living in poverty can provide insight into the perceptions of the family about educational supports. The successes or failures of those programs can help inform policy makers as they move ahead with policy decisions. By understanding the specific details about families’ perceived needs, educational leaders have a place to start when implementing educational programing.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

For this study, the research design allowed for the articulation of perceptions about those experiencing poverty and living in the suburbs through interviews. Initially, a comparative case study framed the analysis wherein one group of families had accessed governmental supports and the other group of families did not utilize the same supports. To establish the background for this study, the epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and qualitative methods will be shared. This qualitative approach was used as data were gathered, coded, presented, and the themes analyzed.

Problem Statement

As stated in the previous chapter, through the study of those living in poverty, researchers have started to define poverty from different perspectives (Aber et al., 2012; Damore, 2002; Duncan, 1999). The research has tended to define low-income people from a hegemonic perspective (Chamberlin, 2004; Rothstein, 2004). More descriptors from the perspectives of people living in poverty in the suburbs will add further clarity on how to support this specific population.

This focus of this study was on the perception of those experiencing the phenomenon of poverty. As stated by Chamberlin (2004), Payne (2003), and

Smiley and West (2012), education can break the cycle of poverty. The objective of this research was to uncover what supports parents living in poverty in the suburbs perceived they needed to have their children succeed in school. The following central research question guided this study:

> Q1 What do suburban families who qualify for free and reduced lunch programs perceive they need to support their children's academic success?

Epistemology: Social Constructionism

To increase understanding of the study's design, it is important to understand the theory of knowledge that forms the foundation of the study. Not only does it provide perspective, but it also contributes to identifying bias. The foundation for this study is social constructionism. According to Creswell (2008):

> Assumptions identified in these works hold that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. The questions become broad and general so that participants can construct the meaning of a situation. (p. 8)

This approach allowed for the construction of themes to come from data that were gathered as participants made sense of their economic situations in terms of support for their children's academic achievement (Charmaz, 2006).

Theoretical Framework: Interpretivism

A theoretical knowledge base is the philosophical stance from which a given methodology emerges. The theoretical framework of this study is interpretivism. The collection and presentation of the data will function under the

assumption that reality cannot be separate from our knowledge of it, so no separation of subject and object exists (Angen, 2000). As explained by Hays and Singh, the observer exists in the dialogue with the subjects (2011, p. 7). Meaning emerges from that dialogue, and conclusions are drawn and considered in real time. Interpretivists believe the criteria for determining the value of research are socially constructed (Hays & Singh, 2011). Researchers' values are present in all phases of the process. The resulting interpretations are bound in a moment with the context of that moment and are open to re-interpretation through the process of dialogue (Hays & Singh, 2011). For the story to be told from the perspective of people experiencing the phenomenon, the researcher can account for bias by admitting that he/she has preconceived ideas and letting the narrative take shape through a dialectical process that allows the meaning to be created by people who are experiencing suburban poverty.

Methodological Framework

A qualitative approach is an appropriate method for the study of social phenomenon. "A central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 13-14). A description of the needs of impoverished suburban people to support academic achievement will emerge from the information. Since this study explored perceptions about education, that focus lends itself to a qualitative approach.

The research was conducted via case studies. This method required that a bounded system be clearly defined. Any bounded system should have clear

limits (Merriam, 2009). The limits in this study were that participants had experienced poverty, lived in a clearly defined geographic location, and experienced interaction with an institution. The two groups included for comparison will be groups who have accessed support and those that have not accessed support.

The comparative component of the case study sought to explore a bounded system and present an in-depth picture of the case subjects (Creswell, 1998). For category analysis, themes were identified then compared to themes in prior research. The hope is that the resulting patterns lead to questions, questions lead to hypotheses, hypotheses lead to further studies, and additional studies can lead to the identification of successful solutions.

Decisions about categories were made by the researcher throughout the data collection process (Charmaz, 2006). The “strategy of comparative analysis for generating theory puts a high emphasis on theory as process; that is, theory as an ever-developing entity, not a perfect product” (Glaser & Strauss, 2009, p. 32). The inclusion of multiple cases created a descriptive study that was a “‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43).

According to Creswell (2008), when using a narrative design, literature review plays a more minor role. The narrative approach allows for the construction of themes to come from observations, rather than preconceived opinions and bias from the literature (Charmaz, 2006). As part of the analysis, the literature served as a frame to compare and contrast themes that emerged.

The qualitative approach allowed for the open expression of subjects' experiences.

Research Participants

Participation of the volunteers was based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics with specific criteria (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009). In order to justify case study analysis, it was important to ensure the boundedness of the case and determine that there was a clear limit to the number of people who could be involved in the case. The primary subgroup identifiers that were used as participant criteria were qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Another key qualifier for subjects was geographic location. For the purposes of this study, the definition of a "suburb" was a combination of geographic region, population density, and school district delineation. The subjects resided in areas containing between 2,500 and 30,000 people along the northern front range of Colorado. The homes were located in areas outside central cities, but in metropolitan statistical areas as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) and relied on neighboring cities for services and employment (Burchell et al., 2005). This definition of suburb created a clearly articulated area combining U.S. Census parameters, the Colorado Department of Education's classification of school districts, and research by social scientists. The suburbs along the Colorado Front Range are comprised of a number of geographic areas that can be classified as suburban, thereby making it an ideal location to draw from for a representational sample for this case study. The subjects were drawn

from school districts that have seen an increase in rates of free and reduced lunch utilization.

As for the United States Census, according to Murphy and Wallace (2010), “the standard used by the U.S. Census Bureau . . . defines suburbs as municipalities with populations greater than 2,500, that are located in metropolitan statistical areas, and that are not central cities.” The study used “suburban” to refer to the Colorado Department of Education’s definition of population centers that are outside of major metropolitan centers. The participants resided in urban-suburban districts or outlying cities. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) provided the following definitions: “Urban-Suburban: Districts comprising the state’s major population centers outside of the Denver metropolitan area and their immediate surrounding suburbs. Outlying City: Districts in which most pupils live in population centers of seven thousand persons but less than thirty thousand persons” (Colorado Department of Education, 2016b).

To focus the story about perspectives toward education, this study limited its variables in order to draw conclusions that will be compared to other themes that emerged. According to Huberman and Miles, in selecting cases, “selection of an appropriate population controls extraneous variation and helps to define the limits for generalizing the findings” (2002, p. 12). To limit some of the variables, such as single parent household dynamics, the participants had two parents living in the home. Families living in poverty with two-parent families represent 28.3% of the total population living in poverty (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014).

Regarding the age of the children, it was desired that the children had experienced some schooling so that the parents would have interacted with the educational system. To that end, each family had at least one child who had completed middle school. An important component was to clarify success in education: For the purposes of this study, success meant students who are passing classes and on-course for promotion to the next grade level.

The sample size was intentional. As explained by Merriam (2009), the criteria were first established and served to dictate the sample size. Collecting data from multiple families allowed for comparison and an analysis of common themes. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling; that is, participants were intentionally selected to meet criteria that fit the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). In order to participate in this study, participants met demographic data based on income equal to or less than the income eligibility guidelines for reduced lunch published by the CDE (Colorado Department of Education, 2017).

One subgroup included five families that have accessed supports. The other subgroup of participants included three families that have not accepted supports. The supports were defined as resources directly linked to formal schooling that included free and reduced lunch programs, CPP funding, and/or scholarships to attend classes, including waived registration fees.

Participants were sought through community organizers, churches, and government-sponsored agencies. The search for subjects was satisfied when four families in each subgroup volunteered for the study. In the event that more

families had wanted to volunteer at the same time, more families would have been added to either group.

The additional subqualifier provided a point of comparison. The two groups within the sample allowed for a comparison of the perceptions toward government assistance between those groups. Those points of intersection provided data on programs that are perceived as successful. The comparison of the two subgroups served to establish a holistic, “thick” description of the phenomena being studied (Shkedi, 2005).

Participants were sought through flyers disseminated through various organizations and requests made of community organizers. The flyers invited potential research subjects to participate in conversations regarding their perceptions about educational supports. The researcher visited organizations and made personal requests for participants. The purpose of the study and its time commitments were shared (see Appendix B). The volunteers were given consent forms (see Appendix C) that contained information about how their privacy would be protected and about the interview, as well as a statement that the study had been approved by the University of Northern Colorado’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once all forms were signed, they were maintained in accordance with IRB guidelines.

Before collecting the data, the questions underwent a pilot process. In order to determine that the survey questions were understandable and addressed the central question, a group answered the questions and provided feedback as to the questions (Creswell, 2008, p. 402). There were four pilot test

participants, who had a written copy of the questions provided, then had the questions asked of them. They were asked to evaluate the questions by writing feedback directly on a copy of the questions and sharing observations. The feedback from the test group was used to revise the questions.

Methods of Data Gathering

Information was gathered through two methods. The first was through an interview with the parents. Conducting interviews allowed for a greater depth of conversation to express participants' unique perspectives. The researcher's field notes were another component of data collection.

Before beginning the data collection, measures were taken to ensure confidentiality. To protect the confidentiality of participants throughout the data collection process, pseudonyms were assigned to both individuals and families. The interview protocols related to confidentiality were adhered to through the interview process, with the parents having the consent form explained to them and signed. They received a signed copy to retain. The IRB approval was shared. Signed documents were kept in a file cabinet in the graduate advisor's office.

In each family's initial conversation, the focus of the study was clarified, background information on the family obtained, and parents' perceptions gathered. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and was digitally recorded. The recordings were transcribed, and after sharing the transcription with the participants, the digital recordings were deleted.

Questioning strategies did not to lead the participants to a desired answer, but rather probed for understanding (Charmaz, 2006). The objective was to first identify perceptions of education in the conversations. Some structured questions allowed for natural dialogue (see Appendix A). The questions' focus was about the parents' hopes for their children, moving into what they need from schools, and concluding with more general perceptions about educational supports.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Presentation

The interviews were analyzed through an open coding process to "enable investigators to break through subjectivity and bias" (Corbin, 1990, p. 13). After comparisons of the initial categories, axial coding further organized the categories, and the final step involved generating overarching themes from those categories.

As the data were collected, the data underwent an open coding process. The coding included both the interview notes and researcher's field notes (Creswell, 2008). Upon completion of each interview, that interview and related notes were encoded. The categories were grouped, maintaining a constant comparison model and encoding the data upon completion of each interview until all eight interviews were completed.

The transcripts were analyzed, looking for similarities in word choice and similar descriptions of perceptions regarding supports for school success. The created categories were looked at through comparison diagrams (for contrast) and cluster analysis diagrams (for comparison). After all the interviews were completed, because of the constant comparison process, there was a list of

generated categories. The analysis continued through the identification and clarification of core categories (Creswell, 2008, p. 444).

The findings were linked together into categories through axial coding. Axial coding has been described by Creswell as the process of relating codes (categories and concepts) to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking (p.434). The most prevalent codes were generated from the open coding process. The categories were then compared between the two groups, generating a categorization of principal themes. This provided a clear sense of the findings in the text of the transcriptions, relationships between categories of data, and significance in terms of comparable emphasis attached to different categories across interviewees.

The next step was to use a selective coding process wherein an explanation of the interrelationship of the categories in the axial coding model is generated. These final categories were the basis for the development of explanations and the assessment of themes that emerged in both subgroups. The process generated a clear summary of themes in addressing supports that suburban families living in poverty perceived they needed to support their children's academic success in school.

A second piece of datum was the researcher's field journal. To counteract the limitation of observer's bias, the researcher's notes were maintained. They included background data gathered about the school, the neighborhood, descriptions of interview settings, and reflections about the interviews. The notes contributed to the constant coding and themes that emerged. The notes served

as points of comparison between actions, words, and other data, such as any documents shared by the parents or collected by the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2008).

Using constant comparative analysis, data were continuously gathered, sorted into categories, additional information collected, and the new information compared to the existing categories (Creswell, 2008). The details from conversations used principles of grounded theory and arrived at the themes. The final themes emerged from data gathered through transcripts, observations, and researcher's notes that were considered (Creswell, 2008, p. 434). The final themes were compared and contrasted to the literature on perceptions of education for families living below the poverty line. The limited case study size, while not allowing enough data for the formation of a complete theory, allowed for the emergence and expression of an overarching concept.

Limitations, Assumptions, and Trustworthiness

When seeking to describe a social situation, many limitations and an abundance of variables exist (Angen, 2000; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 2009). This study is limited to what people living in poverty perceive that they need to increase their children's achievement in school. Limitations included sample size, regional differences, and family construction. The sampling was taken from one area along the front range of the Rocky Mountains. Families at a similar economic level living in suburbs in other regions may have different perceptions. The subjects may not reflect the typical case found when looking at sampling from across the suburban United States. Gathering the data from intact

families was an additional limitation, as single-parent family structures may have different experiences.

Trustworthiness was contained within the process. According to Elo et al.(2014), “the trustworthiness of data collection can be verified by providing precise details of the sampling method and participants’ descriptions” (p.10). The ongoing coding process and constant checking of the themes provided an audit trail. The credibility of the data gathered from the interviews was achieved through triangulation of interviewing of comparative groups. As stated by Shenton (2004), “Another form of triangulation may involve the use of a wide range of informants. This is one way of triangulating via data sources. Here individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others” (p. 66). The variety of the interviews, field notes, and neighborhood and school data were utilized to increase triangulation of data, improving reliability. This process improved the trustworthiness of the study.

Subject selection was clear and included a process for member checking contained in the sharing of transcriptions with interviewees. The field notes not only aided in developing a richer, thicker description of the data, but made note of my perspectives and biases. Collaboration between the participants and the researcher limited the effect of preconceived notions about the data (Creswell, 2008).

Summary

The focus of this study was the perceptions about educational supports among those experiencing the phenomenon of poverty. The objective of this research was to uncover what supports those living in poverty in the suburbs perceived that they needed in order for their children to succeed in school. The hope was to accurately communicate those perceptions through a comparative case study. This method was used to develop an in-depth understanding of the perceptions around education (Creswell, 2008, p. 477). By recording their stories and coding responses to identify themes, a picture of the educational supports that parents of suburban children living in poverty perceive are needed for their children to be successful in school was created. This information can inform school leaders and other policymakers as to what supports could be implemented to support the academic success of suburban children living in poverty.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of suburban parents regarding educational supports needed to help students living in poverty achieve academically. The research question guiding this qualitative study was: What do suburban families living in poverty perceive they need to support their children's academic success in school? Interviews with parents participating in the study also explored what the parents would like educators at their child's school to know, the parents' perceptions of their child's attitude toward school, and what the parents were proud of or viewed as successes regarding their child's education.

In this chapter, the findings from conversations with parents from eight households that fit the set of specific criteria are described. The criteria for inclusion were that participants were two-parent households, lived in a suburban area, qualified for free or reduced lunch, and had one student who was at least middle school age. All participants lived in a state in the Rocky Mountain region. The suburbs where participants lived ranged in distance from 15 to 30 miles from a major metropolitan city and included a variety of housing types. One family lived in a townhome, two families lived in mobile homes, and five lived in detached single-family homes. Two of the eight families lived in areas with a

prevalence of multifamily housing. The remaining six lived in single-family housing areas. The economic data of the subdivisions where families lived varied. The percentage of poverty in the suburban neighborhoods ranged from 1.5% to 26.1% (see Table 4).

Table 4

Participants' Family Characteristics

Participants	Free or reduced lunch	Number of children in household	Age ranges of children	Poverty % in neighborhood[1]	Accepted government sponsored support
Jack and Diane	F*	4	5–12	7.9%	N
Stephanie and Joe	R	4	12–17	2.2%	Y
Corrine and Curt	F	5	10–18	1.5%	Y
Tammy and Leo	R*	1	19	6.5%	N
Mary	F	3	9–17	7.9%	Y
Elisa and Robert	F	3	9–16	26.1%	Y
Howard and Catherine	F	3	6–14	7.9%	N
Andrea and Chris	F*	3	3–14	10.5%	N

Note. *Not utilizing the resource [1]Adapted from "Poverty by Age and Ratio", Colorado Department of Local Affairs, 2017.

The interviews with the participants provided an opportunity to more deeply understand what these parents felt they needed for their children to experience success in school. The data gathered were “interpretations that are bound in a moment with the context of that moment and are open to re-interpretation through the process of dialogue” (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 389). Themes emerged through analysis of the interview transcripts as explained in Chapter III and were specific to parental views of academic supports needed for students living in economically difficult situations in the suburbs.

The Family Interviews

Jack and Diane. Jack and Diane lived with their four children in a three-bedroom, two-bathroom townhome. The neighborhood consisted of apartments and townhomes and was predominantly a rental home area. The bedrooms were upstairs with a living room and kitchen downstairs.

Jack worked in the computer field. In the last five years, he had three different jobs. Over that time, the family’s economic situation improved. Most recently, he obtained a middle-management job with a computer company. The family was actively involved with their church, and they were leaders in their congregation. They supported other families through their involvement. They placed value on service to others, which influenced their perspective on receiving help from outside of the church community and was reflected in their suggestion for schools to use home visits as a form of support. Diane helped lead the children’s religious education program at the church. Through Jack’s leadership

position in the church, he had an opportunity to go on home visits to support members of the congregation.

While their situation had improved, they still qualified for the reduced lunch program. As a family, they did not access the free and reduced lunch program. Diane shared that, in the past, she was willing to use programs on her terms for onetime needs if there was an element of anonymity. The family used programs that were sponsored through nongovernment organizations. Diane talked about using a summer food program that was hosted by a local church in the past. She explained that she didn't accept food-based help "because feeding our family isn't a burden we have."

Jack and Diane's family was improving their economic situation. They accessed support from community-based programs while supporting others. It was important that the help they received did not take away support from someone more in need. They shared that school supports could replicate the structures their church had in place.

Stephanie and Joe. Stephanie and Joe were parents of a nontraditional family: They had one biological daughter and three adopted children, and over the course of nine years, they fostered over 20 children. Their neighborhood was in an area populated by single-family homes with most of the homes built between 2002 and 2006. They resided in a four-bedroom, three-bathroom, open-floor-plan ranch. Stephanie chose to stay at home with their first foster child, whom they adopted. Stephanie gave birth to one daughter, and they adopted another girl. Currently, they have stopped participating as a foster home and

focus their time on raising their two middle-school-age daughters. At the time of the interview, their son was preparing to start college.

They started their family life in a suburb further south where Joe worked in an auto body repair shop. Joe moved up in the auto body field. He expressed that the work was difficult and that the pay was inconsistent. Most recently, after a time off when he was looking for work, Joe became a real estate agent. They qualified for and accessed the reduced lunch program.

Location was very important to them. Stephanie shared that they made decisions about where to live based on a supportive community. The suburban area they chose, according to Stephanie, has a “smaller community, more accountability, and better access for all of their children.” As they looked at purchasing their current home, they were aware of the positive impact the school had on the value their house. They viewed that value from both an economic perspective and as having a positive impact on the connections to other people for their children.

Like Jack and Diane, Stephanie and Joe were improving their economic situation. They, too, used support from community-based programs but also used the free and reduced lunch program. They worked with county-sponsored adoption programs. They believed that location was important as it related to the quality of the school.

Corrine and Curt. Corrine and Curt lived with their five children—four boys and one girl. Two of the sons were in elementary school, the daughter was in middle school, a son was in high school, and the oldest in the house was

getting ready to go to college. Corinne and Curt's home was a three-bedroom ranch house with one bathroom. The common living area was comprised of an open kitchen area connected to a living room with a small eating area. To the immediate west of their home were multimillion-dollar homes on larger lots. The house was built when the area was more rural in nature. The home was on an approximately half-acre lot. With the growth of the suburban area, there was now a busy road that passed in front of the house. The neighborhood incidence of poverty was less than 1.5%.

Corrine worked for a pizza chain, and Curt stayed at home taking care of the children. In the last 3 years, Curt had been diagnosed with cancer that was in remission. Over those 3 years, the family lived in four locations, and the children attended three school districts. Corrine and Curt attempted to keep the children in one school system, but the commute became difficult, so they enrolled their children in the neighborhood schools. They qualify for and utilize the free lunch program.

Corrine and Carl used support from many different agencies. They placed value on schooling, making housing decisions based on the schools. Their experience in numerous systems gave them perspective on effective schooling. They valued school, speaking proudly about their son who was accepted to college.

Tammy and Leo. Tammy and Leo had an adult son and daughter. They supported their son as he moved through the school system, and they wanted to share their experience. The son had graduated, entered the workforce, and was

living at home. Their daughter was married and lived in a neighboring town. They lived in a three-bedroom, two-bathroom home surrounded by single-family homes built from 1930 to 1980. The house was a single-story, single-family home built in the 1970s. The bedrooms were on one side of the house, and the kitchen was along the back of the house. The front bedroom had been converted into an office where Leo worked from home.

They did not have a child actively attending school. Upon hearing about the study, Tammy wanted to share her story of supporting her son through the school system. They had direct experience with the school system, so they met the qualification for participation. As participants, their recollection was more reflective in nature than the others.

While their son was in school, Leo worked for a tech company in an entry-level position. He received multiple promotions with the company. Tammy stayed at home to take care of their son. Through their son's public-school years, the family qualified for free and reduced lunch but chose not to access the program. Their situation improved with the payoff of their home mortgage and the children becoming more self-sufficient. At the time of the interview, Leo was a software engineer, and Tammy continued to stay at home supporting their son.

Like two of the previous three families, their economic situation was improving. They were proud of how they stuck together as a family and made it work for their son. Tammy shared that she was the advocate for her son and that his success wouldn't have been possible without her work as a parent with the school system.

Mary and Carl. Mary and Carl lived with three children. Their daughter had graduated high school and was living with them. She helped take care of the house and the boys. One son was in third grade while the other son was in seventh grade. Both boys attended a kindergarten through eighth grade school. The family lived in a four-bedroom, three-bathroom, split-level house. The upper level was the living area with two of the bedrooms down a hall. The area in which they lived consisted of single-family houses where most were built in the 1980s. Surrounding their development were multifamily houses. The neighborhood incidence of poverty was 7.9%.

Mary worked the night shift doing janitorial work while Carl worked the day shift as a mechanic. They arranged shifts so that one of them could be home for the children. Carl was called in to work and didn't participate in the interview. The family qualified for and used the free lunch program.

Mary was one of three families that participated in the I Have a Dream Program. Her third-grade son received support at school through the program. She liked the support that her son received from the tutors but felt the school and teachers needed to keep her informed and desired more communication.

Howard and Catherine. Howard and Catherine lived with their two boys and one girl in a three-bedroom, one-bathroom mobile home. The home consisted of an open living area that included an eat-in kitchen and living area with the bedrooms down a hall. They lived in an area comprised of modular and mobile homes with an incidence of poverty at 7.9%.

Howard worked for a landscaping company, and Catherine stayed at home to support the children. In the winter, Howard's job was focused on snow removal. The family qualified for and utilized the free lunch program.

Both parents were born in Mexico and completed their schooling through high school in Mexico. The children have attended school exclusively in the United States. The eldest boy was in middle school, and the other two attended elementary school. Howard and Catherine coordinated support so their children could focus on school. While they had bus service, they chose to drive their children to school to avoid their boys' being pulled into behavior altercations.

Howard and Catherine were the second of three families that participated in the I Have a Dream Program. Their third-grade son received support at school. Howard wanted them to stay focused and complete school so that they may get better jobs and have a better situation than what he was able to earn for them.

Elisa and Robert. Elisa and Robert's family consisted of two boys and one girl. The boys were in middle school while the girl was in fourth grade. They attended a public K–8 school. Their home was a three-bedroom, one-bathroom mobile home in a mobile home park. The neighborhood was situated between a single-family housing development and a major interstate. The incidence of neighborhood poverty was 26.1%.

They were a stepfamily created through a separation between Robert and the children's mother. Elisa was the stepmother, having been a part of the children's lives since the girl was an infant. Robert had primary custody, and the

children resided with him and Elisa most of the time. He was in the process of seeking sole custody.

Both parents had dropped out of high school. A couple years after dropping out, Elisa earned her GED. Robert worked in the manufacturing field and has worked for the same company for 15 years. He was raised in the area with two brothers. Robert's extended family lived in the surrounding area. Elisa took care of the children while attending school to become a medical assistant. The family qualified for and used the free lunch program, and their daughter participated in the I Have a Dream Program.

Robert shared that, being from the area, it was important to maintain stability for his children. They have worked to keep the children in the same school system. They applied for and used bus service to a school that is not in their attendance boundary through the district's transportation office.

Andrea and Chris. In Andrea and Chris's family, there were three children living at home, with one daughter living with family in another state. The older girl and boy were Andrea's from a previous relationship. The two younger boys were three and four years old. The older boy completed middle school and had started high school. They lived in a four-bedroom, three-bathroom, two-story home built around 2010. The neighborhood was a newer subdivision occupying the area between a retail area and a more rural area.

Chris was in the navy and used the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program to attend college. He continued in the reserves and left the navy, using his ROTC grant to enroll in a Ph.D. program where he studied

climate science. He was a teaching assistant at the university and Andrea stayed at home taking care of the children.

By Andrea's admission they did not need food because her son could "take leftovers" for lunch, but when it came to early childhood intervention they welcomed the support for the two younger children. The household income qualified them for the free lunch program and they chose not to use the program. They used a state-sponsored program for early intervention for both the younger boys. The program provided the boys speech therapy and occupational therapy services and continued to assist the four-year-old with preschool tuition.

Interview Overview

The interview conversations created a context about what the parents thought about schools and resources that they perceived that they needed. They shared the place school occupied in the lives of their children and the resources that schools provide to their families. Their definitions of success and perceptions about school created a context for the support they utilized and resources that they would like to see from schools.

Defining success. This study defined success as passing grades and being able to move to the next grade level. According to the parent participants, success was defined as having independence, being a well-rounded adult, and obtaining the skills to achieve personal goals. When discussing their hopes, the parents shared that they wanted their children to achieve success in the world both emotionally and physically.

Personal contentment and well-being were included as indicators of success. Tammy shared, “A success is where he's dealing with society. Taking care of himself and earning his own income. He doesn't need to have us take care of him for the rest of his life.” Jack and Diane relayed their hopes and dreams and outlined what they wanted for their children. Jack explained:

> I’m proud of them for . . . being good human beings. . . . My goal is to raise them to be ready to go out in the world and be successful in ways that the want to be, and to be contributing members of society.

Tammy wanted both of her children to be “mentally balanced contributing members of society. . . our goal was that she grows up and be able to be happy.” Joe shared that he hoped his children “can have a family, and a home, and raise children of their own and be stable.” Liz defined success for her daughter as:

> I just want to see her be happy and be a strong independent woman. It's important to me as a woman. I want her to be very independent and not really worry. She does pretty good in school. She's learning division and all that. That's her struggles. I guess, mostly all of them, I really just want them to be happy. I want them to be successful in life. Not go the roads we went in life.

Diane’s goal aligned with what Liz had shared, as follows:

> As a mother, my goal is to raise them to be ready to go out into the world and be successful in the ways that they want to be, and to be contributing members of society, not lazy members of society, and to shoot big and achieve their dreams. I fizzled out in high school. I stopped my honors classes by my senior year because I was done, and I'm hoping they will choose to not fizzle out. . . .

Jack elaborated, “I would say doing new things, and having new ideas, and helping society change in ways that are productive . . . .” In these statements, success was not defined as a specific direction, but a level on contentment.

For two of the eight participants, there was a component of success related to academic grades. Success was defined by Mary as academic grades. “Yeah,…it's like, ‘Mom, you're so mean! B is good!’ I'm like, why do you not want for an A?” Andrea said, “. . . maybe a C is your best. But when I know that my son is better than a C, then I'm telling him he's not being successful.” That explicit connection to grades was not contained in the other interviews.

Financial independence was important in defining success for the families in this study. Stephanie said, “We want the American dream; Mom, Dad, dog, fence, in a nicer, newer area.” Howard wanted his children to complete school so they could get better jobs. Tammy said, “Success is where [her son] is . . . taking care of himself and earning his own income. He doesn’t need to have us take care of him for the rest of his life.” To obtain that level of financial independence, the schools had to provide essential skills.

Role of schools. The parents wanted their children to continue their schooling so that they could have more opportunities. Schools were referred to by participants as places where children obtained skills for jobs and learned how to work with others. Stephanie and Leo shared that the goal for all their children, at a minimum, was to finish high school. Both Stephanie and Corrine were proud that their sons were enrolled in college.

In four of the eight interviews, college attendance was a component of success. Tammy shared, “After [my daughter] started looking and working in the work force, I knew she would go back to school.” Elisa shared a conversation that she had with her son.

> He'll come to me. "Do you want me to go to college?" I'll be like "Yeah". But, I'm not going to tell you what to do. The other day, he was asking me . . . ‘cause he's very into music, rapping, singing, all of that, making music. He asked me the other day, actually, "What's a good school for music?" I'm like "I really don't know". . . . always told him, since he was [Her daughter’s] age. You get into college. I will do whatever I have to, to help you.

Andrea said she wanted her daughter “to go to college and do something that she enjoys because I really believed that you should do something that you enjoy.” She added the caveat that “ . . . you want to make money and be able to support yourself, but at the same time I don't want her stuck in a job where she's making really good money and is miserable.” Continuing onto college was an option that parents considered as a step for the child to develop into that self-sufficient adult.

In three interviews, participating parents were more content specific, sharing about the content areas of math and writing. According to Mary, the role of the school is to teach them during the school day. She described needing the school for help that was specific to her son’s learning. She explained that he struggled in math and that he would not accept her help because she didn’t do it right. “I need help at school. I’m not there.” Elisa and Robert talked about the importance of writing. Robert started with the need to be able to write from the aspect of penmanship. Elisa shared that, to her, the importance of writing was that “they need to communicate ideas more than just text.” The parents recognized the importance of schooling to lay the foundational components of learning and to instruct children in specific content.

Resources

The participants in this study identified two categories of resources. Participants shared thoughts about tangible resources such as food, clothing, and school supplies, and service-based resources like extra-curricular programs or tutoring. The resources discussed by participants were both school-based and community based.

Tangible resources. Participants shared what they needed on a day -o-day basis. The primary tangible support mentioned was food. Four of the eight families explained how the basics of food were available through other means than relying on school or government programs. Resource providers that were used included churches and community food pantries.

Four out of the eight families shared their needs and efforts to connect to food, housing, and clothes. Hector said, “I can get the clothes sometimes... “ but we need “support to get groceries.” Curt received support from the Veteran Administration and explained, “They helped us out with housing. They helped us out with other situations sometimes. But still sometimes you can't get everything from them.“ Robert talked about a continued need for clothing by saying, “every time I turn around, she has grown out of something.” Curt and Elisa also expressed concern about obtaining the necessary clothes for their children.

Corrine and Curt expressed difficulty with getting food-based support. Corrine shared her frustration by explaining, “It’s the resources—they aren’t wide enough. From money for housing to food, it took lots of time.” Finding and obtaining support created frustration for Curt, Tammy, and Elisa. Corrine shared:

> . . . first thing is they want a million documents from you. When plainly they can see that you're struggling. It's pretty bad when you ask for help, they give you 2-1-1. Call this and then there's nothing. Or they'll send you or give you a referral sheet with 10,000 of the same thing that everybody's like, "no, no, no, no, no" or "try back tomorrow." They put you in this dilemma where you don't know where to turn but to the schools or to the church.

Some of the pressure for tangible resources was created through the children's social networks at school. Robert shared that his daughter's desire for particular clothes was so that she could be like her friends. Corrine shared how her children were attending a school that allowed students to bring their own technology. She described the hardship when her children came up to her and said, "'I am not getting the computer I need.' . . . You're almost forced to find money to get them [tech]." The parents explained how the need for tangible resources could expand to other school supplies, as well.

Service-based resources. Parents shared resources that were used to directly help their children academically. All families had at least one child who participated in extracurricular activities. While some of those activities were free, there were some sports and camps that required fees. Five of the families, who also accessed the free or reduced lunch program, used school-based scholarships for the children to participate in extracurricular activities.

Intervention programs were recognized as making a difference for children. The results from participation in early childhood programming was a source of pride for Andrea. She said, "... So he's had speech and occupational and behavioral therapy. So seeing him go from using very little words to having conversations and being able to tell stories or retell a book that he's read makes

me proud." When talking about the tutoring support through the I Have a Dream Program, Mary said, "my son says, 'Mom, I feel a little behind in math. I will stay late this and this day.'" The school-based intervention programs were identified by parents as beneficial.

Locating resources. Participating parents discussed the availability and the difficulty in finding resources. Stephanie shared, "You had to go hunting for a lot of them, a lot of supports, like for kids." Gene echoed, " . . . you gotta go hunting for those things. Nobody tells you what services are out there." Tammy explained that it was that they "really had a hard time finding things." She explained that she got her son enrolled in a woodworking course through community support. Diane explained her perspective about the dilemma as follows:

> I think society has changed. When I grew up in Loveland, you could find all the information on everything in the newspaper. The Reporter Herald came out every day, and it had all the information, but this community doesn't have that same kind of newspaper systems. Besides, society has changed, and people aren't subscribing to the newspaper. They're reading everything else online. I guess Facebook groups, or moms' groups, but you still have to go out and search those out, so people who aren't comfortable searching them out would have problems finding the resources they need. We were at a time of a really bad financial situation, and I was trying to figure out what I could do to deal with it, and so I did try to think of the resources that were available, because paying my mortgage isn't a resource that's available, but some food services are. I thought, "Okay, I need to change my thinking a little bit.

Curt shared ". . . It's hard to find programs. They need some sort of clearinghouse. . . basically I go to neighbors." The resources that they accessed were through churches and community organizations.

There was interest expressed in having one point of contact to help coordinate resource support. Liz shared, “What I've heard from a lot of people too, is there's not a clearinghouse for . . . support that you might need.” Jack shared a solution from his experience by explaining:

> Well, in our case, we have a very strong church support system. Our group of people that we meet with at church is very much like a family. We meet with the same people, we have the same meeting schedule, we go to the same meetings together, the dads will go and have their meeting, and the moms will go, so we all know each other really well through that . . . [the leaders] visit families every month to just check up on them, and make sure everything is okay....

He articulated what this would look like for schools, emphasizing the power and benefit of a home visit and having someone there to support a family:

> . . . somebody who was familiar with all of the different programs that were available, qualifications that you had to meet in order to qualify for them, and helping ... Maybe not necessarily with actually filling out the paperwork, but at least getting the paperwork and knowing what to do with it. Just someone who is knowledgeable about the programs, and the process of getting into them, who could anonymously help….It's just understanding people's needs, just go on a visit at their house.

That idea of a single point of contacted extended across three of the interviews.

Codes

The discussions moved from the daily living needs to what characteristics parents would like to see in their child’s school. The parents expressed that they needed certain behavioral conditions on the part of school personnel. They discussed behaviors that they would like to see in school building leaders, teachers, and counselors in more detail than any physical need. In addition to the academic foundation, these intangible needs they shared included stability, trust in the school, treatment with dignity, complementary instruction to family values,

and support for children’s personalities. The core theme that encompassed all interview responses was that families required cooperation from the school to develop children into well-balanced adults (see Table 5).

The participating parents observed that they wanted students to develop social skills, independence, and obtain academic skills to support them in the future. Mary said, “…every morning I tell my kids, 'Remember, you're going to school to learn.’ The teachers are not there just so they can take stuff from you guys or to waste their time."

Table 5

Codes from Parent Responses: What Parents Need to Help Children Succeed

Open Codes	Axial Codes
Completing a level of schooling; achieving success in the world; having limited struggles, providing for themselves, and contributing to society; being safe	Wanting them to be independent adults and contributing members of society
Creating a foundation for learning; learning beyond the school; providing skill instruction that they can use in future careers; getting essentials	Providing academic and social skills
Working with different types of people; connecting with others	Meeting social/emotional needs
Complementing values; supporting children's personality; participating in school events	Acknowledging them as individuals
Receiving communication from teachers; aligning with family values; providing information about learning, positive behaviors, and detrimental behaviors	Communicating with home
Trusting schools or establishing trust with school; being treated with dignity; wanting to not be made to feel different	Establishing trust
Receiving support elsewhere; getting wrong support; being frustrated by systems; meeting children's academic needs	Desiring efficient, responsive support
Finding support; building on positive examples; getting support; accessing food programs; adding specific programming; providing learning tools; needing school materials	Targeting physical and educational needs

Parents described the type of people that would be in place in a school that would help their children to be successful. Tammy said, “it all has to do with the office people. If they support the teacher, and they support the parents, you have a successful school. If a parent can feel like he can walk in there, sign-in ,and say ‘I'm here.’” Mary shared, “I want a teacher that has a heart for the kids.” Curt described a situation where an effective teacher helped him understand the needs of his son. Tammy described a teacher that made a difference “when [my son] went from Mrs. Smith; she related to him and got down to his level.” The parents wanted an openness and approachability on the part of the personnel who worked in a school building.

Themes

Themes that emerged from the interview data clarified the components of programs that helped parents support their children. The factors most frequently identified as helping students and families were the interactions with people. The parents explained that support isn’t about a specific program. It is about the attitude and behaviors of teachers and the culture of the school. The important qualities of those interactions were validating parents’ concerns, finding someone who listened to them, and feeling included in the school community.

The details about what that cooperation looked like and how it best worked is articulated in the themes. The themes recurred several times in the data set, within and/or across transcripts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The themes are communication, alignment of social-emotional needs, and an action orientation by school personnel. From those themes emerged the concept that

parents desired a supportive, collaborative school culture in order for their children to succeed.

Theme 1: Communication. The parents explained that it was important for those who work in the schools to maintain communication with parents. Elisa shared that the parents had a role in the communication as follows:

> For us, I'm part of it. Being a better parent ... trying to communicate more with our teacher, both ways. Her teacher last year, we had an email thing back and forth. Her teacher this year, it's more of just a notification thing. I don't have a direct way that I can get in contact with her.

Elisa wanted to be more readily informed, explaining, “The school's are getting crowded. But, it's something that's, I think. . . . a need that needs to be met.” When asked the biggest thing that they needed academically, Robert responded, “ . . . just the calling between the schools and us.”

The participants desired communication specifically around behavior. Joe observed that with that communication he would be able to help; “Well, we would need the cooperation of the teachers to report back behaviors and what they see the kids doing in the classroom, stuff we don't see.” Elisa and Robert relied on their oldest to report the things that were occurring at school. “We still struggle with the oldest one to come and tell us. I think keeping parents in the loop a little more . . . when I was in school. I would've never gotten away with things. [My parents] would have known.” Robert added, “They would've called your parents. I remember they called my parents.” There was a desired immediacy within the request from these parents.

Three of the eight participating parents expressed frustration about not receiving adequate information when their child misbehaved. Mary wanted to be

notified more regularly if her boys were misbehaving or struggling in class because, “If they care about kids, they should let me know.” She expressed that they should call or ask her to come to the school in person. Robert agreed and explained that he was a parent who wasn’t always easy to talk to when he heard negative things about his boys’ behavior. He wanted the teachers and administrators to keep calling and emailing even if a parent didn’t respond positively at first because in the end, they will work together. “I am that parent, I was . . . but keep calling.” The communication from school, specifically when it turned to behavior, should not be left to the children.

Parents wanted to hear about academic progress as well. They relied on communication from teachers so that they could help support the learning at home. To help their children succeed in school, Joe and Stephanie needed clear communication from their children’s school. They relied on emails, meetings with the teacher, and phone calls. They wanted to monitor what their children were learning so, according to Joe, that “if there was a gap, we would help fix it.” Stephanie agreed when she said, “Communication needs to go beyond simply updates about school.” Stephanie explained that she needed to know detailed information regarding how the children were doing in school to identify and help fix any potential “gaps.” Stephanie mentioned that an email would be helpful in addition to the simple grade book reports. She wanted more information than whether work was completed or not.

A source of frustration for some parents was a lack of clear communication. Regarding instruction, Mary explained that she relied on the

school to inform her what her sons were doing. Mary explained that the teachers and administrators never emailed or called. “It’s like they don’t have time because I told them I need to know homework or something like that, I need to know. I don’t want to wait until we have conferences. You guys show me.” Mary wanted more specific information about how they were being taught.

The participants shared stories where they were dissatisfied with the communication. Robert said,

> …no, they never email me. They never call me. It's like they don't have time. Because I told them as soon as there is a problem, I need to know; homework or something like that, I need to know. I don't want to wait until we have conferences and you guys show me he's missed this and this and this and then this and this...if they care about the kids, they should have let me know.

Mary talked about times when she wasn’t notified about homework and when she wasn’t included when her son got a behavior referral by explaining, “They don't do it. It's something that I don't like.” Liz understood that teachers might be busy,

> but, even a message ... We were calling ... [Robert] was calling the school. They'd be in a meeting. That's fine. They have meetings. Or, he would leave a message. He would never get a call back. Even just a five-minute message, like ‘I got your call, let's set up a time to talk, or when I have time’. It was just us calling them, trying to get a response.

Within the frustrations expressed by Mary and Elisa is a desire for timely communication.

Participants shared that they wanted their perspectives to be considered by the teachers. They wanted their observations validated and to be believed. Stephanie summed up that the important thing is the “communication and the believing of what’s going on between the two parties.” Tammy had a similar interest. She wanted “to be heard and validated. That yeah, we know our own

child. No, we’re not just trying to throw the child at the school.” The need to be listened to by school personnel was important to these participants.

Effective communication from school personnel helped build trust. Sharing of student information and events, as well as the act of listening, was identified as important. “There should be alignment with school and we should be believed by the school.” Joe said that it is important that “we trust them and that they trust us.” The important things are “the communication and the believing of what’s going on between two parties.” Communication with teachers and schools was a component of trusting the school.

Theme 2: Alignment of social-emotional needs. The participating parents wanted some of the values that they supported at home reinforced at school. Jack and Mary said that they wanted the school to support the “values” that they had at home. Five of the eight participating families listed some character traits as things that they would like to see represented at school.

Participants shared comments that indicated they wanted schools to instill positive social behaviors that aligned with what they modeled at home. Specifically, they wanted the school to reinforce social skills, problem solving, positive social behaviors, and a work ethic. Mary wanted the school to teach them to be respectful “and values and morals and things like that.” Elisa explained that it was important for the school personnel to be consistent with what they reinforced at home. “I feel like they’re contradicting what we're trying to teach them about it, because then they get away with things at school . . . . We're not teaching the kids good responsibility.” Robert added that teachers are “letting

them get away with everything." Jack and Diane connected education to their children's goals and maintained that they needed a balance with the role of home in teaching about work ethic. They appreciated that school provided their children with an opportunity to work with different types of people. Jack shared that he wanted a teacher who would align with their values in terms of setting goals and encouraging his children. Diane viewed the role of schooling as working with different people, connecting to others, and creating a foundation for learning. Mary said, "I want my kids to socialize and to grow up and to learn that sometimes things are not going to be too nice." She wanted her boys exposed to people who had different personal values. Jack hoped that schools taught his children "how to interact with one another, teach my son ways to interact, to be respectful with all adults."

Mary and Diane shared instances where the teachers supported the character development that they reinforced at home. Mary wanted her son to learn that he should respect teachers. She said, "you need to respect the teacher. So for two days, you not playing PS3 or whatever . . . I told the teacher, 'As soon as he does something to you, you want to email me right away. You can do whatever you can do here with him, and I'll do my part.'" Diane said,

> When we had the issue with Brian and getting himself ready for school, so the first Monday that it happened . . . .I came to get Brian, and boy, Brian was on and ready to go by the time I got back, but I had told him, you have to let the office know why you were late, and then you have to tell your teacher why you were late, because it's part of the accountability, and so I walked him in, and he did it, and the office supported me on that, and his teacher, supported. She said, "We will work this into the curriculum today." I received awesome support.

Theme 3: Action orientation. Parents shared stories where a component of education that helped their children was a teacher's ability to act on the information that they shared. Diane said she wanted "teachers who are willing to follow through with our kids and give them the structure and feedback that they need." Tammy shared that she wanted her concerns "validated." She wanted action over labels. Tammy explained to school personnel, "You don't need to test him. You just need to listen to what I say." She acknowledged that her son had needs, but she wanted a change in the way the teachers responded to him as much as she wanted him to receive the label for services.

The teacher and school personnel can be important catalysts in meeting academic needs. According to Curt and Corrine, there was a difference between educators who needed the job and educators who listened to their needs. They explained that the teachers in their prior district, which had a higher percentage of poverty, did not have attitudes that indicated they wanted to help children. He explained how a teacher in their recent school district helped identify their son's specific needs and implemented an individualized education program. Tammy had a similar experience in getting her son identified. She also shared about a teacher who maintained contact with her son and became a mentor. Curt shared an experience where a teacher helped his other son "open up" and got him back on track.

Five of the participating couples shared that positive school attributes were a focus on their child and connection to people. Curt and Corrine shared that good teachers "can see the stress on [kids] and [the kids do] not have to say,

‘Oh, I need help.’” Tammy appreciated it when individuals within the school system reached out. She explained, “There were times when I felt like I was out there on my own. There was a lot of people in the school district that did care . . . I’d say saved us.”

Jack described the type of teacher that would best support his children:

> Teachers who are willing to listen, teachers who are willing to follow through with our kids, and just give them the structure and the feedback that they need. I guess, theoretically, some teachers are a lot more lax, and they'll just dish out homework and they'll sit back and watch, but we've never experienced that with our kids' teachers.

Contrasts

There were very few differences between the group who identified that they did not receive support and the group that said that they did utilize supports. One difference was concern over the perception of others and self-perceptions. The three families who did not identify as having major needs were concerned about being identified publicly and not accepting support was a source of personal pride.

Both Diane’s family and Andrea’s family did not use the free or reduced lunch program. Diane shared about her thoughts around accepting reduced lunch from her school by explaining:

> We actually have always qualified for reduced lunch, but for long time chose not to partake of that, because feeding our family isn't a burden that we have. Yes, we have a low income. It's higher now with the new job. Thank goodness, but I don't know, as someone who loves to cook, feeding my family has never been an issue . . .We were at a time of a really bad financial situation, and I was trying to figure out what I could do to deal with it, and so I did try to think of the resources that were available, because paying my mortgage isn't a resource that's available, but some food services are. I thought, "Okay, I need to change my thinking a little bit," but I still really struggled. My mom worked as an elementary librarian

> at my elementary school, and before I got online and filled out the forms, I spent a tearful conversation with her on the phone. "What are people going to think? Did you as the librarian know at the school is on reduced and free lunch or not?" I didn't know these things. I didn't know how open this information would be.

Chris said, “We knew about the free or reduced lunch, and we don't use it.” Andrea added, “My husband kind of feels that . . . . We can provide a lunch for [our son].“ She explained that “he would rather take leftovers or something from home here.”

Tammy and Leo did not want to publicly accept assistance. Not only did they not use the free and reduced lunch program, Leo did not want to accept other types of support. “Someone put our name in for Santa Cops where they give you the gifts for your kids. I said, ‘No! I don't want. I can provide gifts for my own children.’ Well, actually she could.” He added, “She would pull money out of her hat.” Tammy responded, “That's because I went ahead and Santa Cops helped us.” From Leo’s perspective, he did not want to receive support, and Tammy had accessed the support when it was from a community organization.

Contradictions

The contradictions did not only exist between the two groups of parent who did and did not accept support; the idea of what supports families accepted and what they didn’t was not consistent. Each family was unique in how they interacted with resources that were meant to support. Within the interviews, there were points where what the participants expressed and their actions did not align. The contradictions can seem incongruous. These contradictions can provide insight into the perceptions toward different programs, however.

The free and reduced lunch program generated discussion. While many would accept the resource (five of the eight families), they did not always accept other support. In the case of Liz and Robert who utilized the free lunch program and scholarships from the school for participation in extra-curricular activities, they chose not to participate in programs to provide clothes or food to the family. Liz said, “we'd rather those resources go to people who really need it.” The sentiment of there being people in greater need was repeated by other participants. Andrea said, “feeding our family is not a need we have.”

There can be frustration in being publicly identified. Stephanie explained that there was a stigma to free and reduced lunch. Stephanie and Joe accessed the reduced lunch program and other programs to support foster families. Stephanie shared, “At one point, one of the kids was stamped with a lunch money stamp on their hand, and they came home crying.”

In the case of Tammy, she publicly did not access the free lunch program. She secured resources so her son could participate in extra-curricular classes and spent household savings to have her son diagnosed. Once the diagnosis was complete, she accepted the support of the IEP from a public school.

The contradictions occurred on a simple level as well. Liz and Robert both shared that they wanted improved communication. When the discussion turned to the I Have a Dream program in which their daughter participated, Liz shared that the program coordinator was “the only one that is” communicating regularly. “She's really good about that.” Robert echoed that the coordinator was communicating “very well…Sometimes too good. I want to throw my phone

away.” The appropriate balance of communication lies between the dissatisfaction that they expressed with the classroom teachers and the volume of communication that they received from the coordinator.

Andrea accessed resources to provide early childhood special education support for her two younger children. She shared that a source of pride was seeing the language development of her three-year-old. Later in the interview, Andrea shared that they didn’t need food.

> … No, no. We're not quite there. My husband is very budget-wise. And so our grocery bill is the first budget….And so anything ... We kind of have our food and then our fuel for our cars to go places. So he's very budget-wise. I'm not the budget person in the house.

The contradiction between action and words provided insight into the use of resources.

Summary

Interviews regarding what low-SES children need to succeed at school took place with parents from eight households. The families lived in the suburbs and qualified for free and reduced lunch. The conversations were focused on what parents perceived they needed for their children to succeed in school.

All families required cooperation and support to develop children into well-balanced adults. The parents in this study wanted their children to grow into independent, contributing members of society and to have social skills. Those goals required a school that develops children’s physical and emotional needs while acknowledging them as individuals. Specific programs were not the focal point of the conversations. In six of the eight interviews, parents stated that there needed to be alignment of social-emotional needs between home and school.

The achievement of success as defined in this study meant that students were passing classes and on course for promotion to the next level. The participating parents added their perspective that success in school meant the ability of their children to have a positive future. They wanted their children to be content and financially independent. In order for the parents' definition of success for their children to be realized, they identified a number of school personnel actions that would be helpful. These actions included the reinforcement of the values of social skills, problem solving, and the development of a strong work ethic by educators; meaningful communication that involved both the conveyance of information regarding behavior, academic achievement, and challenges as well as listening to parental input and insights; and finally, educators' taking actions to support their children's success.

The responses that the participant's shared helped them address the question of what supports they perceived that they needed to help their children succeed in school. Those responses generated the themes and an overarching concept took shape. Organizing and analyzing the responses revealed the idea and answer to the research question that the participating parents want a supportive school culture. A desire to have a school where they can receive support, that can direct them to additional resources, and that aligns with the goals that they hold for their child is included in the overarching concept of wanting a school that is a support to their child. The ways that schools can build the structures to support the practices noted by the participants of this study will be discussed in Chapter V.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Overview

Perspectives from eight suburban families. Were shared in Chapter IV. The stories they shared began to identify what families perceived they needed from schools when living with economic hardship. The interviews focused on the role of education and educational supports. The major findings that were shared related to relationships and school culture. The themes that emerged from the study were a need for concise communication with school personnel, an action orientation, and an alignment between school and home. The communication needed to include detailed correspondence, listening to the parents, and an alignment with parents' values and opinions.

The rate of poverty is increasing more rapidly in suburban areas than in urban areas (Kneebone & Holmes, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Addressing the question of how we can support those living in a condition of poverty in the suburbs is a concern because "the suburban poor population grew more than twice as fast as the urban poor population between 2000 and 2013 (66 percent versus 30 percent). By 2013, the suburbs accounted for 56% of the poor population in the nation's largest metro areas with the number of poor in suburbs outstripping the urban poor by 3.5 million" (Kneebone & Holmes, 2014, p. 27).

Schools can play a supporting role for families (Books S. , 2004). They can provide school supplies and resources for children, wraparound care, enrichment opportunities, and support for families (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). They can be the place where a family turns when they need additional support (Patrikakou, 2008). Curt expressed a reliance on schools when he described that, after his family exhausted options from other social services, they turned to the schools.

Relationships Among the Themes

Data were gathered through the interviews with the participants, the researcher's field journal, neighborhood census data, and school district information. These multiple pieces of data provided "individual viewpoints and experiences [to be] verified against others" (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). A repetition of words, phrases, and concepts led to the emergence of the themes. Using the narrative form of case study, triangulation, and member checking increased trustworthiness. The terminology of the themes was created through the coding process. The themes that emerged were communication, alignment of social-emotional needs, and an action orientation. These themes provided insight into the core research question. It led to the overarching concept which informed the recommendations for teachers and building leaders.

The findings from this study are important because they clarify that the participating families desired a culture of support but not specific programming from their school. The findings can create a foundational basis for the ways that school officials respond when seeking to support families facing economic

hardship. According to the interviews, to support the success of suburban children from low-Socioeconomic status (SES) families, a school should have specific cultural components in place (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Unpacking the themes displays how these components of the school culture interrelate to support low-SES students. The overarching concept that emerged from the interviews with participants in this study was a need for supportive relationships. Parents needed to feel that the school would support the values that they held at home, that they would be believed by the school, and that they would not be treated differently because of economic status. Supportive relationships rely on reciprocal communication, an action orientation, and an alignment with the social-emotional needs valued at home as seen in Figure 1.

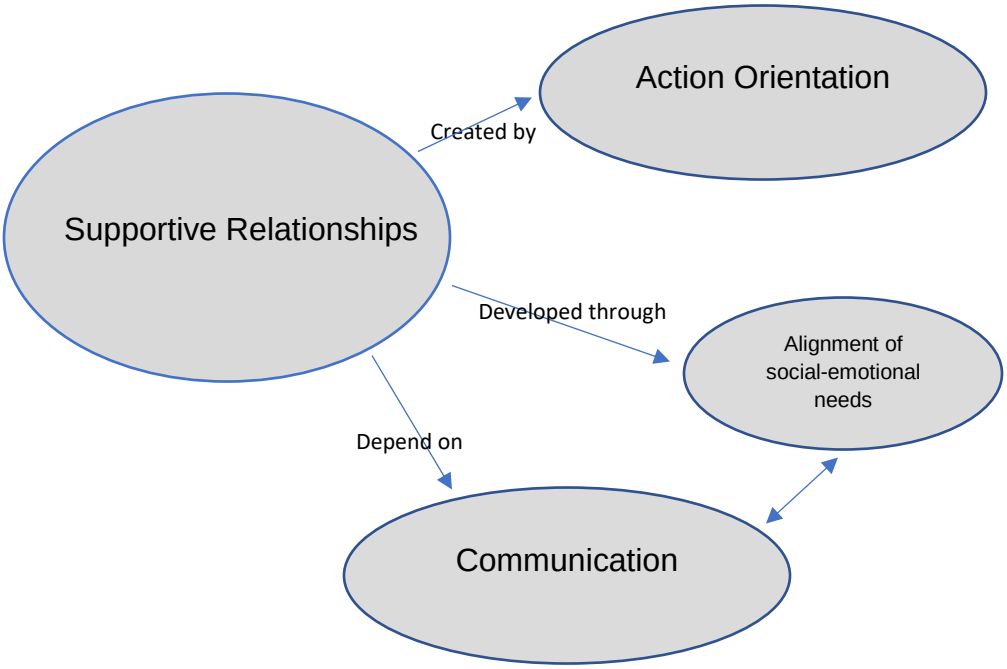

Figure 1 Relationships among the themes.

Supportive relationships depend on effective communication. The need for communication ranged from wanting to know what was occurring in the school to being validated in their thoughts about what was best for their children. They indicated that a quality of good communication was specificity about what was occurring in class. This need for specific information aligned with Hill and Tyson's work that found parent involvement specific to academic planning improved student academic success (2009). Parents expressed a need for reciprocal communication, and they wanted the school to listen to them, share with them, and then respond to the needs of their children.

Another theme was an action orientation on the part of school personnel. Supportive relationships are created by inclination toward action among the school staff. This theme focused on the expectations parents held for their children's teachers. The parents participating in this study wanted teachers and administrators to identify learning needs, offer solutions to learning gaps, and show interest in their children by offering solutions and, in the end, follow through on those solutions.

Supportive relationships were developed through an alignment of the needs articulated by participants. Parents shared that this meant trusting the school to instill right from wrong, develop a strong work ethic, and provide the skills that a child will need to become independent. When parents discussed values, they spoke about teachers at the school who had helped their children grow both academically and emotionally.

These three themes are components of a supportive relationship, which means that parents are treated with dignity and included as partners in their children's education. To accept assistance, parents must feel comfortable with the people who work at the school (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Gorski, 2018). Five of the eight parents shared that the school personnel were aware that the family needed support, and because of that, it wasn't necessary to ask for additional support.

The themes that emerged in this study built on one another allowing the emergence of an overarching concept that encompassed communication through the understanding of the social-emotional needs of the children and then acting on the knowledge creates a supportive relationship between the school and the family (Albright, Weissberg, & Dusenbury, 2011; Patrikakou, 2008). The first step is a reciprocal communication between school staff and parents that allows for a flow of information. Communication strengthens the bonds of trust by allowing for more specific information to be shared about children. The information allows for the generation of a personalized plan. To effectively support the children of the suburban group living in a condition of poverty, school leaders need to create supportive relationships.

Comparison of participant groups. The initial purpose of these case studies was to compare the perspectives of those families that accepted governmental support with those that did not. The sample was too small to generate definitive comparisons. While there were minor differences among the case studies and an emergence of trends to explore, due to the small sample,

additional data would be required in order to make more specific recommendations.

Since there was a small sample and there was overlap among the emerging themes, all responses were used to generate the themes from the case studies. In comparing the responses of the five homes that reported that they accepted support and the three that reported that they did not utilize support, there was limited variation in the responses.

In addition to the small sample impeding a complete comparison, reliance on government agencies is a continuum. Some of the participants said that they did not use free and reduced lunch but were willing to utilize early childhood intervention supplied through state agencies. Andrea and Chris used early childhood support in the form of an early childhood outreach program for children with significant delays. The evaluations were conducted by teachers who were paid for by the state's department of education. Andrea was willing to use that resource but chose not to use the free and reduced lunch program. Other families had similar experiences where they utilized some aspects of government resources while declining others.

There was a point of contrast specific to two families who did not want to accept help. Two of the participating families that chose not to access governmental programming described that they had concerns about being identified and treated differently so they did not use the programs. The parents shared that they received support from other places. Some of the participants shared that they did not need food-based support.

Those who opted not to use support shared that they used other resources to meet their needs. Diane described that they had a strong church support system. In addition to their home church, they could access a free lunch program in the summer through a different church. Tammy described how she and Leo used an inheritance to pay for a private diagnosis for their son. They used a special education advocacy group but felt that the group just wanted money and did not serve their son.

Contradictions

Across all the interviews, there were many contradictions. There seemed to be a stigma around the free and reduced lunch program. There were points where they wanted more communication but didn’t want to be singled out. They viewed tangible goods differently than programs and federally funded programs differently than local programs.

Out of the three participating families that chose not to use the lunch program, all used some other resource provided by the school, whether it was an IEP, early childhood intervention, or scholarships to participate in extracurricular activities. While these contradictions complicated any thorough comparison, they provide insights as to the choice to use specific supports.

For the other five participating parents, once the paperwork was completed and the support flowed to the family from the free and reduced lunch program, the family was more likely to accept support. Corrine explained “that it was when the school knew we needed help and we didn’t have to ask every time.

. . they just let the kids come because they knew that we didn't have any money." Not requiring additional paperwork allowed for greater participation.

Participants wanted more communication but didn't want to be singled out. An example was Robert and Elisa who wanted teachers to keep calling but felt that the I Have a Dream coordinator called too much. The idea that was expressed was that they wanted to know when it related to behavior.

From these contradictions emerged a potential path forward which would be to capitalize on personal connections. A close relationship with someone associated with the school was when parents were most comfortable accepting support Parents spoke in positive terms when talking about teachers who made connections with their children. Once a teacher establishes that connection, they could be the ones through which support programs are offered (Albright et al., 2011).

Connections to Literature

There was an alignment between the findings of this study and the academic literature about methods high-poverty schools use when supporting student achievement (Berliner, 2009; Books S. , 2004). Successful schools that serve students living in poverty place an emphasis on relationship building and support the child emotionally, physically, and academically (Jensen, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). These schools' relationships with parents are of great importance, as was affirmed in the perceptions of the participants in this study. Successful schools communicate regularly, offer parenting guidance and

support, and include parent voices in their decision-making (Deal & Peterson, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

The responses of the parents in this study added depth to the research about communication and parental involvement as components of academic success. Newsletters and meetings are initial components of successful outreach, but there needs to be a deeper level of parent involvement (Jensen, 2009). In a meta-analytical study on parent involvement, Hill and Tyson (2009) identified that:

> Overall, parental involvement during middle school is positively related to achievement. However, the types of involvement in which parents engage matter. Among the types of involvement, parental involvement that creates an understanding about the purposes, goals, and meaning of academic performance; communicates expectations about involvement; and provides strategies that students can effectively use (i.e., academic socialization) has the strongest positive relation with achievement. (p.758)

The findings of this study point to a need for a deeper level of such communication. Parents shared that listening is an important part of communication for them (Albright et al., 2011). The connection between communication and action revolved around a deeper level of connection. The parents wanted their children to be identified as unique individuals and to have their needs addressed from that level. Thus, communication from the school needs to include the conveyance of communication from educators at the school, but also listening as part of the communication process, with action resulting from the communication process.

The findings did not align with the literature on serving students from poverty regarding physical supports such as food, school supplies, and

participation in extracurricular activities (Afterschool Alliance, 2010; Berliner, 2009; Damore, 2002). In the research literature about food programs, it has been noted that there is a prevalent need for tangible support (Books, 2004; DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The participants indicated that the need for food was getting fulfilled elsewhere and at a level that did not generate concern from the parents. In these cases, while school was a resource for food, it was not the primary provider of nutrition services.

Some studies have indicated that children who are being raised in poverty are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities (Afterschool Alliance, 2010; Berliner, 2009). The findings of this study did not align with those conclusions. In this study, most of the children participated in some type of extracurricular activities. Parents valued their children's participation in extracurricular activities and were able to find resources to support that participation. Their ability to find resources aligned with the way resources are allocated between high-poverty and low-poverty schools. High-poverty schools receive more resources to support student participation in school-sponsored activities (Gamoran & An, 2016). The ability of the participants to find support throughout the community and not solely from the school indicated that areas with lower poverty rates may not require as much school-based support programming.

The findings aligned with the way in which the education system allocates resources (Books S. , 2004; Gamoran & An, 2016). In schools with a prevalence of students receiving free or reduced lunch, there are more resources provided

through the school district. The participants in suburban settings with lower incidences of poverty receive help outside of the school.

Recommendations for Practice

One of the objectives of the interviews was to gain insight into how school leaders can more effectively serve suburban families living in poverty as they support their children. Although specific prescriptive programming was not referenced, ideas for school leaders to improve a school's culture were contained within the themes. The participants' responses highlighted guiding principles that building leaders can use as a framework for assessing interactions with families.

The outline of cultural components needs to include effective communication and methods for including parents in school. According to the parents in this study, school leaders need to provide personalized communication to parents. The communication should include time to listen to the insights of the parents so the school personnel can create responsive supportive systems for all families.

Communicating to deepen understanding. Structures for communication need to be in place. Newsletters, updates, and committee involvement are the first level of communication. Then deeper communication occurs as reciprocal communication, through which the teacher and the parent share ideas and listen to each other. To provide support for families who face economic hardship, communication from school should focus on specific learning needs.

This communication on behalf of teachers may require additional development. Communication cannot be taken for granted and is not a natural skill. “The reluctance on the part of the teachers to actively involve parents may be partially due to insufficient training in developing the necessary skills” (Patrikakou, 2008, p. 4).Professional development for teachers would need to focus specifically on developing communication skills.

The parents in this study shared explicit feedback regarding communication that teachers could use for guidance including the following:

- Tammy said, “having people say yes, you're right; to be heard, and to be validated. . . . That, yeah, we know our own child.”
- Stephanie stated, “Communication needs went beyond simply updates about school.” She explained that it is helpful for there to be “communication and the believing of what’s going on between the two parties.”
- Mary asked for more frequent communication. “If they care about kids, they should let me know. I need help at school. I'm not there… It's like they don't have time because I told them I need to know homework or something like that, I need to know. I don't want to wait until we have conferences, you guys show me.”
- Diane stated, she wants her children to have “teachers who are willing to listen, teachers who are willing to follow through with our kids and give them the structure and feedback that they need.”

Someone involved in the school needs to be aware of a family’s economic status. A primary step in making communication work is identification. There needs to be a balance between privacy rules and disclosure. To be included in school planning and outreach efforts, the leaders in the school need to be able to identify specific groups of students and families that may need support, such as those of low SES.

Action orientation. According to the participants, school leaders need to focus on the specifics of the children and their families who should be carefully listened to and have their needs addressed. The findings of this study indicate that parents believe many schools stop at a more general level of communication. The parents shared successful stories of when individuals in the school went that extra step to understand their needs and those of their children.

The parents in this study explained that they wanted teachers to advocate for their children. Curt and Corrine illustrated that desire when they identified a teacher who helped their son get help through his individualized education program (IEP). Tammy, who did a lot of work privately with her son, acknowledged that the people in the school helped. She said, “even though there were times when I felt like I was out there on my own, it was a lot of people in the school district that did care.” The parents valued the times when someone connected to the school expressed caring through action.

Limitations and Alternate Interpretations

This study used free and reduced lunch status as a criterion for participation because it is a widely used indicator by school districts. Free and reduced lunch status qualifies students for reduced fees and scholarships for extracurricular activities. Using the free and reduced lunch criteria as a qualifier placed some of the participants above the poverty line. The families that qualified for reduced lunch were up to 185% over the poverty line, whereas the families that qualified for free lunch were up to 130% over the poverty line (Colorado Department of Education, 2017). People below 100% of the poverty threshold

may require more services than those in this study. That difference in SES could be the reason the participants declined services. Three families qualified for reduced lunch, and five qualified for free lunch. In order to explore perceptions of those living in economic poverty, perceptions of those parents who were living at and below the poverty threshold would need to be gathered.

The idea of economic hardship and asking individuals to self-identify was a limitation. The subgroup of families who did not access supports was more hesitant to self-identify. The study used a set determination in the form of free and reduced lunch eligibility. One of the difficulties was the subgroup's perception that they did not need support. They also shared that they did not want to be identified as a unique group or "singled out."

There are other possible interpretations of the findings. Since some of the participants' situations were improving, the findings may not apply to people under more extreme economic stress. Another way to view the responses is that there could be a saturation of support agencies that address basic resources in the specific region where the participants lived. A possible reason that participants did not mention food-based support resources is that the food services program and food support may be embedded within the suburban community so as not to be considered a resource.

Another interpretation is that this was not the perception solely of an economically impacted population. The perceptions shared might be the perceptions that all parents have toward school. To verify the data, perception

data of parents who do not qualify for free or reduced lunch would have to be gathered.

Structural recommendations. Contained in the conversations were recommendations for improvement. For instance, school leaders should focus on the practice of reciprocal communication. Dialogue takes time for administrators and teachers (Albright et al., 2011). I encourage professional development focused on communication. Not being “heard” by school personnel was a topic that caused frustration for participants. Professional development should include listening with empathy, potential barriers to effective communication, and matching the method of communication to the context (Patrikakou, 2008).

A recommendation from the participants was to add a school position that could focus on outreach to families (Albright et al., 2011). That person would be a case manager for families dealing with economic hardship. This suggestion connected to the experience that Jack shared when he described a system in which more experienced church members visited and supported younger members of his church. For a school that staff member would be focused on listening to families, visiting them, and connecting them to resources.

In areas that are more impacted by poverty, social workers are included as a part of the staff (Kelly, Cosner B., & S., Frey, & Alvarez, M., & S., 2010). “High-poverty schools were more likely than low-poverty schools to offer students at least one social service. . .” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Based on this study, the type of service would be based on family outreach. A

recommendation is to expand the service model to include an individual in each school.

The parents referenced times when a resource person would have helped them. Diane said, “it would have been helpful to have somebody who was familiar with all of the different programs that were available.” Stephanie confirmed that need. She shared a story about finding tuition support too late and finding out that the fund was out of money: “Nobody tells you what services are out there.” Information on successful schools teaching in high-poverty communities shows that these schools demonstrate such personalized contact as a component of their success (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Recommendations for Future Research

While the findings of this study provided insights into the relational supports that parents of low-SES students feel could support their children’s academic success, more insights could be gained through further research. Future research could add clarity to the needs of low-SES families living in the suburbs and provide access to supportive services as well as the impact of current school programs. The following are a few suggested studies that would add to the understanding of these topics:

1. A quantitative study surveying a large number of parents living in suburban areas across the United States who qualify for the public school free lunch program regarding the services, both from school and from the community, that they utilize, the supports that they receive from these services, and what services they feel they still need.

2. A qualitative study similar to the one conducted for this dissertation with a larger sample of parents in order to provide clarification as to why parents utilized particular services and not other services available to them.

3. A qualitative study with a larger sample of low-SES suburban parents regarding the methods and quality of communication between the parents and school(s) their child(ren) attend to provide more insight into effective communication characteristics that provide parental support for student academic success.

4. A mixed-methods analysis of school programs intended to support low-SES student achievement to gain a greater understanding of which programs are perceived by parents to have a positive, negative, or neutral impact on student success.

Conclusion

The findings of this study can serve as a foundation to explore areas of the quality of communication and effective programming offered to children in suburban settings. Future research would add layers of specificity to some of the findings. Such studies could add detail about the programs that effectively serve suburban populations and move beyond examining parents' perceptions.

I started this research because of a personal desire to support families that I felt were under-identified. Larger systems must continue to focus on the greatest leverage points when targeting students. This means that the systemic resources go to schools with higher concentrations of poverty. My hope was to

provide suggestions for actions that could be taken to identify and support people living in conditions of poverty where support is not as readily available.

At the beginning of this study, I held initial assumptions about the needs of low-SES parents and their students who live in the suburbs. I predicted that I would hear about important programs that families accessed for tangible support. I believed there would be a place where parents were able to obtain lists of resources. Relating to the academic world, I expected to find that there would be a greater interest in higher education and that success would be defined in terms of grades and merit in education. I thought that schools would be described as a place of support and trust and that the school would be a resource and support for the family.

The data gathered did not align with most my initial assumptions. Physical resources were not a prevalent theme. Additionally, I assumed that there would be clear pathways for families to receive additional support, but across the interviews, this was not the case. The idea of what is meant by school success was defined in terms of future independence and not from the more academic terms I predicted or that we use as educators.

The assumption I held about school culture and trust was confirmed in the interviews. Roland Barth (2002) wrote, “A school’s culture has more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the president of the country, the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal, teachers, and parents can ever have” (p. 7). This study affirms that what matters to students’ success in school is the culture of the school. Authors

and researchers who have studied school change have identified the organizational culture as critical to the successful improvement of teaching and learning (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1998; Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1991). Suburban schools, even with lower percentages of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, need to pay attention to how the culture of the school aligns with the populations that have specific needs.

A key point in the findings is that the parents living in economic hardship did not feel listened to by school personnel and that they felt their concerns were not validated. This requires that school leaders act to include all parents' voices in the school community. According to the participants, the supportive community would be established through specific communication about the needs of their child, an alignment with social-emotional needs articulated by the parents, and action on the part of school personnel. My hope would be that, in addition to an increased awareness of those who live in poverty in the suburbs, school leaders would create that supportive community where this economic group could have a voice and feel more included in the schools their children attend.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual Parent Interview Protocol

- Prior to beginning the interview, the background of the study will be shared, including methods that will be used to protect confidentiality, the method that will be applied to the data, and how the findings will be presented.
- Introductions

To address the research question, the parents will answer the following questions:

1. Tell me about your child(ren). What kinds of things make you proud of them?
2. What are the primary hopes you have for your child(ren)? How does education factor into those hopes?
3. What are the kinds of support you need on a day-to-day basis to support your child?
4. Tell me about your child's attitude or feelings toward school.
5. What are the primary supports you need on a day-to-day basis to support your child's success in school academically? What about socially?
6. Specifically, in order to succeed in school, what supports does your child(ren) need?
    a. What supports are you aware of available to meet those needs?
    b. What additional supports would you like to see?
    c. What resources have you not used that you are aware of? Why?

APPENDIX B

FLYER SOLICITING PARTICIPANTS

Share Your Story

About How to Help Your Children

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH

On Educational Supports

I am looking for volunteers to complete interviews regarding beliefs about educational supports that are needed for your children. As a participant in this survey, you would be asked to share your thoughts about education, talk about what supports you use, and what supports you would like to have in order for your children succeed in school.

The interviews will take approximately 45 minutes each for us to complete. Your participation will help inform school leaders so that they better support children. If you are interested, please contact:

Sean Corey

720–204–0878 seanc5504@gmail.com.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Northern Colorado

APPENDIX C

CONSENT & ASSENT FORMS

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

I. Project Title: Perceptions About Educational Supports from Those Living in Poverty in the Suburbs

Researcher: Sean Corey, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Phone: 720–204–0878 E-mail: core4747@bears.unco.edu Research Advisor: Linda Vogel, PhD Phone: (970) 351–2119

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to gain insight into what supports those living at the economic poverty level in the suburbs believe they need to have their children succeed in school. Your sharing and participation in these conversations will lend insight to educational leaders about what they can do better to support your children. The primary research question that will guide this study is: What supports do you believe you need to support your children's academic success in school?

Over two separate interviews at your home, we will have two conversations. The first will be with each of you, the parents, individually. The second conversation will be with both you and your spouse/partner to share themes that emerged from the first interviews and to clarify what you view as important for your child's/children's success in school.

At the end of the interviews, I will share the ideas you discussed with me in the first interview with you. A main objective is that I accurately portray your thoughts and opinions. I will take every precaution in order to protect the confidentiality of your participation. I will assign a pseudonym to you. Only I will know the real name connected with the pseudonym that I have assigned to you.

Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept in a locked cabinet in the research advisor's office at UNC, which is only accessible by the researcher and his advisor. Potential risks in this project are minimal. If you become uncomfortable, you may choose to not answer or to stop the interview at any time.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study, and if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you agree to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference.

If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970–351–1910.

_____ _____

Subject's Signature Date Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

DATE:	May 12, 2017
TO:	Sean Corey
FROM:	University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1051380-2] Perceptions about Education of those Living in Poverty in the Suburbs
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Amendment/Modification
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	May 12, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE:	May 12, 2018
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of May 12, 2018.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sean -

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