# Suburban Poverty: Teachers' Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy

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# ABSTRACT

Suburban poverty has significantly increased over the past decade, creating new challenges for teachers in suburban school districts. These challenges include teachers working with children who have housing and food insecurities or are homeless, family instability, chronic stressors, social and emotional struggles, lack of attachment or positive relationships, and lack school readiness skills. Poverty is one of the most significant factors affecting student learning and achievement; yet, despite increases in students from low-income families and the negative effects of poverty on student learning, there is very little research regarding suburban poverty. The purpose of this study was to expand the research related to suburban teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy regarding their students in poverty. This quantitative, descriptive survey study examined the knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy of teachers in seven northeast Ohio suburban school districts experiencing shifting demographics. The findings of this study suggest that teachers in suburban school districts have inadequate knowledge about poverty, may hold negative beliefs about poverty, and are least efficacious in engaging students in poverty. These results have substantial implications for professional development and hiring practices in suburban school districts that strive to provide a quality and equitable education for all students.



*Keywords:* Suburban poverty, poverty, knowledge, beliefs, efficacy, implicit bias, deficit thinking, stereotypes, equity

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Suburban America is very different today than stereotypically portrayed in the iconic television sitcom "Leave It to Beaver." The late 1950s television show depicted a white, middle class family of four, with a white collar working father, a stay-at-home mother, and two school aged children living life in the suburbs. The suburbs were viewed as places where people aspired to live for better housing, a better way of life, and the myth of the American dream. Today, suburban communities are fraught with a myriad of unique challenges. One of the most significant challenges faced by suburban cities and suburban school districts is the rapid increase in poverty (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). The perception that poverty is a problem predominantly in urban and rural cities is just that, a perception and not the reality. Yet, despite the increase of poverty in the suburbs, as well as suburban residents being more economically and demographically diverse, suburban poverty is often not viewed or regarded as an issue.

In these transitioning suburban communities, the public schools are serving a higher percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged or living in poverty (Allard, 2017; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). Children attending suburban public schools have fewer resources and are more diverse. This has created new and different challenges for many educators who are teaching in suburban school districts. Teachers serving students in once more affluent school districts may not have the background, knowledge, or experience to effectively teach students from poor families.

## Statement of the Problem

Suburban poverty has significantly increased over the past decade, creating new challenges for teachers in suburban school districts. These challenges include teachers working with children who have housing and food insecurities or are homeless, family instability, chronic stressors, social and emotional issues, lack of attachment or positive relationships, and lack school readiness skills (Jensen, 2009; Olinger, 2017). Poverty is one of the most significant factors affecting student learning and achievement. Teachers in suburban school districts may have an implicit bias or beliefs about economically disadvantages students that result in erroneous stereotyping about students and their family (Gorski, 2012). More residents in poverty live in suburbs than do in large cities or rural areas (Kneebone, 2014). Furthermore, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), 52.1% of students, the majority, attending public schools are economically disadvantaged. Yet, despite these increases in low-income students, there is very little research regarding suburban poverty. This study addressed the gap in the current literature of suburban teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about students in poverty.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe teachers' perceptions of their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach students in poverty in a suburban district setting with shifting demographics. The effect of poverty on student learning and achievement is well researched and documented. Researching suburban poverty and how teachers and districts respond will add to the already existing body of evidence. This research study is significant in the fact that there is limited research on poverty in

suburban schools and the teachers in these once more affluent districts serving students from poor families.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research study is grounded in the work of Ruby Payne, Eric Jensen, Paul Gorski, and Deficit and Implicit Bias Theories. Each of these researchers has extensively studied poverty from different perspectives. To begin, Ruby Payne (2005) contended that schools typically operate from middle class values and norms and to better understand poverty, teachers need to understand the differences in the *culture* and values of the different socioeconomic classes. Given that many teachers have a middle class background, it is important for teachers teaching low-income students to be familiar with the distinct dissimilarities between middle class norms and norms of lower-income households.

Next, Eric Jensen (2009) focused on the negative effects of living in poverty have on brain development and learning. Jensen (2009) emphasized the importance of teachers understanding the many risk factors connected to poverty. Most notably, these risk factors include chronic stressors, health and safety concerns, cognitive development lags, and social and emotional issues. All of these risk factors affect how the brain develops and negatively impact student learning.

Paul Gorski (2012), critic of Payne's "culture of poverty," examined how misguided stereotypes of those in poverty are damaging to poor students and their families. Gorski's (2008a) research focuses on dispelling or debunking the myth of the culture of poverty perpetuated by Payne. Teachers possessing inaccurate beliefs of their economically disadvantaged students can result in inadvertently lowering learning

expectations and underestimating their students' abilities. Gorski (2018) advocated the importance of teachers acquiring accurate information about the causes of poverty and the lack of access and opportunity to resources that perpetuate poverty. Each of these three different viewpoints about poverty provides a basis for this research.

Lastly, Deficit Theory and Implicit Bias Theory are relevant to this study as beliefs of teachers about students in poverty are being examined. Deficit theory originated in the 1960s in an endeavor to justify poor and failing performance in school by students in poverty whose language development was inadequate because of the students' home environment (Collins, 1988; Eller, 1989). Implicit Bias Theory suggests that all individuals possess biases, that are influenced by stereotypes, at an unconscious level and these implicit biases influence an individual's actions without the individual being cognizant of them (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Staats, Capatosto, Tenney, & Mamo, 2017). Both deficit theory and implicit bias theory in schools can be detrimental to student learning if teachers possess deficit thinking and negative implicit bias about their students.

## Research Questions

Five research questions guided this study. The research questions are:

1. What is the level of knowledge of teachers from suburban districts with increasing poverty regarding teaching students in poverty?
2. What are teachers' beliefs regarding teaching students from poor families?
3. What is the level of teachers' sense of efficacy toward students in poverty?
4. Is there a positive relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy?

5. Are there differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and teachers' demographic information?

## Participants

The participants in this study included teachers that were currently teaching in suburban school districts located in northeast Ohio. The teachers that participated in the study were teaching in the eight public school districts in northeast Ohio.

## Research Design

This research study used a quantitative, descriptive survey designed to investigate teachers' perceptions of their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach children in a suburban school setting that has increasing poverty. The descriptive research survey design allowed the researcher to gather information and gain insight on a current issue through collecting data to describe current conditions of what exists and describe general characteristics of the sample population (Jackson, 2015; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). In this study, the phenomenon was increasing poverty in eight suburban school districts located in northeast Ohio that have experienced an increase of at least 10 percentage points of students who were economically disadvantaged between 2003 – 2018. The research sample included over 2,200 teachers who taught in the identified suburban districts. To gather information on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach economically disadvantaged students, participants were sent a survey via email and voluntarily completed an online secure survey. Once the data were collected, they were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

## Limitations

While this study will add to the existing limited literature on suburban poverty in public schools, there are limitations of this research to be acknowledged. First, this study is based on a purposive sampling technique with an element of convenience. Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalizable to other regions of Ohio or the United States. Second, the participants were expected to self-report their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy. It is possible that respondents did not answer the questions honestly but rather answered in a manner that would be viewed as the more socially appropriate way to respond. Further, it is possible that respondents lacked the ability to accurately self-reflect and may not be aware of their implicit bias. Lastly, the response rate for surveys being sent by email may not meet the expected response rate of 61% or higher.

## Operational Definitions

The following terms are used throughout the study.

**Achievement gap** – "Any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and minorities, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-income households" (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013, p. 1).

**Economic Disadvantagement** – "Students who are known to be eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch, a program through the United States Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A) National School Lunch Program. Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch can be determined through a variety of methods including the electronic direct certification process or completion by a parent or guardian of a free and reduced-price lunch application. A student with an approved application on file for a free or

reduced-price lunch is qualified to be reported to ODE as economically disadvantaged" (Ohio Department of Education EMIS Manual, 2018, Version 8.0, Section 2.5, p. 6).

**Poverty** – "The official definition of poverty for the United States uses dollar amounts called poverty thresholds that vary by family size and the members' ages. Families with incomes below their respective thresholds are considered to be in poverty" (Dalaker, 2018, p. 1).

**Suburban School District –** The Ohio Department of Education classifies school districts into categories based on similarities, or typologies, based on factors such as student poverty, enrollment size, student minority population, parental education attainment, and tax base. There are four general typology descriptors that include Rural, Small Town, Suburban, and Urban. Suburban school districts in this study are classified as Typology 5 – Suburban (Ohio Department of Education, 2013).

**Teacher Sense of Efficacy** – Teachers' sense of efficacy is the belief in their capability to make a difference in student learning, to be able to get through even to students who are difficult or unmotivated (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

**Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) –** The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale is an instrument designed to assess their capability concerning instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management. The TSES is constructed in a 12-question short form and a 24-question long form (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

## Summary

For decades, dating back to President Johnson's declaration of the "War on Poverty," efforts to eradicate the negative effects of poverty have been a focus of our national discourse. However, despite these efforts, poverty is not decreasing; rather, it is increasing and the geography of poverty is shifting from urban and rural communities to the suburbs (Allard, 2017). Suburban communities and suburban school districts are facing challenges associated with poverty without the many safety nets found in larger urban metropolitan communities. Furthermore, teachers who teach in suburban school districts who have been accustomed to teaching children from middle class families may not possess the necessary knowledge or experiences to appropriately meet the needs of students from poverty. Studying the suburban public schools' poverty phenomenon and teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy regarding economically disadvantaged students is critical to be able to support teachers' development, who in turn, support and serve all our students.

# CHAPTER II

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The landscape of poverty has changed. Living the American dream may not be equivalent to living in a suburb in a house with a yard and the proverbial white picket fence. Poverty is no longer concentrated within urban and rural regions. According to Kneebone and Berube (2013), poverty is increasing most rapidly in suburban areas. With this increase in poverty, suburbs are now facing challenges that were typically associated with large urban cities or small rural communities. One of these challenges is educating students in poverty within suburban public school districts.

Once considered affluent suburban districts, these school districts are facing a change in demographics with an increase in poverty and diversity of students. This is transforming many suburbs into communities progressively stratified by income, affluence, opportunity, and education (Allard, 2017; Freeman, 2010). Freeman (2010) contended that it can be difficult to grasp the realities of poverty when the children of low income families and middle class families live in the same community. "Suburban poverty often goes unrecognized behind a veil of respectability; and when the children of disadvantage attend the same schools as the children of privilege, poverty has a tendency to appear more discreet, more manageable, and less debilitating" (Freeman, 2010, p. 676). Scott Allard (2017) concurred with these sentiments in that poverty issues in suburbs "can be hidden from plain view" (p. 1) with families living in houses and subdivisions that can superficially appear middle-class.

This rapid change of increasing poverty in suburban school districts has left many teachers unprepared to meet the needs of their students (Wilson, 2012). Often, teachers

continue to teach as if the suburbs have remained untouched from poverty and the changing demographics of their students. While some teachers are responsive to the changes in demographics of students, many struggle and continue to teach as if all students are as they were a decade ago (Wilson, 2012). When there is a lack of responsiveness to students in poverty and a lack of understanding how poverty affects student learning, educators often become frustrated with minimal or no student progress and begin to blame students and their families (Gorski, 2012, 2018; Jensen, 2009).

As suburban poverty and student diversity has significantly increased over the past decade, new challenges have emerged for teachers in suburban school districts. Poverty is one of the most significant factors affecting student learning and achievement, yet there is very little research regarding suburban poverty. This study will address the gap in the current literature of suburban teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about students in poverty.

## Theoretical Framework

Teachers bring knowledge and beliefs shaped by their own personal history into the classroom every day; therefore, interactions with students are filtered through the teacher's mental models and worldviews (Gay, 2018; Milner, 2017). The decisions, communications, relations, and exchanges made by teachers regarding their students are influenced by their knowledge and predispositions. Therefore, a teacher possessing knowledge and an understanding of their beliefs about children in poverty is necessary. The theoretical framework for this research as it relates to suburban poverty and education will focus on the theories of Ruby Payne, Eric Jensen, and Paul Gorski.

Furthermore, since teacher beliefs, and predispositions about their students will be examined, implicit bias theory and deficit theory are relevant.

The seminal work of Ruby Payne essentially established the theory of a culture of poverty. First published in 1996, and since revised four times, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty,* Payne (2005) examined the differences between poverty, the middle class, and wealth. In other words, distinctions between social classes. As the title suggests, Payne's work focused on helping others, and educators in particular, attain a better understanding of poverty through understanding the differences in culture and values of socioeconomic classes. Payne defined poverty as "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (Payne, 2005, p. 7). These resources include financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships or role models, and knowledge of the hidden rules among classes (Payne, 2005). According to Payne (2005), poverty has less to do with money and finances; rather, poverty has more to do with the resources available to an individual. Furthermore, poverty can also be generational or situational and these two types of poverty are not the same. Generational poverty is a much longer duration of experiencing poverty, usually two generations or more, while situational poverty is shorter in duration and typically triggered by a specific event, such as a loss of a job (Payne, 2005).

Payne (2005) asserted that schools function from middle class standards and customs. Therefore, for educators to better understand poverty and support students in poverty, teachers must know the *hidden rules* of poverty and the middle class and teach these differences in rules to students that are poor. According to Payne (2005), "Hidden rules are the unspoken cues and habits of a group" (p. 36) and that rules are present in

social classes. People in a particular group understand these practices and behaviors and may believe that they are the same for other groups. Payne (2005) outlined 15 different areas of hidden rules among classes, including but not limited to money, food, and driving forces. Using money as an example, those in poverty believe money is to be spent, the middle class believe money should be managed, and the wealthy believe money should be invested (Payne, 2005, pp. 42-43). The point Payne (2005) made with the hidden rules is that the motivations of each of the classes are very different. For people that are poor the driver is survival and relationships, for middle class the driver is career and achievement, and for the wealthy it is social and financial status, as well as political connections.

While Ruby Payne's work is widely known in the field of K-12 education, specifically with professional development on poverty, there are limitations to Payne's work. Furthermore, Payne has received significant criticism from other scholars (Bromer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Gorski, 2008a; van der Valk, 2016). Payne's work is most notably limiting because her work is self-published (for profit) and therefore does not meet the same thorough and robust standards of peer reviewed research (Gorski, 2008a). Critics of Payne's work contend that the framework she proposes is based more on her personal observations rather than a structured inquiry or research. Additionally, criticisms include that Payne's work focuses on perceived deficits of the poor and how to fix them, heavily relies on stereotypes, does not acknowledge the societal systems that perpetuate poverty, and promotes a "culture of poverty" that does not exist (Bromer et al., 2008; Gorski, 2008a, 2016; van der Valk, 2016).

Eric Jensen (2009) contended that the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students exists as a result of poverty affecting brain development. Jensen (2009) defined poverty as "a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects mind, body, and soul" (p. 6). Jensen asserted the importance of teachers' knowledge about the risk factors associated with poverty. Four main risk factors experienced by many students in poverty are (1) emotional and social challenges, (2) acute and chronic stressors, (3) cognitive lags, and (4) health and safety issues (Jensen, 2009, p. 7). These risk factors interfere with how the brain develops.

These four significant risk factors negatively affect future performance in school for children raised in poverty. For children to develop emotionally and socially, they need to develop positive and strong attachments to parents or care-givers. The lack of attachment or an uneasy attachment to parents or caregivers results in children with significant insecurities such as lack of trust, difficulty self-regulating behavior, becoming easily frustrated, and giving up. Therefore, in the school setting, children have a difficult time developing relationships with teachers and are more likely to exhibit impulsive behaviors and insensitive emotional responses (Jenson, 2009). Additionally, children that experience trauma or chronic stress have difficulty developing coping skills and weakens the ability to learn and retain information. This, in turn, results in cognitive lags, especially language development, between children raised in poverty and their more affluent peers, which has been well documented in academic achievement gaps (Jensen, 2009; NAEP, 2018). Finally, the risk factor of health and safety affects children from poor families through poor nutrition, inadequate healthcare, and exposure to dangers in

the home such as lead in paint in older dwellings. When students' basic needs are not met, they are more likely to have difficulty concentrating and learning (Jensen, 2009). All of these factors negatively affect brain development.

Understanding negative effects of poverty on the brain, while at the same time understanding that the brain is malleable and can change, leads to the opportunity to examine the environments in which students learn at school. Jensen (2009) stated, "brains are designed to reflect the environments they're in, not rise above them" (p. 46). In order to mitigate the detrimental effects of poverty on student learning, the environments in which students learn need to include intentionality in approaches that positively influence brain development. These include neuroplasticity and gene expression, changing intelligence (IQ), and fluid intelligence (Jenson, 2009). Jensen's (2009) emphasis regarding brain development of children affected by poverty is that brains have the ability to change and in fact do change, leading to changing intelligence. With neuroplasticity and gene expression, the brain changes or develops as a result of an experience or environment despite the genetic make-up of biological parents. Fluid intelligence is the ability to quickly transfer and adapt learned strategies from one situation to a new situation. According to Jensen, intentionally teaching students thinking skills, or metacognition, such as critical thinking and problem solving by nurturing fluid intelligence, is one of the most effective practices to build student's cognitive capacity (Jensen, 2013).

While the actual ill effects of poverty on children are real and documented, Paul Gorski contended that the culture of poverty is purely a myth, detrimental, and concluded that a culture of poverty is nonexistent (2008a, 2008b, 2016). As one of Ruby Payne's

most formidable critics, Gorski's (2008a) research focused on dispelling or debunking the myth of the culture of poverty perpetuated by Payne. Based on an analysis of poverty, researchers on the culture of poverty concept, according to Gorski (2008a), acknowledge and agree that "there is no such thing as a generalizable mindset or culture of poverty" (p. 135). The analysis concludes that marked differences in values, views, and culture do not exist between the poor, middle class, or wealthy. What does prevail are systems that prevent equal access and opportunity for the disadvantaged to quality basic needs such as healthcare, education, and nourishment (Gorski, 2008a). Gorski outlined four myths, or smaller stereotypes, that are common surrounding poverty and at times are undisputed as facts. The myths include that poor people are lazy and unmotivated, don't value education, are linguistically flawed, and have a higher tendency to be substance abusers (2008). In reality, none of these myths is fact. Gorski cited statistics and research that debunk each myth and support the following listed realities. Poor people are no more lazy or unmotivated than more wealthy people and actually spend more hours working multiple jobs. Those in poverty hold the same attitudes and values about education as more affluent parents but may have less access to school involvement. With regard to use of language, everyone uses a range of language registers and all are sophisticated. Lastly, low income people are no more inclined to be substance abusers than those more affluent, and substance abuse is equally distributed among different classes (Gorski, 2008b).

In more recent and related research, Paul Gorski examined the four myths of those in poverty through a more focused lens of stereotypes (2012). An example is given that exemplifies how stereotyping may be detrimental to low income families and students.

This is illustrated by low income parents not attending parent teacher conferences and educators passing judgment that the parents do not value or are not interested in their child's education. Whereas a more affluent parent may not attend a conference because of a business trip, which may not be viewed negatively and more readily absolved in the teacher's mind (Gorski, 2012). In order for educators to provide optimal learning experiences for students in poverty, stereotypes and biases of those in poverty must be dispelled. Creating and sustaining equitable learning environments for poor students is imperative and the myth of a "culture of poverty" and stereotypes surrounding poor students must be debunked.

## Deficit Theory and Implicit Bias Theory

In the 1960s, deficit theory arose as a means to justify achievement gaps or higher rates of failure of disadvantaged students (Collins, 1988). Deficit theory suggested that economically disadvantaged or black students were "intellectually disadvantaged" because their home environment was not language or literature rich and provided inadequate language development (Eller, 1989, p. 670). In other words, in deficit theory, students are described by what they are not able to do or their deficits versus what they are able to do or their assets (Eller, 1989; Gorski, 2008b). For example, students who may have a limited vocabulary, do not speak in full sentences, or lack the use standard English may be perceived by teachers as having a language deficit. Therefore, the teacher may make inappropriate assumptions about the students' ability to learn.

While assumptions that teachers make about students, students' learning, and the students' capacity to learn can be explicit, research suggests that teachers' assumptions or attitudes about their students are at a deeper, unconscious level. Greenwald and Banaji

(1995) formally termed this unconscious level of thinking as "implicit attitudes" and defined implicit attitudes as "introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects" (p. 8). More recently, known as implicit bias theory, the theory implies that people unknowingly, or unconsciously, act or make judgments based on stereotypes or bias. According to the State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review, implicit bias is defined as "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner; activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control; can be positive or negative; everyone is susceptible" (Staats et al., 2017, p. 10).

As stated previously, both deficit theory and implicit bias theory in schools can be detrimental to student learning if teachers possess deficit thinking and negative implicit bias about their students. Ultimately, if teachers do not believe that all of their students, regardless of race, poverty, or gender can achieve high levels because of erroneous stereotypes through an unknown implicit bias, teachers may have lower expectations for students who have been traditionally marginalized in public schools (Eller, 1989; Gorski, 2008b, 2016; Saphier, 2017; Staats, 2013).

## Intersectionality

Poverty in and of itself is complex. Compounding the complexity of poverty is intersectionality. The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 while examining the marginalization and oppression of African American women (Columbia Law School, 2017). The *Oxford Dictionary* defined intersectionality as "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they

apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage." In other words, individuals many times are disadvantaged by multiple identity markers and intersectionality recognizes that they do not exist independently of one another. For example, a student that is identified as economically disadvantaged may also have overlapping different identities such as an English learner, Hispanic, and transgender. While examining economic disadvantagement in the suburban school setting, it is important to keep in mind an intersectionality lens.

## Federal Policy

On December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law, which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). ESSA is the latest iteration of decades old education policy aimed at improving public education and increasing student growth and achievement for all students, in particular students that are economically disadvantaged, black, English Learners, and other minority groups of students. A brief glimpse into the past demonstrates the federal government has a long history of creating laws and policies that govern how states educate students in public schools across the United States.

Dating back to 1867, the federal Department of Education was established to assist states in establishing effective school systems. Along the way, standardization and accountability became more prominent in federal policy. In 1965, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was initially signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. ESEA was part of Johnson's declaration of War on Poverty and along with ESEA instituted several federal initiatives to reduce poverty that included Social Security

Amendments to encompass Medicaid and Medicare, The Food Stamp Act, and Head Start (Kilty, 2014). At the time, the federal investment to support ESEA was in excess of one billion federal dollars and was allocated to states, including monies for Title I programs to serve economically disadvantaged students. Through the allocation of these funds, it was the hope that not only equity be achieved, but by addressing the lowest achieving students, all students would thrive. Essentially, the original legislation of ESEA was an effort to "level the playing field" for poor children and minority children, specifically black children (Hewitt, 2011). In the years that followed, ESEA was reauthorized a number of times, always maintaining the key mission of improving funding and subsequent performance of schools serving the most disadvantaged youth.

Nearly 30 years later, President Bill Clinton reauthorized ESEA as Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). This legislation included reforms to Title I and increased funding for bilingual and immigrant education. Just seven years later, in 2001, President George W. Bush reauthorized ESEA, yet again, as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Often referred to as a turning point in education policy and controversy, this act sought to close achievement gaps among student groups by federally mandated high-stakes testing and held schools accountable for student achievement levels (Hewitt, 2011; Sass, 2016). The legislation outlined Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) setting goals requiring 100% of all students to meet minimum proficient standards in reading and mathematics by the year 2014 (Mathis, 2006). Additionally, the legislation outlined sanctions or punishments against schools that were not making adequate gains toward meeting NCLB goals.

By 2011, the U.S. Department of Education began allowing states to submit waivers that offered flexibility regarding some of the requirements and sanctions of NCLB, specifically because students were not meeting the 100% proficient threshold on federally mandated state testing. In just over a year, nearly 70% of all states in the U.S. submitted and were granted waivers that provided flexibility to NCLB obligations (Sass, 2016). The federal waivers became void as states across the nation began the implementation of the most recent version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorized in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (Ohio Department of Education, 2016). This new federal legislation has many similarities to its predecessor legislation with the primary goal of an equitable education for all students and closing achievement gaps of our most marginalized students. Title I Federal Programs remain in place under this new legislation. One of the major differences between NCLB and ESSA is the replacement of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with a state-defined index system, which is a major shift from federally defined accountability targets. This provides each state greater flexibility and state autonomy to develop "ambitious state-defined long term goals" with shorter, interim goals toward progress for all students (CCSSO, 2016).

While the United States Constitution leaves the responsibility to individual states to educate public school students, over the past five decades the government has provided billions of dollars of federal aid to states to supplement educational programs. Most notably, federal dollars are allocated to fund Title I programs to states based on percentages of economically disadvantaged students, ultimately in an effort to increase the achievement of poor children. According to the National Center for Education Statistics in the *First Look* report, in fiscal year 2016, the federal government provided

$56 billion dollars in aid to states for elementary and secondary education. Of those funds, $14.7 billion dollars were budgeted for Title I for economically disadvantaged students (Cornman, Zhou, Howell, & Young, 2018).

Despite President Johnson's "War on Poverty" and federal government policy and aid to states to improve public education for poor students, 50 years later with many of these programs still in place, the effects of poverty continue to create inequalities in the quality of life of those in poverty with regard to education and healthcare (Jacob & Ludwig, 2008; Robinson, 2007). Significant achievement gaps continue to exist between students that are economically disadvantaged and students that are not (NAEP, 2018).

## Leadership Perspective

The knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to be an effective educational leader in public schools today are different than just a few years ago. More than ever, educational leaders need to be more than managers and instructional leaders. Educational leaders must be the lead learner, innovative, a leader of teacher leaders, and committed to equity in order to create the conditions within a school or school system that support high expectations, challenging, caring, and supportive learning environments for all students and staff (NPBEA, 2015; The Schlechty Center, 2019). The world is a different place and is changing at a rapid pace, therefore, necessitating educators across the nation to prepare students for careers that do not yet even exist. The students that educational leaders serve are also changing. There is more diversity amongst student demographics including ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, ability, religion, and sexual orientation (NCES, 2018). There is no sign that this rapid pace of change, both in society and with

students, will be slowing down. This, in turn, is creating innumerable challenges and opportunities for educational leaders.

One of the opportunities for educational leaders, in particular at the school level as principals, is the ability to create the conditions within the school setting that may positively influence teachers' beliefs and bias. School level leadership matters in shaping the beliefs, ideals, and values within the school that ultimately influence student achievement (Jones & Ringler, 2017; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). To influence teacher beliefs, school leaders are in a unique position to establish norms and values within a school that promote equal access and opportunity for all students and confront deficit-based thinking and erroneous stereotypes about students (Gorski, 2008a). Marzano et al. (2005) identified 21 responsibilities of effective school leadership, one of which is the school leader's ideals or beliefs. School leaders that have clear defined positive beliefs about students, teachers, and learning, that constantly share their beliefs with teachers, that their actions are aligned with their beliefs, and are aware of their implicit bias is one of the most important ways in which a school leader can effect change (Marzano et al., 2005). Additionally, school leaders can influence teacher bias and beliefs by helping teachers become aware of their own implicit bias and beliefs.

More than ever, public education needs effective leaders to take on the challenges and opportunities facing education today and in the future. According to the Professional Standards for Education Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), school leaders need to be "tenacious change agents who are creative, inspirational and willing to weather the potential risks, uncertainties, and political fall-out to make their schools places where each student thrives" (p. 4). To ensure that each student

thrives and has access to opportunities, school leaders must be culturally competent, inclusive, and promote inclusion for all students through inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership assumes that everyone warrants being included fairly and justly in all systems and practices of schools and society (Ryan, 2006).

## Professional Standards: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

In 1994, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) formed a consortium, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), to develop standards for the education profession in preparation for the 21st century. These standards provide a framework of competencies for professional educational leaders. However, the standards give meager consideration to equity and the marginalization of non-dominant groups of students and their families (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017).

In 2014, the NPBEA embarked on another revision to the standards. Working with the Council of Chief State School Officers, the standards were revised to reflect the current day complexities facing educational leaders. In October 2015, the new standards were released as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and the six original standards from 2008 were expanded to 10 standards (NPBEA, 2015). One of the most notable changes or additions was an entire standard explicitly dedicated to equity and cultural responsiveness in leadership. PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness states, "Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11).

This third standard of equity and cultural responsiveness includes eight actions that effective leaders take to ensure equity and access to educational opportunities. These actions include:

> Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context; (c) Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success; (g) Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice. (p. 11)

In a crosswalk comparing the new PBEL 2015 standards and the ISLLC 2008 standards, the comparison identifies the key differences on PBEL Standards 3 (Center on Great Teachers & Leaders, 2016). The key differences include requiring leaders to:

> ensure equity and cultural responsiveness for each student by encouraging perceptions of student diversity as an asset for teaching and learning, confronting and altering institutional biases rather than simply recognizing them, and serving as a true advocate for equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership . . . emphasizes preparing students to be productive in a diverse, global society rather than focusing only on improving their academic or social outcomes. (p. 7)

The revised standards reflect the importance of culturally responsive leadership.

Specifically, the standards require educators to "confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11). In order for school leaders to make

progress in confronting institutional biases of student marginalization, which involve exclusion practices, leaders need to be able to recognize how school systems systemically perpetuate marginalization (Ryan, 2006).

## Leadership and Diversity

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders specify 10 standards that include a research- and practice-based understanding among educational leadership and student learning (NPBEA, 2015). Essentially, the standards are a guide for what effective school leaders should know and be able to do. Effective school leadership is second only to the quality of teaching among school-related factors in improving student achievement. When it comes to diversity among students, it is important that school leaders develop cultural competence to understand diversity and be an inclusive leader.

In inclusive leadership, emphasis is on the process and product of leadership. As stated previously, inclusive leadership also assumes everyone deserves to be included (Ryan, 2006). One of the greatest obstacles to inclusive leadership practices is in acknowledging and confronting exclusion. School leaders who are proponents of inclusive leadership and profess to be inclusive leaders often do not even recognize exclusive practices because they are so ingrained in the educational system. Furthermore, inclusion practices sometimes only involve differently abled students into general education and leave out or exclude practices for English Learners and other marginalized groups (Ryan, 2006).

In order for school leaders to effectively confront and change institutional biases of student marginalization, school leaders need to become keenly aware of their own biases and deficit-based thinking (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). School leaders need to

continually engage in gaining knowledge to develop their own cultural competence with regard to identity, culture, language, and relationships. Developing "cultural competence requires both deep cultural knowledge and a process for surfacing, challenging, and reframing deficit thinking" (Nelson & Guerra, 2014, p. 90). Additionally, Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) asserted that culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) behaviors include, but are not limited to, critical self-reflection and commitment to promoting culturally responsive school environments.

## Student Achievement

A multitude of studies and research examine the negative effects of poverty on student achievement (Eamon, 2001; Engle & Black, 2008; Gorski, 2015; Hart & Risley, 2003; Jacob & Ludwig, 2008; Jenson, 2009, 2013; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Robinson, 2007; Waterman, 2014). Significant achievement gaps exist for children who are disadvantaged or minorities in our public schools. Disadvantaged students perform at much lower levels in both mathematics and reading than those that are not disadvantaged (Jacob & Ludwig, 2008; NAEP, 2018). Evidence of the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and students that are not poor is documented in the Nation's Report Card, which compiles results of student performance on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). This assessment measures what students should know and be able to do in various academic content areas across the United States.

According to the most recent results of NAEP in reading and mathematics of students in fourth and eighth grade, there are significant gaps in student achievement between students that are eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and

students that are not eligible (The Nation's Report Card, 2018). Figure 2.1 clearly illustrates the trend in student performance since 2003 in fourth grade reading average scores between students not eligible for NSLP and students eligible for NSLP. Over a nearly 15-year period of time, there is a persistent and significant achievement gap of 26 – 29 scaled points between the two groups of students with students eligible for the NSLP having lower scores. In 2017, the average scaled score of students not eligible for NSLP was 236, while the average scaled score for students eligible for NSLP was 208.

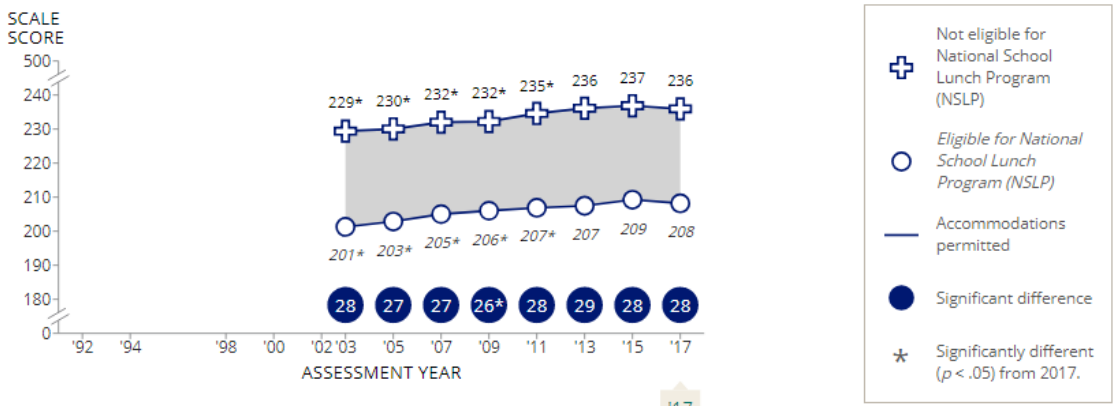


*Figure 2.1.* Trend in fourth grade NAEP reading average scores and score gaps, by eligibility for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) from 2003 – 2017 (NAEP, 2018).

Nearly identical achievement gaps exist in student performance in eighth grade mathematics between students eligible for the NSLP and non-eligible students. The average scaled score in eighth grade mathematics of students non-disadvantaged was 296 and disadvantaged students 267, resulting in a 29 point scaled score gap in the 2017 NAEP administration. Figure 2.2 exemplifies the substantial gap in academic achievement in eighth grade mathematics since 2003 when comparing student achievement among students eligible and not eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NAEP, 2018).

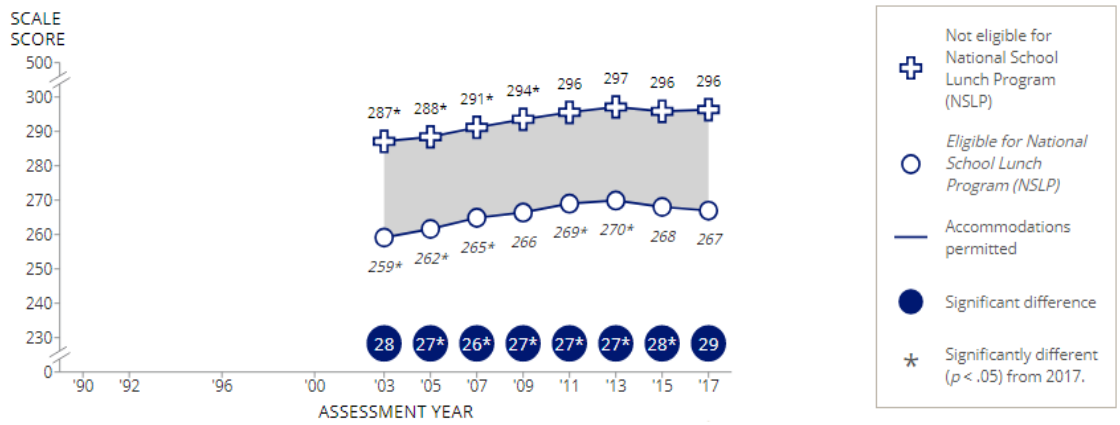


*Figure 2.2.* Trend in eighth grade NAEP mathematics average scores and score gaps, by eligibility for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) from 2003 – 2017 (NAEP, 2018).

In spite of the decades old federal policy and supplemental federal funding to states intended to close achievement gaps and achieve a state of equality for disadvantaged children, according the Nation's Report Card, no progress has been attained. Children who are raised in poverty are faced with daily challenges that more affluent children never have to experience, which in turn affects their learning in school. Early in life, children raised in poor families lack the resources and opportunities to develop school readiness skills and a deficit in school readiness has lasting effects on success in school (Engle & Black, 2008).

Lacking resources for disadvantaged children include financial, healthcare and nutrition, stability, social and emotional, role models, literacy rich environments, spiritual, and physical resources. Additionally, children who grow up in families that are poor are more at risk to experience negative or hostile parenting, conflict, and violence (Engle & Black, 2008; Evans, 2004; Jensen, 2009). Children developing and living without resources begin school already behind their more affluent peers and mightily struggle to accomplish comparable academic achievement (Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

A longitudinal study of preschool-aged children conducted by researchers Luby et al. (2013) at Washington School of Medicine, concluded that living in poverty impacts brain development. In the study, children ages 3 – 6 years of age were assessed annually for three to six years using a variety of measures to examine behavior, social, emotional, and other development. At school age, magnetic resonance imaging was used to examine the brains of the students. The results were remarkable indicating, "The finding that exposure to poverty in early childhood materially impacts brain development as school age further underscores the importance of attention to the well-established deleterious effects of poverty on childhood development" (Luby et al, 2013, p. 1135). This research provides conclusive evidence the negative effects of poverty on brain development.

The effects of poverty on brain development are evident and consequently result in lower student achievement for children in poverty. The achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students is significant and has existed for decades as conveyed in the *Nation's Report Card* (NCES, 2018). Children raised in families that are poor often lack the school readiness skills, such as early literacy skills, communication skills, behavioral self-regulation skills, attention skills, and physical health necessary to be successful in school. When children in poverty enter kindergarten substantially trailing more affluent peers, the gap often never closes (Engle & Black, 2008).

## Change in Demographics

The characteristics of school-aged children have been changing at a rapid pace. In the fall of 2018, 50.7 million students will attend public elementary and secondary schools in the United States (NCES, 2018; Riser-Kositsky, 2019). According to 2016

data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the majority of public school students attend suburban schools (39.7%), 30.2% attend urban schools, 18.7% attend rural schools, and 11.3% attend schools in a town. Over the past decade, there have been significant changes in the demographics of students that public schools serve across the nation. Because the majority of students attend suburban school districts, suburban schools are faced with educating students that are more diverse and disadvantaged (Allard, 2017; Kneebone & Berube, 2013).

In 2013, the United States hit a milestone with one of the most notable changes of the increase in the percent of disadvantaged or poor students. A research bulletin by The Southern Education Foundation (2015) reported that the national percentage of low income students in public schools in the United States was at an alarming 51%, and for the first time considered the "new majority" (p. 1). This statistic is based on pre-K–12 students eligible for free or reduced lunches in the federal National School Lunch Program (NSLP) as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the 2012-2013 school year. In the 2015-2016 school year, this percent of disadvantaged students eligible for the NSLP increased to 52.1% (NCES, 2018). Of the 50 states and District of Columbia in the U.S., 19 states have a majority, or greater than 50%, of low-income students and 21 other states have between 40 and 49.9% of disadvantaged students. There are only 11 states in the United States with student poverty rates lower than 40%.

According to the 2015-2016 data, the District of Columbia and Mississippi have the highest percent of disadvantaged students of 76.4% and 74.9%, respectively. The state of New Hampshire has the lowest percent of disadvantaged students with 28.3%

disadvantaged. Nationally, the percent of poor students in public schools has changed from 38.3% in 2000-2001 to 52.1% in 2015-2016, resulting in a 13.8 percentage point increase. In the state of Ohio, 44.9% of students are eligible for the National School Lunch Program. The percent of disadvantaged students has significantly increased in Ohio from 28.4% in 2001 to nearly 45% in 2016.

Another momentous change in student demographics is diversity. Students of minority races are now the majority of students who attend public elementary and secondary schools in the United States. As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics, the 2015-2016 school year marked the first year that the majority of students in public schools were minorities, with 51.1% of students in a minority race and 48.9% White students (NCES, 2018; Riser-Kositsky, 2019). NCES projects that in the fall of 2018, the majority of minority students will increase to 52.2%. Specifically, the composition of the diversity of students is White – 41.5%, Hispanic – 27.6%, Black – 15.4%, Asian – 5.1%, two or more races – 3.1%, American Indian/Alaska Native – 1% and Pacific Islander – 0.3%. It is projected that the percentage of White students will continue decline over the next decade (NCES, 2018).

Adding to the diversity of students is the percent of students who are identified as English language learners or limited English proficient, which also increased in 2015 compared to 2001. In 2015, nearly 10% of students attending public schools in the United States speak another primary or first language other than English. This is an increase from 8.1% in 2001. In the fall of 2015, in suburban school districts, 9.1% of the students were English language learners (NCES, 2017). The predominant primary or home language of English learners is Spanish followed by Arabic.

It is not uncommon for educators and others to have the belief that poverty issues and diversity among students are concentrated in large urban districts. With the *new majority* of 52% of children in poverty in the United States, poverty rates in suburban areas are escalating at a rapid pace. The issue of poverty is not isolated to urban and rural settings (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). Many suburban school districts have historically served more affluent families and students. The issue of increased poverty in suburban districts requires schools and communities to tend to an issue that was once considered an urban or rural problem (Freeman, 2010). Including suburban poverty as part of the national discussion is necessary.

An examination of poverty rates in the largest 100 metropolitan areas in the United States, specifically over the 2008-2012 time period, captured how poverty shifted during the economic downturn (Kneebone, 2014). According to Kneebone, more residents in poverty live in suburbs than do in large cities or rural areas. The author categorized different levels of neighborhood poverty: *Distressed* neighborhoods have at least 40% of residents that are poor and *high-poverty* neighborhoods have at least 20% of residents in poverty. In the time period studied, suburban communities experienced the most rapid pace of increased poverty, which was nearly three times greater than poverty growth in cities. Kneebone contended that if suburban poverty is disregarded, then new areas of concentrated poverty will exist. Additionally, Kneebone concluded that many suburban areas, including the schools within them, are not equipped with the resources to support the underprivileged. The rapid increase of poverty in suburban school districts also includes more affluent districts that once had very few students in poverty but are

now experiencing a significant increase percentage of students in poverty over a relatively short period of time.

## Teacher Quality

Despite the fact that the characteristics of students have significantly changed with increased poverty and diversity, the characteristics of teachers that serve students in public schools have remained relatively the same. According to *The Condition of Education 2018,* by the U.S. Department of Education, there is little diversity among public school teachers. In 2015-2016, 80% of teachers are White, 9% are Hispanic, and 7% percent are Black. Although there was a four percentage point decrease in White teachers compared to 1999-2000, this is still a substantial difference in the race of teachers contrasted with the majority of students in public schools now of a minority race. Furthermore, the public education teaching profession continues to be dominated by females. The overwhelming majority of teachers are female (77%) and only 23% are male (McFarland et al., 2018). In fact, the percentage of male teachers decreased by 2% between 1999 and 2016.

While economic and cultural mismatches frequently exist between teachers and students, the beliefs that teachers possess with regard to poverty can overcome the negative effects of such a mismatch (Haberman, 1995; Mundy & Leko, 2015). In other words, teachers in suburban schools may not have experience working with students from poverty, or personal experience with poverty, but their knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and efficacy regarding children in poverty can either hinder or benefit the development of their students in poverty (Mundy & Leko, 2015).

As stated in Chapter I, minimal research exists about suburban teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about students in poverty. Much of the research is in urban and rural school settings. For example, a qualitative case study by Chandler (2014) sought to understand the learning disabilities process in a high poverty rural school district. One of the researcher's questions included, "What do teachers in a poor rural school district believe about poverty?" (Chandler, 2014, p. 31). The findings from this study concluded that the inservice teachers, nearly all from middle class backgrounds, who participated in this study held stereotypical beliefs about students in poverty including that they are lazy and do not work hard enough. Further, the mismatch of middle class teachers and poor students was evident in that the teachers lacked an understanding of how poverty affects student learning (Chandler, 2014).

A study conducted by Mundy and Leko (2015) examined the prior knowledge of preservice teachers about poverty. An open-ended questionnaire was given to the preservice teachers to discover perceptions and beliefs of poverty and how teachers should respond to students from poverty. Questions included: (1) What will your future students look like? (2) What does poverty mean? (3) What do children in poverty look like? (4) How does poverty impact achievement? and (5) How should teachers respond to children in poverty? (Mundy & Leko, 2015). The results indicated that while there is some knowledge about students in poverty, it was inadequate to be able to support students from poverty. Further, the responses of the preservice teachers revealed a glimpse into their beliefs of those from poverty that were deficit based and negative; specifically, when parents and families of students in poverty were referenced, they were perceived to be an impediment to the child's school success (Mundy & Leko, 2015).

Additional research seeking to understand how a preservice teacher's individual identity and the effect of that identity on their teaching was the focus of one university. To collect data, recent graduate placements were examined and found that 66% of the graduates began teaching in districts surrounding the university that were high in poverty and minorities, yet the preservice teacher demographics did not match these schools demographics (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010). A perception survey was administered to preservice teachers to measure their awareness of diversity and poverty. Results indicated that the preservice teachers believed that issues of poverty would not have an impact on their teaching (Cuthrell et al., 2010).

This is an alarming finding given the immense research linking poverty to low student achievement. Furthermore, given shifting demographics of diversity and student poverty in suburban school districts, teachers possessing knowledge about the effects of poverty as well as their own implicit biases about students in poverty is crucial. Selecting quality teachers to work with students from poverty is essential in making a positive difference in outcomes for students. In his seminal work, Martin Haberman, by studying teachers in urban high poverty school settings, distinguished specific qualities or "ideologies" that teachers possess that make them thrive when working with economically disadvantaged students (Haberman, 1995). For students that are in poverty, in Haberman's words, "having effective teachers is a matter of life and death" (Haberman, 1995, p. 1).

In addition to content knowledge, teaching strategies, classroom management, and student engagement techniques to name a few, which are all important factors for beginning effective teachers, Haberman (1995) identified characteristics and ideals of

*star* teachers that sets them apart from others when working with children that are in poverty. One of the most important attributes of a quality or *star* teacher is the ability of the teacher to look deep inside themselves to uncover and understand any personal biases, prejudices, beliefs and beliefs about student learning, and lack of knowledge about the students they serve that are different racially, socio-economically, and culturally than themselves. What teachers believe about poverty and why people are poor influences how teachers teach and work with students that are poor (Budge & Parrett, 2018; Gorski, 2013; Haberman 1995). Therefore, the ability of a teacher to self-analyze, acknowledge, and confront any personal or implicit biases they may possess about students that are very different from himself or herself is paramount in being able to be an effective and quality teacher.

Additionally, effective teachers possess other competencies that make them successful when working with youth that are disadvantaged. These include being reflective, persistent, non-judgmental, open-minded, sensitive to differences, efficacious, good listeners, relationship builders, resilient, and ultimately believe that their teaching is to develop good people (Haberman, 1992, 1995; Haberman, Gillette, & Hill, 2017). Moreover, effective teachers of students that are in poverty do not blame parents or the students and believe that parents care about their children and education (Gorski, 2013; Haberman, 1995; Parrett & Budge, 2012).

## Effective Practices

While there are multiple identified effective practices that positively influence the learning of disadvantaged youth, the focus will be on two of the most critical influences.

Phillip Schlechty (2011) in *Engaging Students,* identified what he believed were under the direct influence of the teacher that had an effect on student learning:

> There are really only two things that have the prospect of having a direct impact on student performance over which the teacher has any real control. First is the relationship that teachers have with their students and the way teachers, as leaders, treat their students. Second is the work teachers assign their students or encourage them to undertake. These two things, rather than the teacher's performance, should be central in our concern about the effect of teachers on student learning, for they determine what students do, and fail to do, as they carry out their lives at school. (p. 4)

Schlechty (2011), along with many other researchers, identified one the most powerful and effective practices that positively influences student learning. This effective practice is teachers developing positive, caring, and trusting relationships with their students (Budge & Parrett, 2018; Gorski, 2018; Haberman, 1995; Hattie, 2009; Jensen, 2009, 2013b; Tough, 2016). In fact, John Hattie (2009) in a meta-analysis determined the effect size of the teacher to student relationship to be 0.72. This large effect size has a likelihood to considerably positively influence student achievement (Hattie, 2009).

When students have positive relationships with their teachers, they are willing to put forth more effort and in general have favorable feelings about school. Furthermore, Hattie (2009) contended, based on effect size that positive relationships matter more than socio-economic status. However, developing constructive relationships with students takes time and effort on the part of the teacher. It must be more than a few quick get-to-know-you activities at the beginning of a school year. Rather, cultivating positive teacher

student relationships takes time and is done with intentionality (Budge & Parrett, 2018). Indeed, for all students, but especially for students that are less advantaged, constructive and trusting teacher-to-student relationships are imperative for student success. According to George Couros (2015), "the three most important words in education are relationships, relationships, relationships, without them, we have nothing" (p. 68).

The second effective practice that influences student learning, in particular, disadvantaged students, is the teacher having high expectations for student learning (Budge & Parrett, 2018; Haberman, 1995; Hattie, 2009; Saphier, 2017). Having high expectations for all students' learning is both a belief about student capability and the specific actions that the teacher takes to make that belief a reality for students (Budge & Parrett, 2018; Saphier, 2017). Often teachers proclaim that they believe all students can learn and have high expectations for their learning; however, sometimes actions taken by the teacher, such as giving up easily on a student and not persisting with a student when the student is struggling to learn or assigning low-level tasks, do not support this claim.

Jon Saphier (2017) in *High Expectations Teaching* emphasized the importance of effort-based ability of students as the most important factor in student success and therefore as stated in the subtitle of the book, "smart is something you can get." Just having high expectations for student learning is not enough. Students who are disadvantaged are also often low achieving students and may begin to develop a deficit mindset of their abilities if they have not experienced success in school. Students may believe that there is something wrong with them or they are not as capable of learning. Therefore, in addition to high expectations, the actions that teachers take to ensure each student meets high expectations are equally important. These teacher actions through

words, nonverbal cues, lesson design, and scaffolds must convey to their students that the students are capable and able to develop their abilities, that support will be given to meet high expectations, that the teacher will not give up on the student, and continue to motivate students to want to put forth effective effort (Saphier, 2017).

Closely coupled to high expectations is the teacher's knowledge about their students, the accuracy of this knowledge, and how the teacher uses this information about students to design and engage students in learning activities, including the level of difficulty of the tasks. John Hattie (2015) in an updated and revised list of influences on student learning, called this teacher estimates of student achievement. This new influence topped the list at a 1.62 effect size (Hattie, 2015) and remained at an effect size of 1.29 in 2018 (Bennett, 2018; Hattie, 2018). As noted previously by Schlechty (2011), in addition to student relationships, the other factor under direct control of the teacher is the work that is designed and provided for student learning. Therefore, teachers knowing their students' academic ability, their motives for learning, as well as students' background is crucial for teachers to be able to design work for students with just the right amount of stretch that in fact will assist students in reaching high expectations.

## Lack of Research in Suburban Poverty

Most literature involving poverty still tends to be focused on urban poverty, rural poverty, and high poverty districts. While there is some research on suburban poverty, missing from the literature is specific research on rapidly changing demographics with regard to poverty in affluent suburban settings. Further, research seems to be lacking specificity to teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy on teachers teaching in once affluent districts that have become districts with increased poverty. While there is

research on preservice teachers' knowledge on cultural diversity and mismatch, there is not a significant amount of research on experienced teachers in a changing demographic school setting.

A widely held belief is that a means out of poverty is through education. Yet most of our schools and school systems today operate very similarly to how they did decades ago and educate students in similar ways. Our public school system in the United States, in place for over 200 years, is designed to produce the results it is experiencing. In rapidly transitioning suburban school districts with increasing diversity of economically disadvantaged students, continuing with *business as usual* will only result in continued failure for students and frustration for teachers. Everything schools and teachers do must be reexamined. While some educational reforms have shown glimmers of success, a true transformation of our public schools is necessary to meet the diversity of today's learners.

## Conclusion

A reality of public education in many suburban school districts is the significant increase in the diversity of students being served in what once were considered more affluent and homogenous suburban districts. This diversity includes the increased number of children who are economically disadvantaged and attending suburban schools. Yet, the perceptions of poverty are that it is an urban or rural concern. Living in poverty, despite the suburban, urban, or rural location, is a significant hardship and burden. Living in suburban poverty, however, is different and has unique issues. Suburban cities often lack the many safety nets, such as emergency housing, food pantries, or mental

health services for families in poverty which are present in urban cities (Allard, 2017; Kneebone & Berube, 2013).

In these rapidly changing suburban districts, educators feel uneasy about the changing demographics of the students they serve, and rather than accepting the increasing diversity of students, may view it as troublesome. Most teachers in suburban districts are white, were raised in a middle-class family, and were successful in school. In actuality, many teachers in suburban districts, and in particular teachers that have been in the same suburban district for 15 to 20 years, have not had the appropriate preservice training, knowledge, experiences, or background to prepare them to meet the needs of the increasing diversity of their students. In addition to lacking the appropriate preparation to effectively support learning for children in poverty, teachers and school leaders often hold antiquated and erroneous views of poverty and lack an understanding of the effects of poverty on learning (Gorski, 2018; Howard, 2007; Kneebone & Berube, 2013).

Herein lies the dilemma faced by suburban school districts and communities. Suburban poverty is real and needs to be acknowledged as such. Disregarding or minimizing the significant existence of poverty in public suburban school districts will only increase the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their non-disadvantaged peers. A lack of responsiveness to the specific needs of children that are poor in suburban school districts with increased poverty will ultimately negatively impact their future. Gaining information about suburban teachers' knowledge and beliefs of poverty is a critical first step in creating equitable learning opportunities for each student's success and well-being. With students in poverty on the rise and rapidly increasing suburban poverty, part of this transformation must include the confrontation of

stereotypes and biases of those in poverty. Until students are no longer marginalized in our schools, our hopes and dreams for a public school system that supports each learner will not be realized.

# CHAPTER III

# METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe suburban school district teachers' perceptions of their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach students in poverty in suburban districts with increasing poverty. This study used a quantitative, descriptive survey designed to assess the knowledge of poverty, beliefs about students in poverty, and efficacy in teaching poor students of a sample of teachers who taught in suburban school districts located in northeast Ohio that have experienced increased poverty.

The methodology outlined for the study includes research questions, variables, research design, participants, sampling procedures, instruments, data collection, data analysis procedures, limitations, and summary. Each of these sections describes in detail how the study was conducted and results analyzed.

## Research Questions

Five research questions guided this study. The research questions are:

1. What is the level of knowledge of teachers from suburban districts with increasing poverty regarding teaching students in poverty?
2. What are teachers' beliefs regarding teaching students from poor families?
3. What is the level of teachers' sense of efficacy toward students in poverty?
4. Is there a positive relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy?
5. Are there differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and teachers' demographic information?

## Variables

The variables in the study included teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy regarding teaching students from poor families. A teacher's knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about students in poverty are important to student success. A teacher's beliefs and efficacy affects the effort and persistence a teacher will put forth when teaching students who may be difficult or unmotivated (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Teachers with high efficacy are more apt to assume greater responsibility for their students' learning and success. This study examined teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach students from poverty in a suburban school district.

Table 3.1

*Summary of Research Questions, Variables, and Instrument Items*

| Research Question | Variable | Instrument Items |
|---|---|---|
| 1. What is the level of knowledge of teachers from suburban districts with increasing poverty regarding teaching students in poverty? | Knowledge | Knowledge about Poverty- Items 1 – 10 (10 items total) |
| 2. What are teachers' beliefs regarding teaching students from poor families? | Beliefs | Beliefs about Poverty- Items 1 – 8 (8 items total) |
| 3. What is the level of relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy? | Efficacy | Efficacy (TSES) short form- Items 1 – 12 (12 items total) |
| 4. Is there a positive relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy? | Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy | All 30 items 1-30 |
| 5. Are there differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and teachers' demographic information? | Demographic Information and Knowledge, Beliefs and Efficacy | Demographic Information- Items 1 – 8 (8 items total) and all 30 items |

## Research Design

This research study used a quantitative, descriptive survey designed to investigate teachers' perceptions of their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach children in a suburban school setting that has increasing poverty. Quantitative, descriptive survey research is a method used to collect numerical data to explain a particular trend or phenomenon (Muijs, 2004). More specifically, descriptive research survey design allows the researcher to gather information and gain insight on a current issue through collecting data to describe current conditions of what exists and describe general characteristics of the sample population (Jackson, 2015; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). In this study, the phenomenon was increasing poverty in eight suburban school districts located in northeast Ohio that have experienced an increase of at least 10 percentage points of students that were economically disadvantaged between 2003-2018. Teachers currently teaching in these eight school districts were participants in the study that sought to determine teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy in these economically shifting suburban districts about teaching students from poverty.

To ensure the quality of descriptive survey research design for this study, several key features were considered. Trochim and Donnelly (2008) explained different survey methods and tools that can be utilized in descriptive survey research and are typically classified into either interviews or questionnaires. Instrumentation tools implemented in survey research can be commercially designed and extensively used instruments or self-developed tools. Rudestam and Newton (2015) strongly recommended the use of an existing instrument tool. For the purpose of this study, questionnaire type was utilized and the selected instruments were existing instruments and modified by the researcher.

Quality control considerations of the instrumentation for content and construct reliability included selecting existing instruments that were specifically designed to be administered to teachers to measure teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy regarding teaching students in poverty. The instrumentation and procedures section of this chapter expands on the instruments selected and content validity.

To collect quantitative data on what currently exists, online (or electronic) survey instruments were utilized to gather data from the participants. There are numerous advantages to electronic survey research methodology including the ability to access a widespread, substantial sample; a large sample is more likely to be generalized to a population, is cost-effective, and efficient (Jones, Baxterm & Khanduja, 2013; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Trochim and Donnelly (2008) outlined some disadvantages to online survey research which are the potential for low response rate, the inability to explain the study in person, limitations on length of survey, and time to complete survey.

The population for the study was teachers currently teaching in suburban school districts in Ohio that have experienced increased poverty. To determine the target population or sample, purposive and convenience sampling was used to determine representativeness of the sample to the population. Specifically, the Ohio Department of Education's District 2013 typology classification, Typology 5 was used to identify suburban school districts. The sample size and response rate were important considerations to ensure the quality of this survey research study. To estimate the appropriate sample size, Fowler's (1988) Sample Size Table was consulted and the response rate was determined to be 57% or higher. A lack of response, or non-response

bias, significantly diminishes the reliability and validity of study's findings (Fincham, 2008).

## Sampling Frame

The target population of this study were teachers teaching in suburban school districts who have experienced a rise in poverty in northeast Ohio. There were eight public school districts selected to participate in this study. Specifically, teachers selected currently taught in Ohio suburban districts that are identified by the Ohio Department of Education's 2013 typology classification as suburban districts. The typology classification selected for this study was Typology Code 5 – Suburban, Low Student Poverty and Average Student Population Size. While the Ohio Department of Education has an additional typology code for suburban school districts in Ohio, Typology Code 6 – Suburban, Very Low Student Poverty and Large Student Population Size, the researcher did not include these districts because the student poverty percentages were too low for this study ranging only from 0% to 32%.

According to the Ohio Department of Education, there are 77 school districts identified in the Typology 5 category. The poverty rates of these 77 districts range from 3% - 61%. For purposes of this study, the 77 districts were further narrowed to include districts that have poverty rates between 20% - 61%, resulting in 57 suburban districts (Appendix B). As stated in the Ohio Department of Education's *Detailed 2013 Typology Classification Statistics*, the maximum student poverty percentage was 61% in Typology 5 (Ohio Department of Education, 2019). Higher student poverty percentages resulted in school districts being classified as urban school districts. Since this study was focused on

suburban school districts, districts with student poverty rates higher than 61% were not included.

Of these 57 school districts, additional analysis determined districts that met the following criteria (1) district was located in the northeast Ohio counties of Cuyahoga, Lake, or Lorain, (2) had current poverty rates between 20% - 61 %, and (3) had an increase in poverty of at least 10 percentage points between 2003-2014 and 2017-2018. There were eight school districts that met the criteria that were located in either Cuyahoga or Lake County. However, there were no districts from Lorain County that met the criteria (see Table 3.2). Teachers in these eight school districts were identified as the participants for this study.

Table 3.2

*Comparison of Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students Between 2003 – 2018*

| School District | County | 2003 – 2004 | 2017 – 2018 | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Cuyahoga | 31.3 | 41.5 | 10.2 |
| B | Cuyahoga | 7.8 | 25.8 | 18 |
| C | Cuyahoga | 19 | 38.9 | 19.9 |
| D | Cuyahoga | 20.9 | 60.2 | 39.3 |
| E | Cuyahoga | 21.2 | 56.4 | 35.2 |
| F | Lake | 6.3 | 27.9 | 21.6 |
| G | Lake | 11.2 | 25.4 | 14.2 |
| H | Lake | 20.4 | 35.1 | 14.7 |

*Note.* Data source: Ohio Department of Education, Report Card Resources

Demographic variables of teachers who participated included gender, ethnicity, education level, years of teaching experience, years of teaching experience in current district, subjects taught, level (elementary, middle, high), and whether or not the teacher attended schools in the district as a student. A question was included that identified a

teacher's perception of shifting demographics from when the teacher began teaching in the district. The participants or sample group were selected because the teachers met the criteria of teaching in a suburban school district with increased poverty.

## Sampling Procedures

The sampling technique used for this study was nonprobability, specifically purposive sampling. According to Trochim and Donnelly, nonprobability sampling is a sample that does not involve a random selection. Purposive sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling that seeks to sample with a *purpose* in mind (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. 49). In this study the purpose was a focus on certain characteristics of teachers, particularly teachers who taught in identified suburban school districts with increased student poverty. Predetermined participants were selected to study based on the target population. This sampling technique is less restrictive in that a certain number, or quota, does not have to be proportional (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Convenience sampling was also included as part of the larger sample because the researcher is employed in a district that met the criteria and school districts were identified that were geographically located in northeast Ohio (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

The sample population needed to be large enough to be generalized (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). For this survey study, Fowler's (1988, p. 42) Sample Size Table: Confidence Ranges for Variability Due to Sampling indicated the use of a 95% confidence interval. Assuming that participants have a 50/50 chance to respond and a low error rate of 5% or less, a minimum sample size of 500 was needed with over a 57% response rate. Since the target population of teachers are teachers teaching in suburban

school districts with increasing poverty, specific criteria were determined and used to select the participants.

## Instrumentation and Procedures

Two questionnaires and demographic information on respondents were combined by the researcher into a single survey instrument (Appendix C). The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) short form developed by Megan Tschannen-Moran and Anita Woolfolk Hoy (2001) was modified to measure efficacy specific to poverty and combined with select questions from several self-assessments and inventories developed by William Parrett and Kathleen Budge (2014, 2018). The selected questions specifically assessed teachers' knowledge and beliefs about poverty. Additionally, a demographic questionnaire was incorporated to complete the survey. Permission to use the survey instruments was obtained from each instrument author and permission was obtained to administer the survey from superintendents of all selected districts.

### Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scales (TSES) was designed to measure a teacher's sense of efficacy beliefs for completing essential teaching tasks. Three teaching tasks or factor structures assessed included efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional practices, and efficacy in classroom management. Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion for each question on a 9-point scale ranging from (1) *None at all* to (9) *A Great Deal* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The TSES was created to provide a more meaningful and reliable measure of teacher efficacy as it relates to three critical teaching tasks. The TSES was tested in three separate studies and originated as a 52-item instrument and ultimately refined to a long and short form. The

construct validity, essentially how well the measure reflects the theories of efficacy and measures what it is intended to measure, was assessed using the correlation of the new measure with existing measures (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The short form correlations are as follows: overall .90, efficacy in instructional strategies 0.86, efficacy in classroom management 0.86, and efficacy in student engagement 0.81 (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

The researcher selected the TSES short form because the instrument was designed to specifically measure the sense of efficacy that teachers possess in areas of teaching that may create challenges for teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). This instrument very closely aligned with research question number three regarding better understanding and measuring teachers' efficacy. The TSES short form contained a total of 12 questions. The 12 questions were divided into three subscales, each containing four questions: (1) Efficacy in student engagement: item numbers 2, 4, 7, and 11; (2) Efficacy in instructional strategies: item numbers 5, 9, 10, and 12; and (3) Efficacy in classroom management: item numbers 1, 3, 6, and 8. To be more precise to assess a teacher's efficacy toward students in poverty, the researcher modified certain questions in the TSES short form instrument by inserting *in poverty* in question numbers 1, 4, 5, and 7, *that are poor* in question 1, and *poor* in question 11. Rudestam and Newton (2015) indicated that modifying an existing validated instrument by rephrasing or eliminating questions is an acceptable research practice. Since this instrument was combined with another instrument, the short form of the TSES was selected rather than the long form to reduce the amount of time to complete the survey.

Descriptive statistics were used for the three efficacy subscales and the overall efficacy. To measure general teacher efficacy a total mean score was determined using all 12 items on the TSES. For each of the three subscales, a mean score was determined for each scale. A higher mean score indicated a higher sense of efficacy.

**Knowledge and Beliefs About Poverty**

Parrett and Budge (2012, 2018) developed several self-inventory instruments or tools that were specifically designed to assess teachers' knowledge about poverty and the teachers' beliefs regarding their ability to work with students who live in poverty. Questions were selected from three different assessments including (1) *Assessing Our Ability to Take Action,* (2) *What Do You Know and Believe About Poverty* (Parrett & Budge, 2012, pp. 6 and 36), and (3) *Are You Ready to Disrupt Poverty* (Budge & Parrett, 2018). A total of 18 statements were used from these tools to assess teacher's knowledge and beliefs about poverty.

To measure teacher's knowledge about poverty, a total of 10 statements were used from Parrett and Budge's (2012, p. 6) *Assessing Our Ability to Take Action* to assess this construct. These items were incorporated into the survey instrument and named *Knowledge about Poverty* (See Appendix C). Item numbers 5, 6, 7, and 8 were modified by removing the words that described schools as *high performing, high poverty*. The researcher modified these items to keep the statements focused on schools in general.

To measure teachers' belief about students in poverty, a total of eight statements were selected. Six statements were from *What Do You Know and Believe about Poverty* (Parrett & Budge, 2012, p. 36) and two statements were from *Are You Ready to Disrupt Poverty* (Budge & Parrett, 2018, pp. 6-7). These eight statements were combined by the

researcher and incorporated into the survey instrument and named Beliefs about Poverty (See Appendix C).

Rather than using the original 7-point scale ranging from (-3) *highly unlikely* to (3) *highly likely*, the rating scales to measure both knowledge and beliefs about poverty were modified to a 9-point scale from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (9) *Strongly Agree* to replicate the 9-point TSES rating scale. Descriptive statistics were used to measure both knowledge about poverty and beliefs about poverty. To measure a teacher's knowledge, a mean score was determined using all 10 items from the Knowledge about Poverty section of the survey instrument. A high mean score indicated the teacher was more knowledgeable about poverty. To measure a teacher's beliefs about poverty, a mean score was determined using all eight questions from the Beliefs about Poverty section of the survey. However, on this measure, different from knowledge and efficacy total mean score, the lower the total mean on the beliefs measure indicated that the teacher did not have biased beliefs about students or families in poverty. Therefore, reverse coding was used on belief questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. Using reverse coding allowed for a total mean score to be calculated for beliefs so that the scoring aligned with the total mean for knowledge and the total mean for efficacy.

The researcher selected questions from Parrett and Budge's (2012, 2018) self-inventory surveys to construct an instrument to measure teachers' knowledge and beliefs since the authors have extensively researched high poverty schools with high student performance. Based on this research, self-inventory questions were constructed to assess a teacher's knowledge and beliefs about poverty, two factors identified as critical to *disrupting poverty* for students (Budge & Parrett, 2018). The survey questions selected

directly aligned with the researcher's questions 1 and 2 regarding knowledge about poverty and beliefs about students from poverty.

**Demographic Information**

A series of eight questions were included in designing the instrument to collect general demographic information and teaching experience of the participants completing the survey. Questions to gather general demographic information included gender, ethnicity, and highest level of education degree obtained. For teaching experience, questions included total number of years teaching, number of years teaching in current district, and level currently teaching (elementary, middle, or high school). Additionally, a question was added to identify if participants attended a school in the district as a school-aged student, and a final question was added to determine if the participant currently lived in the school district. According to Rudestam and Newton (2015), it is advisable to locate demographic information at the end of the survey; following this guidance, the researcher placed demographic questions last in the survey instrument.

Based on the literature review, the TSES short form and Knowledge and Beliefs about Poverty were selected for construct validity to measure the constructs of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy of teaching students in poverty. Trochim and Donnelly (2008) categorized construct validity into their own category of translation validity, which includes both face and content validity. In other words, each of these validity types assesses the accuracy of *translating* the researcher's constructs into survey questions that measure what is intended to be measured (content validity) and that for face validity, assures that *on its face* the operationalization seems like a good translation

of the construct" (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. 57). To improve the quality of content and face validity, expert review of the modified instrument was utilized.

**Expert Review of Instrument**

Since the survey instrument used in the study modified the existing TSES short form instrument and combined it with the Knowledge and Beliefs about Poverty, as well as demographic questions, the researcher field tested the instrument by method of expert review. Walston, Redford, and Bhatt (2017) and Trochim and Donnelly (2008) included expert review as one method to pretest or field test items to improve validity of the survey. The researcher selected five experts in the field of education with extensive knowledge about poverty. The experts included four university professors with expertise in poverty, research methodology, and policy. The fifth expert has a PhD in Urban Studies and is an executive director of a large non-profit organization that provides grants to Ohio school districts.

The experts were asked to participate in the survey, not to collect data, rather to obtain feedback and reactions on content and face validity of the survey instrument. After completing the survey, the experts were asked to answer the following questions: (1) Were the survey directions clear and easy to understand? (2) As an expert in the field of poverty and/or education, do the survey questions accurately assess the general knowledge and skills, beliefs, and efficacy of teachers regarding students in poverty? (3) Were the survey's questions clear so that the respondents will understand what the survey items are asking? (4) Is the survey able to be completed in a reasonable amount of time? and (5) Please provide any additional comments or feedback on the survey instrument.

After the expert review, one expert inquired as to how teachers participating may interpret what poverty means in the study. Therefore, the researcher added the following statement to the consent form, "In this study, students who are in poverty or economic disadvantaged include students who are eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch." Also, it was suggested that acknowledging that teachers in suburban school districts with increased poverty may lack an awareness of poverty or effective methods to serve students from poor families. Acknowledging this may either assist in more honest responses or potentially lead participants to underestimate their knowledge. The researcher agreed that adding such a statement of acknowledgement may make teachers more at ease in answering honestly. Therefore, the following sentence was added to the invitation to participate in the study, "Research suggests that teachers working in suburban school districts with an increase in poverty, may not have had the experiences or preparation to effectively serve this population of students."

## Data Collection

The researcher obtained approval from Youngstown State Institutional Review Board to collect data for the study. To collect the data, SurveyMonkey was used and the researcher obtained permission from each of the eight school district's superintendents to conduct the research in each respective suburban district. Superintendents were given the choice to either forward an invitation to teachers to participate with the embedded survey link or provide the researcher with the email addresses of the teachers so that the researcher could send the invitation to participate in the study. Since teacher school email addresses were public information, a public records request for teacher email addresses was made if required by the district.

To ensure that the survey was only sent to teachers, the researcher communicated with superintendents that the study was specifically designed for teachers and that administrators, school counselors, speech language pathologists, and other school personnel that were not teachers should not receive or complete the survey. Further, the researcher defined that "teachers" included all general education teachers, special education teachers, tutors, English Language teachers, physical education teachers, fine arts teachers, and electives teachers.

The invitation email to participate in the study with the embedded survey link was sent to 1,483 teachers who taught in the eight identified northeast Ohio suburban school districts. The invitation introduced the participants to the researcher and described the intent of the study. The embedded link navigated interested participants to the secure web-based survey located on SurveyMonkey's web-based online platform. The survey consisted of five pages (1) Online Survey Consent to Participate form, (2) Knowledge about Poverty, (3) Beliefs about Poverty, (4) Teacher's Sense of Efficacy, and (5) General Demographic Information. Teachers willing to voluntarily complete the survey consented to participating in the survey by selecting *I Agree* on the consent form. The total time for participants to complete the study was approximately 10 minutes. The respondents were given two weeks to complete the study. An email reminder to complete the survey was sent to participants after one week and again with two days remaining to complete the survey.

The researcher selected SurveyMonkey as the web-based online data collection due to the platform's robust data security and privacy measures. For this study, all responses were kept anonymous by enabling the anonymous response option; therefore,

email addresses and IP addresses were not collected. The online consent form (see Appendix C) and the invitation to participate indicated that responses were collected securely and anonymously; as such, the survey did not collect any personal identifiable information on the respondents. Further, the survey begins with https://, and according to SurveyMonkey, this indicates the survey responses are collected through a secure, encrypted connection.

## Data Analysis Procedures

The data for this survey were collected using the secure online platform SurveyMonkey. After the two-week data collection period ended, the data were transported to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for further analysis. The data were screened for any missing data or empty cells. Once the data were examined for completeness, the total number of responses was calculated and compared to the total number of respondents to determine the overall response rate. Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized to analyze the data sets. Descriptive statistics were used to organize and describe the data collected on characteristics of teachers who taught in economically shifting suburban school districts and describe their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy of teaching students in poverty (Salkind, 2014). Descriptive statistics are used describe the general features of the data (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

Inferential statistics were used to examine relationships and differences between the variables in the data. According to Salkind (2014), when examining relationships between variables and there are more than two variables, it is appropriate to use a canonical correlation analysis. A canonical correlation is a more advanced multivariate regression analysis used to examine the relationships between variables (Abu-Bader,

2010). In this study, the relationships between the three dependent variables of efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management with two independent variables of teacher's knowledge and beliefs were examined. Additionally, inferential statistics were used to examine the differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and their demographic information. A simple analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine these differences. According to Salkind (2014), this is an appropriate use of ANOVA when examining differences between more than two groups, there are one or more variables, and the groups are being tested once.

The Knowledge about Poverty portion of the survey was scored using all 10 questions and calculating the total mean. The mean was calculated using the Likert scale of 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Mostly Disagree*, 3 = *Disagree*, 4 = *Somewhat Disagree*, 5 = *Neither Agree or Disagree*, 6 = *Somewhat Agree*, 7 = *Agree*, 8 = *Mostly Agree*, and 9 = *Strongly Agree*. The higher the mean score, the more knowledge a teacher possessed about poverty. The Beliefs about Poverty section of the survey were scored using the same methodology. All eight questions were used to calculate the total mean score and the same Likert scale was utilized. However, item numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 required the use of reversal coding. Trochim and Donnelly (2008) described these items as *reversal items* and are reversed in meaning from the general direction of the scale (p. 137). These item responses were reversed before the total mean was calculated.

To determine a teacher's sense of efficacy regarding students in poverty, the TSES short form scoring guidelines were followed (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The TSES short form contained a total of 12 questions. The 12 questions were divided

into three subscales and each contained four questions: (1) Efficacy in student engagement: item numbers 2, 4, 7, and 11; (2) Efficacy in instructional strategies: item numbers 5, 9, 10, and 12; and (3) Efficacy in classroom management: item numbers 1, 3, 6, and 8. The respondents used the 9-point scale that consisted of (1) *None at all*, (3) *Very little*, (5) *Some degree*, (7) *Quite a bit*, and (9) *A great deal*. The total mean was calculated overall and for each subsection.

Additionally, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to determine if any positive relationships existed between knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy. Descriptive statistics included mean, median, mode, correlations, and standard deviation. Inferential statistics included canonical correlation analysis and ANOVA. Finally, the demographic data collected were analyzed and compared to determine differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and teacher demographic data. The outcomes of the study are presented in summary tables and figures.

## Assumptions and Limitations

As a primary assumption with any survey instrument, it was assumed that the participants were honest in their assessments of their self-perceived knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about students in poverty. Additionally, it was assumed that the instrument used in the study indeed had construct validity by measuring what it was intended to measure. A common limitation or threat to validity is that teachers may not respond to the survey questionnaire honestly. Sometimes, even with confidential anonymous surveys, participants respond in a manner in which they believe is the *right* way to respond versus what the respondent may actual feel or believe (Trochim & Donnelly,

2008). This is often referred to as the Hawthorne effect (Stand, 2001). Teachers may have an exaggerated sense of their knowledge about poverty or may not be comfortable responding in a manner that may imply a bias toward families and students in poverty. If teachers did not respond honestly to the survey, this would be a major threat to the study.

Additionally, the sample size may be below the preferred standard quantitative sample size for some applications. Further, purposive sampling has weak external validity as the results may not be able to be generalizable to other similar populations in other states or geographic regions of Ohio. Furthermore, this descriptive survey research design was meant to solely describe a current situation. It was not meant to make predictions, determine cause and effect, or draw any conclusions about relationships (Jackson, 2015).

## Summary

There is limited research and information about suburban teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about students in poverty. This quantitative, descriptive survey research design was used to acquire information on the self-perceived knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy of teachers regarding their students in poverty that they were currently teaching in the eight identified suburban school districts that have experienced an increase in student poverty. This chapter provided an explanation and reasons for research questions, variables, research design, participants, sampling procedures, instruments, data collection, data analysis procedures, and limitations used to describe the characteristics and dispositions of suburban teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy of students in poverty. The data collected enhanced the current body of literature by

including information on suburban poverty that has not typically been included in the literature.

# CHAPTER IV

# RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative, descriptive survey research study was to investigate and describe suburban school district teachers' perceptions of their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach students in poverty in suburban districts with increasing poverty. The researcher collected data from teachers in northeast Ohio suburban school districts that have experienced an increase in poverty to gain insights and describe the current conditions (Jackson, 20; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). This chapter presents the findings by describing the overall responses collected, general demographic information about the sample participants, and findings related to the five research questions:

1. What is the level of knowledge of teachers from suburban districts with increasing poverty regarding teaching students in poverty?
2. What are teachers' beliefs regarding teaching students from poor families?
3. What is the level of teachers' sense of efficacy toward students in poverty?
4. Is there a positive relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy?
5. Are there differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and teachers' demographic information?

The researcher collected data according to guidelines set forth by Youngstown State University's Internal Review Board. The study intended to include eight suburban school districts in northeast Ohio and the researcher obtained permission from eight school district superintendents to participate. One of the eight school districts was not

able to send out the survey instrument during the allotted data collection period. Since the timely release and closing of the survey was not possible, the researcher decided not to include the district in the study. Therefore, the findings are based on the seven school districts that participated.

A total of 488 responses were received. Fowler's (1988) sample size guidelines were followed. According to Fowler's Sample Size Table (1988), 500 participants were needed at a 95% confidence with a 5% or less error rate. The survey was forwarded by superintendent or principals via email to 1,483 teachers in seven school districts. This resulted in a 32.9% response rate. The data set was reviewed and scanned for accuracy. The data review concluded missing data were contained in the results.

The survey contained five pages with the consent to participate on page 1, followed by Knowledge about Poverty on page 2, Beliefs about Poverty on page 3, Teacher's Sense of Efficacy on page 4, and General Demographic Information on the last page. The frequency of missing data increased as the participants progressed through the survey. The consent on page one was completed by 488 participants. Beginning on page 2, Knowledge about Poverty, 90 respondents stopped the survey by skipping all 10 questions in this section, resulting in 398 completing the Knowledge about Poverty questions. An additional nine participants stopped the survey on page 3, resulting in 389 respondents completing the Beliefs about Poverty questions. The Teacher's Sense of Efficacy on page 4 was completed by 384 respondents, as a result of five additional participants stopping the survey. On the last page of the survey, General Demographic Information, an additional two participants stopped the survey and skipped all questions in this section, resulting in 382 respondents completing this section and the entire survey.

This resulted in a final 25.7% response rate. Table 4.1 summarizes the number of respondents completing each section of the survey.

Table 4.1

*Summary of How Many Respondents Completed the Suburban Poverty: Teachers' Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy Survey by Section, and How Many Skipped Each Section*

| Survey Section | Number Completing | Number Skipped |
|---|---|---|
| Consent to Participate | 488 | 0 |
| Knowledge about Poverty | 398 | 90 |
| Beliefs about Poverty | 389 | 99 |
| Teacher's Sense of Efficacy | 384 | 104 |
| General Demographic Information | 382 | 106 |

Although 488 respondents agreed to participate, 382 respondents completed the entire survey. After the consent to participate on page 1 of the survey, 90, or 18.4%, participants stopped the survey. This is a relevant finding that nearly 20% chose not to complete the survey after consenting to do so. The first question after the consent page contained in the Knowledge about Poverty section of the survey states, "I have a good understanding of what is meant by 'living in poverty' in the United States and in my local school." At this point in the survey after reading this first question, respondents may not have been comfortable answering the question if they did not feel they were knowledgeable about poverty. It is also possible the respondents may have changed their mind about participating for other reasons. Of the 398 respondents beginning the survey beyond the consent page, 16 participants or 4% did not complete the survey resulting in

96% of respondents completing the survey once they began the Knowledge about Poverty section. According to SurveyMonkey, survey participants spent an average of six minutes on the survey.

## Demographic Data

General demographic questions were included in the survey to provide background information on the participants. Table 4.2 displays the demographic characteristics of the participants. Of the 382 participants that completed the survey, 76% were female and 24% were male. The ethnicities of participants were 91% White and 3% Black or African American. American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, and Other were all each less than one percent (<1%). The percent of participants that preferred not to answer this question was 4%. The majority of the participants were White females. Most of the participants held a master's degree (83%) for the highest level of educational degree obtained. Fourteen percent of participants held a bachelor's degree and 3% a doctorate degree.

The general demographic questions also explored total years of teaching experience, the number of years taught in the participants' current school district, and the grade level of the current teaching assignment. For total years teaching, 6% taught five years or less, 11% between 6 - 10 years, 16% taught between 11 - 15 years, 16% between 16 - 20 years, 22% between 21 - 25 years, 18% between 26 - 30 years, 8% between 31 - 35 years, and 2% of the participants have been teaching 36 or more years. For the number of years teaching in the participants current district, 15% taught in the district five years or less, 14% between 6 - 10 years, 19% taught between 11 - 15 years, 15% between 16 - 20 years, 16% between 21 - 25 years, 13% between 26 - 30 years, 5%

between 31 - 35 years, and <1% of the participants have been teaching in their current school district for 36 or more years. The grade level band current teaching assignment included 41% of the participants teaching at the elementary level in grades PreK – 5; there were 26% at the middle level (grades 6 - 8); and at the high school level (grades 9 - 12), there were 33%. In sum, the largest percentage of the participants teach at the elementary level and have been teaching for 16 or more years.

The final two demographic questions were asked to determine how many of the participants either attended school, while school-age, in the district they teach in now or live in the school district in which they currently teach. Seventeen percent (17%) of the participants responded that they did attend school in the district where they teach, while 83% did not. When asked if the participants currently lived in the district, 25% of the participants responded yes and 75% responded no, they do not live in the district.

Table 4.2

*Demographic Information on Participants*

| Demographic Question | Characteristic | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 288 | 76% |
| | Male | 93 | 24% |
| Ethnicity | American Indian or Alaskan Native | 1 | <1% |
| | Asian or Pacific Islander | 2 | <1% |
| | Black or African American | 10 | 3% |
| | Hispanic or Latino | 3 | <1% |
| | White | 348 | 91% |
| | Other | 2 | <1% |
| | Prefer not to answer | 16 | 4% |
| Highest degree obtained | Bachelor | 52 | 14% |
| | Master | 315 | 83% |
| | Doctorate | 13 | 3% |

(continued)

Table 4.2

*Demographic Information on Participants* (continued)

| Demographic Question | Characteristic | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total years taught | 0-5 | 22 | 6% |
| | 6-10 | 43 | 11% |
| | 11-15 | 62 | 16% |
| | 16-20 | 61 | 16% |
| | 21-25 | 84 | 22% |
| | 26-30 | 69 | 18% |
| | 31-35 | 32 | 8% |
| | 36 or more | 8 | 2% |
| Years taught in district | 0-5 | 58 | 15% |
| | 6-10 | 55 | 14% |
| | 11-15 | 73 | 19% |
| | 16-20 | 60 | 15% |
| | 21-25 | 62 | 16% |
| | 26-30 | 51 | 13% |
| | 31-35 | 19 | 5% |
| | 36 or more | 2 | <1% |
| Level currently teach | Elementary (Grades PK – 5) | 155 | 41% |
| | Middle (Grades 6 – 8) | 99 | 26% |
| | High (Grades 9 – 12) | 126 | 33% |
| Attended school in the district | Yes | 65 | 17% |
| | No | 316 | 83% |
| Live in school district | Yes | 94 | 25% |
| | No | 288 | 75% |

**Research Question #1**

**What is the level of knowledge of teachers from suburban districts with increasing poverty regarding teaching students in poverty?**

The findings of this study revealed the self-perceived knowledge level suburban district teacher participants possess regarding teaching students in poverty. Table 4.3 displays a total mean score of 5.99 of knowledge about poverty for the 398 participants

completing the 10 knowledge questions. Additionally, Table 4.3 compares each of the 10 questions in ascending order. The mean score for each question was calculated on a 9-point Likert-type scale of 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Mostly Disagree*, 3 = *Disagree*, 4 = *Somewhat Disagree*, 5 = *Neither Agree or Disagree*, 6 = *Somewhat Agree*, 7 = *Agree*, 8 = *Mostly Agree*, and 9 = *Strongly Agree*.

Table 4.3

*Knowledge About Poverty Total Mean Score*

| Measure | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean Score | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge about Poverty | 398 | 2.2 | 9.0 | 5.99 | 1.22 |

Teachers had the least amount of knowledge about developing leadership infrastructures to improve schools with students in poverty with a mean of 4.37. The second least amount of knowledge possessed by teachers was knowing the percentage of students in their school who lived in poverty and were underachieving. Teachers' knowledge also fell below the total mean regarding how schools can improve learning and the lives for students in poverty through research, beliefs, values, norms, practices, structures, and adult learning.

Teachers demonstrated the most knowledge in responding to the statements "I know how poverty adversely affects lives and learning" and "I can explain why my expectations of my students matter and how they influence the kind of learning opportunity I provide." The mean score for each was 7.43 on each of these items. The next highest mean score of 6.85, which fell in the higher end of *Somewhat Agree*, indicated that teachers have some understanding of what is meant by "living in poverty in

the United States and their local school." Also, above the mean knowledge score was "how schools develop safe and healthy environments for students."

The results suggest, based on the total mean and individual response items, that suburban school district teachers' knowledge about poverty and teaching students in poverty is limited as six of the 10 statements registered mean scores in the neutral or disagree range and only two of the 10 statements a positive agreement (> 7.0 on the scale).

Table 4.4

*Knowledge About Poverty Survey Responses Mean Scores From Lowest to Highest*

| Knowledge Question | Mean Score | Scale Range |
|---|---|---|
| I know how schools with students in poverty develop the leadership infrastructure necessary for improvement. | 4.37 | Somewhat Disagree |
| I know the percentage of students in my school who live in poverty and who are under underachieving. | 5.15 | Neither Agree or Disagree |
| I can provide a research-based answer to the question "How do schools make a difference in the lives of students living in poverty?" | 5.27 | Neither Agree or Disagree |
| I know which mind-sets, practices, policies, and structures perpetuate underachievement and how to eliminate them. | 5.62 | Neither Agree or Disagree |
| I know how schools with students in poverty improve student learning and support adult learning. | 5.74 | Neither Agree or Disagree |
| I can describe the beliefs, values, and norms that constitute a school culture conducive to the success of students who live in poverty. | 5.90 | Neither Agree or Disagree |
| I know how schools with students in poverty develop a safe, healthy and supportive learning environment for students and adults. | 6.19 | Somewhat Agree |

(continued)

Table 4.4

*Knowledge About Poverty Survey Responses Mean Scores From Lowest to Highest* (continued)

| Knowledge Question | Mean Score | Scale Range |
|---|---|---|
| I have a good understanding of what is meant by "living in poverty" in the United States and in my local school. | 6.85 | Somewhat Agree |
| I know how poverty adversely affects lives and learning. | 7.43 | Agree |
| I can explain why my expectations of my students matter and how they influence the kind of learning opportunities I provide. | 7.43 | Agree |

**Research Question #2**

**What are teachers' beliefs regarding teaching students from poor families?**

The findings of this study revealed the self-perceived beliefs suburban district teacher participants hold regarding teaching students in poverty. The researcher sought to determine if teachers held negative implicit bias beliefs or stereotypical beliefs about students and families in poverty. Table 4.5 shows the total mean for the eight Beliefs about Poverty questions. In addition, Table 4.6 compares each of the eight Beliefs about Poverty questions in ascending order with the belief question with the lowest mean score reported first and the highest mean score reported last in the table. The mean score for each question was again calculated on a 9-point Likert-type scale. For questions 5, 7, and 8, the following scale of 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Mostly Disagree*, 3 = *Disagree*, 4 = *Somewhat Disagree*, 5 = *Neither Agree or Disagree*, 6 = *Somewhat Agree*, 7 = *Agree*, 8 = *Mostly Agree*, and 9 = *Strongly Agree* was used to measure the mean score of each question. Reverse coding was used on Beliefs about Poverty for questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 resulting in the subsequent scale of 9 = *Strongly Disagree*, 8 = *Mostly Disagree*, 7 =

*Disagree*, 6 = *Somewhat Disagree*, 5 = *Neither Agree or Disagree*, 4 = *Somewhat Agree*, 3 = *Agree*, 2 = *Mostly Agree*, and 1 = *Strongly Agree*. For this measure, the higher the mean score, the less likely the teacher is to hold negative beliefs or negative implicit bias about teaching students that are disadvantaged.

Table 4.5

*Beliefs About Poverty Total Mean Score*

| Measure | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean Score | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Beliefs about Poverty | 389 | 3.6 | 9.0 | 6.85 | 1.06 |

The total mean score of 6.85 for Beliefs about Poverty fell within the *Somewhat Agree/Somewhat Disagree* range. The two lowest mean scores, suggesting neither agreement or disagreement, regarding teachers' beliefs were on items, "Poverty is primarily caused by conditions in the broader society (including schools) that create unequal opportunity" with a mean of 5.43, and "People in poverty, work, on average, more hours than those in the middle class" with a mean of 5.81. Responses to both of these items fell below the total mean for beliefs and in the *Neither Agree or Disagree* scoring range. Additionally, falling below the mean score were beliefs about education as a means out of poverty being "readily accessible to everyone" and the belief that schools can only have a limited effect on students in poverty. The mean total for these items fell in the *Somewhat Disagree* range on the Likert-like scale.

The Beliefs about Poverty items with the highest mean scores were "People in poverty do not work, or they have poor work ethic" with a mean of 7.88, and "Poverty is caused by poor character and poor choices that an individual makes" with a mean of 7.74.

Both of these beliefs for these two reversely coded items fell in the *Disagree* range. Other beliefs about poverty that scored above the mean indicated teachers had a level of disagreement regarding "parents being uninvolved because they don't value education" and agreement that their "bias and assumptions we hold about poverty can pose barriers to effective problem solving and change."

With the total mean for Beliefs about Poverty scoring in the *Somewhat Agree or Somewhat Disagree* range along with four of the belief items scoring lower than the mean, these analyses suggested that teachers in this study hold to some degree negative bias and stereotypical beliefs about families and students in poverty.

Table 4.6

*Beliefs About Poverty Survey Response Mean Score From Lowest to Highest*

| Belief Question | Mean Score | Scale Range |
|---|---|---|
| Poverty is primarily caused by conditions in the broader society (including schools) that create unequal opportunity. | 5.43 | Neither Agree or Disagree |
| People in poverty, work, on average, more hours than those in the middle class. | 5.81 | Neither Agree or Disagree |
| *Education, as a way out of poverty, is readily accessible to everyone. | 6.09 | Somewhat Agree |
| *Schools can have only a limited effect on students who live in poverty. | 6.71 | Somewhat Agree |
| *Parents of students who live in poverty are uninvolved in their child's education because they don't value it. | 7.42 | Disagree |
| The bias and assumptions we hold about poverty can pose barriers to effective problem solving and change. | 7.72 | Agree |
| *Poverty is caused by poor character and poor choices an individual makes. | 7.74 | Disagree |
| *People in poverty do not work, or they have poor work ethic. | 7.88 | Disagree |

Note: *items were reverse coded

**Research Question #3**

**What is the level of teachers' sense of efficacy toward students in poverty?**

The findings of this study showed the self-perceived level of efficacy of teachers participating in this study possess about students in poverty. The teachers' level of efficacy was determined by calculating the total mean for all 12 questions on the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scales (TSES) – Short Form (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). In addition to determining the total mean, in the TSES scoring guide, the 12 questions are divided into three subscales (1) Efficacy in student engagement: item numbers 2, 4, 7, and 11; (2) Efficacy in instructional strategies: item numbers 5, 9, 10, and 12; and (3) Efficacy in classroom management: item numbers 1, 3, 6, and 8. It is important to note questions 1, 2, 4 – 7, and 11 were modified by inserting "in poverty", "poor", or "that are poor."

The items were scored using a Likert-like scale as follows: 1 = *None at All*, 2 = unlabeled, 3 = *Very Little*, 4 = unlabeled, 5 = *Some Degree*, 6 = unlabeled, 7 = *Quite a Bit*, 8 = unlabeled, 9 = *A Great Deal*. The TSES has established reliabilities for the TSES total mean 7.1, SD .98, and 0.90 alpha. The subscales reliability is Engagement mean 7.2, SD 1.2 and alpha .81; Instruction mean 7.3, SD 1.2, and alpha .86; and Management mean 6.7, SD 1.2, and alpha .86.

The total mean and the mean for each of the three subscale constructs are shown in Table 4.7. Overall, the results from this study are similar to the TSES established norms (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Differences may be attributed to the modifications made to questions in order to assess level of efficacy specifically to working with students and families that are poor. The most notable difference was the efficacy in classroom management mean in this study. It is 7.09, which is 0.39 points

higher than the reliability mean of 6.7. A second notable difference was efficacy in student engagement. The student engagement mean in this study is 6.87 and the reliability mean is 7.2 resulting in a difference of (-0.33). Teachers' efficacy in student engagement was the lowest subscale mean, as well as below the total efficacy mean.

Table 4.7

*TSES Efficacy Total Mean and Subscale Mean Scores*

| Measure | N | Mean Score | Std. Deviation | TSES Norm | TSES Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Efficacy Total | 384 | 7.08 | .96 | 7.1 | .98 |
| Efficacy in Student Engagement | 384 | 6.87 | 1.10 | 7.2 | 1.2 |
| Efficacy in Instructional Strategies | 384 | 7.28 | 1.08 | 7.3 | 1.2 |
| Efficacy in Classroom Management | 384 | 7.09 | 1.04 | 6.7 | 1.2 |

Table 4.8 presents the means of each item on the TSES ranked from lowest efficacy mean first and highest efficacy mean last in the table. The efficacy subscale code is included after each item. As stated previously, Efficacy in Student Engagement had the lowest subscale mean. The lowest mean on an individual efficacy question was in the student engagement subscale. Teachers indicated the lowest level of efficacy in assisting "poor families in helping their children do well in school." Three out of the four student engagement items fell below the total efficacy mean. The highest efficacy mean was in the Efficacy in Instructional Strategies subscale. Item "To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?" had the highest mean of 7.81.

Table 4.8

*Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Questions and Mean Score From Lowest to Highest Mean*

| Efficacy Question (TSES) | Mean Score | Scale Range |
|---|---|---|
| How much can you assist poor families in helping their children do well in school? *(SE)* | 6.43 | Between Some Degree to Quite a Bit |
| To what extent can you craft good questions for your students in poverty? *(IS)* | 6.76 | Between Some Degree to Quite a Bit |
| How much can you do to motivate students in poverty who show low interest in school work? *(SE)* | 6.84 | Between Some Degree to Quite a Bit |
| How much can you do to control disruptive behavior of students that are poor in the classroom? *(CM)* | 6.85 | Between Some Degree to Quite a Bit |
| How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy? *(CM)* | 6.90 | Between Some Degree to Quite a Bit |
| How much can you do to help your students in poverty value learning? *(SE)* | 6.92 | Between Some Degree to Quite a Bit |
| How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom? *(IS)* | 7.26 | Quite a Bit |
| How much can you do to get children in poverty to follow classroom rules? *(CM)* | 7.27 | Quite a Bit |
| How much can you do to get students in poverty believe that they can do well in school work? *(SE)* | 7.30 | Quite a Bit |
| To what extent can you use a variety of assessment strategies? *(IS)* | 7.33 | Quite a Bit |
| How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students? *(CM)* | 7.37 | Quite a Bit |
| To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused? *(IS)* | 7.81 | Quite a Bit |

*Note.* (SE) Student Engagement, (IS) Instructional Strategies, (CM) Classroom Management

In summation, while suburban teachers' efficacy in this study was closely aligned the overall TSES efficacy mean, these results suggest that teachers have a lower efficacy in engaging students and their families that are poor, while reporting a higher level of efficacy in instruction and classroom management. In terms of the 12 statements, participants perceived quite a bit of ability to impact the learning of students in poverty in six of the efficacy statements. In the other six, they expressed some degree of ability to address other efficacy strategies. Particularly challenging was the ability to assist poor families in helping their children.

**Research Question #4**

**Is there a positive relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy?**

A canonical correlation analysis was performed to investigate which three efficacy subscales (student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management) predict a teacher's understanding of poverty (knowledge and beliefs) with a sample of 384 teachers in suburban school districts with increased poverty. A canonical correlation analysis is a more sophisticated method of multiple regression analysis and is used to predict multiple outcomes from multiple variables (Abu-Bader, 2010). Data were screened to make certain that assumptions for a canonical correlation analysis were met. Assumptions evaluated include levels of measurement, sample size, normality, linearity, and multicollinearity.

In this study the dependent variables include efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management which all consist of continuous data and measured at interval levels. The independent variables include knowledge and beliefs about poverty and are continuous data and measured at

interval level. The sample size is over seven times the minimum requirement ratio of at least 10 cases per variable, with 384 teachers completing the survey, indicating 76.8 cases per variable. This large sample size is necessary to overcome the overall reliability being just under the required .80. The overall reliability coefficient of all five variables is .79. The reliability coefficients of all variables range between .67 and .73, except for knowledge and beliefs that have reliability coefficients of .46 and .32. The multivariate normality was assessed using the univariate normality of each variable. Measures of skewness and kurtosis were all <1.5 benchmark. Additionally, histograms and normal probability plots were reviewed.

Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to measure linearity between all pairs of independent and dependent variables. Table 4.9 shows significant correlations between all pairs of variables. Included in the measure for linearity was an examination of scatterplots of all pairs of variables. Figure 4.1 displays the scatterplot matrix of all variables. A linear relationship exists between all variables.

The last of the assumptions was to examine the multicollinearity between all pairs of variables by checking their correlations, which should be less than .80. As Table 4.9 indicates, there are three pairs of variables that have Pearson correlations that are too high ($r$ > .80. The efficacy total mean and student engagement efficacy mean ($r$ =.91), instructional strategies efficacy mean ($r$ =.87), and classroom management mean ($r$ =.90) are all greater than the .80 threshold. Multicollinearity was also examined using the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values for each set. Because the correlations between the total efficacy and the three subscales of efficacy are too high, it lacks

discrimination between the variable pairs; therefore, the conical pair results were not interpreted.

Table 4.9

*Correlations Between Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy Means*

| | | Knowledge Mean | Beliefs Mean | Efficacy Total | Student Engagement | Instructional Strategies | Classroom Manage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge Mean | Pearson's *r* | | .23 | .44 | .40 | .41 | .37 |
| | *p* value | | .00 | .00 | .00 | .00 | .00 |
| Beliefs Mean | Pearson's *r* | | | .30 | .29 | .27 | .25 |
| | *p* value | | | .00 | .00 | .00 | .00 |
| Efficacy Total | Pearson's *r* | | | | .91 | .87 | .90 |
| | *p* value | | | | .00 | .00 | .00 |
| Student Engagement | Pearson's *r* | | | | | .68 | .77 |
| | *p* value | | | | | .00 | .00 |
| Instructional Strategies | Pearson's *r* | | | | | | .64 |
| | *p* value | | | | | | .00 |
| Classroom Management | Pearson's *r* | | | | | | |
| | *p* value | | | | | | |

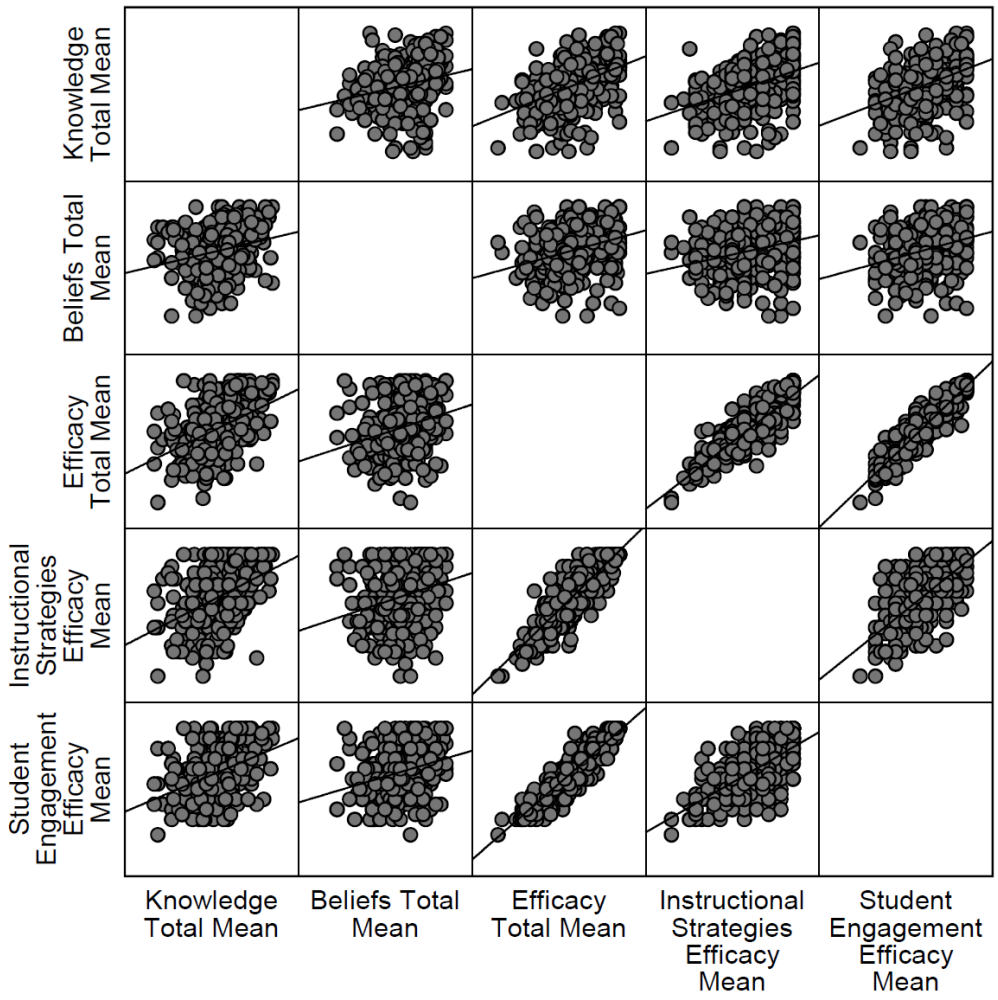


*Figure 4.1.* Scatterplot matrix for independent and dependent variables.

The canonical analysis results indicated that of the overall Wilks' lambda multivariate tests of significance show a significant correlation between the efficacy variates and the understanding of poverty variates (Wilks' lambda = .75, $F_{(6,758.0)}$ = 18.96, $p < .001$). Additionally, the results of the Wilks' lambda dimension reduction analysis test showed that only the first canonical variates pair was significant (Wilks' lambda = .75, $F_{(6,758.0)}$ = 18.96, $p < .001$).

For regression analysis, the results for canonical correlation showed that all three efficacy variates are influenced by both knowledge and beliefs about poverty. Table 4.10

displays the results. The results of the univariate regression analysis showed that efficacy in student engagement was a function of knowledge (β = .36, $t$ = 7.55, $p$ < .05) and beliefs (β = .20, $t$ = 4.28, $p$ < .05). The results of the univariate regression analysis showed that efficacy in instructional strategies was a function of knowledge (β = .37, $t$ = 7.9, $p$ < .05) and beliefs (β = .18, $t$ = 3.9, $p$ < .05). Lastly, the results of the univariate regression analysis showed that efficacy in classroom management was a function of knowledge (β = .32, $t$ = 6.72, $p$ < .05) and beliefs (β = .17, $t$ = 3.49, $p$ < .05). Overall, knowledge about poverty has a greater influence on efficacy than beliefs about poverty, although beliefs about poverty is an influence on efficacy.

Table 4.10

*Regression Analysis of Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy in Student Engagement, Instructional Strategies, and Classroom Management*

| Efficacy Subscales | Knowledge | | | Beliefs | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | β | *t* | *p* | β | *t* | *p* |
| Student Engagement | .36 | 7.55 | < .05 | .20 | 4.28 | < .05 |
| Instructional Strategies | .37 | 7.9 | < .05 | .18 | 3.9 | < .05 |
| Classroom Management | .32 | 6.72 | < .05 | .17 | 3.49 | < .05 |

β = Beta

**Research Question #5**

**Are there differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and teachers' demographic information?**

The fifth research question sought to determine if any relationships existed between a teachers' knowledge, beliefs, or efficacy and select demographic information including total years taught, years in current teaching position, the current level of

teaching, if the teacher attended school in the district while school age, and whether or not the teacher lived in the school district. To determine if a relationship existed between the constructs and variables, Pearson correlations and mean comparisons (ANOVA) were used.

For determining a relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, efficacy, and total years of teaching experience and years teaching in the current school district an ANOVA analysis was used for the continuous variables. The findings suggest that there is no relationship between the number of years teaching and knowledge ($F = .32$, $p = .94$), beliefs ($F = .87$, $p = .57$), and efficacy ($F = .60$, $p = .75$). Further, the findings suggest that there is no relationship between the number of years teaching in current position and knowledge ($F = .60$, $p = .80$), beliefs ($F = 1.51$, $p = .16$), and efficacy ($F = 1.24$, $p = .28$).

For determining relationships between knowledge, beliefs, efficacy, and the current level of teaching, if the teacher attended school in the district while school age, and whether or not the teacher lived in the school district, total mean comparisons were used. Table 4.11 shows the mean totals of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and the teachers' current level teaching: elementary, middle or high school level. Findings reveal when comparing the total overall means of each construct with the current teaching level of the teacher, elementary teachers had a higher mean in all six constructs, and middle school level teachers had a higher mean in all constructs, except efficacy in student engagement. High school teachers had lower mean scores in all constructs except beliefs. In the ANOVA analysis, the findings suggest that there is no relationship

between the current teaching level and knowledge (F = 1.82, $p$ = .16), beliefs (F = .00, $p$ = .99), and efficacy (F = 2.19, $p$ = .11).

Table 4.11

*Comparison of Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy Means With Level Currently Teaching*

| Current Level of Teaching | | Knowledge | Beliefs | Efficacy | Efficacy in Student Engagement | Efficacy in Instructional Strategies | Efficacy in Classroom Management |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total Mean | 5.99 | 6.85 | 7.08 | 6.87 | 7.28 | 7.09 |
| | Mean | 6.11 | 6.87 | 7.20 | 7.08 | 7.37 | 7.15 |
| Elementary | N | 155 | 155 | 155 | 155 | 155 | 155 |
| | Difference | 0.12 | 0.02 | 0.12 | 0.21 | 0.09 | 0.09 |
| | Mean | 6.03 | 6.86 | 7.10 | 6.84 | 7.32 | 7.13 |
| Middle | N | 99 | 99 | 99 | 99 | 99 | 99 |
| | Difference | 0.04 | 0.01 | 0.02 | -0.03 | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| | Mean | 5.83 | 6.86 | 6.96 | 6.66 | 7.20 | 7.02 |
| High | N | 126 | 126 | 126 | 126 | 126 | 126 |
| | Difference | -0.16 | 0.01 | -0.12 | -0.21 | -0.08 | -0.07 |

Table 4.12 shows the mean totals of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy who did or did not attend school in the school district while school age. Sixty-five teachers or 17%, of teachers reported attending school in their current school district while school-age. The findings show teachers who attended school in the district while school-age have lower mean scores when compared to the total mean in all constructs, except beliefs. Teachers who did not attend school in the school district while school-age had higher mean scores when compared to the total mean in all seven constructs. Further, teachers who did not attend school in the district while school-age had higher mean scores than teachers that did attend. In the ANOVA analysis, the findings suggest

that there is no relationship between who did or did not attend school in the district while school age and knowledge (F = 3.41, $p$ = .07), beliefs (F = ..29, $p$ = .59), and efficacy (F = .78, $p$ = .38).

Table 4.12

*Comparison of Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy Means With School-Age School Attended*

| School-age School Attended | | Knowledge | Beliefs | Efficacy | Efficacy in Student Engagement | Efficacy in Instructional Strategies | Efficacy in Classroom Management |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total Mean | 5.99 | 6.85 | 7.08 | 6.87 | 7.28 | 7.09 |
| *Yes* - | Mean | 5.74 | 7.08 | 7.00 | 6.78 | 7.21 | 7.00 |
| *Did Attend* | N | 65 | 65 | 65 | 65 | 65 | 65 |
| *District* | Difference | -0.25 | 0.23 | -0.08 | -0.09 | -0.07 | 0.09 |
| *No* - | Mean | 6.05 | 7.17 | 7.11 | 6.90 | 7.31 | 7.12 |
| *Did Not* | N | 316 | 316 | 316 | 316 | 316 | 316 |
| *Attend* | Difference | 0.06 | 0.29 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 |

While Table 4.12 displays data regarding teachers that attended the school district as a student, Table 4.13 shows a comparison of the mean totals of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy who currently live or do not live in the school district in which they teach. A quarter (25%) of the teachers who participated in this study reported they currently lived in the district. The results of the comparison of means revealed that teachers who currently live in the district have lower mean scores in all constructs, except beliefs. Teachers who do not live in the district had higher mean scores in all constructs: knowledge, beliefs, efficacy, and the three efficacy subscales. ANOVA indicated statistical significance between groups for teachers who live in the district and those who do not for overall efficacy mean (F = 4.72, $p$ = .03), efficacy in student engagement (F = 3.88, $p$ = .04), and efficacy in instructional strategies (F = 3.98, $p$ = .04).

Table 4.13

*Comparison of Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy Means With Residing in School District*

| Reside in School District | | Knowledge | Beliefs | Efficacy | Efficacy in Student Engagement | Efficacy in Instructional Strategies | Efficacy in Classroom Management |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total Mean | 5.99 | 6.85 | 7.08 | 6.87 | 7.28 | 7.09 |
| *Yes* - | Mean | 5.09 | 7.03 | 6.90 | 6.68 | 7.10 | 6.93 |
| *Live in* | N | 94 | 94 | 94 | 94 | 94 | 94 |
| *District* | Difference | - 0.91 | 0.18 | -0.18 | -0.19 | -0.18 | -0.17 |
| *No* - | Mean | 6.06 | 7.16 | 7.15 | 6.94 | 7.35 | 7.15 |
| *Did Not* | N | 288 | 288 | 288 | 288 | 288 | 288 |
| *Live in District* | Difference | 0.06 | 0.31 | 0.07 | 0.07 | 0.07 | 0.06 |

## Summary

Chapter IV presents the results of this quantitative descriptive survey study. Teachers in seven northeast Ohio suburban school districts were the target population for the study. The results showed that of the 382 teachers completing the survey, 76% were females, 91% were White, and 83% held a master's degree. Sixty-four percent of teachers were mid-late career with 16 - 35 years of teaching experience and 49% have taught in their current school district for 16 - 35 years. Regarding the level the teachers currently teach, 41% teach at the elementary level (preK - 5), 26% middle level (grades 6-8), and 33% high school level. The overwhelmingly majority, 83%, of the teachers did not attend school in the district while school-age; and 75% of the teachers do not currently live in the school district in which they teach.

While examining the knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy of teachers in this sample, the research findings showed that for the first research question, "What is the level of

knowledge of teachers from suburban districts with increasing poverty regarding teaching students in poverty," the level of knowledge mean was 5.99. Knowledge had the lowest mean score when compared to beliefs and efficacy. The second research question, "What are teachers' beliefs regarding teaching students from poor families," the total mean score for beliefs was 6.85. In research question three, "What is the level of teachers' sense of efficacy toward students in poverty," efficacy had the highest mean at 7.08. The efficacy subscales showed efficacy in student engagement with the lowest mean of 6.87, followed by efficacy in classroom management with a mean of 7.09, and finally the highest mean subscale was efficacy in instructional strategies at 7.28.

In research question four, "Is there a positive relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy toward students in poverty," a canonical correlation regression analysis revealed a correlation between efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, classroom management and knowledge and beliefs about poverty. Overall, knowledge had a stronger influence on efficacy than beliefs.

For the final research question five, "Are there differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and teachers' demographic information," the relationships between knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and demographic information showed little to no relationship with total years of teaching experience or years teaching in their current district. When comparing knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy with school level teachers are teaching, elementary teachers have the highest mean scores, followed by middle and high school teachers who have the lowest mean scores. High school teachers' mean scores are lower than the total mean in all of the construct variables, except for beliefs. Teachers who attended the school district as a student or currently live

in the school district have lower mean scores than teachers who did not attend school in the district or do not currently live in the district. There is a statistical significance between groups for teachers who live in the district and those who do not for overall efficacy mean, efficacy in student engagement, and efficacy in instructional strategies.

# CHAPTER V

# SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this quantitative, descriptive research study was to understand and describe teachers' perceptions of their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach students in poverty in suburban school districts with shifting demographics, specifically, an increase of students in poverty. In the school setting, the teacher is the individual who works most closely with students; therefore, the multitude of decisions teachers make about and for their students have a profound influence on students' learning (Hattie, 2018). In the suburban school setting, a phenomenon of shifting demographics exists, with more and more students who are poor, ethnically diverse, have experienced trauma, and are entering school with fewer resources (Allard, 2017; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). Many teachers in public suburban school districts have not experienced such shifts in demographics until recently, and they are left unprepared to meet the needs of their students (Wilson, 2012).

The research on suburban poverty and specifically on teachers in suburban school districts with increased poverty is limited. Research in the area of poverty and schools is primarily focused on urban and rural settings, or on high poverty schools in general. This limited research and information poses a problem for suburban school district teachers and leaders who strive to increase student learning by meeting the diverse needs of the students they now serve. Hence, this study attempted to add to the literature and research about suburban school teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about teaching students in poverty. These three constructs of knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy are critical and come into play every time a teacher makes a decision about one of his or her students

(Gorski, 2012; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Haberman, 1995; Staats et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The findings of this study provide new information on the level of knowledge, beliefs held, and the level of efficacy of suburban teachers in districts with shifting demographics. Additionally, the study sought to identify any positive relationships between the three constructs. Lastly, the study examined the three constructs of knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy with teachers' experience (years taught), experience within their current school district, level they teach (elementary, middle, or high school), and whether or not the teachers attended the school district as a school-age student, and finally if the teachers live in the school district.

This chapter contains a summary of findings, detailing the findings for each research question and connecting the findings to research. Next, the discussion section synthesizes the findings and examines the findings in a holistic manner. The last three sections of this chapter include the significance of the study, future research considerations, and conclusion.

## Summary of Findings

The summary of findings section summarizes the notable findings of the study for each research question and considers possible causes for the results. Additionally, a summary of demographic information on the participants is included.

To provide context to the study, demographic information was collected as part of the survey instrument. Each of the respondents was a teacher in one of seven suburban school districts that have experienced an increase in poverty in northeast Ohio. There were 382 complete survey responses. The sample overall was homogeneous with little diversity. The sample included 76% females and 91% of the respondents were White.

Compared to national statistics, the percentage of female teachers in this study is very closely aligned to the 77% of female teachers nationally (McFarland et al., 2018). However, the percentage of White teachers in this study is 11 percentage points higher than the national percentage of 80% (McFarland et al., 2018). These two statistics may be indicative of suburban school districts and allow for this sample to be generalizable to the larger population of suburban school districts.

For the highest educational degree obtained, 83% of the respondents reported having a master's degree. Although this is higher than the national statistic of 57% holding a master's degree or higher, the finding for this sample may be indicative of the years of experience as will be discussed (McFarland et al., 2018). It is not uncommon for teachers to obtain a master's degree. Often, there are incentives for teachers to earn educational hours and degrees beyond the minimum required bachelor's degree. For example, in the northeast Ohio region, in many school districts' collective bargaining agreements with teaching associations, teachers are compensated at a higher rate of pay for earning a master's degree. Additionally, teachers may be seeking a master's degree in pursuit of obtaining additional licenses to enter another facet of the education field such as administration, school counseling, or curriculum.

The respondents in this study have a significant amount of teaching experience. Teachers in this study are mid to late career with 64% of the respondents having 16 - 35 years of total teaching experience and only 6% having five years or fewer years of experience. Nationally, 61% of teachers have 10 to over 20 years of teaching experience (McFarland, et al., 2018). Further, when asked how many years teachers have taught in their current district, 69% of the respondents have been teaching in their current district

for more than 10 years. It is not uncommon for teachers who begin teaching in a suburban school district to remain in that same district for their entire career. Suburban school districts experience lower teacher turnover rates than urban school districts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This statistic is relevant and important to this study, because teachers who have taught in these suburban school districts for 10 or more years have experienced a shift in demographics of their students as described in this study. Therefore, having nearly 70% of the respondents with 10 or more years of experience enhanced the likelihood of capturing accurate results for this particular study. Had the majority of respondents had less experience in their current district, they would not have experienced the changing demographics of the student populations.

The majority of teachers completing the survey taught in grades Pre-K - 8, with 67% of teachers at these levels (elementary and middle), and 33% at the high school level. Nationally, there are more elementary schools (grades K - 8) than high schools (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2019). Hence, the sample is aligned with the population surveyed. Lastly, demographic information collected on the respondents intended to determine if teachers in the study attended school in the school district while school-age or if the teachers lived in the school district. This was an attempt by the researcher to determine how many teachers may have a longer history with the district again, experiencing the shift in demographics. Close to 20% of the respondents did attend school in the school district while school age and 25% of the teachers participating in this study reported living in the school district.

The target population for this research was teachers in seven suburban districts with increased poverty in northeast Ohio. The majority of the teachers were white

females in mid-late career, who teach mostly at the elementary or middle school level and hold master's degrees. Given national demographic statistics on teachers in the United States, the sample for this study is similar with the exception of a higher percentage of white teachers in this sample. There was very little racial and ethnic diversity among this group of respondents.

**Research Question (R1)**

**What is the level of knowledge of teachers from suburban districts with increasing poverty regarding teaching students in poverty?**

There are several findings related to this first research question. The researcher sought to determine the perceived level of knowledge of teachers from suburban districts which were experiencing increased levels of poverty. To put the findings in context, after completing the consent to participate on page 1 of the survey, teachers were directed to page 2 to complete the 10 Knowledge about Poverty questions. The researcher created this part of the survey using select questions from self-assessments and inventories developed by researchers William Parrett and Kathleen Budge (2014, 2018).

The first Knowledge about Poverty question that respondents read in the survey is, "I have a good understanding of what is meant by 'living in poverty' in the United States and in my local school." The first notable finding of this study is that at this very early point in the survey, 90 of the 488, or 18% of respondents who gave consent to complete the survey, stopped the survey. It is reasonable to conclude that respondents at least read the first question and after reading it, decided to abandon the survey. It is unlikely that respondents stopped on question 1 of the survey because of "survey taking fatigue" which generally occurs further into a longer survey (Stiles, 2016). Rather, this

first question may have been abandoned because it made the participants uncomfortable if they felt that they did not have a good understanding of what it meant to live in poverty and did not want to indicate that in the survey. The respondent may have felt that not knowing about poverty was not socially desirable and instead of responding in a socially desirable manner on the survey, abandoned it (Krumpel, 2013). This finding of nearly 20% of suburban teacher participants not answering this question supports the research of mismatch of teacher background and student background which has existed in the education for decades, especially in urban and rural settings (Mundy & Leko, 2015). Most teachers are white and come from middle-class backgrounds. Teachers may not have felt comfortable answering the above question if they have not personally experienced living in poverty or truly not have any knowledge at all about what is meant by living in poverty. The majority of teachers, 75%, completing the survey reported living outside of the district. It is possible that teachers living outside of the district may live in more affluent districts. Research supports that mismatches between teachers and students can be mitigated through developing knowledge about students and their backgrounds (Gorski, 2008a; Haberman, 1995; Jensen, 2013b; Mundy & Leko; 2015; Parrett & Budge, 2012).

The second finding of this study is the level of knowledge about poverty that suburban teachers in this study possess is a mean knowledge score of 5.99 on a continuous Likert-like scale of 1 - 9. This score is in the *Neither Agree or Disagree* range on the continuum. Also notable is that knowledge about poverty had the lowest mean compared to the other two constructs of beliefs and efficacy. This finding suggests the need for leaders in suburban school districts to provide opportunities through

meaningful and appropriate professional development for teachers in suburban school districts to develop their knowledge about poverty. A lack of knowledge about poverty can lead teachers to be deficit minded about their students who live in poverty and hold lower expectations for them, as well as maintain beliefs about people who live in poverty based on stereotypes (Gorski, 2008a, Gorski, 2008b, Gorski, 2016).

Responses to individual question stems revealed teachers had the least amount of knowledge about leadership infrastructures necessary for improvement and knowing the percent of students in their school living in poverty, with mean scores of 4.37 and 5.15, respectively. This finding was anticipated by the researcher. Teachers are often laser focused holistically on the students in their classroom and often are not knowledgeable about the broader context, such as the percentage of students who live in poverty and attend their school or district. However, it would be important for teachers to know which students they serve are disadvantaged as well as in their school overall. This is significant; as not knowing this information affirms that suburban teachers may not even be aware of the levels of poverty in their school. Furthermore, teachers may not see themselves as leaders in the school and may consider leadership to be the principal or an administrator.

The data indicated that teachers had some knowledge about how poverty negatively affects students' lives and learning and could explain why teacher expectations of students matter, scoring the highest mean score of 7.43. However, on the question, "I can provide a research-based answer to the question "How do schools make a difference in the lives of students living in poverty?" the mean score was 5.27. This is conflicting information which suggests suburban teachers lack the necessary knowledge

of research or evidence-based practices that positively affect learning and outcomes for students in poverty (Wilson, 2012). Yet, there is a strong body of literature of the practices and school infrastructures that support learning for disadvantaged students including but not limited to building relationships and holding high expectations (Budge & Parrett, 2018; Haberman, 1995; Jensen, 2009; Saphier, 2017; Tough, 2016).

In summary, given the changing demographics in suburban school districts, it is imperative that teachers develop a thorough understanding of poverty, the causes of poverty, and effective practices that support students who come from poor families. When teachers lack appropriate knowledge about poverty, they risk not being able to fully support and meet the needs of their students. Not knowing how poverty adversely affects students' lives and learning will inhibit the teacher's ability to implement effective instructional strategies. Further, not having accurate knowledge about poverty, teachers may continue to hold erroneous stereotypes, negative bias, or deficit thinking about their students from poor families.

**Research Question (R2)**

**What are teachers' beliefs regarding teaching students from poor families?**

The purpose of the second research question was to examine the beliefs suburban district teachers hold regarding their students from poor families. The researcher attempted to determine if teachers in the study held negative implicit bias, erroneous stereotypes, or deficit thinking about their students. Implicit bias theory suggests teachers may unknowingly be influenced by stereotypes or bias (Gorski, 2008b; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Staats, et al., 2013). Closely coupled to implicit bias theory is deficit theory. Deficit theory asserts teachers may view students according to

perceived deficits, which are seen as resulting from the student's home environment (Collins, 1988; Eller, 1989).

Findings from this study suggest participants exhibited negative bias and stereotypical views about students and families in poverty. The mean score of Beliefs about Poverty was 6.85 and fell in the *Somewhat Agree or Somewhat Disagree* range on the 1 to 9-point Likert-like scale. Since the overall mean did not fall in the *Agree or Disagree* range on the continuum, teachers' beliefs about their students in poverty appear to be consistent with deficit ideology, which can negatively influence the teachers' actions when working with disadvantaged students (Eller, 1989;Gorski, 2016). The two Beliefs about Poverty stem responses with the lowest mean scores were "Poverty is primarily caused by conditions in the broader society (including schools) that create unequal opportunities" (5.43 mean) and "People in poverty, work, on average, more hours than those in the middle class" (5.81 mean). These responses demonstrate teachers in this study hold deficit and bias beliefs about students and families in poverty. Rather than understanding the broader external and structural factors, such as unequal access to quality housing, healthcare, and nutrition that create inequity for people in poverty, teachers may blame students and families for students' underachievement in school (Gorski, 2016).

The literature emphasizes the importance of educators embracing structural beliefs or ideologies about poverty. Gorski (2016) stated:

> If a teacher believes people experiencing poverty are inherently deficient, no amount of instructional strategies will adequately prepare that teacher to see and respond to the conditions that *actually* underlie education outcome disparities

(Berliner 2006, 2013), from structural issues like housing instability to building-level issues like policies - for example, harsh punishments for school absences - that can punish students experiencing poverty for their poverty. (p. 382)

Gorski clearly articulates how detrimental teachers' beliefs about their students can be if they are deficit and negative bias-based. For all students to learn at high levels, teachers must believe that all students are capable of doing so.

While having accurate knowledge about poverty is fundamental, it is what the teacher then does with that knowledge to influence their beliefs about students in poverty that will make a positive difference for students. Teachers must be open-minded and continually examine their personally held beliefs, (e.g., what they believe, and why they believe it) (Haberman, 1995). If teachers ascribe to deficit thinking or negative bias about their students, they may blame their students and their families when students do not experience success in school. Parrett and Budge (2012) identified the need to confront and work to eliminate blame as the first of many steps to foster a safe and supportive learning environment. Since some bias may be implicitly held, it will take time, deep soul-searching, and courageous conversations with a teacher's inner voice to reconcile their beliefs to transform their mental models to ones that will support their students in poverty (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Gorski, 2008b, Staats, et al., 2013).

**Research Question (R3)**

**What is the level of teachers' sense of efficacy toward students in poverty?**

The third research question examined the level of teachers' sense of efficacy when working with students in poverty. There were several findings in this study related to efficacy. The first finding shows teachers' sense of efficacy with students in poverty

was 7.08 and is near the TSES reliability mean of 7.1. This was not anticipated by the researcher. The researcher anticipated the total efficacy mean score would be lower. Efficacy is an important attribute for teachers to possess. Teachers who have high efficacy possess the belief that they have the ability to positively influence student success. In other words, teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy will tend to look at themselves as the contributing factor to student success or lack of success versus outside factors in which the teacher does not have control (Haberman, 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

The second finding concerns teacher mean scores on the subscales of the TSES. In this study, Efficacy in Student Engagement was -0.33 points lower than the reliability mean. This may indicate teachers have a lower sense of efficacy when engaging students who live in poverty in learning. Research supports the importance of the ability of the teacher to engage students from poverty in their learning and is necessary for students to learn at high and profound levels (Hattie, 2009, 2018; Jensen, 2013a; Schlechty, 2011). Eric Jensen (2013a) emphasized the need for teachers to examine their current teaching practices and states, "The attitudes and strategies of yesterday are not enough anymore. It's time to upgrade your teaching" (p. xi). In suburban school districts with increasing poverty, teaching strategies that worked in the past will not meet the needs or engage students in poverty if teachers are not cognizant of students' backgrounds and experiences. Jensen (2013a) identified seven factors that influence student engagement that include but are not limited to building relationships with students, creating stress-free classroom environment, and growth mindset.

Teachers' efficacy in instructional strategies mean of 7.28 was aligned closely with the TSES reliability mean of 7.3, while efficacy in classroom management was 0.39 points higher than the reliability mean. This may be attributed to the level of experience of the respondents. The majority of the respondents have 16 or more years of teaching experience. Most experienced teachers have developed effective classroom management strategies and routines. Additionally, teachers in Ohio are evaluated specifically on their classroom environment. According to the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES, 2015), in order for a teacher to earn the highest rating of "Accomplished" in the classroom environment standard, the teacher must demonstrate,

> A classroom management system has been designed, implemented, and adjusted with student input and is appropriate for the classroom and individual student needs. Students are actively encouraged to take responsibility for their behavior. The teacher uses research-based strategies to lessen disruptive behaviors and reinforce positive behaviors. (Ohio Teacher Evaluation Model, 2015, p. 20)

Having this expectation in teacher evaluation may have contributed to the higher mean score in efficacy in classroom management for the respondents.

**Research Question (R4)**

**Is there a positive relationship between teachers', knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy?**

The findings suggest both knowledge and beliefs positively influence or predict teachers' efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management. To determine if positive relationships existed between these multiple variables, a canonical correlation analysis was conducted to examine the

multiple variables. Using a canonical correlation analysis significantly decreased the likelihood the researcher committed a Type I error in the analysis. This was accomplished through conducting one robust test rather than conducting multiple statistical tests (Sherry & Henson, 2005).

The research of Marten Haberman (1995) highly supports the finding of knowledge and beliefs influencing a teacher's efficacy. Haberman's life's work was identifying the dispositions held by teachers he referred to as "Star Teachers," which made them more successful in working with students in poverty. One of these dispositions is the high level of accountability for student learning. In order for a teacher to have high accountability:

> Star Teachers are well aware of the societal conditions under which many of their students live and learn: school or home violence, food scarcity, transiency, poor housing, racism, and so on. Yet, they never blame the victims (i.e., the learners, families, or community). (Hill-Jackson, Stafford, James, & Hartlep, 2018, p. 13)

In other words, teachers who are knowledgeable about poverty know about their students' background, understand the stressors they may have in their lives, believe their students are capable, and in turn have higher efficacy.

This finding emphasizes the importance of teachers having accurate knowledge about poverty and holding positive beliefs about their students who are poor, because doing so influences a teacher's efficacy. Research indicates highly efficacious teachers truly believe that they are responsible for student learning and what they do makes a difference in the lives of their students regardless of their students' life circumstances (Haberman, 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

School leadership is integral in influencing teachers' knowledge and beliefs, and subsequently teacher efficacy. The school leader is responsible for creating the conditions within the school environment that promote and support teachers in becoming reflective practitioners. To create the appropriate conditions within the school culture for teachers to reflect on their knowledge and beliefs about poverty, the school leader must be conscious of the current school culture (Schein, 1992). Edgar Schein (1992) identified three levels of school culture: Artifacts, Espoused Values, and Basic Underlying Assumptions. Artifacts within the culture are observable but difficult to interpret without further inquiry or questions. Espoused values are conscious goals, strategies, and philosophies. The basic underlying assumptions of the school culture are unconscious and difficult to understand. However, it is this level of school culture that is essential to be able to develop an understanding of why things happen the way they do in the school (Schein, 1992). In other words, school leaders must be able to scratch below the surface to permeate basic assumptions and beliefs about students in poverty.

In order for school leaders to tap into basic underlying assumptions, conditions must be created within the school culture that foster a sense of trust and safety for teachers to be vulnerable and self-reflective. According to Parrett and Budge (2012), school leaders that provide new experiences in a reasonably nonthreatening setting, in turn can lead to changes in beliefs. School leaders need to provide opportunities for themselves and teachers to examine their own perceptions and beliefs about poverty by sharing accurate information about poverty. Rather than directly challenging teachers' beliefs about poverty, school leaders should create experiences for teachers to reflect on their own beliefs (Parrett & Budge, 2012). For example, participating in a poverty

simulation creates the opportunity to engage in meaningful and courageous conversations about knowledge and beliefs about poverty. When teachers dig deeper into their own beliefs, they become reflective practitioners, who are courageous to become very introspective.

The findings in this study affirm that a teacher's knowledge and beliefs about poverty influence teacher efficacy. Yet, in spite of this finding, and as noted previously, the researcher expected lower efficacy scores than reported based on overall knowledge about poverty. This suggests that teachers' knowledge about poverty is insufficient for teachers to accurately assess their efficacy in serving students that are poor. This underscores the importance of school leaders to be able create the conditions for teachers to be reflective practitioners.

**Research Question (R5)**

**Are there differences between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy and teachers' demographic information?**

The purpose of the fifth research question was to explore if any differences exist between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy related to working with students in poverty and select demographic information. The demographic information used included (a) total years taught, (b) years in current teaching position, (c) the current level of teaching, (d) if the teacher attended school in the district while school age, and (e) whether or not the teacher lived in the school district. The findings suggest a statistically significant relationship between teachers who live in the school district and those that do not with regard to overall efficacy, efficacy in student engagement, and efficacy in

instructional strategies. There were no statistically significant relationships with the constructs and the other demographic variables.

There were no statistically significant relationships between knowledge, beliefs and efficacy, and the total years teaching experience, the number of years taught in the current district, the current level of teaching, and whether or not the teacher lived in the school district. The researcher anticipated that there may be a relationship between years of experience, in particular in the current school district, as teachers who have been in their suburban school district for a longer period of time would have experienced the demographic shifts in the district versus teachers in the district for less than 10 years. Years of experience did not make a difference with the knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy of teachers regarding their students in poverty. The fact that no relationship existed in this study between these variables generally affirms teachers in suburban school districts, regardless of experience or teaching level need to know more about poverty and its negative influence on students in poverty and their learning.

Although not a statistically significant finding, some trends emerged in the data. For example, elementary teachers had the highest mean scores in all of the six constructs, and the elementary group means were all higher than the total mean scores, while high school teachers had the lowest mean scores. This may be attributed to high school teachers, generally, teaching many more students than elementary students. For example, a first grade elementary teacher may be responsible for 20 - 25 students for the entire school year, while a high school teacher may have the responsibility for 100 - 150 students. Elementary teachers have fewer students to know and build relationships with, while high school teachers may find it challenging to know and build relationships with

so many students. High school teachers are content specialists and may be more focused on teaching the "content" versus teaching the students the content.

Findings suggest a statistically significant relationship between teachers who live in the school district and those who do not with regard to overall efficacy, efficacy in student engagement, and efficacy in instructional strategies. Overall, teachers who reported living in the district had a lower mean total in knowledge. If fact, it was the second lowest mean of all the means calculated for this study. Based on this study, it was determined that knowledge about poverty positively influences efficacy; therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that lower knowledge about poverty results in lower efficacy. The question to be answered is "*Why do the 25% of the teachers in this study who live in the school district have lower efficacy (and knowledge) than teachers who do not live in the district?"* This may be attributed to teachers who live in the district and potentially have lived in the district for a long period of time may be experiencing the phenomenon of increased poverty in suburban districts in a different way. They are insiders in the suburban community and experience the community not just as an educator in the school system, but as a resident experiencing all aspects of the greater community. They are deeply connected to the community.

It is possible teachers living in these suburban school districts are not fully acknowledging or aware of the shifting demographics within their community. This notion is supported by research that in suburban poverty, it can be difficult to understand the realities of poverty when families with low income live in the same community as the middle class (Allard, 2017; Freeman, 2010; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). As stated in Chapter II and worth stating again, "Suburban poverty often goes unrecognized behind a

veil of respectability and when the children of disadvantage attend the same schools as the children of privilege, poverty has a tendency to appear more discreet, more manageable, and less debilitating" (Freeman, 2010, p. 676). It is also possible that if teachers who live in the community in which they teach and hold negative implicit bias or stereotypes about families that are poor, they may not want to identify as being in a community with decreasing socio-economics. In other words, teachers may wish to identify as being associated with a more affluent community. This may hinder their open mindedness about developing an accurate knowledge about poverty.

As stated previously, this is an interesting finding which certainly raises more questions than answers. Understanding teachers who live in the district and their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about their students from poor families is worth further exploration.

## Discussion

This quantitative descriptive survey research study sought to investigate the knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy of teachers in suburban school districts that have experienced shifting demographics, specifically an increase in poverty. Each of the research questions findings has been examined and analyzed in the summary of findings. This discussion section focuses holistically on the findings and the influence teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy can have on their students who are disadvantaged in terms of learning and success in school.

Teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and sense of efficacy influence consciously and implicitly every decision they make. Teachers' knowledge about poverty influences a teacher's beliefs about an unmotivated student. Based on the teacher's knowledge about

poverty, does the teacher attribute the unmotivated nature of the student to the student and family not valuing or caring about education? Or, does the teacher attribute the students' apathy to a lack of nutrition, housing insecurity, constant stressors in the home, or lack of quality healthcare? When a student from a family that is poor has a limited vocabulary, does the teacher perceive this as a deficit and that the student may not be able to develop language because of the student's inability to learn, or does the teacher view this as an opportunity to develop the student's language and believes the student has the ability to learn. Does the teacher believe that he or she can absolutely make a positive difference in the learning and lives of the students that are poor? Or, does the teacher feel that the outside influences are so great and insurmountable that the teacher has little influence on a student's learning who is poor?

Paul Gorski powerfully captures the concept central to this study when he asks the following, "As a teacher, can I believe a student's mindset is deficient, that she is lazy, unmotivated, and disinterested in school ***and also*** build a positive, high expectations relationship with her?" (Gorski, 2016, p. 382). Understanding suburban teachers' perceptions of their knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy related to students who live in poverty provides the basis to more effectively support such students' learning in the suburban context.

The first finding from this study indicates teachers' knowledge about poverty is inadequate to be able to appropriately support the needs of disadvantaged learners. With the overall mean knowledge score of 5.99, the finding suggests the opportunity exists to increase the level of knowledge about poverty. Data revealed nearly 50% of teachers in this study either did not know or were not certain of the percentage of students who live

in poverty and who were underachieving in their schools. As of 2018, the poverty level in the seven participating school districts in this study ranged from 25.4% - 60.2%. At the most foundational level, teachers having an awareness of the level of poverty in their schools is the beginning to understanding the shifting demographics in suburban schools. Knowing this information helps provide a rationale to the importance about knowing more about poverty and the effects it has on learning.

The literature supports the importance of teachers developing an accurate understanding of poverty. What teachers know and think about poverty matters, because knowledge and mental models influence teacher responses to their students and families (Gorski, 2008a, 2008b, 2018; Parrett & Budge, 2012). It is possible teachers in suburban school districts have not yet engaged in meaningful professional development or discourse to build their knowledge about poverty. Poverty and causes of poverty are complex and multifaceted. Understanding poverty in the context of opportunity gaps in society between the wealthy and the poor and inequalities in access to quality health care, housing, nutrition, educational opportunities, and financial resources may help educators be more aware and empathetic to the unique challenges their students experiencing poverty face (Gorski, 2018; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Further, gaining accurate knowledge about poverty could influence teachers' beliefs about students and families in poverty.

This study sought to understand the beliefs suburban teachers hold related to teaching economically disadvantaged students. A second finding suggests teachers hold, to some degree, a negative bias and stereotypical beliefs about poverty and people in poverty. The total Beliefs about Poverty mean score was 6.85 and fell in the *Somewhat*

*Agree/Somewhat Disagree* on the Likert-like scale. The belief statement in the survey which elicited the lowest mean score (5.43) was, "Poverty is primarily caused by conditions in the broader society (including schools) that create unequal opportunity." This total mean was at the *Neither Agree or Disagree* level. The literature review aligns with this finding. While this can be attributed to lack of knowledge about poverty, it also can be attributed to deficit-based thinking, negative stereotyping, or implicit bias about people who are poor. If there is a belief that poverty is not primarily caused by the conditions in the broader society, the alternative, or deficit belief is that families are in poverty because of their own doing or their own culpability (Collins, 1988; Eller, 1989; Gorski, 2008b). Parrett and Budge (2012) and Budge and Parrett (2018) contended this belief is an impediment that can thwart teachers' efforts to fully meet the needs of their students.

Negative stereotypes such as families in poverty are uninvolved in school because they don't value education, don't work or have a poor work ethic, or abuse drugs and alcohol can implicitly influence teachers' response to their students. Paul Gorski, (2008a, 2008b, 2012) has deconstructed these stereotypes in an effort to help educators and policy makers better understand the broader context of poverty in the United States. When teachers hold implicit bias and negative stereotypes about students and families in poverty, it is destructive to student learning and success, as teachers may not have the same high expectations for learning as they do for their more affluent peers (Eller, 1989; Gorski, 2008b, 2016; Saphier, 2017; Staats, 2013). If teachers have low expectations for their students who are poor, then students will not have access or opportunity to more rigorous learning. John Hattie (2015) identified teachers' ability to accurately know their

students, their students' abilities, and then appropriately design learning for the student as *estimates of student achievement,* and has an effect size of 1.29. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of any implicit bias or deficit thinking they may hold about their students in order to alter their thinking in estimating student achievement.

While exploring teachers' efficacy related to teaching students in poverty, findings from this study show the total mean efficacy score is 7.08. To determine teacher's efficacy, the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scales (TSES) – Short Form (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) was used. The overall efficacy mean in this study was closely aligned with the reliability mean of 7.1, as was the mean on the subscale efficacy in instructional strategies (7.28) with the reliability mean of 7.3. However, the mean of efficacy in student engagement in this study was (-0.33) lower than the reliability student engagement mean. This finding suggests suburban teachers have a lower sense of efficacy in engaging students and their families who are poor.

As stated previously, teachers' self-efficacy is critical, in particular when serving students who are disadvantaged. Highly efficacious teachers believe they have the ability to influence students and their learning, despite the aspects of a student's life that are beyond their control (Haberman, 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Teachers who have a degree of high efficacy do not blame students or families if the student is underachieving or not experiencing success in school. Rather, efficacious teachers examine their practices and look within to determine how to reach their students. It is possible that suburban teachers may be trying to engage their students in poverty in a manner that does not meet the students' needs. This is where teachers' beliefs about their students in poverty influence decisions about student learning and engagement. For

example, if a teacher believes a student has deficits because of their home environment, then inaccurately estimates that the student would not be capable of higher-level thinking and more rigorous learning opportunities, the teacher with the best intentions, may resort to instructional strategies or pedagogies that are lower-level, mundane, and more controlled learning experiences that the teacher believes the student can handle (Gorski, 2013). If ineffective practices such as tracking students, ability grouping, teaching to the test, constant direct instruction, whole group undifferentiated instruction, and low level expectations are practices being implemented to engage students, students will not be engaged (Gorski, 2013; Hattie, 2009; Jensen, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Saphier, 2017).

Although there is no single "silver bullet" instructional strategy that engages students in poverty, research suggests having and communicating high expectations, implementing higher-order thinking, incorporating kinesthetic learning, making the content relevant to students, protecting students from adverse consequences for initial failure, and building positive relationships will assist in engaging students in their learning (Gorski, 2013; Hattie, 2009; Jensen, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Saphier, 2017; Schlechty, 2011).

This study provides beneficial information regarding suburban teachers' self-perceived knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy to teach students in poverty in a suburban district with an increase in poverty. Findings suggest that teachers in these suburban districts with shifting demographics do not have adequate knowledge about poverty, which may influence their beliefs and efficacy.

## Significance of the Study

This study of teachers' perceptions related to poverty and people in poverty in seven suburban school districts with increasing poverty addresses a gap in the literature. Specifically, it explored teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and sense of efficacy in teaching students living in poverty in a context where the poverty level is on the rise. Findings have implications for professional development for teachers regarding knowledge of poverty and understanding, implicit bias and deficit theory, as well as hiring practices in suburban school districts.

Based on findings from this study, it is imperative for suburban school districts with increased poverty to invest in meaningful professional development that will help deepen teachers' accurate knowledge about poverty. As the findings in this study suggest, teachers in suburban school districts may not have had the necessary training and experiences to meet the needs of students affected by poverty. Lack of knowledge about poverty can lead to misconceptions and negative stereotyping about families and students in poverty, which in turn negatively impacts student learning. There is a possibility that if teachers in this study participated in professional development about poverty, it is likely it may have been through Ruby Payne's (2005) *A framework for understanding poverty*. Payne's work has been highly criticized by scholars for focusing on perceived deficits and stereotypes of poor people (Bromer et al., 2008, Gorski, 2008a, van der Valk, 2016).

To build accurate knowledge about poverty, professional development for teachers should be focused on the research-based scholarship with practical applications. For example, Gorski (2008a, 2016) focused on debunking the myths of poverty

perpetuated by Payne (2005) and advocates for a structural ideology about poverty being caused by inequalities and lack of access and opportunity. Parrett and Budge (2012, 2018) drew on their own research of high poverty-high achievement schools and on the work of Gorski and others to provide a wealth of information about poverty and how to build teachers' background knowledge and strategies to "disrupt poverty". Through their research, Parrett and Budge (2012) and Budge and Parrett (2018) have identified strategies that schools and systems of schools can employ to increase the achievement of all learners, regardless of their life conditions. One of these powerful strategies is understanding poverty and possessing accurate knowledge about poverty. Eric Jenson (2009) focused on how poverty affects brain development and learning. Engaging teachers in meaningful professional development about poverty that is job embedded and ongoing will ultimately help the students they serve who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Secondly, this study affirms teachers may hold negative beliefs or implicit bias about students and families in poverty. Therefore, professional development or training to help teachers understand their own beliefs and implicit bias is imperative. As included in Chapter II in the theoretical framework and worth restating, implicit bias is defined as "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner; activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control; can be positive or negative; everyone is susceptible" (Staats et al., 2017, p. 10). Since teachers' expectations for student learning may be influenced by implicit bias, it is critical teachers engage in experiences that will help them identify their own biases (Staats et al., 2013).

Understanding implicit biases is important because they are malleable and can be slowly unlearned with intentionality, effort, and investment of time (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Staats, Capatosoto, Wright, & Contractor, 2015). Referred to as "debiasing", researchers have examined strategies to develop new mental models to replace existing ones. Some debiasing strategies include counter-stereotype training and raising awareness about implicit bias (Staats et al., 2015). Teachers who know themselves as educators and have the ability to be metacognitive, introspective, and reflective will continue to develop and grow and ultimately reach more students.

Finally, this study is significant because it provides insight into the lack of knowledge about poverty and negative beliefs teachers may hold about students in poverty. Such insights may be important for recruiting and hiring of teachers in suburban school districts. The opportunity to hire a new teacher into a suburban school district, or any school district, for that matter, is a golden opportunity to select a candidate who can make a positive difference in the lives of students and one that should never be taken lightly. It will be important for administrators with the immense responsibility of hiring teachers to employ strategies in the hiring process that will assess teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy about students in poverty. This may not be in the forefront of the processes and structures used by human resource personnel in suburban school districts, as poverty has not been viewed as a suburban issue.

Suburban school districts, based on the findings of this study, look to incorporate an instrument that will gage a teacher's aptitude and ability to serve students in poverty. For consideration should be Martin Haberman's protocols for selecting highly effective or "star" teachers (1995, 2010). These teacher selection protocols are designed to

identify teachers' beliefs and behaviors, or dispositions that are necessary for teachers to possess to be successful with students in poverty. Dispositions identified by Haberman (1995) include, but are not limited to, persistence, protecting and valuing student learning, and fallibility.

## Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provided information on suburban teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy in teaching students in poverty, it also raised additional questions for future research. To enhance the findings from this study and to create a more robust and accurate picture of suburban teachers' experiences, future research should include a qualitative component to capture the suburban teachers' voice. This would be important given the significant finding of teachers who live in the school district versus those who do not having lower efficacy. To better explain this finding more qualitative information is needed.

Another consideration for future research would be to understand contextual variable differences in overall level of poverty in a school district and the overall degree of change of increased poverty may have an influence on teachers' knowledge, efficacy, and beliefs. This could be accomplished by including this information in the data collection so that the data could be disaggregated.

Another recommendation for future research would be to determine if suburban teachers participated in any professional development about poverty and the type of training. That data could then be compared to see if professional development in poverty enhanced teacher knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy.

Lastly, since this was the first time the Knowledge about Poverty and Beliefs about Poverty instrument was implemented in a study, the instrument could be used in future studies in other suburban school districts to develop reliability and validity for the instrument; for example, better understanding the preciseness of the labeling to test the colinearity of the variables. In addition to establishing reliability, replicating the study in other suburban school districts could enhance the results to be more generalizable to the total population.

## Conclusion

This study used quantitative, descriptive research statistics to answer the questions of what are teachers' self-perceived perception of their level of knowledge, beliefs, and level of efficacy to teach students in poverty in suburban school districts with shifting demographics, specifically an increase of students in poverty. It further examined these three constructs with respondent demographic information including (a) total years taught, (b) years in current teaching position, (c) the current level of teaching, (d) if the teacher attended school in the district while school age, and (e) whether or not the teacher lived in the school district. The participants of this study were teachers in seven suburban school districts in northeast, Ohio, which have experienced an increase in poverty.

This research study sought to gather information on suburban poverty in order to address a gap in the literature. These findings have provided valuable information that can be used to design professional development for teachers on developing accurate information about poverty and the influence that implicit bias has on teachers' expectations of students in poverty. Ultimately, the goal of this research was to be able to

support teachers to better meet the needs of their students in poverty, especially within their sphere of influence in the classroom.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

## IRB LETTER OF PERMISSION

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555
Office of Research
330.941.2377

June 28, 2019

Dr. Jane Beese, Principal Investigator
Ms. Anne M. Pyros, Co-investigator
Department of Counseling, School Psychology & Educational Leadership
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 205-2019
TITLE: Suburban Poverty: Teacher's Knowledge, Beliefs, and Efficacy

Dear Dr. Beese and Ms. Pyros:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that it meets the criteria of DHHS 45 CFR 46.104(b)(2) and therefore is exempt from full committee review. Your project is approved.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

Dr. Severine Van Slambrouck
Director of Research Services, Compliance and Initiatives
Authorized Institutional Official

SVS:cc

c: Dr. Jake Protivnak, Chair
Department of Counseling, School Psychology & Educational Leadership

APPENDIX B

TYPOLOGY 5 SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OHIO
WITH POVERTY RATES BETWEEN 20% - 61%

| District Name | County | 2013 Typology | Student Poverty |
|---|---|---|---|
| Amherst Exempted Village | Lorain | 5 | 21% |
| Athens City | Athens | 5 | 34% |
| Boardman Local | Mahoning | 5 | 38% |
| Bowling Green City | Wood | 5 | 34% |
| Brunswick City | Medina | 5 | 23% |
| Canal Winchester Local | Franklin | 5 | 27% |
| Cleveland Heights-University Heights City | Cuyahoga | 5 | 61% |
| Cuyahoga Falls City | Summit | 5 | 37% |
| Cuyahoga Heights Local | Cuyahoga | 5 | 21% |
| Delaware City | Delaware | 5 | 35% |
| Fairfield City | Butler | 5 | 29% |
| Fairview Park City | Cuyahoga | 5 | 26% |
| Finneytown Local | Hamilton | 5 | 36% |
| Green Local (Summit) | Summit | 5 | 24% |
| Howland Local | Trumbull | 5 | 31% |
| Huron City | Erie | 5 | 30% |
| Kent City | Portage | 5 | 42% |
| Kettering City | Montgomery | 5 | 39% |
| Lakewood City | Cuyahoga | 5 | 49% |
| Lebanon City | Warren | 5 | 23% |
| Lexington Local | Richland | 5 | 25% |
| Licking Heights Local | Licking | 5 | 39% |
| Little Miami Local | Warren | 5 | 20% |
| Marysville Exempted Village | Union | 5 | 21% |
| Maumee City | Lucas | 5 | 32% |
| Mayfield City | Cuyahoga | 5 | 20% |
| Mentor Exempted Village | Lake | 5 | 25% |
| Miamisburg City | Montgomery | 5 | 36% |
| Milford Exempted Village | Clermont | 5 | 22% |
| Monroe Local | Butler | 5 | 25% |
| Nordonia Hills City | Summit | 5 | 21% |
| North Olmsted City | Cuyahoga | 5 | 39% |
| North Ridgeville City | Lorain | 5 | 24% |
| Northmont City | Montgomery | 5 | 29% |
| Northwest Local (Hamilton) | Hamilton | 5 | 45% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Oberlin City | Lorain | 5 | 44% |
| Perkins Local | Erie | 5 | 31% |
| Perry Local (Lake) | Lake | 5 | 25% |
| Plain Local | Stark | 5 | 42% |
| Princeton City | Hamilton | 5 | 59% |
| Reynoldsburg City | Franklin | 5 | 42% |
| Richmond Heights Local | Cuyahoga | 5 | 53% |
| Shawnee Local | Allen | 5 | 29% |
| South Euclid-Lyndhurst City | Cuyahoga | 5 | 49% |
| Southwest Licking Local | Licking | 5 | 31% |
| Springfield Local (Lucas) | Lucas | 5 | 36% |
| Stow-Munroe Falls City | Summit | 5 | 21% |
| Streetsboro City | Portage | 5 | 41% |
| Talawanda City | Butler | 5 | 33% |
| Tallmadge City | Summit | 5 | 22% |
| Three Rivers Local | Hamilton | 5 | 36% |
| Troy City | Miami | 5 | 40% |
| Vandalia-Butler City | Montgomery | 5 | 29% |
| Wadsworth City | Medina | 5 | 21% |
| West Clermont Local | Clermont | 5 | 31% |
| Willoughby-Eastlake City | Lake | 5 | 33% |
| Woodridge Local | Summit | 5 | 37% |

APPENDIX C

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

**Online Survey Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research study titled *Suburban Poverty: Teacher's knowledge, beliefs, and efficacy*. This dissertation study is being conducted by doctoral student, Anne M. Pyros from Youngstown State University. You were selected to participate in this study because you are a teacher that currently teaches in a suburban school district in Ohio that has experienced an increase of poverty. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey.

The purpose of this study is to assess teacher knowledge, beliefs and efficacy regarding teaching students in poverty. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the following pages:

Page 1 - Online Survey Consent to Participate Form

Page 2 - Knowledge about Poverty (10 Questions)

Page 3 - Beliefs about Poverty (8 Questions)

Page 4 – Teacher's Sense of Efficacy (12 Questions)

Page 5 - General Demographic Information Questions (8 Questions)

You may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses to the survey questions may help gain meaningful information about what teachers from suburban school districts with increasing poverty may need to support students in poverty.

We believe there are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study; however, as with any online related activity, the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. We have taken measures, to the best of our ability, to minimize this risk to keep your answers confidential. These measures include using the secure online platform SurveyMonkey. This survey **will not** collect IP addresses or email addresses. No other personal identifiable information will be collected. All responses will be collected and stored in a password protected web-based platform. No one will be able to identify you or your answers. No one will know whether or not you participated in this study.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may decline to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without negative consequences.

If you have questions about this research study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Anne Pyros at or my Doctoral Chair, Dr. Jane Beese at .

*Thank you for your participation!*

Please complete the electronic consent below:

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

☐ I Agree

☐ I Disagree

**Knowledge about Poverty** (Parrett & Budge, 2012)

Based on your current level of knowledge and skill, rate each statement by marking any one of the nine responses ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (9) strongly agree as each represents a degree on the continuum.

1. I have a good understanding of what is meant by "living in poverty" in the United States and in my local school.
2. I know the percentage of students in my school who live in poverty and who are under underachieving.
3. I know how poverty adversely affects lives and learning.
4. I can provide a research-based answer to the question "How do schools make a difference in the lives of students living in poverty?"
5. I know how schools with students in poverty develop the leadership infrastructure necessary for improvement.

6. I know how schools with students in poverty develop a safe, healthy and supportive learning environment for students and adults.
7. I know how schools with students in poverty improve student learning and support adult learning.
8. I know which mind-sets, practices, policies, and structure perpetuate underachievement and how to eliminate them.
9. I can describe the beliefs, values, and norms that constitute a school culture conducive to the success of students who live in poverty.
10. I can explain why my expectations of my students matter and how they influence the kind of learning opportunities I provide.

**Beliefs about Poverty** (Budge & Parrett, 2018; Parrett & Budge, 2012)

Based on your current level of knowledge and skill, rate each statement by marking any one of the nine responses ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (9) strongly agree as each represents a degree on the continuum.

11. Poverty is caused by poor character and poor choices an individual makes.
12. People in poverty do not work, or they have poor work ethic.
13. Education, as a way out of poverty, is readily accessible to everyone.
14. Parents of students who live in poverty are uninvolved in their child's education because they don't value it.
15. The bias and assumptions we hold about poverty can pose barriers to effective problem solving and change.
16. Schools can have only a limited effect on students who live in poverty.
17. Poverty is primarily caused by conditions in the broader society (including schools) that create unequal opportunity.
18. People in poverty, work, on average, more hours than those in the middle class.

**Teachers' Sense of Efficacy** (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001)

Based on your current level of knowledge and skill, rate each statement by marking any one of the nine responses ranging from (1) "none at all" to (9) "a great deal" as each represents a degree on the continuum.

19. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior of students that are poor in the classroom?
20. How much can you do to motivate students in poverty who show low interest in school work?
21. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?
22. How much can you do to help your students in poverty value learning?
23. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students in poverty?
24. How much can you do to get children in poverty to follow classroom rules?
25. How much can you do to get students in poverty believe that they can do well in school work?
26. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?
27. To what extent can you use a variety of assessment strategies?
28. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?
29. How much can you assist poor families in helping their children do well in school?
30. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?

**General Demographic Information**

1. What is your gender?

   □ Female

   □ Male

2. What is your ethnicity?

   - ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
   - ☐ Black or African American
   - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Other
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

3. What is your highest level of education degree?

   - ☐ Bachelor Degree
   - ☐ Master Degree
   - ☐ Doctorate Degree

4. How many total years have you taught?

   - ☐ 0 – 5
   - ☐ 6 – 10
   - ☐ 11 – 15
   - ☐ 16 – 20
   - ☐ 21 – 25
   - ☐ 26 – 30
   - ☐ 31 – 35
   - ☐ 36 or more years

5. How many years have you taught in your current school district?

   - ☐ 0 – 5
   - ☐ 6 – 10
   - ☐ 11 – 15
   - ☐ 16 – 20
   - ☐ 21 – 25
   - ☐ 26 – 30
   - ☐ 31 – 35
   - ☐ 36 or more years

6. What level do you currently teach?

   - ☐ Elementary (Grades PK – 5)
   - ☐ Middle (Grades 6 – 8)
   - ☐ High (Grades 9 – 12)

7. Did you attend school in the district that you teach?

   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

8. Do you live in the school district that you teach?

   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No