

Insights on Expectations and Characteristics of Teacher-Student Relationships; A
Phenomenological Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of Urban Elementary Parents

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Insights on Expectations and Characteristics of Teacher-Student Relationships; A
Phenomenological Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of Urban Elementary Parents

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ABSTRACT

Teacher-student relationships have long been identified as an important factor in the success of a student, and in the investment of the teacher. Extensive research has been conducted on the perception and outcomes of teacher student relationships from the perspective of the teacher and that of the students. However, research on the outcomes, insights, and expectation of teacher-student relationships from the perspective of parents, specifically parents of urban elementary students, is scarce. This study aimed to address the research gap by exploring the lived experiences of urban elementary parents through a phenomenological, qualitative study. Three semi-structured focus groups were held in which the researcher interviewed and facilitated discussions with parents of a child currently in kindergarten- second-grade in an urban school district in Northeastern Ohio. The 16 parent participants were asked to describe characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships, reflecting on their lived experiences and current state as a parent of an elementary student. Participants shared personal anecdotes, reflected on the impact of teachers in their own life, and emphasized the formative role teachers play in all aspects of a child's life. Responses indicated five primary themes when determining expectation and characteristics of teacher-student relationships from the perspective of parents: 1. Strong and consistent communication, 2. Teacher care and connection, 3. Teacher awareness and understanding to individual situations, 4. Holding students and families to high-expectations, and 5. Student engagement and recognition of individualized learning. The results of the study suggest that the teacher-student relationship is pivotal in making meaningful connections and creating a sense of belongingness and interconnectivity for students. Implications of the study indicate the importance of viewing the teacher-student relationship from a comprehensive lens, including the insights of parents, teachers, and students. The

advocacy for resources and opportunities for teachers to foster relationships is vital in creating student success in the academic setting and beyond. Additional findings include the cruciality of the teacher beyond school in making connections, and the significance of the teacher in the success of the students, especially in an urban setting. The teacher matters in all components of a student's life. Furthermore, the results indicate that high-quality teacher student relationships include interpersonal and authentic relational attributes of care, investment, respect, cultural attunement, and a connection beyond academics.

Keywords and phrases: Teacher-student relationships, High-quality teacher- student relationships, parental perspectives, urban elementary education, care, connectivity, belonging, expectations, characteristics, cultural attunement, parental insights, student engagement, student motivation, individualized learning

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Teacher-student relationships have the ability to impact a student's sense of belonging, level of engagement, and desire to persevere in challenging situations. The teacher-student relationship is influential in student motivation, academic achievement and engagement, resilience, and fostering a sense of belonging (Booker, 2021; Lee, 2012; Pianta, 1999; Sanders et al., 2016; Trust, 2023). Academic achievement is connected to both the student's perception and teacher's perception of the relationship between a student and teacher (Caleon & Wui, 2018; Engels et al., 2021; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). When teachers reported close and positive relationships with students, students in turn demonstrated higher outcomes across all areas, including academic, behavioral, and social domains (Ansari et al., 2020). Furthermore, a high-quality relationship between a student and teacher acts as a mitigating factor, offsetting negative impacts of poverty, lack of consistent home support, and negative behavior issues (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Jensen, 2016; Moseley et al., 2021). The teacher-student relationship, especially in a student's early elementary school years, is often a form of comfort, care, security, and connection (Jerome et al.; Spilt et al., 2012).

When caring teachers, emotionally and instructionally, support students from at-risk and high-poverty environments students perform academically equal to their higher-income, less-at-risk peers (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Jerome et al., 2009). When students feel a sense of connectivity to the learning, they are more motivated to learn (Engels et al., 2021; Jensen, 2016). Positive teacher-student relationships are associated with students' social-behavioral development, including their social connections, a sense of belonging, awareness and consideration for internalizing and externalizing behavioral choices and the level of engagement in risky behavior, particularly associated with at-risk students (Heatly & Votruba-Drzal, 2017;

Howes, 2000; Lippard et al., 2017; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2003; Spilt et al., 2012). Although teacher-student relationships are an especially powerful variable mitigating at-risk and urban students' academic deficits and social deficits, they positively benefit all students, at every stage and level of education (Booker, 2021; Jensen, 2016). When studying factors contributing to students' academic successes, high-quality relationships between students and teachers have an exceptionally significant and strong effect size, making the teacher-student relationship a key factor in students' academic achievement (Hattie, 2009; Jensen, 2016). When perceived as positive by the student and by the teacher, the teacher-student relationship is significantly correlated to increased academic outcomes for students (Caleon & Wui, 2018; Engels et al., 2021; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Students desire the feeling of unconditional acceptance by their teacher and feel a sense of connection to the school setting when there is a student perception of a positive teacher-student relationship (Hanna, 2014).

When viewing the impact of a teacher-student relationship from a contextual and cumulative lens, the sheer amount of time students will spend in school, and more specially with a teacher, should be considered in recognizing the potential impact of a teacher-student relationship. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2008), students in the United States are in school, on average, for 6.64 hours per day, 180 days a year, equal to nearly 1,200 hours each year. In the United States, on average, one-sixth of a student's waking hours is spent in school (Ansari et al., 2020). It is known that the foundational relationships students develop with teachers require consistency, trust, and care (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). The time students spend with teachers throughout the early educational years is formative in the development of foundational cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral skills used throughout the student's academic tenure and adult life (Ansari et al., 2020; Heatly & Votruba-Drzal, 2017).

Aside from the time parents spend with their child, the time spent interacting with teachers is the next, and perhaps most formative and impressive relationship students encounter as they develop. Thus, researching and better understanding the impact of the teacher-student relationship on the student is warranted and necessary in examining the impact of teacher-student relationships from the perspective of parents. The consequences of the vast amount of time spent in school can yield opportunities for students and teachers to develop meaningful and close relationships that promote and foster the skills and resources students need to succeed, in and out of school (Ansari et al., 2020; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Heatly & Votruba-Drzal, 2017; Longobardi et al., 2016; Yan et al., 2015).

In considering the disproportionate struggles facing many marginalized students, especially urban students, students considered at-risk, and students living in high-poverty, it is evident these students face nearly insurmountable academic and social challenges (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Students in urban school systems often underperform academically, and often have teachers with lower expectations (Ahram et al., 2011). Students who feel cared for, respected, and understood by their teachers tend to live up to higher expectations set by their teachers (Ahram et al., 2011, Hamre & Pianta, 2009). A close relationship with a warm, genuine, and caring teacher can buffer students from the negative effects of poor attachment with primary caregivers and increase a student's sense of purpose and belonging (Yan et al., 2015). When authentically developed around the needs of the student, the teacher-student relationship has the potential to change the social and academic trajectory for a student (Scales et al., 2020). The quality of the teacher-student relationship one of the strongest predictors of students' academic success (Fredricks, 2017; Scales et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study was to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives and lived experiences of urban elementary parents. The topic of interest was in better understanding the characteristics, perceptions, impacts, and outcomes associated with teacher-student relationships. The perspectives of parents of urban elementary students remain an important element in understanding the characteristics and expectations held by parents as it relates to teacher-student relationships. There is a lack of research covering the role and perceptions of parents and caregivers as it relates to characteristics of and expectations between the student and teacher. Understanding the impact of teachers in urban education and for marginalized students were specific areas of interest within the study.

Personal Connection to the Study

The researcher's personal philosophy of education is deeply rooted in positive relationships centered around care, individual needs, and mutual understandings. It is essential to provide insights on how the researcher's personal background has impacted a personal drive to further research the topic of high-quality relationships between teachers and urban students. The researcher's prior experiences and outcomes in teaching urban students through relational-first teaching acted as a catapult of need when investigating the essence of teacher-student relationships. An invested and personal interest motivated the researcher to delve deeper into the role of teacher-student relationship by considering the parental insights of urban parents. Addressing the needs and gaps in knowledge further elevated the relevance and importance of the research as all elements of the teacher-student relationships are considered. The portrait of the researcher section presents a more detailed glimpse of the researcher's background and personal investment in the study. It should be noted that several mitigating steps and strategies

were proactively put in place and utilized throughout the study to ensure the researcher's personal experiences were acknowledged and did not interfere with the data collection and interpretations, validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study.

Portrait of the Researcher

As the researcher and sole data collector and analyzer in the study it is imperative that my background be considered and explained for various reasons. First, it is my hope that in sharing my background, one can also understand my passion for teaching and the immense amount of respect I hold for the impact educators make on the lives of their students. My experiences as an educator are the heartbeat of the study. Second, in presenting a clear and transparent snapshot of my experiences, I am more accountable to acknowledge the impression those experiences have made on me and lead the study prioritizing integrity, trustworthiness, and validity as a conscious effort was made to mitigate the influence of my personal judgment and perceptions. Last, is the importance of exploring and validating, the unknowing and yet undisputed, impact we [teachers and students] make on each other. As quoted by Dr. James Comer, a professor of Child Psychiatry at Yale University, “no significant learning can occur without a significant relationship” (Karuny, 2022, p. 1). As an educator, I am more certain than ever that our personal growth is codependent on those around us. Learning and life are journeys of connectivity. In my experiences, learning was the side effect of meaningful, consistent, and accountable relationships.

My first teaching position was as an elementary teacher in an urban school district in which every child was considered “at-risk.” The school was in the center of a high-crime, high poverty, drug-prevalent neighborhood. Poverty, disappointment, and situational barriers were present in every child’s life. This, in turn, meant so were the challenges associated with living in

poverty. For many of my students, academic growth was simply not a priority. Resources, opportunities, motivation, and investment in education were all lacking. Many of the students I taught viewed school as a refuge that provided basic needs, safety, security, and consistency. To positively impact students academically and socially, I had to establish an authentic relationship focused on trust and care. I was not only invested in my students' education, but I was deeply and openly invested in their lives outside of school. I cared about their interests and their backgrounds. Deficiency needs and growth needs were both prioritized in my classroom. I quickly learned that every child had a story, one I knew nothing about, and I had to establish a meaningful relationship if I expected the student to let me hear their story.

Relationships based on the ethics of care and individual needs allowed me to shape my instructional practices to meet the relevant and individual needs of students. I had to realize my own cultural dissonance and be open to what each student needed. I had to find ways to build mutual trust, care, and respect with my students. For a teacher to be truly effective, they must intentionally engage with students based on things connected to the students' interests and curiosities. Students must feel heard and trust the learning process (Sparks, 2019). I had to know students on an individual level and use that knowledge to build learning opportunities that increased their motivation and engagement. At times this meant being vulnerable and selfless with my time and space to build relationships with students that would show a two-fold return on my investment. Whether it was spending my weekend at the local park watching basketball games, attending an event in the neighborhood my students lived in, or simply by asking about their personal interests, dreams, and fears, I realized it had to start with them. The relational scale was not balanced in the beginning. I took time and trust to create a mutually beneficial and reciprocated relationship with students. It wasn't for the faint of heart; building, sustaining, and

growing a meaningful, two-way relation with students was a marathon not a sprint. Time, care, investment, and awareness were needed. Student motivation was directly connected to the quality of the teacher-student relationship developed with individual students.

I soon realized, relationships were the only thing that mattered in student growth. Everything else was a consequence of building, nurturing, and growing relationships with my students. I had a genuine interest and investment in knowing who my students were and empowering them to achieve through the relationships I built. Several studies (Baker, 1999; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Lee, 2012; Pianta, 1999; Sparks, 2019), indicated that strong relationships between adults and students should include: expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power, and expanding possibilities. When I cultivated strong, positive relationships with students, academic growth, in an exponential and impressive way, soon followed. I witnessed students gain confidence, build trust, display mutual respect, own decisions, contribute to the greater good of the class, reciprocate care, and engage in the learning process. I saw a change in social skills and self-regulating behaviors. For me, relationships were like a key that opened all doors. A trajectory of change is a side effect of an influential relationship. And, like meaningful relationships, change, also, does not exist in a silo. The change process, as a result of my relationships with students, was powerful. Through strong relationships with my students, I became more empathetic, aware, connected, and intentional in my thoughts and actions. I recognized strength in resilience, and success in survival when I invested the time to truly know my students. I rethought my core values and reassessed what true learning looked like. I gained far more when I focused efforts on building connections with each student than on standardized proficiency. My background is sacred and essential in shaping the person I am. Each student, each experience, and each opportunity to learn from another

influences who we are and how we view the world. My background and the relational impacts students have had on me are influential underpinnings of this study. In reflecting on this definitive change process that occurred because of strong, meaningful, and consistent relationships with students, there was a personal desire to better understand the holistic impact of high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Needs of Teacher-Student Relationships

The characteristics of high-quality relationships include mutual respect, caring, conveying a sense of hope, investment beyond academics, an awareness of individual need, developing a sense of belonging, and commitment to individual growth (Brue, 2022; Frisby et al., 2020; Jensen, 2016; Leverett et al., 2022; Roorda et al., 2011). A student must have basic needs, known as deficiency needs, met first in order to be motivated by growth needs (Maslow, 1987). Teachers can identify and address a student's deficiency needs and create an environment that supports a student's higher-order needs through supportive and positive relationships (Noltemeyer et al., 2020). Positive relationships between students and teachers have implications for improving the social and academic development in the student (Booker, 2012; Frisby et al., 2020; Jensen, 2016; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015).

Supportive relationships fostered between a student and teacher are essential in developing a climate of inclusivity, care, and academic achievement (Anyon et al., 2018). A non-negotiable attribute in reaching optimal student achievement stems from a student's motivation and engagement in learning (Caleon & Wui, 2018; Krane & Klevan, 2018; Lee, 2012; Murray & Greenberg, 2000). Additionally, student engagement is largely determined by the learning environment, which is largely influenced by the relationship the student has with the teacher (Caleon & Wui, 2018; Krane & Klevan, 2018; Lee, 2012). It is imperative that educators, along

with students' caregivers (i.e., parents/guardians), understand the implications associated with high-quality relationships between students and teachers.

The researcher of this study sought to describe urban parents' expectations and characterizations of student-teacher relationships. Researchers may find interest in further investigating the topic of teacher-student relationships as it is central in understanding several areas of student growth, such as developing reciprocal relational traits, academic growth, resilience, behavior issues, and student autonomy (Booker, 2021; Frisby et al., 2020; Yang & Anyon, 2016). Teacher-student relationships matter in shaping the learning process and meeting the desired outcomes of academic and social indicators associated with student growth. As more is learned about the expectations, characteristics, and traits of positive teacher-student relationships, the more researchers can identify the most effective way to promote student success and individual growth, which is the primary goal of education.

Statement of the Problem

It is not widely known how parents of urban elementary students describe their expectations or characterize teacher-student relationships. Understanding attributes, perceptions, characteristics, and expectations of teacher-student relationships provides valuable insights in understanding student engagement, motivation, interpersonal behaviors, and relational needs. Understanding all elements that contribute to a teacher-student relationship is a powerful tool for the academic and social advancement of students (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Trust, 2021). Relationships between students and teachers have the capacity to negatively or positively impact student engagement and academic performance (Roorda et al., 2011; Trust, 2021). A positive, high-quality relationship can act as a mitigating neutralizer, often counteracting consequences of a previous negative or neutral teacher-student relationship (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). High quality

teacher-student relationships are associated with improved psychological engagement and reduced rates of disruptive behaviors, including lower levels of absenteeism, truancy, and suspension (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Although teacher-student relationships matter for all student populations, such relationships are especially instrumental in the academic and social growth of marginalized students (Caleon & Wui, 2018; Jensen, 2016; Roorda et al., 2011). There are several reasons a student may be considered marginalized including cultural differences, knowledge gaps, socioeconomic status, the need for supplemental instructional support, and inequitable access to resources (Akin & Neumann, 2013).

Ohio has seen a significant and consistent increase in the number of students considered economically disadvantaged, rising between 2006 and 2021 from 35 percent to 49 percent of all students falling within an at-risk category (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2022). In the 2020-2021 school year, economically disadvantaged students in Ohio scored, on average, 35 points lower in academic proficiency on fourth and eighth grade math and reading state assessments (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2022). There is a need for educators to understand relationship qualities that positively impact the academic outcomes of at-risk students. There is a strong correlation between the teacher-student relationship and a student's overall school achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). Research supports the impact on student engagement and academic growth when a positive teacher-student relationship is in place (Fredricks et al., 2019; Jensen, 2016; Leverett et al., 2022).

One way to lessen the negative implications associated with living in poverty, being at-risk for failure, or having inequitable access to resources is through the development of meaningful relationships (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Leverett et al., 2022). Research supports the need and impact of placing high-quality teachers in urban schools; the reality is urban districts

have difficulty attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers (Fredrick et al., 2019; Jacob, 2007). In urban education there is a prominent and disproportionate lack of access to high-quality resources, instruction, and teachers (Lee, 2012). Discrepancies of resources between economically disadvantaged students and economically advantaged students is one component contributing to the achievement gap impacting racial/ethnic students living in poor urban areas (Lee, 2012). Often, urban education has a higher attrition rate for teachers, making it more difficult for students to establish trust, and build and maintain consistent and meaningful relationships with teachers. Moreover, meaningful teacher-student relationships are needed to impact student motivation, create a sense of belonging, and foster a personal investment in learning (Booker, 2021; Fredricks et al., 2019; Trust; 2021). Academic and social growth is largely dependent on students' perception of the relationship they have with teachers (Baker, 1999). Students who lack strong adult mentors outside of school tend to benefit more from positive teacher-student connections (Trust, 2021). The quality and relational skillset of a teacher matters when determining the impact a teacher has on the academic and social growth of students.

Understanding how teacher-student relationships contribute to negative and positive academic and social outcomes for students is important in preparing an instructional environment in which all students can succeed. Understanding characteristics and descriptions of teacher-student relationships is especially important when studying at-risk and urban student populations. In research examining the impact of teacher relationships in an urban, high-poverty environment, students' perceptions of a caring, supportive relationship with a teacher and a positive classroom environment were related to school satisfaction and student engagement in academic instruction (Baker, 1999). Urban students were less likely to feel positively connected to school when

compared to students in other school settings (Trust, 2021). However, when students have developed a positive sense of belonging and connectivity to school and teachers the results were often better attendance, higher grades, and lower dropout rates (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2022). Building meaningful relationships with students requires teacher perspectives that embrace caring in instruction, positive attitudes and beliefs, cultural awareness, an understanding of individual needs, knowledge of the student's background, and an investment in the student's personal life (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2022).

To date, many of the researchers of teacher-student relationships utilized quantitative methodologies to examine predictors of engagement among white, middle-class samples (Fredricks et al., 2019). However, few researchers have explored multiple perspectives on students-teacher relationships, for example viewing the students' perspectives, the teachers' perspectives, the caretaker's (parent/guardian) perspectives, and conducting a cross-analysis of perspectives. There are also very few studies that focus exclusively on at-risk, economically disadvantaged, urban students. What is not known is how parents describe high-quality teacher-student relationships and the expectation held for the teacher-student relation from a paternal perspective. The lived experiences and contributions from parents describing attributes of high-quality teacher-student relationships are unknown. Understanding parents' experiences and insights of teacher-student relationships for their children is an essential element that may bridge gaps in the research. Researchers suggested that support from teachers and parents can promote positive academic outcomes, increase social growth, and further prevent negative psychological outcomes for students (Malecki & Demaray, 2007; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wang et al., 2010).

An interest in fully understanding the role of a teacher-student relationship, exclusively of at-risk urban elementary students, requires further investigation, exploring the insight of urban parents. Teacher and student perceptions of the quality of the relationship was often an indicator in student and teacher success, but little research was found on why the student and teachers perceived the relationship the way they had, implying more research is needed on understanding the characteristics associated with perception of a high-quality or low-quality relationship. Since the perception of the quality and impact of a relationship matters, better understanding the parent and caregiver's perception and expectations of a teacher-student relationship would offer insight on parent-identified important attributes of teacher-student relationships.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives of urban elementary parents. Through an exploration of the personal perspectives and lived experiences of parents of current urban elementary students, the description of characteristics and expectations of teacher-student relationships will be studied. Although several researchers (Anyon et al., 2018; Booker, 2021; Fredricks et al., 2019; Frisby et al., 2020; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lee, 2012; Murray & Greenberg, 2000), conducted studies on the topic of teacher-student relationships, there remains a need to describe from the perspectives of parents of urban elementary students the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Consequently, research on the topic of positive teacher-student relationships has increased over the past two decades (Roorda et al., 2011), parental perceptions of teacher-student relationships in urban settings has not been adequately researched. A gap lies in determining the

insights of parents as it relates to expectations, characteristics, and potential outcomes of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Previous researchers studied teachers' perspectives, students' perspectives, instructional variables, and the interpersonal characteristics of both teachers and students. However, there is a lack of research focused explicitly on what parents expect and how they characterize high-quality teacher-student relationships. Given that the extant literature has not considered the potential gain from better understanding and exploring the parent perspective of teacher-student relationships, a clear need is presented on viewing the impact and characteristics of teacher-student relationships from a broader and more comprehensive lens by considering parental perspectives. Additionally, there are limited studies that focused on urban education and teacher-student relationship from parents' points of view, including parents' expectations for teacher-student relationships. A multidimensional approach in studying teacher-student relationships would allow the researcher to consider parent perspectives and experiences of high-quality teacher-student relationships.

The significance of the study is in the researcher's contributions to viewing the teacher-student relationship through a more holistic and comprehensive lens, based on the lived experiences of parental figures of urban students. This study provides the foundation for future research in the area of the teacher-student relationships impacted by the experiences, expectations, and perceptions of urban elementary parents. The researcher conceptualizes parents and caregivers' experiences and insights of elementary students as it relates to the characteristics of teacher-student relationships in an urban school in Northeastern Ohio.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives of urban elementary school parents.

Through three semi-structured, focus-group interviews, each with sets of four to eight parents of urban elementary school students, the characteristics and expectations of teacher-student relationships were identified. Relations to best practices from existing literature and new insights were unveiled. The following questions guided the study. These questions were designed to capture the lived experiences of parents of current urban elementary students in Northeastern Ohio. The central research questions for the study follow:

1. How do urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships?
2. How do urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

The researcher designed the following secondary questions to support the study's overarching research questions:

1. From parents or caregivers' perspectives, which teacher attributes are associated with high-quality teacher- student relationships?
2. How have the personal experiences of parental figures affected their expectations of teacher-student relationships?
3. What role does the teacher-student relationship contribute to urban elementary students' overall academic performance?
4. How do parents define the role of positive teacher-student relationships in the social outcomes of students?

5. How do parents define the role of positive teacher-student relationships in the academic outcomes of students?
6. What impact do parents associate with negative teacher-student relationships in the social and academic outcomes of students?
7. What are the characteristics of positive and meaningful relationships between teacher and students?

Methodology of the Study and Research Design

The purpose of the study was to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives of urban elementary parents. The researcher of the conducted study used qualitative, descriptive, phenomenological methods to identify parental perspectives of the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationship. Researchers utilizing qualitative methodologies analyze the whys and hows of lived experiences and investigate the human behaviors associated with research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This method of study was relevant because the lived experiences of parents offer valid insights to better understanding expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships held by urban parents and caregivers. The purpose of the presented study is to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships through the lived experiences and perspectives of urban elementary parents using qualitative, phenomenological methods. The phenomenological research approach explores the essence of personal and shared visions, expectations, and experiences (Marjan, 2017). Phenomenography is a qualitative and interpretive research design approach that explores the different ways that people experience and conceptualize a given phenomenon yielding the opportunity for new

interpretations (Marton & Booth, 1997). Phenomenological research designs “hold that experience involves the operation of active processes that encompass and constitute the various contents that become present to awareness” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 41). One of several noted optimal outcomes of utilizing a qualitative study is the opportunity to provide a voice for the participants in marginalized contexts and from less driven, preconceived research theories and literature (Stead et al., 2011). Qualitative studies delve deep into investigating the complexities of a phenomenon, often offering information that would not be attainable in a quantitative study (Marjan, 2017; Stead et al., 2011).

The researcher, through a semi-structured, narrative, focus-group interview approach, captures the perceptions, memories, associations, and lived experiences of the 16 participants (Limpaecher, 2022). The researcher analyzed responses from 16 total participants from three focus group interviews, categorizing verbal and written responses of each participant into themes to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. The researcher analyzed the captured categorical and descriptive themes, coded them, and compared them to empirical literature on best practices in teacher and student relationships. This method of comparison of themes allowed the researcher to identify similarities and differences based on participants’ perspective and experiences.

The study’s targeted participants are the primary parental figures for current urban elementary students in one school setting in Northeastern Ohio. All participants in the study had a current child in kindergarten through second grade in a high-needs, urban school system in Northeastern Ohio. After obtaining site authorization from the school district (Appendix B) and potential participants’ emails, the researcher emailed a voluntary request form seeking parental participation in the study to all parents of the school with kindergarten through second grade

students. In an effort to maximize the number of voluntary participants completing the potential participant form, the form was also shared with parents in an in-person setting at various school functions, such as an afterschool musical, parent-teacher conferences, and a family engagement night. The researcher was on site during these events to further explain or answer questions related to the study and recruit participants. The outcome of sharing the study and recruiting credentialed participants was successful as 25 parents completed the voluntary request for participation form. A minimum of a 25-30% attrition rate was accounted for in the design of the study. Of the 25 that completed the form 16 participants scheduled and participated in the focus groups, meeting the intended sample size projected for the study.

In the informed consent form (Appendix C), the researcher outlined the format of the study, described the commitment requested from parents, and summarized the purpose and use of the researcher's findings. Safeguards protocols for data storage, confidentiality and means to mitigate identifiability, along with any potential risk for compromised data were outlined in the informed consent form signed by each participant. Presented in the form was also the rationale and importance of the study and the potential benefactors of the information gained. Each participant was made aware that they could elect to stop participating at any point throughout the study without any negative recourse, as it was noted in the form and restated orally by the researcher.

In addressing ethical considerations of the study, the voluntary participants were made aware of the nature of the study and intended use for the findings prior to the interviews. Written consent was given by each participant to the researcher. Written statements outlining confidentiality practices and the shared use of data was presented to each participant. Ethical practices were prioritized in the planning, conducting, synthesizing, and evaluating processes.

Confidentiality was maintained by organizing interview responses and individual data in an unidentifiable manner when presenting results of the study.

The researcher conducted three semi-structured focus group interviews with four to seven parents in each interview. The interviews were conducted on site at the school, each lasting sixty to ninety minutes. When completing the informed consent form, participants indicated in writing ideal days and times for interviews to occur based on various times and days presented by me to participants. Consideration of responses drove the scheduling of each interview to ensure convenience for participants and in attempt to lessen attrition. Parents signed-up for the days and time slots most convenient for them, and the aligned and coordinated schedules were made thereafter. A total sample size of 16 parents participated in the focus group interviews. Parents ranged in age from 27 years old to 45 years old with the median participant age being 32.5 years of age. Each participant was coded with a number and a letter (for example 1A, 4B, etc.) to support anonymity and privacy in collecting, aggregating, and disseminating data. Details of the total participants and length of time of each focus group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Focus Group Numbers and Length

Focus Group	Number of participants	Participant codes	Length of the interview
1	5	1A-1E	58 minutes
2	4	2A-2D	61 minutes
3	7	3A-3G	1 hour 13 minutes

In following a qualitative interview process, a framework was developed which allowed for participants to be recorded, speak openly to scripted questions, and challenge or reinforce the thoughts of others in a less structured way to gain an in depth understanding of a concept and to contextualize the experiences and contributions of others (Jamshed, 2014). The interview method in place for this study was semi-structured interviews, in which data was collected through observation, recording and reviewing of transcriptions, note taking, and semi-controlled conversations among participants. To accomplish this the researcher developed and asked scripted questions in each interview, and also allowed for participants to offer off-script insights, experiences, and narratives. The interviewer prompted and informally generated real-time follow up questions after interviewee responses to gain further clarification and information when needed. Participants were encouraged to be reflective in their responses and draw connections to lived experiences. The interviews were recorded in real time and later transcribed. The recordings of each focus group interview were conducted using the audio recording feature on an iPhone and on a laptop. Recordings were captured on both devices to ensure audio quality, and avoid unexpected setbacks with technology. Descript (Descript, 2023), an audio transcription platform was used to develop full transcriptions of each focus group interview. I compared and corrected inaccuracies from the transcripts produced by Descript by reviewing all interview audio and editing as necessary. Transcriptions of each interview session were analyzed. Categorical and descriptive coding was applied to responses to develop and determine like-characteristics and recurring themes. The characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships were able to be developed from participants' responses after an in-depth analysis of coding, decision, and reflection by me.

Those in the field of education (i.e., birth through higher education), educators working closely with urban school-age children, and the parents and caregivers of urban elementary children may benefit from the study's results. Specifically, teachers, school administrators, school counselors, social-workers, parent-engagement advocates, community-school liaisons, and teacher preparation programs may gain relevant insights from the findings in the study. As with all qualitative phenomenological study, this study is unable to be replicated in its entirety. However, future researchers model studies using elements of the conducted study's design and methods to gain insights and new knowledge on parental perspectives of relationships with educators in various fields of study and from other geographical regions.

Significance of the Study

Understanding the role of parents is vital in creating a successful teaching and learning environment. Parental insight is an often overlooked, but crucial component in student success. The purpose of the proposed study is to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives of urban elementary parents. The researcher intends to explore and capture the lived experiences of parents on their expectations and perceptions of teacher-student relationships in urban elementary students in Northeastern Ohio. The researcher conducted three semi-structured focus group interviews designed to capture parental perceptions of characteristics and expectations of teacher-student relationships. Results were compared to existing literature on best practices in parent-teacher relationships. Researchers have widely studied the impact of teacher-student relationships on student social and academic performance (Baker, 1999; Booker, 2021; Caleon & Wui, 2018; Decker et al., 2007; Engels et al., 2021; Frisby et al., 2020; Klem & Connell, 2004; Roorda et al., 2011). Several researchers have considered the perceptions of teachers and students. Very few researchers have

focused on the parental perspectives of teacher-student relationships. This study addressed the research gap by exploring parental perspectives of high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Parents and teachers are the two primary influential adults consistently present in an elementary child's life. Teachers and parents share common goals for students that include social and academic growth, both of which are most effectively achieved through collaboration (Krane & Klevan, 2018). The relationships formed between the student and the teacher in the early formative education years is often the most significant relationship for at-risk student's (Hansen, 2018). The perception of the relationship by the teacher and the student matters significantly in determining the quality and impact (long and short-term) of the teacher-student relationship (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Murray & Greenberg, 2000). Understanding parents' perspectives may provide educators with deeper insights on expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships. Understanding perspectives between home and school contexts, especially in at-risk and struggling students, is important in all aspects of student success (Krane & Klevan, 2018). Parents' attitudes toward school and expectations for their children includes parents' perceptions of education's value, relationships with educators, and perceived benefits of education (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

A significant factor contributing to an at-risk student's success is adult support in academics and at home (Stormont, 2007). Parental involvement in their child's school and in a meaningful tripartite relationship between the student, teacher and parent is critical to student success, especially in at-risk students (Krane & Klevan, 2018). Marginalized and at-risk students face circumstances that make them more likely to have difficulties in school and in life (Anyon et al., 2018; Pianta, 1999; Stormont, 2007). A mitigating factor to offset student challenges is a meaningful teacher-student relationship. Although parental perspectives and support are

considered a factor in determining students' academic performance; researchers have not widely considered the connection between parental experiences and perspectives on teacher-student relationships (Krane & Klevan, 2018). There is a need to focus research on urban elementary students and parental expectations for teacher-student relationships based on gaps in current research (Krane & Klevan, 2018).

Through a qualitative, phenomenological study exploring urban parents' lived experiences, the presented research offers new information to assist educators in understanding expectations, characteristics, and needs of relationships with at-risk or marginalized students. The researcher's conclusions may benefit various tiers of educators, including those working closely with elementary school-aged children and families, parents and caregivers, and students. Specific beneficiaries of the study's findings include teachers, educational administrators, school counselors and social workers, parent- school engagement advocates, institutions of higher education teacher preparation programs, parents, and students. In general, the data from the study may be used to determine common themes of need when considering all aspects of the tripartite relationship between teachers, students and parents.

Teachers may use the results of this study to assist in making informed academic and social decisions related to parental feedback, experiences, and perception of teacher-student relationships. Findings can support teachers in developing high-quality lessons and instructional practices aligned to parents' expectations. The results of the study will provide teachers with specific areas of focus and reflection contributed by parents, which can strengthen practices and identify areas of refinement and reinforcement within the teacher-student relationships.

Educational administrators may benefit from the results and methods applied in this study. Areas of importance to parents, which will allow for an increase in focused collaboration

and goal setting between schools, parents, and students were clearly identified. School-based student support resources will also benefit from the findings. School counselors, parent-school engagement advocates, community liaisons, and school social workers will be better able to meet the needs of both students and parents through the information gained in the study.

Institutions of higher education can use results to determine how well aligned current preparation programs are for teacher candidates in meeting the needs of students and expectations of parents. Additional insights from the findings can assist university faculty in communicating the importance of parental experiences and multiple perspectives when viewing education as a holistic process. Themes and instructional best practices identified in the study will help in the preparation and growth of future teachers.

Parents and caregivers of school-aged students, with a focus on urban elementary students will benefit from the researcher's findings by becoming more aware of all aspects of teacher-student relationships. Ongoing conversations on perspective and experiences will further assist parents in becoming involved and valued in their child's school community.

Students may directly benefit from this research as the findings may encourage them to consider academic and social growth on a seamless continuum which includes invested stakeholders at home and in school. Students who view parents as valued and active members of the school community are more likely to be committed to the learning process (Hattie, 2009; Krane & Klevan, 2018). The findings have the potential to help bridge the gap for students between home and school expectations in relational practices increasing educational and social outcomes.

The researcher herself, along with future researchers, may benefit from the findings of the study. In exploring the expectations and lived experiences from the perspective of urban

elementary parents, assumptions and further research questions will ensue on a parent's role in developing and supporting effective teacher-student relationships in other student populations. Modifications to the current study can be made when constructing new studies to delve deeper into the newly presented outcomes of this research. Information learned in the study is the foundation for opening doors for continued research on best practices in education. Gaining new understandings of the nuances needed to work in unison for optimal student success is a priority in this study and will act as a springboard for the development of future studies. Results of this study may be used in identifying the need for more specific research in the field of teacher-student relationship and the contribution of parental perspective in educational practices.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher conducted a qualitative phenomenological study using three small focus group interviews with a total of 16 parent participants from one singular urban school setting in Northeastern Ohio. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to describe characterizations and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the lens of parents of current urban elementary students. Three small group, semi-structured interviews, based on the availability of voluntary participants were scheduled and conducted by the researcher. All interviews were held at the school site. Parent participants selected the day and times which worked for them to encourage higher participation and scheduling flexibility when committing to the study. For consideration as a participant in the study the parents were required to complete a voluntary informed consent and willingness to participate form. The written responses and group discussion, from a selected sample size of a total of 16 parents, were used as the primary source of data collection to provide insights on the lived experiences of parental perspectives of teacher-student relationships in an urban school setting. The researcher was the

data collector and interpreter in the study. The researcher's role in the study was to identify participants, develop meaningful interview questions and discussion prompts, facilitate each of the three focus groups, and interpret and analyze data to describe the expectations and perspective of urban elementary parents as it relates to high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Limitations using the described method of data collection were that participants' reliability and willingness to engage in transparent and open discussions involving expectations and descriptions of high-quality teacher-student relationships was largely dependent on each participant's personality, individual life experiences, interpretation of events, and interactions that have occurred with their child's teachers in elementary school. The participants' ability to accurately articulate and honestly respond to the interview questions related to past and current experiences presented limitations. It is recognized that human emotions and personal perspectives from the participants and me are often considered undesirable biases confounding results in qualitative phenomenological research designs, however the same elements and emotions are considered essential, insightful, and inevitable when interpreting the data (Leung, 2015).

Even in the midst of limitations, it was through the development and delivery of relevant and inquiry-based questions to participants that I was able to understand and attach meaning to the philosophical anchors which contributed to interrupting a phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). The study design was not without challenges. When using a phenomenological method to gather data, the subjectivity and personal biases connected to the researcher and the participants makes establishing the external reliability and validity of responses and interpretation of data challenging (Neubauer et al., 2019). Steps to mitigate bias and judgment included ongoing

engagement in personal reflection and adhering to the clear aims of the study. An aligned and thoughtful interview guide was constructed to support me when facilitating focus groups. Additionally, the parents' comfort levels and willingness to speak openly in a small group setting may have altered parents' responses to interview questions and contributions to focus group discussions. This, too, was accounted for when viewing the results of the study. By design, this study was limited to a relatively small sample group of 16 urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio. The results of the study are not generalizable beyond this population.

The background of the researcher is clearly disclosed to address any impact it may hold on the study design or comes in hopes to increase the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the results. The researcher was a previous elementary school teacher in an urban school in Northeastern Ohio for 12 years and has held several roles as an educator over her previous 22 years in the field. The researcher is aware of the impact personal judgment holds in viewing participant responses in an authentic and transparent manner. The researcher attentively and intentionally spent time throughout the study engaging in reflective self-consciousness, considering the impression of personal perceptions and experiences on the study (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020). The researcher's experiences in working with urban students and families may present unwarranted or unconscious bias in interpreting data and prompting participants for details related to their lived experiences. Presented previously in the study was the portrait of the researcher in which the researcher acknowledges personal experiences, shares background knowledge, and presents a personal connection to the rationale and need for the study. The interference of personal experiences and bias is recognized and mitigated through the use of the researcher engaging in the epoché process involving self-reflection, memoing and bracketing. By limiting the study to one school in Northeastern Ohio the results of the study may be specific to

the demographics of the community not allowing for external generalization of results. Limitations and delimitations of the study should be considered when viewing the study design, data collection process, and presented results.

Operational Definitions

Several operational terms were used throughout this research study. Contextual factors and constructs of the study, as well as salient terms used in the study are defined below.

- Parent: Within the study, the term *parent* was used to define the primary caretakers or guardians of students. In this study, the term parent did not exclusively include the biological birth mother or father of a child, and may have included a non-biological caretaker/caregiver, grandparent, or family member who was primarily responsible for raising the school-aged child.
- High-quality teacher-student relationships: Meaningful, high-standard relationships between teachers and students that contribute to the academic and social success of students.
- Northeastern, Ohio: Northeastern Ohio is a region in the state of Ohio containing six metropolitan areas; Cleveland–Elyria, Akron, Canton–Massillon, Youngstown–Warren, Mansfield, and Weirton–Steubenville (*ArcGIS StoryMaps*, 2020; Healthy Northeast Ohio, 2023; Northeast Ohio, 2022). The focus of the study occurs in the Youngstown-Warren region of Northeastern Ohio. Statistics for the Youngstown-Warren region of Northeastern Ohio include a population of 538,115 with average per capita income of \$27,993 (Healthy Northeast Ohio, 2023; United States Census Bureau, 2020). Twenty-eight percent of the children in the region, under the age of 18 are living in poverty, and

the overall poverty rate is 25 percent higher in the Youngstown-Warren region of Northeastern Ohio than that of the state average (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

- Urban school: The term urban school is often associated with a high needs and at-risk population in underperforming schools with limited resources. Schools in an urban setting are more likely to serve low income students and students living in poverty (edX, 2022). The location of the study occurred in, what was classified by the National Center for Education Statistics, a small urban city school based on the urbanized area and surrounding city having a population of less than 100,000 (2008).
- Urban students/At-risk students/Marginalized students: Based on the Council of the Great City School (2021) and National Center for Educational Statistics' (2008) executive summary on urban schools from the U.S. Department of Education, the statistics below represent disadvantages associated with urban students. In the research, the term urban student was associated with at-risk students and marginalized students.
 - Urban children were more than twice as likely to be living in poverty than those in suburban locations
 - Students in the nation's urban schools are 50 percent more likely to be living in poverty, and 50 percent more likely to have a parent without a high school degree when compared to students in other schools
 - Urban students were more likely than suburban or rural students to receive free or reduced-price lunch
 - Urban students living in poverty were more like to face long-term poverty

- Urban students had less successful educational outcomes and less connection to school than students from other school settings
- Urban students were less likely to have the family structure, economic security, and stability that are most associated with desirable educational outcomes
- **Qualitative Research Methods:** In qualitative research methods, researchers aim to understand human and social problems utilizing an inquiry-based approach to construct a complex and holistic view of an area of study (Creswell, 1994). Qualitative research is largely centered on the social and human interpretation of data and involves inductive and naturalistic approaches to studying phenomena, social behaviors, and perceptions, focusing on the hows and whys of experiences and attitudes (Lanka et al., 2021).
- **Phenomenological Research:** Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that aids in describing the lived experiences of an individual or group (Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenological research focuses on discovering and studying a phenomenon which has impacted an individual or group of individuals to perceive an event or situation in a particular way (Neubauer et al., 2019; Polkinghorne, 1989). Phenomenological research is used to support inquiry and help understand experiences, motivations, perceptions, and actions which contribute to thought process and belief systems (Neubauer et al., 2019; Polkinghorne, 1989).
- **Semi-structured focus group interviews:** Semi-structured focus group interviews are a qualitative method of gathering data which relies on asking semi-structured interview questions to a small group of selected participants (George, 2022). Semi-structured interviews allow for some predetermined fixed questions and some open-ended

discussion or off-script questions to further explore the responses of participants (George, 2022).

- Epoché Process: The process a researcher undergoes to avoid the disruption of preconceptions by bracketing personal experiences or preconceptions in an effort to attempt to understand the essence of a phenomenon with transparency and without judgment (*Social Research Glossary*, 2022). Epoché allows the researcher intentionally self-reflect to disclose personal experience and feelings with the intent to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 2015; Moustakas, 1994).
- Member Checking: Member checking is a means to validate the trustworthiness of qualitative research studies. Through member checking the researcher refers back to the participants to validate or clarify the accuracy and resonance of the transcribed and analyzed experiences, words, and intentions of participants to increase credibility of the findings (Birt et al., 2016).
- Categorical Coding: Categorical and descriptive coding was used as a means to draw meaningful data from the audio transcripts and researcher notes in the study. Categorical coding is a theme and patterned based system which enables semi-structured transcripts and focus groups to develop more structured themes and patterns used for deeper analysis and more systematic conclusions. The thematic categorical coding process was used as a means to make relationships and interpretations based on categorical variables (Gibbs, 2007; Medelyan, 2023).
- Sense of Belonging/Belongingness/Connectivity: Belongingness as noted in the research is used to define the sense of connection, belonging, and purpose held by students which

is often co-dependent of the teacher-student relationship. A sense of belonging may be defined as the feeling of acceptance, respect, inclusion, support, and mutual care in cognitive and social aspects of education (Bowen, 2021).

- Engagement: Within The context of the study engagement is presented in a twofold manner. First is student engagement, defined as the degree of investment, interest, inspiration, curiosity, and personal governance a student displays in an academic setting (Sabbott, 2016). Teacher engagement is also referenced. Teacher engagement is referred to as the dedication and investment in students. The teacher is motivating, engaging, and prioritizing student growth on a cognitive and personal level.
- Cultural Attunement: Cultural attunement is the awareness of cultural differences with an invested desire to respectfully learn how to best understand those differences (Hoskins, 1999).
- The Theory of the Ethics of Care: The Ethics of Care is a theoretical framework centered on moral significance which implies there is a connection between relationships of care and human growth (Sander-Staudt, n.d.). The ethics of care identifies caring relationships as being ontological to basic needs and advancement which are centered on the happiness of a person (Noddings, 2013).
- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, developed by psychologist Abraham Maslow, views human motivation on a hierarchical system to categorize needs by physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization; once lower needs are met it is possible to advance to the next higher order need (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2020).

- Deficiency needs: According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory model, human needs can be separated into two types of needs: deficiency needs and growth needs (Maslow, 1943). Deficiency needs decrease motivation as the needs are satisfactorily met and include needs on the base of the pyramid model: biological/physiological, safety, love/belonging and esteem (McLeod, 2020).
- Growth needs: Growth Needs are considered the highest level in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and refer to the realization of a person's potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth (McLeod, 2020). Growth needs focus on the motivation to fulfill human potential and seek growth through change (Maslow, 1943).

Summary

Teacher-student relationships are foundational in the academic and social success of students (Booker, 2021; Lee, 2012; Trust, 2021). The topic of teacher-student relationships has been extensively studied from the perspective of the teacher and from the perspective of the learner. There are, however, gaps in existing research on determining the role and insight of parents when considering the relationship between teachers and students. Researching parental expectations and descriptions of high-quality teacher-student relationships presents a perspective that has not been widely studied. In the context of this research, with a focus on participants' lived experiences, the teacher-student relationships, and the characteristics of teachers are of particular importance, given the often-asymmetric nature of teacher-student relationships and the role teachers hold as figure care and as an educator (Pianta, 1999). This study provides an overview of the expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships in urban elementary students, through the lens of parental perspectives. Using qualitative research methods, the presented phenomenological study included 16 total participants, sharing personal

experiences and insights in three small-group, semi-structured focus group interviews. Each participant voluntarily consented and was the parent or primarily guardian of a current of urban elementary students in Northeastern Ohio during the time of the study. The researcher's questions and discussion prompts presented in each focus group aimed to understand the lived experiences of parents in connection to expectations of teacher-student relationships. Through the lived experiences and perceptions of urban parents, the researcher intends to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher- student relationships, specific to urban elementary students in Northeastern Ohio.

The purpose of the study was to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives of urban elementary school parents. The intended outcome of the study were to (a) gather data from urban parents of elementary school students who described the characteristics and expectations of teacher-student relationship from a parental perspective; (b) identify characteristics and themes of high-quality teacher - student relationships from a parental perspective; and (c) make assumptions and alignments of urban parental expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships to the characteristics and descriptions found in previous research on high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspective of teachers and students. Results from the study may be of benefit to educators at all levels, ranging from preschool through higher education, as well as social workers, school counselors and other agencies or organizations working in concert with students, parents, teachers, and school systems at large. Departments of education, policy makers, and institutions of higher education may also find the results useful in determining how to develop program needs and meaningful practices. Outcomes from the study also provide valuable insight to future researchers who may use the current study design and results as a

foundation or framework to further investigate the role of parental perspective in understanding teacher-student relationships.

The researcher presents an in-depth review of empirical and relevant literature on the topic of teacher-student relationships in Chapter 2. Connections to two theoretical frameworks; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943, 1987) and Noddings' Ethic of Care (2005, 2013), were used as the foundational theoretical underpinnings of the study. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model has been explored as deficiency needs and growth needs impact students' academic and social learning and motivation for growth (Maslow, 1943). The Theory of The Ethics of Care (Noddings, 1988) was used as a framework for understanding the role care plays in the development of meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 further strengthened the need and relevance of the designed study presented in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The teacher-student relationship is instrumental in all areas of student connection and success (Anyon, 2018; Booker, 2021; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). The purpose of the literature review was twofold; the first being to examine variables and identify characteristics that positively impact teacher-student relationships from previously conducted studies and research, and the second was to investigate the guiding principles of high-quality student-teacher relationships developed in an educational setting. The chapter aims to provide insights on the role teacher-student relationships have in the academic and social successes of students. Exploring the perspective of the student's caregiver's (parent or primary guardian) expectations and characteristics for teacher-student relationships is essential in investigating the comprehensive impact teacher-student relationships have on student success. In the literature review, the term parent is intended to define the student's primary caregiver or guardian, and may not exclusively be used to describe the biological mother or father of the student. Important to the review is the investigation of common characteristics of meaningful relationships between teacher and students, the adverse effects of negative teacher-student relationships, the impact of a teacher on all aspects of a student's growth and development, and challenges facing urban schools and at-risk or marginalized students. The role of perception, need, and impact of the teacher-student relationship from the parental perspective was also investigated.

The researcher is intentional in identifying commonalities in teacher attributes, teaching styles, and teacher interpersonal beliefs that influence the quality of teacher relationships with students from current and empirical research studies. By examining all aspects of the teacher-

student relationship, variables that contribute to supporting positive teacher-student relationships can be identified (Decker et al., 2007). The researcher focuses on exploring various perspectives when analyzing the impact, expectations, and characteristics of teacher-student relationships. Considering the outcomes of several diverse studies allowed for a synthesized and comprehensive view of the role the teacher-student relationship plays across various grade levels and ages, in different demographic settings, and within diverse school systems and structures. Teacher disposition, and teacher attunement to student needs were also reviewed. Student motivation, engagement, and resilience are influenced by the quality of teacher-student relationships (Sparks, 2019; Trust, 2021). Student motivation, a sense of belonging, and resilience are directly connected to the impression of the teacher perceived by the student (Sparks, 2019). High-quality, meaningful relationships are an imperative component for student success, this is especially evident in the relationship between a student and a teacher during a child's formative years (Jensen, 2016; Trust, 2021).

Theoretical Frameworks

Theory of Ethics of Care

The Ethics of Care and the impact of care in relation to student academics, welfare and educational growth is an area of significance explored by Nel Noddings (1988, 2002, 2013). The implications of care in education are telling and deeply connected to the ethical and moral foundations evidenced in strong teacher-student relationships (Noddings, 2013). Noddings' Ethic of Care theory connects moral imperative and caring relationships as deliberate ways to advance others through relational engrossment (Noddings, 2013). Noddings identifies caring relationships as a foundational basic human need in which the caregiver acts unselfishly and with pure

intention to better the one that they are caring for (Noddings, 2013). The Ethics of Care is often characterized by two distinct actions; responsibility to care and response of being cared for (Noddings, 1988). Although subjectivity of both the cared-for (student) and caregiver (teacher) is acknowledged in the model, the influence one person can have on another through a caring relationship is influential and long-lasting (Noddings, 1988). The Ethics of Care is a two-stage model, consisting of two parties; the cared-for and the caregiver/one-caring (Noddings, 2013). Noddings (1988) identified four core components needed in ethical and moral relationships to build a trusting and caring dyadic partnership; modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Opportunities to communicate, demonstrate acts of care, and provide confirmation to those showing care and those being cared for create consistency, engrossment, affirmation, and personal growth (Noddings, 2002; Noddings & Soltis, 2005).

Noddings' theory of the Ethic of Care serves as a relevant theoretical framework in outlining the role care and personal connection plays in education and, more specifically, in the teacher-student relationships cultivated in an educational setting. Care is defined as a set of relational practices which foster growth, development, protection, encouragement, self-awareness, respect, and investment in a mutual way (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Care occurs within the parameters of a caring relationship (Noddings, 2002; Owens & Ennis, 2005). Noddings theory of the Ethics of Care framework addresses the importance of care as a natural characteristic desired by all humans (Owens & Ennis, 2005). In education, the Ethics of Care can be applied to teacher-student relationships with focus on reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships between a student and the teacher; the student is cared for and the teacher is the caregiver. A teacher-student relationship rooted in the Ethics of Care involves modeling open and meaningful dialogue, respect, authentic concern, and personal acceptance (Noddings, 1988).

There is a sense of commitment and obligation to grow the cared-for by the caregiver even when the cared-for does not reciprocate the same investment of care (Noddings, 2005, 2013). The one caring (caregiver/ teacher) considers all aspects of the one they are caring for (student), including the needs, expectations, background, personal experiences, and future of the one being cared for (Noddings, 2013).

Ultimately, in an ideal relationship between a caregiver and the one receiving care, the actions and intentions are meaningful enough that the relationship grows into a mutually caring relationship in which the cared-for has the capacity to give care (Noddings, 2013; Nodding & Soltis, 2005). Care ethicists claim that responsibilities derived directly from relationships between particular people and relationships should be empathy and care-based (Noddings, 2013; Noddings & Soltis, 2005). Teachers model care as the caregiver to students when they encourage responsibility, kindness, moral decision-making, self-affirmations, and continuous growth (Noddings, 1988). Noddings notes the Ethics of Care requires personal recognition of faults and a desire to bring out the best in others; it is a co-dependent model tied to moral and ethical awareness (Noddings, 2013). The caring teacher promotes and encourages student practice in caring, providing opportunities for students to act in caring ways through their interaction with teachers and peers to develop the ability to care deeply through modeling and guided practice (Noddings, 1988).

The theory of the Ethic of Care is rooted in affection, ownership, authenticity, and meaningful connection to others (Noddings, 2005, 2013). As stated by Owens and Ennis (2005), “The care ethic suggests that the teacher approaches student needs from the subjective perspective of “I must do something” rather than the objective, “something must be done” approach” (p. 393). The teacher is fully invested in the outcome of the student as a moral

obligation to do what is best morally and ethically for the student because the relationship is one in which the teacher is the caregiver (Noddings, 2005). A teacher's obligation and urgency to better the student is done through the Ethics of Care lens (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Noddings states, "My contention is, first, that we should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement and, second, that we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others" (1984, p. 176). Education and the essential formative relationship developed between a teacher and a student in an educational setting should intentionally be focused on relational care, personal investment, and respect.

Several noted reciprocal characteristics should be evident in a relationship of care between the student and the teacher including commitment, caring efforts, acknowledgement of experiences, seeking to understand, and listening (Owens & Ennis, 2005). In addition to the reciprocal characteristics, according to Noddings, caring is also a practice of engrossment in which the teacher must be fully devoted to promoting inclusive student acceptance and project an awareness of student values (Noddings & Soltis, 2005). Noddings' believes that caring, when "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness" is a preferable approach to ethics and motivational displacement (1988). When a caring relationship is cultivated with pure and moral intentions and consistently valued over time the pendulum will swing and the one caring (the teacher) will manifest mannerisms and attributes of caring to the cared-for (student), causing a motivational shift and an increase in academic and social growth.

A caring relationship, in its most basic form, is described by Noddings as a connection or encounter between two people (i.e., the cared-for and one giving care), in which both parties contribute to the growth of the relationship (Noddings & Soltis, 2005; Owens & Ennis, 2005).

Reception, recognition, response, motivation, and attentiveness are attributes that the caregiver must show and the one being cared for must receive (Noddings, 1984; Noddings & Soltis, 2005). The desire to be cared for in a caring relationship is a universal human characteristic and the responsibility of connecting learning using this theory in education is powerful (Sanders et al., 2016). Teachers are the game changers, power players, and motivators when it comes to fostering a caring relationship with students. Care is connected to motivation, engagement, resilience, and perception of investment (Jensen, 2016; Noddings & Soltis, 2005; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Sanders et al., 2016). At-risk and marginalized youth require that interpersonal care be part of the teaching relationship and it is identified as a key factor in school achievement and student attendance (Sanders et al., 2016). Teacher-student relationships that foster the highest capacity for learning and achievement are those that make students feel safe and provide positive caring resources (Lee, 2012; Sanders et al., 2016).

The teacher's responsibility in the act of creating, maintaining, and modeling caring relationships is monumental. Care is fostered when teachers prioritize affective growth, character building, social connections, relational practices, moral identity, and ethical perspectives to goal setting and problem-solving (Noddings, 1988). Teachers not only have to create caring relationships with students, but they also have to do it to the degree that the students will ultimately develop the capacity to care for others (Noddings & Soltis, 2005). A caring relationship between a student and teacher must be deeply valued and cultivated. Education centered around the Ethic of Care will inevitably strengthen a student academically (Sanders et al., 2016). Teachers who value and display care in instruction will strengthen relationships with students (Jensen, 2016; Noddings & Soltis, 2005). The elements of caring relationships must be intentional. According to Noddings theory of the Ethics of Care, knowing the process of caring

and being cared for are acts with much return on their investment, especially within the educational community (Noddings & Soltis, 2005).

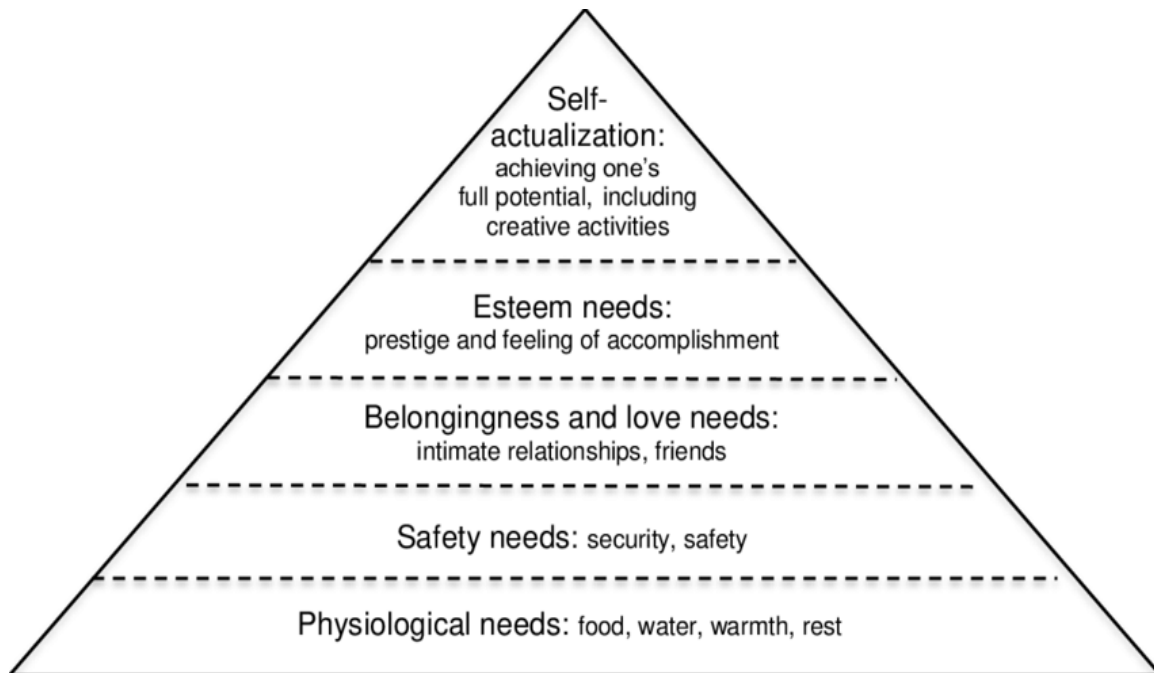
Along with a clear focus on authentic care it is also important to recognize individual student needs. Prioritizing what students have and need is essential in creating academic environments and personal relationships which understand the growth needs and deficient needs of students. The theoretical framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is further applied to understanding the importance of connection, specifically in teacher-student relationships.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Positive teacher-student relationships involve an awareness of student needs. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a motivational theory consisting of a tiered five-level system of human desire representing basic needs of survival to complex emotional and psychological needs (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2020). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943, 1987) is often represented as a pyramid, with the most basic needs at the bottom. Needs are mentally prioritized in order of basic needs to psychological wants to reach personal satisfaction and self-accomplishment (Maslow; 1987; Kurt, 2021).

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Source



Note. Figure 1 represents Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs consisting of five hierarchic layers, listed from basic to most complex. Maslow, A. H., 1987. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper and Row.

Maslow's (1943) original hierarchy framework is developed in five motivational areas: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. Physiological needs include food, water, warmth, and rest. Safety needs include safety and security. Belongingness and love needs include intimate relationships, friends, esteem needs are related to self-confidence, accomplishments, mutual respect, and recognition. Self-actualization is realizing one's potential, including cognitive, aesthetic, and transcendental needs (Maslow, 1943, 1987).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is that one can only move onto the next stage of higher needs once the lower-level needs have been adequately satisfied (Maslow, 1943). Behaviors will be centered on meeting the needs in the lowest order, and then will progress to higher orders as needs are satisfied (Maslow, 1943). This is relevant because relationships are established after basic needs are mostly fulfilled. According to Kurt (2021), students must feel a sense of connection and belonging in the classroom, which means feeling psychologically and emotionally safe. Often the most at-risk students require basic needs to be met first, in order to invest in meaningful high-quality relationships (Jensen, 2016). Understanding Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is significant in making determinations about the impact of the characteristics associated with high-quality teacher-student relationships. Students in the most compromised life situations crave a trusting and safe relationship with their teacher (Kurt, 2021). When needs are satisfactorily met in the right environment, every person has the capacity and desire to move up the hierarchy towards self-actualization (McLeod, 2020). To meet the needs of belonging, connectivity, love, and self-growth, students need to feel safe and secure with teachers (Kurt, 2021).

According to Maslow (1943) education and the learning process is viewed as a holistic approach to growth as the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual aspects of individual student learning are predictors of reaching optimal success. The Hierarchy of Needs theory can be divided into a deficiency needs/growth needs framework in which low level deficit needs must be addressed to progress on to addressing growth needs, although neither the deficit need or growth need must be met in 100% fulfillment to advance (McLeod, 2020). As stated by Kurt (2021, p.7), "A greater comprehension of each student's basic needs is likely to lead to the teacher's ability to help the student overcome their personal educational obstacles, allowing each

student to reach their educational potential.” Individuals gradually and fully progress to more advanced growth needs when they feel safe, secure, and connected. The hierarchy has been used to explain how effort and motivation are correlated in the context of learning and responding to human behaviors (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2020).

The academic and social challenges facing many urban schools and at-risk students are also considered in the literature review. Noddings’ Ethics of Care theory (1988) and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs model (1943) are contributing theoretical frameworks, providing insight on the impact of care, motivation, and deficiency and growth need in high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Literature Review

Characteristics of High-Quality Teacher-Student Relationships

Students who have experienced strong and meaningful relationships with teachers are more academically engaged, have more developed social skills, and less behavioral issues in school (Anyon et al., 2018; Trust, 2021; Yang & Anyon, 2016). The area of teacher-student relationships is one that is embedded throughout education. Supportive, caring, and meaningful teacher-student relationships are a critical aspect in shaping an interpersonal climate in schools which allows students to feel connected and have a sense of belonging (Lee, 2012; Sparks, 2019; Trust, 2021). “Strong relationships between adults and students must include expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power, and expanding possibilities. Importantly, these relationship-building actions must be done with an equity lens, one that supports positive racial, cultural, and ethnic identity development” (Trust, 2021, p. 2). No important learning will occur without a meaningful relationship.

Teachers who cultivate care, compassion, and empathy for and with their students are able to manage students' behavior and academic engagement better, leading to independent motivation and academic growth (Sparks, 2019). When students perceive the teacher in the teacher-student relationship as caring, attuning to individual student needs, accepting, respectful, and transparent students can more effectively navigate the learning environment (Caleon & Wui, 2018). Understanding the research connected to teacher-student relationships and the change in interpersonal student behaviors could assist teachers in increasing student motivation and factors connected to academic achievement (Jensen, 2016; Trust, 2021).

Positive teacher-student relationships in all areas of education contribute to a student's academic and social growth (Jensen, 2016; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2015; Sanders, et al., 2016). In a study conducted by Jeffrey et al. (2013), students identify positive teacher-student relationships as caring, safe, and emotionally supportive. Strong teacher-student relationships are those in which the teacher provides support with personal issues as well as academic needs (Jeffrey et al., 2013). High-quality teacher-student relationships are beneficial for academic engagement, motivation, and student connectedness to school in all phases of education, including elementary, middle, high school, and postsecondary students (Jensen, 2016; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2015). Research shows teachers who foster positive relationships with their students create classroom environments more conducive to learning and meet students' developmental, emotional, and academic needs (Lee, 2012; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2015). The school climate, which is largely dependent on the relationships that teachers have with students, has the potential to provide experiences and opportunities which impact students significantly academically, socially, and emotionally (Jensen, 2016). Furthermore, teacher-student relationships play a vital role in reversing cycles of inequality and disadvantages facing

students (Jensen, 2016; Yang & Anyon, 2016). When students have access to relevant and meaningful educational encounters and maintain high-quality relationships with teachers, they are more likely to achieve academic and social growth (Sanders, et al., 2016; Yang & Anyon, 2016).

The cultivation of strong positive relationships between teachers and students matter greatly both for educational outcomes and, also, for the overall wellbeing of students (Sanders et al., 2016). Key adult relationships, such as the teacher-student relationship, have the potential to moderate risk and mitigate negative outcomes when students view the relationship with their teacher as meaningful, significant, and mutually respectful (Sanders et al., 2016). When students feel valued, and connected to the teacher they are more likely to positively adapt in challenging circumstances and be more resilient when faced with adversity which leads to better educational outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Sanders et al., 2016). Once a child enters school, relationships with non-parental adults, specifically teacher-student relationships, become increasingly important in contributing to the students' positive acclimation in school, school connectivity, and self-confidence (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Although teacher-student relationships are an essential component of school success, they are especially influential in urban schools considering the challenges many urban school systems and at-risk students are facing (Fredricks et al., 2019; Leverett et al., 2022; Yang & Anyon, 2016).

Challenges Facing Urban Schools and Students At-Risk

The term *urban school* can be defined as a city school in a mid to large central city (edX, 2022). The term urban is often associated with a high needs or at-risk population in underperforming schools with limited resources, which may or may not be the case (edX, 2022).

The characteristics of being considered at-risk are, in most cases, connected to student demographics, school performance, access to resources, and school interventions (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). The term *at-risk* is often used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically, or students that face challenging circumstances outside of their education, such as poverty, transiency, insecure housing, exposure to violence or other adversities which can impact their success in school (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). Most risk factors facing urban students are situational rather than innate (Great Schools Partnership, 2013) and can be mitigated with high-quality, caring teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). This is further evidence of the need for high-quality teacher-student relationships as a means to counteract risk factors.

To better navigate daily challenges associated with low socioeconomic status, violence in neighborhoods, inequitable access to resources, and trauma, students need strong and meaningful relationships (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Leverett et al., 2022). “When a student has an emotionally stable family, good friends and positive relatives, the need for relational stability in school is less” (Jensen, 2016, p. 26). Minority and lower-achieving students are at greater risk for declining academic engagement and achievement as they progress from elementary school to middle school; however, students at-risk for academic decline benefit from supportive and meaningful teacher-student relationships (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; National Center for Educational Statistics (2007); edX, 2022).

Urban school systems and urban students face many disproportionate challenges that contribute to the difficulty students have in reaching their full potential academically and socially (Leverett et al., 2022; Yang & Anyon, 2016). Teacher quality, teacher retention and consistency, and teacher experience are among the issues facing urban schools (Lee, 2012). The quality of the

teacher is a relevant factor in a teacher's ability to engage and motivate student learning. Black and Latino students are more likely to have inexperienced or unqualified teachers, fewer demanding college preparatory courses, more remedial courses, and higher teacher turnover, each impacting students' potential success (Lee, 2004). Unfortunately, urban districts have difficulty attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers (Jacob, 2007). Fredricks et al. (2019) addresses the negative impact urban schools face with teacher attrition rates and the impact they play on student engagement stating, “a disproportionately high number of low-income students of color face particular engagement challenges as a result of higher rates of student and teacher turn over (p. 2).

Urban students are often considered to have a stronger predisposition for failure based on their situational circumstances, life outside of school, and backgrounds (Lee, 2012). Lee states, “there has been a significant and consistent achievement gap among racial/ethnic groups, and emotional disengagement of students of color has been offered as one explanation for this phenomenon” (Lee, 2012, p. 331). Challenges associated with urban education include students with more challenging negative behaviors, higher absenteeism, difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, poverty, trauma, and limited resources (Lee, 2012). At-risk students face difficulties in life and in the school environment that marginalize and disengage them from education (Snow, 2020). At-risk students are often behind in core areas such as math and reading (Lee, 2012).

Urban schools are significantly impacted by the concentration of poverty, policies that fail to adequately address individual student needs, and teachers' dysfunctional perceptions of students' intellectual abilities (Brue, 2022). Teacher and student perception are influential factors in a teacher-student relationship (Jensen, 2016). Many marginalized students often lack

consistency, care, and stable relationships at home (Snow, 2020). Jensen (2016) states, “relationships between students and teachers are more important to students who don’t have a loving relationship at home.... a relational mindset in the classroom is the teacher’s way of assuring students that we are all in this life together” (p. 27). Positive student–teacher relationships may increase academics, mental health, and behavioral outcomes for diverse learners (Leverett et al., 2022). Teacher-student relationships can influence both the actions and outcomes of students. To increase academic capacity in at-risk students, a caring and meaningful teacher-student relationship is a much-needed variable (Hughes & Cao, 2018; Leverett et al., 2022). According to a national web-based survey conducted by YouGov, new data demonstrated that parents agree with the research, relationships between students and teachers play an invaluable role in the academic and social growth of students (Search Institute, 2023).

Teacher-Student Relationships with At-Risk and Marginalized Students

Investigating the potential positive outcomes connected to impactful teacher-student relationships is necessary in understanding how teachers can set up even the most challenging and at-risk students for optimal social and academic success. Hughes and Cao (2018) conducted a longitudinal trajectory analysis studying the perceived warmth and caring associated with teacher relationships and academics. Study results implicate that when teacher warmth is perceived as shifted or lowered, the trajectory of student scores in math and reading also decreased (Hughes & Cao, 2018). The care of a teacher is associated with academic outputs. On the other hand, results from the study show an increase in math and reading scores when the student perceived the teacher-student relationship as warm, caring, and consistent (Hughes & Cao, 2018).

Teacher-student relationships often provide at-risk students the skills and tools they need to overcome challenges when resilience is modeled and practiced within the relationship (Lee, 2012; Brue, 2022). In one study focused on low-SES minority students, findings show that greater engagement in academic lessons was a characteristic shared by all students who were deemed to be academically resilient (Brue, 2022). Positive teacher-student relationships assist with a student's ability to be resilient and engaged (Lee, 2012). Positive relationships between students and teachers have the potential to offset or compensate for the risk's students face outside of school (Sanders et al., 2016). In this regard, positive school relationships with teachers can be seen as critical resilience resources for youth who confront high levels of risks outside of school (Sanders et al., 2016). Engagement is needed in the learning process and is often associated with a teacher's instructional practices and student relationships with teachers (Brue, 2022). However, disengagement tends to increase as students' progress through school with a steeper decline in engagement and school connectedness for low-income African Americans and Latino youth in an urban school (Fredricks et al., 2019). When teachers offer strong instructional and emotional support through a consistent and meaningful relationship, students from low-income families perform equal to their higher income peers (Sanders, et al., 2016). In contrast, students in poverty that feel disconnected from their teacher have lower achievement and more conflict (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Sanders, et al., 2016).

Low income, at-risk students of color benefit greatly, academically and socially, from positive relationships with teachers (Fredricks, 2017). Although, urban youth and students of color often tend to have more difficulty developing and growing relationships with their teachers (Fredricks, 2017). When negative relationships exist between students and teachers, there is more evidence of classroom disengagement, behavior disruptions, a lower sense of belonging,

disconnection, and lower self-regulating behaviors (Decker et al., 2007; Fredricks et al., 2019; Frisby et al., 2020; Scales et al., 2020). Disengagement is often a side effect of lower level relationships between students and teachers, which often results in boredom, rejection, behavior issues, and higher absenteeism (Fredricks, 2017). In contrast, Fredricks (2017), further explains that strong relationships with urban students show benefits in motivation and academics when developed in a caring, positive, and transparent environment. Student success is associated with students identifying having positive relationships with teachers that were caring, supportive, matched instruction to personal interest, invested in all aspects of the student, and offered daily affirmations and encouragements (Fredrick, 2021). In support of this research, a separate study surveying 25,400 sixth through twelfth graders from an urban district found that only 16 percent of middle schoolers from low-income backgrounds felt they had a strong and meaningful relationship with a teacher (Trust, 2021). The teacher-student relationship changes the student's behavior and engagement in the classroom.

High-quality teacher relationships are imperative in a student's academic success (Fredrick, 2021). When high-quality teacher-student relationships are lacking, there is an increased potential for a negative impact academically and socially for the student (Fredrick, 2021). When a poor relationship between a teacher and an already struggling urban student is in place, the negative relationship with the teacher is setting the child back, rather than preparing them for success (Fredrick, 2021). Jacob (2007) addresses the challenges and negative results associated with ineffective urban teachers in his article *The Challenges of Staffing Urban Schools with Effective Teachers*. Although many teachers may not be less effective in the bigger picture, Jacobs states, “many urban teachers are less highly qualified than their suburban counterparts in respect to characteristics such as experience, educational background, and

teaching certifications" (2007, p.129).

Interpersonal teacher characteristics play a role in the quality of instruction, student motivation, and the teacher's ability to cultivate impactful teacher-student relationships. Students growing up in low-income families with challenging situations are less likely than other students to develop high-quality relationships with teachers (Scales et al., 2020). The results of Hughes et al.'s (2012) study, which involved academically at-risk elementary students, indicated that students identify relationships with teachers as positive or negative based on aspects of teacher behaviors such as warm, caring, kind, respectful, and authentic. Teachers are a critical component in mitigating the negative precursors associated with poverty and limitations placed due to a lack of home support facing many urban students (Trust, 2021). Teachers lay the foundation for success by building positive, meaningful, relationships that have the potential to decrease negative behaviors and increase student motivation and engagement (Fredricks et al. 2019; Trust, 2021; Yang & Anyon, 2016).

Student engagement is a dependable and robust predictor of a student's academic success. Highly engaged students are less likely to drop out of school (Lee, 2012). Teacher impact is associated with teacher effectiveness. "The cumulative effects of teachers is striking, students who have three consecutive very-high quality teachers will gain 50 percentile points more on an achievement test than a student who has three consecutive average teachers" (Jacob, 2007, p.137). Ensuring the allocation of effective teachers in urban schools becomes an issue of equity, and one in which is not always afforded to urban students (Trust, 2021). With a clear understanding of the difficulties facing urban schools, the need to put in place high-quality teachers in high-need schools is even more pressing. The urgency to provide at-risk students opportunities to have exemplary teachers that foster meaningful relationships is pressing. Further

explored in the research is the pedagogical practices associated with teachers identified as having high-quality relationships with students. Understanding the attributes and instructional practices of teachers with positive teacher-student relationships is critical for developing relationships with students that provide opportunities for optimal academic and social success.

Leading with Care and Meeting Individual Student Needs

The relationship between a classroom teacher and a student can be a means to motivate students when the teacher is acutely aware of, and intentionally addressing, individual student needs. Noltemeyer et al., (2020) conducted a study investigating the relationship of deficiency needs and growth needs in relation to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. The study results imply that when basic needs of school-aged children are met, growth needs are prioritized (Noltemeyer et al., 2020). Children living in poverty are considered more at-risk for adverse home environments which expose them to food insecurity, unsafe neighborhoods, insecure housing, inconsistent positive relationships, and violence (Engle & Black, 2008; Noltemeyer et al., 2020). Children living in poverty have implications of lower cognitive and academic performance, higher absenteeism, and more academic based behavior issues (Engle & Black, 2008; Noltemeyer et al., 2020). In relation to children's development, Maslow's theory suggests that children's ability to be motivated by "growth needs" (e.g., academic achievement, self-actualization) must be built upon the satisfaction of "deficiency needs" (e.g., physiological needs, safety needs, love/belonging needs) (Noltemeyer et al., 2020).

If basic needs are adequately met (deficiency needs), students have a greater chance of being motivated to meet higher order needs (growth needs) and become more invested in the growth process (Noltemeyer et al., 2020). The results of the study suggest that teacher caring,

identifying barriers impacting success, and support, all of which are related to a component of Maslow's love/belonging/esteem needs, had positive effects on children's academic achievement (Noltemeyer et al., 2020). A leading determinant in increased academic engagement is when a student views their teacher as warm, caring, and attentive to their individual needs (Hughes et al., 2012)

Both Noddings and Maslow's theories are aligned to human connectivity as a means for human growth and satisfaction. The relational mindset teachers must convey is that we are all interconnected and connections are made with students as a person first, then as an academic learner (Jensen, 2016). Ethics of Care and the Hierarchy of Needs are tiered systems in which personal evolution is connected to connection, caring, and satisfaction of needs.

In "Rules Without Relationship Lead to Rebellion: Secondary Teachers and School Belonging," Booker refers to teacher-student relationships as, "the cornerstone of school belonging and can predict the success in the secondary grades" (2021, p.65). Student connection and a sense of belonging are essential in academic and social growth. The study investigates the teacher's role in connecting, engaging, and motivating students in connection to Maslow's Self-Actualization and Hierarchy of Needs model. Humans are motivated by basic needs and once those needs are satisfied, motivation and personal fulfillment can come from love, attachment, relationships, achievement, mastery, and connection (Booker, 2021). The importance of school connectedness and school belonging were highlighted as characteristics of strong relationship between teacher and students in the findings of the study. Four categories were identified from the study that represented priority characteristics of teacher-student relationship, caring, consistency, contracts, and challenges (Booker, 2021).

Relationships encourage a sense of belonging, care, and growth. Creating student belonging is a necessary function for social membership to a larger group and life skills beyond the classroom (Booker, 2021). Additionally, “when teachers prioritize positive relationships, while simultaneously holding students accountable for their behavior and actions, the spirit of the classroom is reinforced” (Booker, 2021, p. 67). Students must feel valued, connected, and cared for by those they are learning from before they are motivated to achieve (Booker, 2021; Maslow, 1943; Noddings, 2005).

Impact and Outcomes of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Strong teacher-student relationships provide a foundation for student engagement, belonging, and academic growth (Lee, 2012). The more high-quality relationships students have with their teachers, the better their engagement will be in school (Trust, 2021). Teachers who are relationally connected to their students will have students that achieve at a higher-rate (Lee, 2012; Jensen, 2016; Trust, 2021). Jensen (2016) views teacher-student relationships as non-negotiable and claims that while every child may not require the same level of relational support, every child must have a respectful and positive relationship with their teacher centered around teacher care and mindset. Both the student perception of a teacher-student relationship and the teacher’s perception of a teacher-student relationship must be viewed as positive (Brue, 2022; Jensen, 2016; Leverett et al., 2022; Longobardi et al., 2020). The two-way perception of care and positive impact is especially necessary when teaching at-risk or emotionally disconnected students (Brue, 2022; Jensen, 2016; Leverett et al., 2022; Longobardi et al., 2020). Relationships with teachers are one of the single most common resources for children in school, and they often operate as a protective factor against risk for a range of problem outcomes facing at-risk children (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

A valued and positive relationship with the teacher, characterized by affection, care, closeness, and support, tends to be associated with a more positive attitude towards school in students, a greater sense of connectedness to academics, and a greater degree of engagement at school (Baker, 1999; Longobardi et al., 2020). Extensive research has been conducted in the area of teacher-student relationships. Identifying common attributes of high-quality teacher-student relationships is essential in understanding the role of care and need in student achievement. High-quality teacher-student relationships include mutual respect, caring, conveying a sense of hope, investment, an awareness of individual need, developing a sense of belonging, and commitment to growth (Brue, 2022; Frisby et al., 2020; Jensen, 2016; Leverett et al., 2022; Roorda et al., 2011). In a meta-analytic approach to analyze the correlation between high-quality characteristics of teacher-student relationship and student school engagement and achievement, 99 studies covering preschool to high school students were reviewed (Roorda et al., 2011). Results of the cross analyses of studies showed significant associations between student perception of teacher-student relationship quality and student achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). Findings of the meta-analysis also highlighted that the teacher-student relationship was a substantial indicator in student engagement, perception of the teacher, and academic achievement at all ages and was, “.... more important for children who were academically at risk, in particular for children from disadvantaged economic background” (Roorda et al., 2011, p. 520). At-risk students that lack strong mentorships in adult relationships at home tend to benefit more from positive teacher-student connections (Trust, 2021). While teacher-student relationships matter in all student populations, they are especially instrumental in the academic and social growth of marginalized students (Roorda et al., 2011).

Additionally, in an in-depth longitudinal study investigating the role of the teacher in

building student resilience and positive pathways for at-risk students, students were less engaged in school and were facing challenges outside school (Sanders et al., 2016). Low-risk students had higher engagement in their academics putting them at a lower risk for failure. Resilience and teacher-student relationships were identified as mitigating factors to offset at-risk students (Sanders et al., 2016). Positive teacher relationships were directly correlated to a student's resilience, and this correlation was notably higher for students at-risk (Sanders et al., 2016). “Experiences gained in school have the potential to significantly impact upon the life chances and achievements children go on to have as adults. Schools have a vital role to play in reversing the cycle of inequality” (Sanders et al., 2016, p.111). The highest risk students are those with the highest need and greatest precursor for academic failure. These students need teachers who display trust, show understanding, provide support, and listen to their problems not related to school concerns (Sanders et al., 2016). Teachers should take into consideration students' risk factors, prior experiences, and challenges outside of school, develop positive rapport through personal discussions, allow students to be active in the decision-making process, lead with a caring and compassionate tone, and provide empowerment through options (Sanders et al., 2016). In particular, at-risk students are positively impacted when teachers build positive relationships that emphasize respect, consistency, understanding, and caring, which empower students and enhance their resilience resources leading to their capacity to stay engaged and increase their motivation (Sanders et al., 2016).

Positive relationships between students and teachers are a strong predictor of academic and behavioral outcomes in early formal education through eighth grade (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). The adverse impact is represented when teachers and students describe their relationships as negative, resulting in lower test scores and a greater risk of behavioral concerns (Hamre &

Pianta, 2005). The teacher-student relationship can produce a positive and consistent return in the areas of academics and behavior (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). The impact of the relationship is most impressive when developed in early education and remains consistent throughout a child's schooling (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Positive relationships between students and teachers have a significant effect size on academic growth and are a primary contributing factor in a student's academic success (Hattie, 2009). The quality and nature of the relationships between students and teachers has a larger effect on academic growth outcomes than socio-economic status, professional development, or curricular programs (Hattie, 2009). It is the relationship with the teacher that makes the impact in academics (Hattie, 2009).

In alignment with Booker's findings, Scales et al. (2020), indicated teacher-student relationships strongly predict the following outcomes: the degree of student motivation in academics, the degree to which a student feels connected to their teacher, the degree of personal belonging expressed by a student, and how the school climate is perceived by the student and the teacher. The study included survey responses from diverse middle schoolers. The findings suggest, "that a teacher's relationship with students promotes motivation by positively affecting students' perceptions about their own agency and competence, and their connectedness to teachers" (Scales et al., 2020, p. 649). Teacher-student relationships can produce change in social and academic areas within one academic year, including an increase in student GPA when connected to a teacher they value, trust, and respect (Scales et al., 2020).

When considering how positive teacher-student relationships are formed, Mosley et al. (2021) investigates how relationships are built and evaluates the changes in student performance connected to teacher-student relationships. The study supports the need for students and teachers alike to perceive their relationships with each other as meaningful and high-quality (Mosley et

al., 2021). Perception plays a role in the relationship (Booker, 2021; Engels et al., 2021; Hughes & Cao, 2018; Mosley et al., 2021). If a teacher considers the relationship with the student high-quality from the teacher perspective, the student also tends to view the relationships as high-quality; hence, perception is a factor in establishing high-quality relationships (Caleon & Wui, 2018). The student's perception of the quality of the relationship they have with the teacher is a determining factor of how the relationship will affect the student's academic engagement (Caleon & Wui, 2018). Teacher actions can increase or decrease student motivation, and the quality of teacher relationships can improve with increased interaction and invested time (Moseley et al., 2021). Teacher-student relationships impact learning and contribute to a student's sense of belonging (Booker, 2021; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hughes & Cao, 2018; Mosley et al., 2021; Scales et al., 2020).

Findings from a 2019 longitudinal study, connected middle school students' academic engagement with the teacher's reports of closeness and perception of care (Engels et al., 2021). The study examined school engagement and academics while considering the role of effective teacher-student relationships in the academic learning process (Engels et al., 2021). Within the multidimensional study all elements associated with student performance were considered including behavioral and emotional dimensions, and positive and negative teacher-student relations from both the teacher and student perspective. Results indicate that close and supportive teacher-student relationships positively impact the social and academic growth of students, whereas when teacher-student relationships are perceived as negative by the student the outcome is lower school engagement and lower achievement (Engels et al., 2021). The student perception of the relationship, as well as the teacher's perspective of the relationship in a dyadic teacher-student relationship, contributes to student's behavior and emotional engagement and connection

to school (Engels et al., 2021; Pianta et al., 2003).

“The Role of Classroom Relationships as Sources of Academic Resilience and Hope” by Frisby et al. (2020) investigates the role of teacher-student relationships in higher education. By studying the impact of instructor-student interpersonal relationships in higher education, the researchers revealed that academic resilience and hope were closely connected to the quality of relationships college students formed with their instructor and perhaps more impactfully their peers. Strong teacher-student relationships were consistent with student perseverance and resilience in overcoming challenging situations (Frisby et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2011). Teacher and peer relationships are needed for academic success and resilience regardless of the educational level of the learner (Frisby et al., 2020) The psychological need of human relatedness and connectivity, as well as hope and resilience for overcoming challenges, are satisfied through high-quality relationships (Frisby et al., 2020). Within the study, *hope* is defined as “the ability to set goals, the agency to achieve goals and to develop and execute pathways to achieving those goals” (Frisby et al., 2020, p. 290). Hope is needed for students to move past the challenges of now and develop a stronger future (Frisby et al., 2020). The sense of hope can be connected to the similar sense of future, resilience, success, and investments mentioned in previous studies. Fostering strong and consistent relationships with students is an agent of hope and leads to student resilience when confronted with academic and social challenges (Frisby et al., 2020). Hope leads to setting and achieving goals, attaining higher grades, grit and perseverance in the face of obstacles, increased graduation rates, meaningful relationships, and life achievement beliefs (Frisby et al., 2020). In other words, hope in students equates to academic and social resilience which is an essential component of life success and a side effect of high-quality relationships (Frisby et al., 2020).

A previous study investigated the factors associated with student engagement and connection. Within that study, interviews with middle school and high school students took place to examine the factors that influence urban students' engagement or disengagement and it was determined that students who are more engaged do better academically and a student's engagement is associated with negative outcomes, including higher behavior problems, delinquency, and substance use (Fredricks et al., 2019). Rated in the study was how students view teacher and school relatedness/connectivity, autonomy, and competencies in academics, as each is related to a student's engagement or disengagement. Results indicated that students who developed more positive relationships with teachers appeared to be more engaged, then their less engaged counterparts that expressed they did not trust or respect their teacher (Fredricks et al., 2019) Less engaged students expressed feeling that their teacher often misjudged them and did not describe their relationship with the teacher as personal, caring, or understanding (Fredricks et al., 2019).

Positive teacher-student relationships can impact student's levels of motivation, resilience, and engagements. Klem and Connell studied impacts associated with teacher-student relationships as they relate to academic advancement and academic standards. "Relationships Matter: Linking Teacher Support to Student Engagement and Achievement" (Klem & Connell, 2004) details a longitudinal study in which the findings connected a caring school environment as a key influencer in school academic performance. The study looked at survey responses from teachers, as well as students in grades three through five who were considered on an optimal track for success and students at-risk for failure. The factors used to differentiate optimally performing students from students at-risk were attendance, reading scores, and math scores. Students need teachers who provide support, care, and meaningful interaction for academic

growth to be obtained (Klem & Connell, 2004). Results show elementary students who reported feeling highly engaged in the classroom were 44% more likely to do well, and middle schoolers who reported feeling highly engaged were 75% more likely to do well (Klem & Connell, 2004). The study's findings offer evidence of the connection between student engagement, teacher-student relationships, and academic performance. Within the study, teacher-support and relationships between students and teachers were analyzed. The results showed that a lack of teacher support for individual student needs had the largest negative effect on elementary student experiences of engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Klem and Connell (2004), address the importance of teacher connection stating, "students need to feel teachers are involved with them - that adults in school know and care about them. Students also need to feel they can make important decisions for themselves, and the work they are assigned has relevance to their present or future lives" (p. 262) Within the confines of a teacher-student relationship, student autonomy, support, investment, and connectivity to future learning were deemed important factors in student academic success.

Teacher-student relationships are powerful indicators associated with the efforts and engagement in several studies. When strong relationships are in place, students are more likely to attempt risky situations, apply themselves fully, show investment in their academics, and model traits of meaningful relationships with peers (Fredricks et al., 2019). Students who expressed poor teacher-student relationships also expressed not having a sense of relatedness or belonging in the classroom and often became disruptive and defiant during instruction. The contrary is true for students that expressed feeling connected and respected by their teacher; "Feeling respected by teachers can go a long way in supporting urban school students' engagement, especially for students of color" (Fredricks et al., 2019, p. 24). The findings suggest, "unsupportive

interactions between a teacher and student make it more likely a student will perceive himself or herself as unwelcome, incompetent, and pressured. In turn, these negative interactions can lead to further withdrawal of teacher support” (Fredrick et al., 2019, p. 24). The teacher-student relationship is a factor in student engagement, academic growth, connectedness, and behavior.

Having an awareness of individual student strengths and weaknesses, triggers, coping strategies, defense mechanisms, and goals will help build connections with students resulting in more connected relationships (Anyon et al., 2018). To form positive relationships with students, teachers must be invested in all areas of a child’s life. The effects of teacher-student relationship on student engagement, performance and motivation were examined in Lee’s (2012) two-dimensional study of high schoolers. The study assessed students’ literacy and math skills during a three-cycle collection period investigating the impact of relationships on academic growth (Lee, 2012). The study tested three hypotheses, 1) the teacher-student relationship when deemed positive will positively impact engagement and academic performance, 2) academic growth is associated with student engagement and motivation, and 3) the association between teacher-student relationships can cause differences in student outcomes of academic growth (Lee, 2012). The results of the study show that teacher-student relationships, when viewed as positive by the student, have significant positive associations with student outcomes in the areas of behavior, emotional engagement, and academics (Lee, 2012). Based on survey responses, when students perceived a positive, reliable, and caring relationship with their teacher was present and consistent they had increased efforts in academic learning and perseverance (Lee, 2012). Students also felt a deep sense of belongingness and had higher scores in academic areas when they perceived their relationship with the teacher as nurturing, meaningful, and positive (Lee, 2012). The teacher-student relationship is a significant predictor of student outcomes in the areas

of behavioral, emotional, intellectual, and social development (Lee, 2012). In order for a relationship to be meaningful and valued, each member needs to perceive the relationship as authentic and mutually beneficial.

Common Research Themes

Research on teacher-student relationships has elucidated a series of common themes. The connection to care, consistency, motivation, and individualization in relationships became a common theme in the research. The mindset and disposition of the teacher in developing strong relationships with urban students surfaced throughout many studies. The correlation between student resilience and their sense of belongingness or connectedness is influenced by the pivotal relationships they develop with teachers or mentors (Frisby et al., 2020; Lee, 2012). Through the cross-analysis of study findings and current literature, significant common research themes are apparent. Both teacher and students thought the most beneficial relationships occurred when teachers demonstrated caring, trust, compassion, respect, and a sense of belonging (Fredricks et al., 2019; Frisby et al., 2020; Lee, 2012). Commonalities in the findings across studies also included teacher-student relationships in which autonomy was valued and teachers empowered students to own their actions (Fredricks et al., 2019; Frisby et al., 2020). Creating a pathway to future goals and developing a sense of hope for students was an outcome of positive and consistent teacher-student relationships (Booker, 2021; Fredricks et al., 2019; Frisby et al., 2020; Sanders et al., 2016). Teachers are a powerful mitigating factor to offset academic failure, and social deficits, especially in high-risk students (Anyon et al., 2018; Jensen, 2016). The disposition and investment of the teacher in a teacher-student relationship are perceived as important characteristics by students (Jensen, 2016; Scales et al., 2020). An individual teacher has the ability to change an individual student's attitude, values, perception, perseverance,

resilience, and motivation (Anyon et al., 2018; Scales et al., 2020). High quality relationships between students and teachers include mutual respect, mutual investment in the learning process, sense of belonging, and student autonomy (Frisby et al., 2020; Lee, 2012; Scales et al., 2020).

As the reviewed study's interview responses were organized into qualitative strands, major themes were identified including the impact of teachers' positive actions, characteristics of the teacher relationship to include caring, trust and mutual respect, classroom structure and expectations, and fairness to students without preference (Mosely et al., 2021). Additionally, student perception of teacher inequality impacts the student's perception of developing a high-quality relationship. Several studies suggest that a positive classroom environment is directly connected to the interactions between students and teachers and the quality of the relationships between the two (Longobardi et al., 2020). Furthermore, students at risk for academic failure can be motivationally impacted by the teacher-student relationship resulting in higher engagement and better scores academically (Anyon et al.; Baker, 1999; Booker, 2021; Jacob, 2007; Scales et al., 2020). The level of closeness within the teacher-student relationship has been found to be positively correlated with academic achievement and lower behavior issues (Longobardi et al., 2020). Additional commonalities in the findings include the need for teachers to represent clear and consistent classroom policies, allow for autonomy in the academic and social decision-making process, promote instructional freedoms, and monitor performance goals in a fair and encouraging manner. Students reported the importance of being heard, treated fairly, and feeling supported as traits that impacted engagement (Anyon et al., 2018; Fredricks et al., 2019).

Need for Further Research

The literature review showed a deficit of studies exploring the student and parent

perspective of the topic of relationships. There are shortcomings in existing studies exclusive to urban student perception of relationships, and limited research on the longitudinal impacts of relationships, both to the teacher or mentor and to the student. The role of a parent or guardian's personal experiences in urban education and with teacher relationships could act as an influencer in the expectations for their current school-aged child. The majority of studies reviewed captured the thoughts and perceptions of the classroom teacher. Very few studies addressed the topic from the students' perspective, and more specifically from the elementary student perspective. The gap in research focused on urban students, and parent perspectives further strengthened the need to investigate the teacher-student relationship in an elementary setting from the perspective of urban parents. Fredricks et al. (2019), "few studies have talked directly to urban adolescents about their school experiences to better understand the contextual factors that support students' needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy and whether these factors can help explain variations in engagement and disengagement in school" (p. 5).

Samples used in many studies were not exclusive to urban students or at-risk students. To date most of the research on teacher-student relationships had used quantitative methods to examine predictors of engagement among white middle-class samples (Fredricks et al., 2019). An interest in fully understanding the role a teacher-student relationship has, exclusive in at-risk urban elementary students, required further investigation and additional research. The overall research provided some insight in how teachers impact students through the quality of relationships, but left questions unanswered to the contextual factors associated with how African American and White urban adolescents respond to relationships as it relates to engagement or disengagement and perceived teacher support (Fredricks et al., 2019). Additional limitations included multiple perspectives within one study, for example viewing student

perspective, teacher perspective, caretaker (parent/guardian) perspective, and conducting a cross-analysis of the results.

Teacher and student perception of the quality of the relationship was often an indicator in student and teacher success, but little research was found on why the student and teachers perceived the relationship the way they had, implying more research was needed on understanding the characteristics associated with perception of a high-quality or low-quality relationship. The gaps in the research and presented limitations over how studies were employed further supported the need to conduct new research that intentionally investigated the impact of the teacher-student relationships, with a specific focus on understanding the impact and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships on urban students and on those that act as the students' caregivers.

Summary

In all aspects of student success, teachers matter and relationships matter. Teacher-student relationships are a clear influencer in students' school engagement and achievement (Fredricks et al., 2019; Jensen, 2016; Lee, 2012; Longobardi et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2011; Scales et al., 2020). This is especially true when working with at-risk students (Anyon et al., 2018; Jensen, 2016; Longobardi et al., 2020). Teacher-student relationships that focus on care, individual support, and student need, contribute to increased academic growth, attendance rates, and student motivation for learning. (Klem & Connell, 2004). Educational and developmental research has shown that the social and relational aspects of the classroom setting, particularly qualities of relationships between teachers and students, are a modest but robust predictor of students' academic achievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Lippard et al., 2017). Teacher-student

relationships, when viewed as positive by the student, contribute to a student's overall academic and social growth; however, when viewed as negative the relationship has the potential to negatively impact student efforts and motivation. As the relationship between students and teachers strengthen, patterns of negative behaviors decrease while motivation increases (Decker et al., 2007; Fredricks et al., 2019; Spilt et al., 2012). "When students have positive relationships with teachers, they internalize the academic values and expectations appreciated by those teachers" (Lee, 2012, p. 337). The characteristics of teacher-student relationship as well as the perception of care, investment, and respect students received from the relationship are indicators of student engagement and motivation.

Understanding the rationale and implications for learning associated with relationship building is foundational in training teachers on how to appropriately foster high-quality relationships. Research suggests that students who have meaningful and positive relationships with teachers as characterized by the level of closeness, dependability, and low conflict demonstrate higher performance and increased outcomes in learning (Ansari et al., 2020, Howes, 2000; Lippard et al., 2017). Lee (2012) reinforces the role of the teacher in all aspects of learning as his findings indicate emotional engagement and motivation are connected to teacher-student relationships. A sense of belonging and security are associated with teacher support and a positive school community (Jensen, 2016; Lee, 2012; Spilt et al., 2012). When teachers form authentic, positive, caring relationships with students, even the most at-risk students are able to form a reciprocal caring connection (Baker, 1999, Caleon & Wui, 2018; Decker et al., 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hughes et al., 2012). Teachers that are invested beyond a student's academic needs will have stronger and more meaningful relationships with students.

There has been a clear shift in analyzing the role of the teacher-student relationship in the

comprehensive success of students. The teacher must be more than a provider of instructional knowledge. “Supportive and genuine relationships are essential in creating a positive school climate, reducing problem behaviors, and lessening racial discipline gaps” (Anyon et al., 2018, p.222). Positive teacher-student relationships are a non-negotiable component in student and teacher success. Study after study reinforces the need to cultivate and maintain meaningful, positive, and caring relationships between students and teachers, as they are necessary for academic and social growth.

When negative relationships exist between students and teachers there is a notable increase in disengagement, behavioral issues, low sense of belonging, increased disconnection, and lower self-regulating behaviors (Decker et al., 2007; Fredricks et al., 2019; Frisby et al., 2020; Scales et al., 2020). Research has shown that positive classroom environments are directly impacted by the teacher-student relationship, are also associated with increased academics, increased investment, and a more positive school climate (Baker, 1999; Lee, 2012)

Student engagement and investment is a strong predictor of student success (Jensen, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lee, 2012). Student engagement and motivation is deeply dependent on the relationship’s students have with teachers (Klem & Connell, 2004). When engagement and motivation are lacking, the adverse side effects include lower academic growth, less investment in school, and a feeling of exclusion. Student autonomy in the learning process will not only strengthen the teacher-student relationship, but will also provide the student with the opportunity to make decisions, own consequences, and respect the decision-making process. The students who perceive their teacher as someone who creates a caring, structured, fair, and individualized learning environment with opportunities for autonomy, high-standards, and support are far more likely to be engaged in the learning (Jensen, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004).

Not only does the teacher-student relationship influence a student's motivation and interpersonal characteristics, but teacher-student relationships are linked to academic growth and willingness to engage in class. "Relationships strongly predict motivation, relationships predict grades, and motivation predicate grades. The reason student-teacher relationships work to produce better grades is because they more directly contribute to better motivation, and it is the motivation that more proximally contributes to grades" (Scales et al., 2020, p. 666). The positive outcomes associated with teacher-student relationships are both cyclical and spiraling in that one positive side-effect of a relationship ignites another which in turn strengthens the first (Scales et al., 2020). The action and reaction are equally important in a teacher-student relationship. Typically, both teachers and students desire to have an impactful and positive relationship, however there is a need for teacher training with a target focus on teachers of at-risk students and how to best connect to students on an individual and meaningful level (Decker et al., 2007).

An influential and significant part of a student's daily experiences in school are a function of their psychological membership to the learning environment, more simply known as their sense of belongingness. This sense of belongingness is cultivated through the quality of the relationships perceived by the student with both peers and teachers (Sparks, 2019). Having meaningful, loving, caring, and mutually beneficial relationships is a human need that must be fulfilled to reach a self-actualized state (Maslow, 1943). Human beings are neurologically hardwired to make meaningful connections (Jensen, 2016). Teachers are in a position to develop the needed high-quality relationships students require for growth. A positive teacher-student relationship enhances students' sense of belonging and creates security; it increases students' willingness to engage and develop an awareness of mutual respect (Jensen, 2016).

Teachers have the opportunity to be the positive constant many children need. "Students

spend more than 1000 hours with their teacher in a typical school year. That's enough time to build a relationship that could ignite a student's lifetime love of learning- and it's enough for the dynamic to go totally off the rails" (Sparks, 2019, p.1) Teacher-student relationships are foundational in providing care, satisfying student needs, and creating an environment in which every student feels a sense of connectivity to the teacher and the learning. High-quality teacher relationships are connected to a more positive student self-image, higher engagement, increased motivation, lower behavioral issues, a sense of belonging, and academic growth (Baker, 1999; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Lee, 2012; Pianta et al., 2003; Spilt et al., 2012). "Students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school. In turn, high levels of engagement are associated with higher attendance and test scores, variables that strongly predict whether youth will successfully complete school and ultimately pursue post-secondary education and achieve economic self-sufficiency" (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 270).

Teachers that neglect to prioritize fostering and developing strong relationships with students based on caring, connection, positive interaction, and personal investment are missing the key ingredient needed for academic and social success in students. Teachers should be committed to understanding student backgrounds, allow for some academic freedoms, and develop a sense of community within the classroom to demonstrate connectivity and belonging (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Understanding the perceived expectations of teacher-student relationships from a parental lens and the parental described attributes of high-quality teacher-student relationships in an urban school has been further explored throughout this research study. It was important to gain insight on parent views and expectations for high-quality relationships, which could shed light on the parents' perspectives related to characteristics and expectations of

high-quality teacher-student relationships.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to gain insight on the expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives of parents (primary guardians/caregivers) of urban elementary students. The need to further investigate the topic of teacher-student relationships through the parental lens is central in understanding elements which contribute to student success such as: autonomy, student academic growth, care, satisfaction of basic needs, a sense of belonging, reciprocal relationships, and emotional connections (Booker, 2021; Frisby et al., 2020; Yang & Anyon, 2016). This chapter reviews the methodology of the qualitative, phenomenological focus group study which aimed to describe the characteristics and expectations of positive teacher-student relationships as interpreted through the perspectives and lived experiences of urban elementary parents. The purpose of the study was to explore parental perspectives of high-quality teacher-student relationships in an urban setting aiming to conceptualize the characteristics and descriptions of those relationships. The lived experiences, backgrounds, and personal interpretations of events described by participants were essential in investigating the expectations and characteristics of urban parents in this study. Understanding the elements of a teacher-student relationship that are important to parents in an urban setting is a powerful tool to support urban students and educators.

Phenomenological researchers intend to view and inquire about the experience of others considering *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019). Understanding all elements that contribute to a meaningful teacher-student relationship, including parental insights, can be used to aid in the academic and social advancement of

students (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Trust, 2021). The significance of the study was in the commitment to investigating the teacher-student relationship through a holistic and comprehensive lens, based upon the lived experiences of parental figures of urban students.

The central research questions included investigating how urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics and their expectations of high-quality teacher- student relationships. Additional secondary inquiries included exploring the parental perspective of the role a meaningful teacher-student relationship has on student success, gaining insight on the personal and lived experiences of parents, and identifying positive and negative characteristics of teacher-student relationships. The researcher designed the following research questions to capture the lived experiences of parents of current urban elementary students in Northeastern Ohio.

Central research questions were:

1. How do urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships?
2. How do urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

The following secondary questions were designed to support the study's overarching research questions:

1. From parents or caregivers' perspectives, which teacher attributes are associated with high-quality teacher-student relationships?

2. How have the personal experiences of parental figures affected their expectations of teacher-student relationships?
3. What role does the teacher-student relationship contribute to urban elementary students' overall academic performance?
4. How do (urban) parents define the role of positive teacher-student relationships in the social outcomes of students?
5. How do (urban) parents define the role of positive teacher-student relationships in the academic outcomes of students?
6. What impact do (urban) parents associate with negative teacher-student relationships in the social and academic outcomes of students?
7. What are the characteristics of positive and meaningful relationships between teacher and students?

The secondary questions assisted the researcher in gathering information to further investigate the overarching research questions. The research questions were designed to capture the lived experiences using the personal insight of parents of current urban elementary students through small, semi-structured focus groups. This chapter includes an outline of the participants, the researcher's role, the process and analysis of data collection, and the identification of limitations and ethical considerations throughout the study.

Research Method

The researcher used qualitative, phenomenological methods to describe parental perspectives of the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Exploring the lived experiences and insights of urban parents contributed to capturing a deeper understanding of the phenomena being investigated. Qualitative research is intended to investigate something or someone in a systematic manner that aids in the connection of meaning and understanding to human interpretations or experiences on a specific topic or study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative case studies delve deep into investigating the complexities of a phenomenon, often offering information that would not be attainable in a quantitative study (Marjan, 2017; Stead et al., 2011).

The application of a qualitative methodology is most appropriate to support the research goals because qualitative methodologies analyze the whys and hows of lived experiences and investigate the human behaviors associated with research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Additionally, the utilization of a qualitative case study design compliments the intended research because individuals will be examined in their natural setting, the researcher will be the primary research instrument, and inductive and deductive logic will contribute to the building themes necessary to provide a holistic account of the phenomenon explored in the study (Creswell, 2017). Outcomes of the study were based on a systematic analysis that organized parental feedback into categorical key findings, then into essential themes. Synthesizing the essential themes resulted in the development of important takeaways and actionable future steps.

The themes are based on narrative transcriptions and written data which were used to describe the participants' lived experiences. One of several noted optimal outcomes of utilizing a qualitative study is the opportunity to provide a voice for the participants in marginalized contexts and from less driven, preconceived research theories and literature (Stead et al., 2011). Through exploring the lived experiences of parents with students in an urban school setting the researcher identified thematic descriptions and characteristics of teacher-student relational needs.

Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research focused on learning from the lived experiences of others. Within a phenomenological study the researcher often seeks to describe or interpret the essence of a phenomenon through the intimate exploration of the perspective of others (Neubauer et al., 2019). Relevant to this study, a phenomenological approach allowed me to gain knowledge from the experiences and interpretations of events from the perspective of others, and apply that newly obtained knowledge to understanding how others construct their reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). The use of a phenomenological approach and the intentional design of open-ended interview questions allowed me to explore the participants' interpretations of experiences seeking to understand the essence of individual and shared life events contributing to a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2019).

The use of a (descriptive) phenomenological research approach was applicable due to the potential for researcher bias and need for neutrality in viewing the study findings (Moustaka, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenology is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the lived experiences of participants (Moustaka, 1994). The researcher sought to understand paternal perspectives, expectations, and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships from a less considered stance; that of the parents. In

the descriptive, phenomenological approach, the researcher engaged in the epoché or bracketing process which will allow for researcher reflection and transparency; in essence intentionally abstaining from the convolution that personal beliefs may carry when exploring the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019; Social Research Glossary, 2022). The practice of epoché is seldomly completed flawlessly, it is however, a useful practice intended to create a clear and fresh perspective on data by drawing an awareness to the need to set aside or reduce the impact of the researcher's own experiences, assuming the position of a tabula rasa or blank slate when exploring the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In explicit attempts of gathering valid and reliable findings, the researcher engaged in personal reflection prior to the start of the research, during the data collection process, and also when analyzing the outcomes of the study in an effort to set aside personal judgments and life experiences which may interfere with the study. The process of bracketing included the following strategies; the use of reflective journal thought in which the researcher wrote down (memoing) thoughts, perceptions, and experiences that may affect the research process; re-examining personal positions through the research process, and preparing an interview guide consisting of a range of guided questions when clarification or further discussion is needed (Chan et al., 2013).

The researcher, through a semi- structured, narrative, focus-group interview approach, captured the essence of parental perceptions, memories, associations, and lived experiences, their expectations and desired characteristics of teacher-student relationships. (Limpaecher, 2022). The researcher conducted three small group interviews with four to seven parents in each interview. The focus group interviews were on-site at the school, each lasting approximately sixty to ninety minutes. A total sample size of 16 parents participated in the case study. An analysis of participant responses from each interview was used to categorize responses into

themes used to further describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Data saturation methods will be applied in the data reduction process. Beyond the initial planned focus group interviews, data collection ceased once redundancy in the themes indicated a satisfactory point of saturation was reached. The researcher analyzed the key findings, and the captured themes. Data was coded and compared to the current literature presented on teacher and student relationships. This method of comparison of themes allows the researcher to identify similarities and differences based on participants' perspective and lived experiences.

Participants, Location, and Sample Details

The target population for the study was parents or parental figures (which included primary caregivers/guardians) that have a child currently at the identified research site, which was one urban elementary school in Northeastern Ohio. All participants in the study had at least one school-aged child in grades kindergarten through second grade in an identified high-need, urban school system in Northeastern Ohio. It was essential that all participants experience the phenomenon being studied and independently contribute to the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2017). The research was conducted at a single location, one K-3 elementary school in Northern Ohio which has roughly 215 students in grades kindergarten through second grade. The student demographics of the school are as follows: 70% African American, 6% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, and 15% Multi-Racial. Seventy-nine percent of students are receiving the government funded free or reduced lunch programs. The school is considered a high-needs school located in a high-crime, high-poverty community. Many students in the school are considered underserved or at-risk, academically and financially.

The participants for the study were identified using both purposeful criterion sampling in conjunction with voluntary response sample. The sample selection was purposeful in nature because the researcher has put in place explicit predetermined criteria in which the participants must meet to gain detailed knowledge about the essence of the phenomenon in study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Purposeful criterion sampling is widely used in qualitative phenomenological studies to assure the phenomenon being studied can be supported with information-rich responses by the selection of relevant participants. This style of sampling is used to maximize the potential information gathered from participants in an effective manner when resources may be limited or sample sizes are small (Moran, 2021; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). The criterion for participants was clearly presented and purposeful. Each participant in the study must have had shared characteristics including; (a) be the primary caregiver for a school-aged child in kindergarten through second grade, (b) the child must currently be enrolled in the urban school site used for the study during the time of the research and (c), the participants must be comfortable sharing their lived experiences through oral responses in a small focus group setting. There was consideration for the total needed sample size to gain information-rich data when using purposeful sampling, making this style applicable for the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).

The researcher also used voluntary response sampling as a concurrent sampling method, implementing it alongside purposeful criterion sampling. The use of voluntary response sampling is fit because the researcher will send out a survey to all participants meeting the purposeful criterion sampling requesting participation in the study. A hard-copy request for participants was sent home with every child in kindergarten through second grade to be shared with their parents. The method of using a hard-copy, tangible form over email or electronic forms was done in

alignment to the suggested needs of the parents by the school principal. The principal informed the researcher that several homes lacked consistent and reliable internet and the best recommended mode for communication would be by sending a form home with the school-aged child.

Based on voluntary responses, the participants for the study were selected. The researcher intends to conduct three small focus group interviews with three to five parents in each interview. A total projected sample of 16 participants was used. The sample size satisfactorily served the needs and intention of the study. Since the outlined methods for recruiting participants in the study did not produce adequate responses, a snowball sampling method was then be used. This was a planned alternative option, and utilized as need be. The method snowball, purposeful chain sampling is often introduced when key participants who met the study criteria are used to assist in referring other participants to increase the sample size of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Snowball sampling is also used when the population needed for a study is difficult to recruit or when limited participants have responded (McCombes, 2022; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).

Role of Researcher

An awareness of the personal connections a researcher has to the research topic is imperative in understanding the scope, method of inquiry, and design of a study, as well as the interpretation and presentation of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For this study the researcher was positioned as an insider. It is vital to the research process that the researcher understands the phenomenon of interest from the perspective of the participants, as opposed to interference from personal experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher was

positioned to view the research from the emic or insider perspective. Triangulation of data strengthened the research findings and increased the validity and reliability of results.

The researcher was the primary data collection instrument in the study, and responsible for preparing, collecting, and analyzing the data in the study. The researcher developed the scripted interview questions (Appendix D) used in the focus groups and facilitated the interview process allowing for scripted and off script questions. The researcher was directly involved in the data collection process and in the coding and analysis of the research findings. The researcher was responsible for engaging in the epoché process, which called for identifying and reflecting on preconceived notions of the research, and recognizing personal biases and prejudgments (Moustakas, 1994). This process acts as a safeguard to minimize the potential for bias in the research.

The researcher acted transparently, bracketing out personal biases before, during, and after the study to focus on the stories, experiences, and perspectives of participants throughout each focus group. As noted, the bracketing process included the researcher keeping a spiraling reflection journal of personal judgments, assumptions, and perspectives, memoing and written reflection. Consideration of the stance of the researcher and the professional background of the researcher will be included in the reflections. Because of the nature of the study, the researcher's familiarity with urban teaching, a deep understanding of the community, and positions held in K-12 and higher education, it is imperative that the potential for implicit researcher bias be acknowledged and minimized as much as possible. The researcher selected a site for the study in which she holds affiliation or outside interaction with any of the participants. There are no pre-existing conflicts of interest pertaining to any school administrators, teachers, students, or parents. While biases stem from identity and experiences, and will never be fully removed, the

researcher made explicit attempts throughout the researcher design, data collection process, and data analysis to act with neutrality and include safeguards in securing data, ensuring confidentiality, and transparency. Details of the safeguarding methods are further explained in the data collection subsection of this chapter.

Data Collection

The triangulation of data is important because utilizing triangulation enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings. This research study employs the triangulation of data evidenced in recording, transcribing, and interpreting data. Triangulation of data across all three focus groups and across all data collection sources will also increase data reliability. The methods for gathering data are through small, semi-structured in-person focus group interviews, including scripted and open-ended questions, and opportunities for participants to share experiences or elaborate on personal connections contributing to the interview questions. The interview questions supported the initial research questions and aimed to capture the essence of urban parent insights on expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships. The researcher sought to understand the phenomena through the unique and shared lived experiences of participants.

The sample in the case study consisted of 16 total parent participants, each with current urban elementary students in grades K-2. All participants met the noted criteria for the study. Participants were provided the informed consent form prior to the study. The researcher obtained a signed informed connect form for each participant prior to conducting focus group interviews. The informed consent template is found in Appendix C. The informed consent forms were printed on brightly colored paper and sealed in an envelope addressed to the parents or guardians of the child. An additional envelope was included for the parents to enclose the completed form

in and return to school with their child. Several potential dates and times were listed to assist in scheduling the focus group interviews on the availability of the potential participants.

Additionally, the researcher obtained permission to address the parents at a school-wide parent-teacher conference event in December. The researcher was granted five minutes to address the parents attending the event as a means to explain the study and recruit an applicable sample. The time was spent reviewing the purpose of the study, the collection and use of retrieved data, and formally requesting participants for the study. Informed consent forms were available for parents to review during that time.

The researcher was fully embedded in the data extraction process; focused on asking, watching, and reviewing the interviews with a structured and purposeful goal (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interviewing is necessary when research relies on the feelings, interpretations, and interactions of the sample and the explored phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Audio recording of the interviews will occur which will be later transcribed with assistance from a transcription software program. Written notes on elements of the interview that are unable to be captured through the audio records of the interviews will be completed in real-time by the researcher. The notes included comments on the participants nonverbal body language such as, facial expression, wait time, or tone and emotion associated with comments. The researcher was the primary instrument in the case study and developed and facilitated all three focus group interviews. The full interview guide form containing questions and interview protocol can be found in Appendix F.

The study implemented a semi-structured format for each of the three small focus groups. The method of using semi-structured interview questions was intentional to gain flexibility in the scope of learned information, to avoid predetermined or structured order or questions, and to use

the interview guide as a means to mix structured and less structured questions and discussion prompts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher was the interviewer and monitor of each focus group. An interview guide will consist of researcher-developed questions aligned to the purpose of the research. To ensure participant understanding of the interview process a scripted introduction and interview norms was developed (Appendix F) and will be read at the start of each focus group.

An interview guide was utilized by the interview in each focus group. The interview guide included a variety of initial open-ended questions, follow up questions, prompts, hypothetical scenarios, and discussion points to best capture the essence of each participant's experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Prior to the interviews with participants, a practice interview with a panel of experiences in the field took place. Panel experts included a principal, district administrator, teacher, and parent liaison. The purpose of the proactive interview was to gain insight on the relevance, clarity, and delivery of the questions. Adjustments and modifications were considered to the questioning and format based on the feedback from the experts in the practice interview. According to Roulston, (2021), qualitative interviewers present a question, and realize that an answer may not always be forthcoming or the answer provided may not align to the exact question posed. However, the response or conversation which may stem from a posed question may yield important information in understanding the essence of the phenomenon. Because of this, the researcher was flexible, redirected when necessary with prompting or probing, and allowed the interviewees to share information they feel is relevant to the topic. The interview guide was intentionally developed by the researcher to distract relevant data aligned to the research questions and themes identified in the literature review presented in chapter two. The interview guide provides the researcher a set of common, aligned, and

purposeful topics and questions for the interviewees to respond to and discuss. However, the guide is not an exact prescription, meaning that there is room for probes, follow up questions, and requests for stories or details that may not be listed on the interview guide (Roulston, 2013). An example of the type of questions and discussion points is found in Figure 2. The complete interview guide can be viewed in Appendix F.

Figure 2

Example Questions Found on the Interview guide (Abbreviated from the Used Guide)

Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Guide:

Review basic terms that appear in the questions or prompts:

- Teacher-student relationships
- Meaningful relationships, high-quality teacher-student relationships
- Characteristics
- Experiences
- Safety
- Belongingness/ community
- Autonomy
- Engagement

Information Questions:

1. How do you define an urban school?
2. In your opinion, what are some challenges urban students may be facing? Why?
3. How can those challenges be supported in the classroom by the teacher?

Do you think the relationship a teacher has with a student can change the student? In what ways?

4. How would you define student success?
To what extent are teacher-student relationships responsible for student success?
5. Reflecting on your childhood, how did you feel about school?
What were your relationships like with teachers?
Were they mostly negative or positive? Why?
6. Think about an elementary teacher that impacted you. In what ways did they impact you? Why?
Describe the memorable characteristics of that teacher.
How did you respond to that teacher? Why? What elements of your relationship with that teacher are valuable? In essence, how did that teacher make you feel?

Data Analysis

Phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to state his or her assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation, and then bracket or suspend these preconceptions in order to fully understand the experience of the subjects without imposing a prior hypothesis on the interpretation of an experience (Creswell, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), data analysis in phenomenological studies include: collecting, reviewing, questioning, and scrutinizing data to gain a deeper insight on the meaning, experiences, and connection to circumstances. The data analysis process included the following steps in a systematic and explicit manner: reviewing interview transcripts from parental focus groups, reviewing and reflecting on my notes, making annotations and connection to meaning, identifying units of data through coding, clustering data into categories or themes, revisiting each theme as additional units of data are added to the findings, constructing textual descriptions of the transcripts and written notes, and interpreting and applying the findings to construct the essence and experiences contributing to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Precautionary steps in the data analysis process required the researcher to remain open-minded and exercise flexibility, welcoming to the emergence of new themes. Equally as important was the researcher's awareness of coding themes and exporting the themes though data compartmentalization in categories as a fluid process.

Themes that were projected to emerge in the data analysis process, based on the literature review, included teacher-student relationships benefiting the overall wellbeing of students including both academic growth and social-emotional growth. Additional themes expected to emerge during the analysis of parental expectation and characteristics of teacher-student relationships in an urban elementary setting based on a constructed a priori list included:

a sense of belongingness for the student, autonomy, communication about expectations, investment beyond academic content, safety and comfort, personal connection, and a deep sense of being cared for and cared about. Data was rigorously reviewed and dissected until data saturation had been satisfactorily met. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and consistently throughout the research.

The study involved data analysis measures which relied on inductive and comparative approaches to viewing data. The constant comparative method for analysis was also applied. The constant comparative method first presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and later summarized by Merriam and Tisdell (2015), is defined as a method of analysis that produces grounded generalizations related to a broader level of data abstraction. The analytical constant comparative approach requires the researcher to inductively view new data and compare and contrast it with previous known data, working to compartmentalize each unit into a strategic and systemic puzzle (DePoy & Gitlin, 2015). This process was continuous and spiraling until each piece was assigned to a theme or identified as an outlier, and until data saturation had occurred. As new patterns emerged from the findings they were coded and placed into an appropriate existing category or a new category was created. After the construction of key findings, the emergence of themes by carefully and appropriately coding the transcriptions and interview notes was intentional and explicitly conducted. This method of analysis is most appropriate when attempting to capture the essence of a phenomenon, when human accounts or experiences are instrumental in the data collection, and when the researcher is seeking to develop a theory involving social data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Based on the descriptive indicators, the implementation of a constant comparative method was most appropriate in this study.

The constant comparative analytical process involves a cyclical process of breaking the raw data apart through comparing, conceptualization, coding, and categorizing, and then putting the data back together as relationships appear between coded units to form similarities and differences which will contribute to the larger emergence of themes (DePoy & Gitlin, 2015). As Creswell (2013) notes, the analysis process beginnings are often large in scope with the numerous themes emerging in the initial extraction; however, as inductive and deductive measures are applied the researcher should aim to narrow or reduce the categories in a plausible, conceptual, and dependable way. The data analysis process was intended to be fluid and was constructed to allow for flexibility as new or unrecognized themes emerged.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Ensuring validity, reliability, and trustworthiness in qualitative research findings relies on the detailed rigor in research practices and ethical guidelines put in place throughout the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher was aware that the authenticity, rigor and trustworthiness are a result of careful, intentional research design, adhering to personal ethical standards, and applying the accepted practices of the larger scientific community to experimental study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Rigor, reliability, and validity are correlated to the presence and interaction of the researcher with the subjects (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher followed a constructed interview guide to ensure the basic premise of each focus group will follow the same format.

To allow participants to share beyond the preconstructed interview guide questions, semi-structured, open-ended, and follow up discussions will also be included in each interview. Participants were encouraged to request clarification and restatement of questions. The

researcher allowed the participants to speak openly, encouraging the ongoing flow of conversation and sharing of personal experiences as one way to ensure validity. Validity is relative, and should be considered within the purpose, fluidity, and circumstances of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This is especially important when conducting a qualitative phenomenological study. Honoring and respecting each participant's response as a construct of their personal reality and individual truth will provide trust and relevance in exploring the lived experiences of each participant. Member checks will occur throughout the study, seeking response clarity and accurate repetition of data from participants. Constructing valid representation of the participants' responses and how they view their reality will be prioritized when disseminating the data. The researcher ensured that adequate engagement in the data collection process occurred to effectively and accurately represent how each participant understood the studied phenomenon of describing characteristics and expectations of teacher-student relationships.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the data, measures to promote validity and reliability were put in place throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Several safeguards were in place to increase data animality, security, and authenticity in each phase of the study. The researcher engaged in the epoché process of bracketing and personal reflection throughout the study. Bracketing allowed the researcher to identify and reflect on preconceptions and prior personal experiences that may impede the lens of clarity when collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data (Chan et al., 2015). Bracketing is advantageous in qualitative phenomenological study because it contributes to the researcher's measures of validation and transparency. If the researcher is unaware of their own preconceptions and beliefs, it is impossible for them to put these issues aside and view outcomes in a transparent way (Chan et

al., 2105). Therefore, the ability to be aware of one's own values, interests, perceptions and thoughts becomes a necessary prerequisite, causing the researcher to intentionally set aside judgments and notions that influence the research process and data analysis.

Capturing the data in an authentic manner will contribute to the trustworthiness of findings. Researchers are responsible for employing multiple methods of validation techniques within a study as evidence that all precautionary safeguards were addressed to strengthen the findings of the study (Creswell, 2017). When applicable, the researcher used direct quotes from participants to ensure an accurate quintessence of meaning was captured. As noted, data was thematically and descriptively coded and the researcher extracted emergent themes until the point of data saturation occurs, ensuring that all data was reviewed until adequate redundancy could be met. The initial and emergent themes were well-supported by data and further ensured the validity of the themes. Rigor and trustworthiness of data is evidenced in the researcher's multidimensional approaches to collect and analyze data accurately which includes; taking field notes during the interview process, recording the interviews, transcribing the interviews, coding the data, analyzing transcriptions, identifying themes, seeking data saturation, and triangulation of data.

The researcher conducted a pilot study with a panel of educational experts (i.e., teachers, administrators, principal, parent liaisons) prior to the scheduled semi-structured focus groups. The implementation of a pilot interview allowed for the researcher to gain expert insight on the development of interview questions, allocated time for interviews, need for follow up prompts and suggestions on the format of the interviews. Feedback from the pilot interview was considered and the researcher made the necessary adjustments to the questions, format, and expectations, further aiding in the effectiveness and intentionality of the interviews. The

researcher applied theory and rationale to support the methodologies and practices used in the study's conceptualization, data collection, analyzation, and interpretation. Validity of the study was further supported through the connection of implemented practice to theory and the justification of the research methodology.

Ethical Considerations, Limitations and Delimitations

The qualitative phenomenological research approach applied in this study involved the intimate study of human subjects and their perception of lived experiences describing the essence of characteristics and descriptions of meaningful teacher-student relationships. Seeking to understand the participants' ontological and epistemological insights was pivotal in the authenticity of the study; therefore, several ethical considerations and safeguards were put in place to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Because qualitative researchers encounter ethical issues during the data collection, analysis, aggregation, and dissemination of their study, developing and adhering to ethical standards is essential (Creswell, 2017). The role and responsibility of the researcher involves protecting the study participants from negative consequences and unnecessary harm, maintaining their privacy and confidentiality, and communicating in a transparent and clear manner to mitigate the potential for negative ethical or social ramifications.

Approval from Youngstown State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), as well as formal approval from the school site used in the study, was obtained prior to the start of any data collection (Appendix A). The IRB acts as a neutral authority to ensure ethical regulations are met and the study design is designed in a way that protects the welfare, rights, privacy, and safety of human subjects (Grady, 2015). Participants used in the study were provided detailed informed consent forms which clearly outlined the purpose of the study, the role of the

participant, the format of the interview, the data collection measures, and the intended use of the retrieved data. Written consent to participate and confirmation of understanding of the study was provided by each participant to the researcher prior to the start of the study. The informed consent forms stated that the participants are willingly volunteering for the study and may withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences (Appendix C). No coercion or pressure was used to gain subject participation. Participants were offered a \$15 gift card to an area grocery store as an expression of gratitude for their time, investment, and contributions to the study. This was noted in the informed consent form and approved by the school administrators, and the IRB committee.

As a means to acknowledge the preconceived notions and biases of the researcher, the method of bracketing occurred throughout the study. Bracketing (or epoché) is used in qualitative phenomenological studies as a means to ethically address preconceptions that may impact the researcher's clarity, contaminating the interpretation of data and impacting the research outcomes (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher was a former educator in an urban district in the general demographical area in which the study occurred, therefore to minimize the impact of bias and a conflict of interest it was ensured that the participants did not have any relationship with the researcher prior to the interview. The researcher did not work at the site in which the participants had children attending school and was not connected to the school's culture or climate, socially or professionally, prior to the study. The practice of spiraling and ongoing bracketing put in place a safeguards for the researcher to address data in a presuppositional way, acknowledging personal conceptions, connections, and the impact of interference when personal judgments are not intentionally addressed. Bracketing increases the credibility, validity, and ethical practices of the researcher and mitigates personal interferences in data interpretations.

Confidentiality of participants, any potential negative outcomes connected to a data breach, and data security procedures were also outlined in the informed consent form and were restated orally, prior to the start of each focus group interview. The researcher obtained signed informed consent forms for each participant prior to the start of the study and reviewed the forms in real time on the day of each focus group interview (Appendix C). The risks to participants, very minimal. However, participants were made aware of any known risks associated with the study and potential uses and beneficiaries of the data (Creswell, 2017). If the participant's identification was to become compromised throughout the study or thereafter, negative impacts may include short-term negative social judgments and the potential for personal emotional/mental distress. The researcher was intentionally mindful of signs of distress or unwillingness to continue from participants during the interview process, acknowledging that deep and personal inquiry may highlight previous traumatic or stressful experiences. There were no foreseeable long-term negative impacts or exposures to human harm as an outcome of participating in the study.

Because of the safeguards in place for handling data in a sensitive and secure manner, the likelihood for a data breach or individual harm was greatly minimized. Safeguards included locking interview data in a secure location, password protecting electronic data, coding data using a letter and number system, reporting findings in an unidentifiable manner, and responsibly destroying sensitive data after the federal regulated period for research of three years has concluded (Office of Research Integrity, n.d.). The data retrieved from the interviews was only accessible by me (the researcher). Coded transcription data and notetaking was shared with all participants after the transcription process as completed in an effort to member check for accuracy and increase data validity and reliability. Evidence of member checking through an

email to each participant is found in Appendix G. The interview process was practiced and piloted with a panel of educators prior to the study in an attempt to get feedback and develop questions that were relevant, clear, and applicable to the purpose of the study. The use of pseudonyms for participants supported the anonymity and confidentiality of the subjects in the study. The focus groups were referred to as interview group A, B, or C, and participants were identified with a number and a letter (e.g., 1A, 3C). Data coding was used in the data reporting and dissemination process. The researcher was mindful and intentional in conducting the research with honesty and transparency, adhering to the expectations of the IRB committee, and seeking guidance from the appointed dissertation committee to further ensure ethical and reliable outcomes.

Summary

As more is learned about the expectations, characteristics, and traits associated with high quality teacher-student relationships through the perspective of urban parents, a better understanding of effective strategies and skills needed to promote student success, meaningful caring relationships, and individual growth may arise. The phenomenon of exploring teacher-student relationships in an urban setting through the lens of parents will allow for the lived experiences and personal connections to be considered. In all aspects of student success, teacher-student relationships matter, the more that is learned about all aspects and expectations of the teacher-student relationship the better. Teacher-student relationships are a clear influencer in students' school engagement, academic achievement, and social growth (Fredricks et al., 2019; Jensen, 2016; Lee, 2012; Longobardi et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2011; Scales et al., 2020).

The purpose of the study was to investigate how urban elementary school parents describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality and meaningful teacher-student

relationships. This was achieved by the implementation of a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study in which small, semi-structured focus groups of parents were interviewed on their perceptions and perspectives of teacher-student relationships. From the lived experiences of parents and their perspectives, the researcher intended to define and describe the elements of teacher-student relationships that mattered most to parents. Data collection and plan for analysis was appropriately aligned to the needs of the research questions and the implemented methodology.

This chapter provided a description and rationale for the application of a qualitative phenomenological study. Justification of the methodology was explained. The chapter also described the study design, sample selection process, criteria for participants, the role of the researcher, data collection methods, and the data analysis process. The detailed applications of ethical safeguards and exercised assurances of data credibility in the study by implementing bracketing, informed consent forms, locking and coding data, seeking expert feedback on the interview format and questions, applying the constant comparative approach to data, and triangulating data collection methods are presented within this chapter.

A phenomenological study relies on the transparency and contributions of participants to gain deeper insights on how experiences are interpreted (Moustakas, 1994). Limitations using this method of data collection may have included the participants' reliability and willingness to engage in descriptive, transparent, and open discussions involving personal expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Limitations are the constraints based on the methodology and design of the study which are typically out of the researchers control and connected to the methodological design of the study (Theofanidis et al., 2019). The study was largely dependent on each participant's personality, individual life experiences,

interpretation of events, and interactions that have occurred with their child's teachers in elementary school. The study was limited to small focus group interviews confined to particular time length of approximately one hour, causing limits of time-constraint for data collection, and limiting how much data could be collected during that time period for each participant. Because the study was qualitative in design, it could not be retested or replicated in its entirety due to independent variables contributing to outcomes. Therefore, a limitation was testing for reliability through replication.

Delimitations and the scope of the study should also be recognized. Delimitations are the choices made by the researcher which present boundaries within the scope of the research (Theofanidis et al., 2019). Delimitations in the study included the inability to make broad generalizations of the results based on the individual nature of participants' lived experiences and the data being retrieved from one singular site with a narrow focus on parents of urban kindergarten through second-graders in a particular region of the state. The study was delineated by the small sample size, the criteria put in place for participants, the location, days and times of interviews, and the format of the interview. The study was focused on parents with students in a high-need urban school. As an educator previously in urban education, the researcher was familiar with urban education and the potential impact of student-teacher relationships and chose to interview parents with children in one particular urban elementary school. This decision may not allow for larger insights on urban parent perspectives or for the application of data beyond the parameters of the study. Exploring the essence of personal and shared visions, expectations, experiences, and interpretations of individual events is largely connected to the unique background of each participant and presents limitations and delimitations associated with qualitative phenomenological methods of research (Marjan, 2017). As with all phenomenological

studies, the results of the study and the interpretations associated with the interaction among participants are not generalizable beyond this point in time and this sample group.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the findings of the qualitative phenomenological case study conducted through semi-structured focus group interviews. A qualitative, phenomenological research method approach was implemented to investigate parental perspectives of the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Conversational and open interviews are a method of research likely to present opportunity for authenticity, transparency, and a flow of heuristic exploration of the lives of others (Moustaka, 1994). According to Creswell (2017), focus group interviews provide a degree of depth and detail which is not often accomplished through individual interviews. Through semi-structured small focus groups, an exploration of the lived experiences and insight of parents of current urban elementary students in Northeastern Ohio occurred. The in-depth qualitative descriptive phenomenological study, aimed to answer the following research questions which were presented in Chapter 1:

Research Question 1:

1. How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

Research Question 2:

2. How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

Full insight was accomplished by addressing secondary questions. The researcher designed the following secondary questions to support the study's overarching research questions:

1. From parents or caregivers' perspectives, which teacher attributes are associated with high-quality teacher-student relationships?
2. How have the personal experiences of parental figures affected their expectations of teacher-student relationships?
3. What role does the teacher-student relationship contribute to urban elementary students' overall academic performance?
4. How do parents define the role of positive teacher-student relationships in the social outcomes of students?
5. How do parents define the role of positive teacher-student relationships in the academic outcomes of students?
6. What impact do parents associate with negative teacher-student relationships in the social and academic outcomes of students?
7. What are the characteristics of positive and meaningful relationships between teacher and students?

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand how urban parents described the characteristics of and expectations for high-quality teacher-student relationships. This chapter includes a presentation of the analyzed data culminating in the findings and development of themes through the coding of interview transcripts and categorical findings. The intent of this chapter is to demonstrate how the collected data supported the initial categories and the emergence of themes.

Description of the Sample

A review of the sample population and descriptive statistics of the sample is included here to provide further insights on the background, relevance, and connection of each participant to the inquiry of the study. The sample included 16 total parents, each having a child in grade kindergarten through second in an urban school setting. Purposeful criterion sampling was used in conjunction with voluntary response sampling and snowball sampling to gain participants. The study focused on the perspectives of parents with a current child in kindergarten through second grade in one urban school in Northeastern Ohio. Because a less than anticipated sample size was initially obtained when recruiting participants for the study, participants who committed to the study were asked to contact others that fit the criterion needed for participation to gain additional participants. The sample population was purposeful in nature because there were explicit predetermined criteria for participation in place to gain detailed knowledge about the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Prior to the focus group interview a total of 25 participants signed up for the study with an actual sample size of 16 completing the study. A sample size of 16 participants met the projected size of 12-18 participants when planning the study. A twenty percent attrition rate was accounted for and the initial intended sample size was met with 16 participants.

Prior to, and during the data collection and analysis processes, I bracketed personal experiences and thoughts about the phenomenon utilizing Moustakas's (1994) method for qualitative analysis. Results of the study revealed the development of individual, textural and structural description of the data (Moustakas, 1994) from the perspective of parents of urban elementary students in one isolated school setting in Northeastern Ohio. Participants, independently, elected to participate in one of three small focus groups. Each focus group

interview was held on a different date and time to allow for optimal scheduling of participants. All participants completed an informed consent prior to the start of the focus groups. The informed consent form outlined the purpose of the study, data collection process, and the need for participants.

Additionally, each focus group participant completed a written, short answer survey and a close-ended informational form; then each participant participated in a 60-90-minute semi-structured, small group interview in which, I, the researcher, facilitated the sessions and presented guided interview questions and topics. A conversational approach was used in the interview processes to encourage open discussion and contributions of personal experiences. The first focus group included five participants, the second focus group had four participants, and the third focus group had seven participants, which totaled 16 participants in three, separate focus groups. A true sample size of 16 adequately met the initially projected sample size for the study of 12-18 participants. The uneven number of participants in each group was based on the participant's scheduling choice. All three groups had between four to seven participants. Table 2 represents the total participants, codes used to identify each participant, length of each interview, and total pages of transcripts from each interview.

Table 2

Focus Group Statistics

Focus Group	Number of participants	Participant Codes	Length of the interview	Pages of transcripts
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1	5	1A-1E	58 minutes	25 pages
2	4	2A-2D	61 minutes	27 pages
3	7	3A-3G	1 hour 13 minutes	35 pages

Prior to the start of each focus group, participants were asked to complete an informational, written questionnaire form which included several close-ended and open-ended questions. The participants were allotted approximately twenty minutes to complete the form (see Appendix E). Close-ended questions included age, relationship to the child, the grade level of the child, views on personal experiences of schooling, and types of schooling participants received as students. As presented in Table 3, participants ranged in age from 27 to 45 years with a median age of 32.25.

Table 3*Participant Ages*

Variable	N	Age	Frequency	Percentage
Age	16			
		27	1	6.25
		28	4	25.0
		29	1	6.25
		30	1	6.25
		31	3	18.75
		32	1	6.25
		35	2	12.50
		37	1	6.25
		41	1	6.25
		45	1	6.25

As indicated in Table 3, of the 16 urban parent participants, the youngest participant was 27 years of age and the oldest parent participant was 45 years of age. Participants identified themselves as male or female on the informational form. The sample included 3 of 16 male participants (18.7%), and 13 of 16 participants (81.3%) were female. All but one participant identified themselves as the student's biological parent, with one participant indicating they were a non-parental primary caregiver. Table 4 presents descriptive characteristics of the 16 participants, including the classification of school type for each participant, personal views on

experiences in school, and the relationship of each participant to the child. The statement “*As a student, your own experiences with teachers are described as...*” was presented on the informational form completed prior to the start of each semi-structured interview. The response options included a Likert rating scale of *mostly positive, somewhat positive, indifferent (neutral), somewhat negative, and mostly negative.*

Table 4

Description of Participant’s Personal School Characteristics and Relationship to the School-Aged Child

Variable	N	Level	Frequency	Percentage
School	16			
Attended		Urban	14	87.5
		Suburban	2	12.5
		Rural	0	0.0

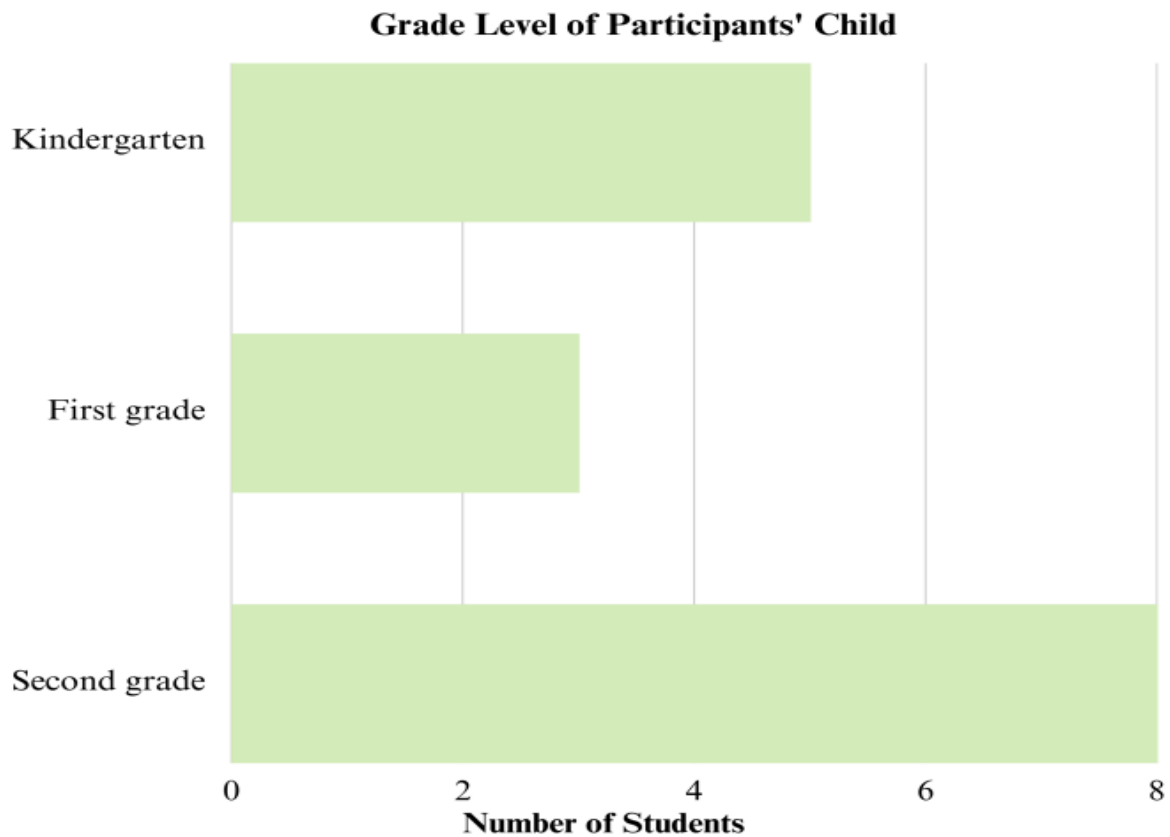
Relationship	16			
to the Child		Mother	12	75.0
		Father	3	19.0
		Legal Guardian	1	6.0
		Mostly positive	12	75.0
Personal views	16	Somewhat positive	3	19.0
on lived		Indifferent	1	6.0
experiences of		Somewhat negative	0	0.0
school				

As presented in Table 4, the majority of participants (87.5%) responded urban for their schooling setting. All 16 participants had a child currently in kindergarten through second grade in an urban school in Northeastern Ohio. An awareness of the descriptive characteristics of participants is useful as responses were analyzed, and assumptions were made related to the contributions of each participant. The parents' background and current state is valuable information to consider as the focus of the study was on urban parents' descriptions of the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. The uniqueness and similarities of each participant allows for a wide perspective when exploring the lived experiences. Figure 3 is a graphical image illustrating the grade level of each participant's child. The study focused on the perspectives of parents with current urban students in kindergarten through second grade, including $n= 5$ kindergarteners (31%), $n= 3$ first graders (19%), and $n= 8$

second graders (50%). Some participants had children beyond the grade bands of kindergarten through second grade; however, the study focused on their children in grades K-2.

Figure 3

Grade Levels of Participants' Child



Thematic and categorical data coding allowed for a purposeful and organized analysis of interview transcriptions and written questionnaire forms to ensure theme emergence was carefully detectable and consistent. As new themes emerged, previous transcripts were reviewed again to ensure key relevant points enabled deeper analysis. Each of the three interview audio transcripts and all 16 written questionnaire forms were viewed in isolation and then again

collectively using data deduction, saturation, and constant comparative methods to ensure a rigorous and valid analysis. The themes in this research remained primarily consistent with the original indicated categories and those of the priori list developed through the literature review as described in Chapter 3. Projected themes, or priori-based themes, based on what was derived from urban parents' expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships presented in literature and current research included:

- Social-emotional growth of students
- Academic growth
- Promoting a sense of belonging
- Clear, consistent, and ongoing communications
- Individualized learning/autonomy
- Being cared for/a genuine sense of caring
- Intentionality
- Cognitive and affective components in learning
- Safety/comfort (mental, physical, emotional)
- Investment and knowledge of the student beyond academic content

Additional concepts of cultural awareness and attunement, the quality of teacher preparation in higher education, creating a sense of purpose, and consistently having high expectations regardless of background or experiences emerged but were not included in the initial noted themes. Only the categorical findings presented through data triangulation, saturation, and reduction were identified as key empirical findings. Data analysis was a multi-dimensional process implementing several phases before synthesizing findings to the essential take aways of the study. The first step included organizing the data into themes. Then further

categorizing, analyzing, comparing, and synthesizing the themes into meaningful categories. The last phase was determining the essential takeaways and the call to action for applicable use of the study as presented in the study's significance.

The outcomes of the study and of the researcher's inquiries will be referred to as the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The goal of data analysis through coding achieved the classification items that applied across the majority of the data (Simon, 2011). Data were coded by listed units with relevant meaning that captured content from each interview during the study. The derivation of essential takeaways was multi-phased and procedural, which included the identification of key finding, then the development of essential themes, which supported the essential takeaways and suggestions for future research. A thematic coding framework guided the extraction of cognizant themes. Through an in-depth analysis of interview transcripts and questionnaire data, which included thematic data coding, data saturation, data deduction, and constant comparative methods, as described in Chapter 3, the following key findings and the connection of each to the initial research questions were identified:

Key Findings

Key Finding 1: Clear, Consistent, and Ongoing Communications

Urban parents in Northeastern Ohio described clear, consistent, and ongoing communications as an expectation and characteristic of high-quality teacher-student relationships in elementary school. Communication was further defined as the communication between the teacher and parents, teacher to students, and students to teacher. The entities of strong, clear, and ongoing communication include the parent, teacher, and student. Clear, consistent, and continuous communication were identified as necessary attributes, characteristics, and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships (RQ1, RQ 2).

Key Finding 2: Teacher Care and Connections

Urban elementary parents in Northeastern Ohio described teacher care, personal connection, a sense of belonging, and authenticity as characteristics for building and maintaining high-quality teacher-student relationships with urban elementary students (RQ 1). Care was defined as acting in an authentic and nurturing way towards students and families. Teacher authenticity, transparency, and kindness are needed to develop individualized teacher-student relationships which foster deep connections and a sense of belonging for students.

Key Finding 3: Teacher Awareness and Understanding

Characteristics and expectations of high-quality, teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents in Northeastern Ohio included teachers' awareness of the students' cultures, individual situations, and urban challenges as meaningful to teacher-student relationships. Parents believed that teacher awareness and understanding strengthens the teacher-student relationships (RQ1, RQ2). Characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents include teacher consciousness, interest-based learning, understanding individual backgrounds, and investment in knowing and understanding the personal lives of students.

Key Finding 4: High Expectations

Expectations for and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents include setting and holding students to high standards and recognizing parental expectations (RQ1, RQ2). Participants' characteristics and expectations for high-quality teacher-student relationships included teachers holding students accountable for reaching high academic and behavioral expectations, presenting meaningful learning opportunities for students to be accountable and own their learning, creating challenging

academic learning targets, and providing the necessary support for students to reach high academic and behavioral expectations.

Key Finding 5: Student Engagement and Individualized Learning

Characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationship as described by urban elementary parents in Northeastern Ohio included student engagement and individualized learning (RQ1, RQ2). The engagement of both the teacher and the student were referenced as factors impacting teacher-student relationships.

Open-ended questions on the pre-interview questionnaire included parents' personal descriptions of high-quality teachers, expectations for teachers, expectations for students, outcomes of strong teacher-student relationships, negative impacts of poor teacher-student relationships, and the impact of good teachers. In a phenomenological study, the researcher focuses largely on seeking to understand a phenomenon through exploring the lived experiences of participants; therefore, it is crucial that the participants' descriptors were considered in the analysis (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). The findings aligned with an awareness of the participants' perceptions, allowing the voices of the participants to come through in thick, rich, detailed descriptions, which is a key component of qualitative, phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994).

Audio recordings of each interview session occurred, using the voice recording feature on an iPhone and audio recording device on a laptop. The audio recordings were transcribed using Descript, a software transcription tool (Descript, 2023). For accuracy, each recording was viewed and annotated several times, making necessary edits to the captured transcriptions and appropriately delineating each speaker on the transcripts using a number-letter identifier for each speaker and a color-coded key. The participants were coded in each interview with a

corresponding number and letter to provide anonymity and privacy in the data aggregation and analysis processes. The transcriptions were emailed to each participant to allow for member checking and participant clarity. Member checking allowed participants to check the accuracy of their descriptions and provided me feedback on the validity, accuracy, and reliability of the transcriptions (Creswell, 2017; Morse et al., 2002). The opportunity for participants to reflect on audio transcriptions, summary data, and interview outcomes for accuracy is a necessary component in the quality control process of conducting interviews focusing on the phenomenon benign experienced (Coffey& Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2017). The participants did not disagree with the authenticity, credibility, or accuracy of the transcripts. Interviewees in the first focus group were coded as 1A-1E, interviewees in the second group were coded as 2A-2D, and interviewees in the last focus group were coded as 3A-3G.

The transcripts were then color coded to represent each individual speaker in each interview. Initial transcription coding was conducted and reviewed to determine the relevance and usefulness of the codes in relationship with the research questions. Codes were analyzed in a purposeful way, making connections to the identified research aims. Merging codes occurred when necessary and appropriate to avoid an overlap of themes. Clusters of themes, derived through codes, occurred by grouping units of meaning together (Moustakas, 1994). Codes, categories, themes, and interpretations that emerged in the data analysis process and the codes that contributed to the four identified categorical findings shaped the overall outcomes in this study. The institutional review board (IRB) process, as outlined by Youngstown State University's IRB committee, was followed during all phases of the data collection, data analysis process, and data sharing process.

The findings were further synthesized by collating the results of the coding process to identify overarching themes. The five generated themes, as presented below, aligned to the coded findings and were used to determine the connection to theoretical frameworks and the significance of the study.

Themes

Theme One: Teacher Communications

Clear, consistent, and ongoing communication was considered a necessary characteristic and an expectation of high-quality teachers as described by urban parents (RQ1, RQ2). The theme of communication was identified as a recurring characteristic of high-quality teacher-student relationships by urban parents in all three focus groups and in the majority of the written responses by the participants on the questionnaire.

Before each focus group an informational written questionnaire was completed by each participant. Table 5 presents information from the written questionnaire supporting the characteristics and expectations of communication in teacher-student relationships as identified by urban parents, including the sentence starter and participant response.

Table 5

Evidence of Communication in Participant Written Questionnaire

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	
What is most important to you when it comes to your child's teacher?	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="561 573 1382 825">● Participant 1A "... ongoing interaction with me and the teacher and my child and the teacher, having good communication and feeling comfortable to discuss anything. Talk through the good and bad stuff in a respectful way"<li data-bbox="561 867 1382 972">● Participant 1D "... communicate with me, tell me what I need to know so we can both help my child."<li data-bbox="561 1014 1382 1266">● Participant 1E "... communicate with me daily, get to know me and my child, listen, and spend time talking to me about what you need to know. Be respectful in how you [the teacher] communicates."<li data-bbox="561 1308 1382 1560">● Participant 1F "... having good communication and knowing that the teacher will be helpful and intentional. I want the teacher to reach out to me and let me know their expectations and how we can work together."<li data-bbox="561 1602 1382 1707">● Participant 2A "... knowing that they [the teacher] will pay attention to me, be clear on how they communicate, make <hr/>

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	<p>my child feel comfortable asking for advice or clarification, and reaching out to me often.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 2D “... listen and understand when talking. That my child is included in conversations and is clear on how they should act.” ● Participant 3B “... understanding and communication.” ● Participant 3C “... good communication, clear expectations, take time to listen to me and clearly explain rewards or consequences or behaviors, just be open.” ● Participant 3D “... approach me first, discuss concerns, and always keep me in the loop when it comes to my child’s education. Reach out to me often, for positive and negative things.”
I expect my child’s teacher to ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 2B “... contact me directly when there is a problem, be kind and respectful in how she communicates with me and my kid.” ● Participant 2D “... reach out to me and include me in all conversations, make me aware of positive and negative

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	<p>things going on in school and with my child. Assume I want to know everything.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 3A “... come to me first, communicate with me if you have concerns, celebrate and acknowledge my child’s milestones and make me aware of their success in school.” ● Participant 3B “... give me on-going notes or calls about my child’s behavior or progress, updates me on what is going on” ● Participant 3C “... ask what is happening at home and take time to talk to me and listen to what my values are for my child.” ● Participant 3D “... approach me first, keep me in constant communication. I want to be in the loop about my kid’s education” ● Participant 3E “... really listen when my child talks to you [the teacher] or tells you about things.” ● Participant 3F “... approach me about situations involving my child, good or bad, talk to me, help me and work with me to help my child be a better student”....

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	
<p>What does a teacher do to support a strong teacher-student relationship?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1B, 2C “She reached out to me” ● Participant 1E “Make the students know they are included, allow them time to talk to you [the teacher] and discuss things. Asks questions when she [the student] doesn't understand and the teacher talks to her through her confusion.” ● Participant 1F “She works hard to communicate with me, and lets me know how I can help my child academically and socially.” ● Participant 2A “She goes out of her way to make sure she connects with me about concerns or issues, sends notes home, calls me, texts. She listens and pays attention to my child.” ● Participant 2D “She lets me know when milestones are being met, she is excited to tell me about my child’s achievements. She reaches out to me with questions and works with me directly.”

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 3A “She provides me and my child with resources, communicates areas of need, and asks me for my input-on things.” ● Participant 3D “She listens when my child talks about things, gives her attention and makes her feel connected and important.” ● Participant 3E “She is versatile and knows how to connect and communicate in a way that my child feels comfortable and important.” ● Participant 3F “She knows her words are powerful and knows how to use them.”

In a written questionnaire, participants were asked “*What is important to you when it comes to your child's teacher?*” It was evident in the responses that urban parents expect the teacher to communicate in a clear, meaningful, and ongoing way with students and parents to have high-quality teacher-student relationships. Of the 16 participants, the explicit word communication occurred 12 times in participants’ written responses to that question; evidence that 75% of participants directly identified communication as an area of priority when asked about expectations and characteristics important to the parent in a teacher-student relationship.

The recurring theme of communication was further evident in each of the three focus group interviews. When asked about the expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships, all participants placed some emphasis on the value of clear, ongoing, meaningful, intentional, or respectful communication. Some participants further addressed the overarching theme of communication by elaborating on expected communication in various settings. For example, communication was reflected in terms of the communication between the teacher and the parent, the teacher and the student, and the teacher, parent, and student collectively. Various forms and approaches to expected and effective communication were also noted in the focus group interviews. Participants expressed the role of verbal communication, the need to feel comfortable when communicating (which included verbal and non-verbal communication), and other forms of communication to inform, such as notes, calls, texts, comments on academic reports, newsletters, behavior charts, etc.

During the focus group interview process, conversational style responses were encouraged of the participants to best capture the essence of authentic lived experiences. Communication was both an expectation and characteristic of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Numerous references to the role of communication occurred when participants reflected on high-quality teaching, expectations of the teacher, success in urban education, and how strong teacher-student relationships are built and maintained. When participants were asked to share what high-quality teacher-student relationships looked like and how it was measured, communication occurred in several responses across all interviews.

Participant 1A responded by saying,

Understanding the parents' wants and knowing where the family is in general is important for teachers to have patience, connections, and the right type of

communication. We [urban parents] have to listen and talk with teachers about what is going on. We got to take the time as parents to get to know the teacher, too. You know, we respect her as she respects us back, how we communicate is part of that mutual respect.

Participant 1E referenced the importance of communication in meeting student needs as the participant stated,

Communicating with the child, seeing where their strong points are and um, where they need to work is part of how the message is delivered. Knowing how to talk to each kid and their strengths and weaknesses is what it is all about. Obviously if they're not getting it, you [the teacher] have to understand that and communicate with me [the parent] so, communication is necessary in helping the kids grow.

Participant 1C added to the conversation and noted the importance of the parent and teacher working together by stating,

... but if my child is struggling in a particular area, reach out to me and I can go above and beyond to do what I need to do at home and try to make it a little bit more understandable for him. As a parent you [the teacher] gotta talk to me, communicate those needs. Then I'll reach out to the teacher, too to see, hey, are my kids struggling in any areas? And, you know, not just wait 'till like the progress reports and stuff come out, but communicate with me all the time.

Urban parents understand that communication is not mutually exclusive and they are an intricate component in creating and facilitating successful communication. As recognized by Participant 3G, "Parents have to be on the same page and show their kid they respect the teacher and school is important. Parents need to be in the discussions." The participants reflected on the

role the teacher is expected to play as well as the role the parent is expected to play to support strong and ongoing communication which positively impacts teacher-student relationships. Urban parents placed value on two-way, respectful, ongoing, and clear communication as a contributing factor in high-quality teaching. Participant 3G further expanded on his thoughts by stating, “if I knew the teacher was accessible and tried to communicate the issues I [the parent] had no problem coming to the school to support her.” Participants 3E added to the conversation by saying, “Parents need to feel welcomed, appreciated, and heard so they come up [to the school] and are comfortable.” Communication, respect, and support work in unison to create the best learning environment for students. Teachers that use effective and ongoing communication as a tool to build a strong relationship with the child and the families are the teachers that will experience the most success in an urban setting.

Students in an urban school are often faced with inconsistency at home, making consistent communication at school a priority. Participant 2C reflected on the importance of consistent communication stating,

Consistency at home and consistency at school matters. That consistency is done through ongoing communication, making the teacher aware and talking to them. And a lot of times students in an urban school are more transient. So, their consistency gets broken up ... they either move more, they're looking for different types of housing, different things come up ... so the communication piece is what is needed.

The needs and challenges of urban students were brought up as participants mentioned urban students having higher rates of absenteeism, discipline issues, poverty, unstable home lives, and low academic achievement. Communication was discussed as a means for the teacher and parents to face cultural dissonance and build relationships of understanding that stem to the

teacher-student relationship. Communication was referenced as a means for teachers to be aware and to address challenges facing urban students.

Participants were openly interacting and sharing their thoughts with each other. I further expanded on the discussion by asking “What do good teachers do and how do they do it?” In each of the three focus groups, communication was echoed by nearly all participants. Although some participants stated communication verbally, others shook their heads in agreement or interjected comments of support. Participants were united in voicing the impact effective and regular communication from the teacher can have on urban students. Parents of urban students expect the teacher to provide ongoing, clear, and meaningful communication to establish a high-quality relationship between the teacher and the student. This was evident in the participant statements below. Participant 1C said,

I expect the teacher to share how I can help her as the teacher and help my child.

Communication is needed if the students and families are expected to be supportive of the teacher. There's been situations where teachers get, you know, disrespected all the time by parents or kids. Like, you know, so they kind of keep their distance and they don't even try maybe. Or they don't try to form that relationship because they don't feel like they're comfortable doing their job. Investment, communication, and respect is on both ends, the students and the teachers. A lot of urban teachers might give up because it is a hard job and they struggle with communication.

Participant 2C stated that teachers need to communicate about everything, not just the academic components of school. Parents are also responsible for ensuring strong communication occurs. When asked about the actions of a high-quality teacher the participant stated, “She [the teacher] reaches out beyond school stuff. She knows your family's needs beyond the school. She

asks about what is important to the students. She knows about the home life, the family, the family issues. She spends time communicating.”

Participant 2B added that all relationships stem from strong communication and communication is foundational in creating a high-quality teacher-student relationship. The participant suggested that in order for teacher-student relationships to be meaningful the teacher should, “... probably start by spending one-on-one time with parents.” She added,

I know it's difficult to make time to talk. It's difficult on both ends. But I think more one-on-one with just the parents is needed to build a good relationship. This could help explain where the child is emotionally, in school, and about their life and needs...really knowing the child and parents as individuals and knowing the parent’s situation and expectations before it is too late in the year.

Participant 3F made a connection between strengthening the relationship between a teacher and student through invested and consistent communication. Having strong communication will allow the teacher insight to know when something with the student is off and put the right resources in place. “If a kid comes to school hungry or tired, or even afraid, that teacher should be able to communicate with the kid and the parents to see what needs done.”

The idea of using communication as a tool for collaboration and as a means staying informed was also an expectation. Participants shared several expected or accepted ways in which the teacher could communicate. The need for ongoing communication was an expectation that urban parents felt could be obtained using a variety of communication tools. Many participants noted the impact of meeting the urban families where they are and providing communication efforts to support individual needs. Table 6 represents various means and styles

of clear, ongoing, and intentional communication expected by urban parents to create high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Table 6

Communication Efforts of High-Quality Teachers Referenced by Participants

Means for the Teacher to Communicate with Parents
Face-to-face discussions
Calls
Texts
Newsletter
Classroom apps (Dojo, Remind, Schoology)
Class tags
Classroom website
Notes home
Academic reports
Meetings
Shared journals
Quick/Impromptu conversations at drop-off/pick-up
Invite parents in the classroom
Behavior reports
Communication logs
Home visits
Community functions/events

The entities involved in strong, clear, and ongoing communication include the parent, teacher, and student. Participants expressed the need for respectful and accountable

communication to advance understanding and connection. Communication is a means to create comfort, understanding, value, and inclusivity. Communication a vessel for building and maintaining strong relationships which promote growth in academics as well as in personal areas for students. Clear, consistent, and continuous communications were identified as necessary attributes, characteristics, and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships by all participants.

Theme Two: Care and Connection

Care, personal connection, and authenticity are descriptive characteristics in building meaningful teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents (RQ1). Teachers providing care and acting in a caring manner, developing a personal and individual relationship with both the student and the family, and presenting themselves in a transparent, authentic, and relatable manner were characteristics needed in high-quality, teacher-student relationships as identified by urban parents. Parents expressed the importance of a teacher creating an environment of belonging in which the child feels loved, cared for, accepted, and acknowledged. The theme of care and connection was significant as it was strongly expressed and widely represented in all three focus group interviews and in the participants' written response on the questionnaire. All 16 participants expressed some aspect of care and personal connection as necessary characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships in urban schooling.

Table 7 presents participants' written responses supporting the characteristics of care and connection in teacher-student relationships. Categories associated with the theme of care and connection included participant references to authenticity, nurturing, compassion, mutual openness, discernment, student well-being, and a sense of belonging.

Table 7*Evidence of Care and Connection in Participant's Written Questionnaire*

Question/Sentence Starter	Participant and Sample Responses
What is most important to you when it comes to your child's teacher?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1A “ ... ongoing interaction with me and the teacher and my child and the teacher.” ● Participant 2A “ ... that the teacher is loving, empathetic, and make my child excited about being at school.” ● Participant 2C “ ... cares about my child, and their well-being, acts in a kind, respectful, and open way to create an environment where all students feel important and belong. ● Participant 3D “ ... a sense of understanding, knowing that when I am not with my child the teacher cares and loves them as much as I do. The teacher models how to be kind, compassionate, and respectful.”
Describe what a positive teacher-student relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1C “ ... the teacher is caring and helpful, the students are connected to their learning.” ● Participant 1D “ ... the teacher and the student act lovingly, respectful of each other, kind, and work to be better each day.” ● Participant 2A “ ... open, honest, caring ...”

Question/Sentence Starter	Participant and Sample Responses
I expect my child's teacher to ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 2B “ ... encouragement, supportive, caring, nice, mutually respectful.” ● Participant 2D “ ... comfortable, understanding, caring, loving, nurturing, involved in my child’s life.” ● Participant 3A “ ... nurturing, understanding, consistent, kind, engaging, authentic, compassionate.” ● Participant 3B “ ... both should love learning, be concerned about each other, invested, and caring.” ● Participant 3F “ ... Compassionate, loving, invested, high discernment, peaceful, connected”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1C “ ... be caring and respectful to me and my child.” ● Participant 1D “ ... to do their very best to build a caring and real relationship with my child, share and be open.” ● Participant 1F “ ... work with me to help by child succeed academically socially, be a model of what is right.” ● Participant 2C “ ... care for her, give her the support she needs.” ● Participant 3E “ ... Be open and transparent, allow my child to see them [the teacher]as a personal not just a teacher,

Question/Sentence Starter	Participant and Sample Responses
	<p>show how they [the teachers] feel and think, make personal connections with the kids.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 3G “ ... Be caring, attentive to my child’s needs, consistent, and compassionate.”
<p>What does a teacher do to support a strong teacher-student relationship?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1A “She [the teacher] makes connections, puts in effort. She cares about my child as an individual, sees their worth.” ● Participant 1E “ ... be kind and caring, and the students are kind and caring back to the teacher, it is a give and take. The teacher is open and encourages the children to share their feelings.” ● Participant 1F “She makes the student realize she cares for them.” ● Participant 2B “She goes out of her way to make sure she connects with me about concerns or issues, sends notes home, calls me, texts. She listens and pays attention to my child. She spends time showing she cares and respects her students.”

Question/Sentence Starter	Participant and Sample Responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 3B “She [the teacher] cares about my child, she is concerned and invested in all parts of her [the student] life.” ● Participant 3D “She [the teacher] listens when my child talks about things, gives her attention and makes her feel connected and important.” ● Participant 3E “She [the teacher] is versatile and knows how to connect and communicate in a way that my child feels comfortable and important.” ● Participant 3F “She [the teacher] is kind, and creates an environment of love and empathy, so then there is a mutual love.” ● Participant 3G “[The teacher] shows how to be a good person, creates a sense of community and connection, impacts other areas of their [the student] life because they [the teacher] take the time to care about stuff outside of school.”

In analyzing the written responses of the eight open-ended questions on the questionnaire, all 16 participants (100%) referenced the importance of care, love, connection, nurturing, a sense of belonging, compassion, or kindness as aspects or characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships. The urban parent’s responses were aligned to the previous

research findings on the role of care and connection in meaningful teacher-student relationships from student perceptions as identified in Chapter 2. When students feel a sense of care, connectivity to the learning, and a perception of investment by the teacher they are more motivated to learn (Engels et al., 2021; Jensen, 2016; Roorda et al., 2011). When participants were asked to “*Describe a teacher that impacted you as a student*” in the written questionnaire, responses of participants’ lived experiences outlined memories of caring, inclusivity, a feeling of being loved, and authentic connection in the relationships they had with a teacher.

Participant 1A wrote, “My history teacher in high school. He made us feel important, and like we belonged, and he interacted with his students. He asked about our lives and we knew he cared about all his students.” The sense of care, connection, and individual attention was recognized by a number of participants. Participant 1B wrote, “She always went out of her way to help me out and noticed if I needed extra help or if I was falling behind. She talked kindly and lifted me up. We knew she cared about all her students. I knew she would do anything to help me.” Participant 1F wrote, “She saw potential in me that no one else did. She helped me grow in all areas of my life and worked hard to make me feel needed. She always presented me with opportunities and resources that would help me, even things outside of school. I knew she cared about me.”

Other participants' reflections of an impactful teacher included Participant 3A’s memories of his former English teacher and her ability to make him feel loved and important so much that he went from high absenteeism and at risk of failing to wanting to attend school. Participant 3B recalls knowing her sixth-grade teacher was genuine, loving, and created a space for all students. She recalls her teacher having an unconditional love for her students and

recognizing that even when she was disappointed she never stopped caring. Similar memories were shared by Participant 3A. She wrote,

She [my previous teacher] was caring and authentic, she made me feel like she believed I would do anything. She asked about my family and checked on me. I knew she loved me and she was consistent with it. Even on a bad day she let me know I was cared about and loved. She did a good job of keeping me involved and excited about school. I felt like I was needed.

Participant 3E wrote about the impact of this third-grade teacher stating,

I had a third-grade teacher that made it her mission for me to be successful. I was a behavior problem and acted out a lot. She wouldn't accept failure. She pulled me next to her desk and made sure I knew exactly what I needed to do to get better and [she] stayed on me when I messed up. That's love. She spent so much time on making me be a better person and was invested in me even when I didn't treat her that good. She cared for me and believed in me, she even checked on me for years after I left her classroom.

Eventually, I changed my ways because her caring about me was not conditional, it just was always there.

As Participant 3E shared what he wrote, he was taken aback by the memories of that moment in time. It was as if he was recognizing the imprint that one teacher made on him many years ago. He shook his head and became emotional in his recollection of the event. When a student has a strong connection with the teacher, and elements of care, connections, self-worth, and individual support are present in the relationship, the student becomes less at-risk than peers without strong emotional support from a teacher (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

Simply stated by Participant 2A, “kids care how much the teacher cares.” Similar sentiments over the impact of a caring teacher were expressed in Participants 3G’s written response as she reflected on her own second-grade teacher and stated,

My 2nd grade teacher was the best, she was loving, nurturing, and discerning. She believed in me and always said she knew I would do great things and achieve greatness. She told us that we deserved to be the best at whatever we did in life. She changed the trajectory of my life and my journey as a student. Sometimes I think about how powerful her words were and how much I needed the love she gave me at that time in my life. I am thankful for all she did to help me be who I am today.

Table 8

Open-Ended Questions on Participants' Questionnaire

Open-Ended Written Questions

1. What is important to you when it comes to your child's teacher?
 2. Describe a positive teacher/student relationship
 3. I expect my child's teacher to ...
 4. I know my child's teacher cares when ...
 5. In order to have a strong relationship with the teacher I expect my child to ...
 6. Positive outcomes of high-quality teacher-student relationships include ...
 7. Negative outcomes of poor teacher -student relationships include ...
 8. Describe a teacher that impacted you when you were in school.
-

Further support of the theme of care and connection was evident in each of the three focus group interviews. The participants spoke with passion as the concept of care and teacher connection was addressed as a necessary characteristic in developing and sustaining high-quality teacher-student relationships. The theme of care and connection became personal as many participants made connections to their own life as a student and the powerful teacher-student relationships that they experienced. Participants were asked to think of a pivotal teacher-student relationship they experienced and to describe what it was like. This question appeared to be easy and effortless as the participants responded openly, as if they were taking a vivid journey back in time and describing a very specific moment that changed them. Participant responses were

centered on their experiences and the impact individual teachers had on them as students.

Participant 1D referenced the impact of a middle school science teacher, who called him by name and shared that he was at a very low place in life and hated going to school, until he had Mr. V. Mr. V was described as caring, invested, kind and connected. He was the teacher who made the learning match the student. Participant 1D stated,

He made me feel like the teaching was done in a way that was specific for me, he understood how I learned best and used it to make connections with me. After that, I really started coming to school, really paying attention. He made sure I knew he cared. He told me I was smart. He went out of his way. And really putting everything into a perspective. He changed my thoughts on school in general, made me realize I could be good at it in my own way.

In the second focus group speaker 2B, recalled the impact of Mrs. J., her middle school teacher. She described how the connection with her teacher was built on transparency, care, and openness. Vulnerability and compassion were used to describe her teacher. She was smiling as she went back in time, describing her. By the time she finished her response she was visually emotional, holding back tears. She said,

Mrs. J. You know, she made everybody feel important in her own way. I think everyone who's had her remembers her the exact same way, she was fair, and loving, and looked at us like family. We all knew she loved us. She was stern, but had a personal connection with all of us. I remember when she had cancer, she didn't let us all know right away. But there was a time where she came to work and of course she wasn't feeling her best or whatever, but we went through this whole story and she made a connection with everybody about how she felt and how, how she was doing, like internally. She showed

everybody, like her vulnerable side and so we could all make connections, she reminded us that life comes in phases and that was relatable. She made us feel like we were her world and she needed us and we believed her.

Participant 3G reflected on her memories of her second-grade teacher. She shared that she longed to reconnect with her as an adult and thank her for all she did as a teacher. When asked about a teacher that made an impact she said without hesitation,

My second-grade teacher. I was looking for her when I came back to Ohio, I found out she passed away, but I'll never forget her because she was loving, she was nurturing and she definitely believed me. I felt cared about and important. She encouraged me all the time. I owe her, I wanted to thank her. She definitely shaped me. Teachers like that are who can really change these kids.

Participant 3C also noted the importance of transparency to create a real connection, “ ... it's a feeling of openness, a certain realness that everybody can remember in a great teacher.” She then stated, “even if a teacher didn't grow up like the students you [the teacher of urban students] can still make a connection if you care.” Authenticity in how a teacher cared was mentioned several times when describing high-quality teacher relationships in urban schools.

Many participants referenced the teacher-student relationship going beyond academics and built on a foundation of genuine care and personal connections. Participant 2D shared that her seventh-grade teacher went beyond academics to let her know she was loved. She said, “Mrs. K was always there, I knew she cared. When my brother passed away on his motorcycle she came to the funeral to support my family. She was the best.”

Speaker 3G shared the impact of consistent caring. She stated, “My kindergarten teacher became my third-grade teacher. She developed a relationship that lasted throughout our

elementary years. She didn't just forget about you. She cared about you as you grew up. That relationship is what helps kids love learning.”

Participant 3B recalls the teachers creating a community in the classroom. Each child held a valuable role in the success of the community. She stated, “Even the kids that were behavior problems or the smart kids, there was no favorite. The care that was given was equal across all of us. The school literally felt like a community.” She adds that she hopes her child feels that same love and connection with her teachers because that is what students today need most.

Participant 3A felt she always knew she had dedicated teachers and meaningful relationships with her teachers. She stated,

...they loved me and they pushed me. They stayed on me and it felt real, like I owe them my success because they put so much of their time in building a real relationship with me. I knew they cared. I felt loved at school. My kids deserve that, too, when they go to school.

Participant 3B specifically noted the crucial role of care in a child’s elementary years as she stated, “Kids need more care and love and attention when they are young. It does matter if the teacher has compassion and love for her students.” Participant 3B elaborated on her point by adding that as students get older the focus shifts from care and love to managing behaviors. Therefore, during the elementary years of school, teachers must make connections, build relationships, and let the students know they are loved.

In agreement with the others, Participant 3E shared, “I need the teacher to be teaching how to care and unite the kids. It's like those small things, showing kindness, and being real that are the biggest parts to me.”

Participant 3A referenced the challenges many urban children face outside of school and the impact that may have in the classroom. She contributed good teacher-student relationships to the teacher's willingness to continue caring and making each child feel like they belong even when it is discouraging. She shared that urban educators must understand the importance of constantly caring and acting in love because, "as bad as it may be at times, every one of those students is somebody's baby." She stated, "... you [the teacher of urban students] can't just fix everything that's going on with all these kids. It's impossible, but you can be consistent in how much you care about them." Her passion and excitement were evident in her body language, as she repeatedly tapped the table and slowed her words down, loudly dragging out, "You [the teacher of urban students] have to ... to have compassion, care, and kindness." Participant 3F, responds to Participant 3A in agreement, but added that care and discernment must be intentional. "Having a high level of discernment is necessary. It is that real connection a teacher has with the student. Being able to pick your moments, you know [as a teacher] when there is an open door with a child for you to be impactful." Participant 3E, shook his head in agreement, adding, "That faith in the teacher will happen if the teacher cares enough to keep trying. I know that".

Care and compassion were again referenced as participants were asked to discuss challenges specific to students in an urban environment and how a positive teacher-student relationship may positively impact the situational challenges that students face. Participant 3F reflected on her own change process as an urban student and stated, "That constant, unconditional love and care and effort, even when the teachers don't think it is working. I promise you it is working. Sometimes it is slower than the teacher wants but it is changing the student for the better and it is happening over time."

Participant 2D shared that the love, sense of belonging, connection, security, and empathy a child feels through the relationship with the teacher is just part of creating a climate of care. Participants believed that student learning was negatively impacted when the students do not feel cared for or connected to the teacher and the class as a whole.

Participant 2B recognized that the aesthetic and affective qualities are powerful in developing deep understanding and authentic relationships. She stated, “Sometimes things trump book learning and it's time to have life learning and give them [students] an opportunity to be the caregiver instead of the caretaker. The classroom and school should feel like a community, centered on love and acceptance.”

The concept of feeling loved was presented several times across each interview. Participant 3G recalled there was a deep sense of connection and community when she was a student. She recalled her teachers expressing affection as she shared, “I always felt cared about and loved, I remember my favorite teachers giving me hugs, asking about my life, and being much more involved than just a teacher. It’s like they were family.”

Participant 3F also recognized the impact of connection when a teacher created a sense of community in which each child felt cared for, valued, and respected. He stated “It can't fall on just the family, or just the teacher. There needs to be a sense of community involvement. Making a child feel loved ... that is on all of them, a team effort.” There was an emphasis on creating a sense of belonging and connectivity to make students feel cared for by the teacher.

Participant 2B’s statement further supported the role a teacher holds as a model of care and integrity as she said, “I agree, the teacher influences all parts of my kids' life. I need them to be caring, kind, and model good choices.”

For Participant 3C, the teacher's energy, attitude, and passion were key components to building relationships. She believed students will know if the teacher is authentic and expressing a love for what they do and this is part of creating a high-quality relationship with urban students.

Participant 3A stated,

A lot of times, these kids, they're beat down at home. They have problems. So, and in regards to the relationship between the teacher may be the only beacon of light that the kids see that day. At least be kind to them. Show them you are on their side, you know, they don't need to be beat up here when they've been beat up at home. They gotta know they have you, and they can depend on you, and you care about them.

Participant 3C supported the message of care in teacher-student relationships for positive impacts to occur by stating,

Maybe that kindness, maybe that smile you [the teacher] see in them [the urban student] and recognizing their potential can make a difference for them. That connection, that feeling of support, investment, and understanding on a personal level is what is needed to perform. That is how the teacher becomes memorable, a life-changer.

All 16 participants recognized that a meaningful teacher-student relationship was one in which the teacher and the student are invested beyond academics. Caring teachers listen to the needs of students and help them to acquire the knowledge and attitudes needed to achieve their goals, not those of a pre-established academic curriculum but those connected to personal growth and life (Mackness, 2021). Participant 2B stated, "Knowing the teacher cares about them [the students] beyond just getting a good grade creates a real bond. That will go a long way."

Participant quotes supporting the need for teachers to go beyond academics and center relationships on love, care, connection, and compassion are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Participant Quotes on the Need for Teacher-Student Relationships to go Beyond Academics

Participant	Quote
1A	<p>“We [urban teachers] are not just teaching how to do the math problem. Teachers are modeling how to be kind and caring, and showing kids what to expect and how to be respectful and nice. Urban teachers need to be a good person, kind, and believe that each kid has the potential and ability to be great in life.”</p>
1E	<p>“She feels strong when she's in class. Her teacher empowers her. She loves her, and cares about her. And that is much more important than academics.”</p>
1F	<p>“If the teacher cares more about academics than the kids, the kids will not want to learn. I do understand though that teachers get paid for a job, but I feel like, um, you kind of understand that every kid needs love first.”</p>
2A	<p>“They think because you've dumped time and effort into me I don't want to disappoint you. So I think the kids in urban neighborhoods are up for more challenges.”</p>

Participant	Quote
2B	“When a teacher goes beyond the school, that translated into leverage and respect for the teacher in the classroom, and the students really start to see the needle move academically because they have that buy-in and respect. They don’t need to wonder if their teacher cares or think they might care, they actually know they care because of how they acted.”
3A	“Kids get bored if they stay in there without love, passion, connection. You just talking and you just teaching from a book. Make it real.”
3B	“I kind of think that professionalism, book stuff, don't outweigh the nurturing and understanding and the peace that these kids need in school. This is, some of these kids escapes. They need to feel nurtured. They need that connection.”
3C	“You [the teacher] have to be real, have transparent relationships, let them really know you and be open with your class, take time doing that.”

Participant	Quote
3E	<p>“I think it's way beyond academics. I think it stays at just academics. You get nowhere. Teachers need to be connected to the kids.”</p>
3G	<p>“You do better when you know. The child is gonna perform better when he goes just beyond academic, you know, academia. You don't care they won't care.”</p>

Many of the participants expressed that they believed one teacher can make a world of difference for a student if all the pieces are there in the relationship. The pieces included care, love, investment, compassion, and ability to see the child's potential. Participant 1A expressed, “It takes one person. It just takes one. Every kid deserves to have that one teacher, the one to make you feel that they care and that will go a long way with you, it stays with you your whole life.” All participants believed that the teacher was the single most impactful force in a child's education.

Participant 3G stated,

I think one teacher is the difference for a lot of these kids ... I can tell you honestly, all it takes is one. If you get put down at home, even if you're not, it takes one teacher to believe you and let you know that you matter, and that they care. And once you know that and really believe it nothing can stop you. It stays with people. A teacher can make or break a kid. That's a lot of responsibility. But as an urban kid, you find that one that

believes in you, what you believe, that they believe in you and they see you. It will change. It can and will change the trajectory of your life. I know that.

As with many of the participants, Participant 3C placed the power in the teacher's consistent actions and words as a means to show students love and affection. He stated, "It's the teachers that make the kids feel empowered, loved, and respected. They hold that responsibility."

The categorical coding of interview and written questionnaire data led to the development of findings and overarching themes. Participant responses related to love, nurturing, connection, teacher authenticity, a sense of belonging, compassion, and care when describing characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships were included in this finding. The theme of care and connection as characteristics of parental expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships in an urban elementary school was profoundly evident in the participants' responses.

Theme Three: Teacher Awareness and Understanding

Expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents included an awareness of the students' culture, individual situations, and urban challenges. Teacher awareness and understanding of students' individual backgrounds, home life situations, and culture will strengthen the teacher-student relationships (RQ1, RQ2). The theme of teacher awareness and understanding was identified as a described characteristic of high-quality teacher-student relationships by parents of urban elementary students and as an expectation of high-quality teacher-student relationships by parents of urban elementary students.

The analysis of a written questionnaire presented participants' written responses aligned to the importance of teacher awareness and understanding. Categorical thematic codes connected to teacher awareness and understanding included the participants' statements or allusions to the

teachers need for awareness of individual student situations, family dynamics, cultural attunement, empathy and awareness of urban challenges, and situational awareness. Table 10 presents information from the written questionnaires completed by participants, supporting the urban parent descriptions and characteristics of teacher awareness and understanding as elements of high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Table 10

Evidence of the Need for Teacher Awareness and Understanding in Participant Written Questionnaire

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	
What is most important to you when it comes to your child's teacher?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1D “ ... if they [the teacher] know my child as an individual. Do they see my child as a person or make judgments on them before they get to know them?” ● Participant 2A “ ... that the teacher ...empathetic” ● Participant 2B “ ... that the teacher is understanding and respectful, they are aware of what goes on in the classroom and at home.” ● Participant 3G “ ... the teacher sees diversity as a positive thing and has respect for where each kid is at. They take time to think about the challenges each kid might face outside of school.”

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	
I expect my child's teacher to ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1A “ ... take time to know my child. Invite the families into the school [for events or programs] to get to know us as a family” ● Participant 2D “ ... [the teacher] understands that all students have different challenges and be helpful no matter what the child is going through.”
I know my child's teacher cares when ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1C “ ... my child comes home talking about all his teacher does for him. When she tries to understand and connect with my child beyond his academic needs.” ● Participant 1E “ ... she [the teacher] understands my child and sees him fairly ... she does not make assumptions about him because of his homelife or things like that.” ● Participant 2C “ ... she [the teacher] helps out in all areas. She gives us resources [food, clothing, community resources, access to support etc.] to help our family be successful.” ● Participant 2D “ ... provides support and understanding to help my child.”

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 3D “ ... notices changes in my child and sees them as important and values all they are.”
Positive outcomes of high-quality teacher-student relationships include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1C “ ... a peaceful and understanding environment ... more understanding.” ● Participant 1D “ ... authentic learning, more empathy, better support in social and emotional areas of learning.” ● Participant 1E “ ... the teacher and student learn to understand and be tolerant of what they are going through ... dealing with. The student is less guarded and share more.” ● Participant 2B “ ... less anxiety, ability to be yourself and more trusting.” ● Participant 2D “ ... knowing and understanding each student individually and that includes knowing what their life is like in school and at home.” ● Participant 3A “ ... the teacher is connected. The students are connected to the teacher and the school, there is a person who knows them and believes in them.”

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 3C “ ... a lifetime of impact on learning, properly preparing them for the next level of challenges in school and in life.” ● Participant 3D “ ... a better understanding of the child's home life and better opportunity to get parents and teacher on the same page, more support for the child.”

The theme of teacher awareness and understanding was presented consistently and with repetition by urban parent participants as common expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Situational empathy and understand was addressed as a need and area of importance in teacher-student relationships. Represented in this theme was the teacher’s sense of cultural attunement, understanding and awareness of situations facing students and families, and an overall knowledge of the challenges, both academically and socially, that many urban students face. Participants expressed the desire for their child to have a teacher that is respectful of diversity, aware of cultural competencies, and empathetic in words and actions towards all students, but especially towards those students facing barriers beyond their control (i.e. poverty, homelife, lack of support, etc.). Participants further shared that support and respect for the teacher was an outcome of the teacher showing individual awareness and cultural understanding to the student and to the families as a whole. Table 11 presents quotes obtained from participants in all three focus groups as further evidence of participants' experiences,

descriptions, and expectations connecting high-quality teacher-student relationships to a teacher’s cultural awareness and understanding.

Table 11

Participant Quotes Referencing Cultural Awareness and Individual Understanding

Participant	Quote
1A	“The culture is different. A lot of the time the teachers that don’t try to make connections or understand don’t get it. Not every child is the same. Their home life isn't the same.”
1D	“An urban school is different. The students and families are different from other schools. You [the teacher] don’t always know what you’re going to get with these kids, so you have to be aware of what goes on and be open to knowing them.”
1E	“Some teachers, when they go into work in an urban school, might not feel comfortable there. Good teachers are comfortable even when the kids are dealing with outside problems. Even when they are culturally very different than them.”
2A	“It is the awareness of what is happening within the community. Right. And it's not always too good. The way a kid lives at home and how the teacher reacts to their home life affects the outcome for the students for sure.”

Participant	Quote
2B	“The student needs to know they could approach the teacher about something beyond school, that they could ask for help with anything. They need to know; their teacher will help them with personal problems.”
2B	“You [the teacher] may never know what's going on at the child's home, the child needs to be able to approach their teacher with home problems and trust that they won't be judged.”
2B	“So assisting in, understanding, and recognizing all the needs of a family and a student. You might know somewhere families can get some food. You might know how to help the parents, which will help the children too. The teacher should be a resource for the family. They need to understand what the family is going through and help them connect to resources or agencies that could help them.”
2B	“The teacher is expected to know what is allowable and permissible in school and enforce it. It might mean telling students that what happens at home is not okay in school because the expectations are different.”
2D	“The culture of urban kids is unique. A lot of the kids are coming from really tough backgrounds, with a lot of other challenges,

Participant	Quote
	<p>sometimes poverty or drugs or no help at home or no education.</p> <p>There is not a lot of family instability. So, the family dynamic may look different.”</p> <p>“ ... but that sense of belonging, that understanding and support in all areas, I think is important.”</p>
3A	<p>“Understanding, like a home connection. Knowing students is more about the understanding of our culture, our environments. Teachers should understand our environment and where we come from.”</p>
3A	<p>“You [the teacher] can't just go in like with a standard and think that structure is gonna work for all these kids. Their lifestyles are totally different, each and every one of them. The kids gotta be seen for who they are and care about regardless of what goes on at home. School should be a safe place where they don't worry about all that other stuff.”</p>
3B	<p>“ ... it is just better when a family can be who they are and connect with the teacher in the community, outside of school without being judged or less than the teacher, it needs to be a community.”</p>
3B	<p>“When it came down to the teachers, that didn't matter, you know, if everybody was equal. I didn't have as much and I knew my teachers</p>

Participant	Quote
	understood that and never judge me or how I lived. Seemed like my best teacher treated all of us like her favorites.”
3F	“Teachers need to understand the adversity and not project their lifestyle, their belief system onto the kids without understanding what goes on at home.”
3G	“I expect understanding, because that helps when you, when they're not from the same culture or they're not from the same type of household.”
3G	“Understanding where they are, where they come from, um, where they should be headed, understanding what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, and things like that. Really take the time to understand the difference and not pass your judgment on my kids, understand who they are and who I am raising them to be. Because what you think might not be what is going on.”

Student-teacher relationships can be strengthened when the teacher is conscious and sensitive to the homelife, family dynamics, and challenges facing students. Throughout the focus group interview process participants shared that effective teachers were those that recognized the differences in students and worked to develop a sense of understanding and awareness. Acknowledging and respecting a student’s diversity as it related to culture, family dynamics,

background, and situational choices was noted as a characteristic of high-quality urban teachers by several participants.

Many participants were open with how they perceived urban challenges and how those challenges often created academic and social issues in school for many urban students. When a teacher invested time in understanding the individual life of each student those challenges could be mitigated through relationships built on understanding, awareness, and meaningful connections. Participant 1D shared his own educational experiences and described what some of his classmates went through. He said, “A lot of the kids did not have support at home, it is a different lifestyle. The kids grow up faster and more is put on them at home.” He explained that since many students are faced with home situations that set them up for failure, it was necessary for teachers to be flexible, understanding, and aware of each student’s individual needs.

When asked to describe the characteristics of a pivotal teacher, Participant 1D reflected on his previous middle school science teacher. He shared that the teacher was memorable and effective because he knew each student and built lessons around the background, interests, needs, and abilities of each student. He stated,

As a kid I hated everything about school, it was boring. It wasn't fun. I had other problems to worry about, you know. I just didn't like it at all. When I got with Mr. V, he changed everything for me. He made me want to get up, come to school. He made everything different from what I was used to. He understood that my life was different and he didn't hold it against me. Every other teacher, I felt, just taught me, because it was their job, but he would put it in the perspective of sports, like basketball, baseball, football. He would make me learn

using something that I liked. He actually understood how to reach me and where I was. You know what I mean?

Participant 1A added that the teacher's awareness of a child's home life was a determining factor in how to best connect with both the child and the family in a way that shows respect and understanding. "We have to be understanding to one another. It comes from wanting what is best for everyone." The participant then stated, "Not every child is the same. Their home life isn't the same ... understanding the parents' wants and knowing where the family is in general is important in creating a relationship of respect and understanding." Cultural attunement is necessary in developing strong and respectful relationships. Participant 1D shook his head in agreement and interjected, "Teachers can't go in and adjust their [the urban student's] home life. Right. There're some situations that are beyond the control of the education system. But nothing is beyond the teacher attempting to understand." Participant 1E added to the conversation by expressing there was often a disconnect between a teacher's life and a student's life. She acknowledged the positive impact a teacher-student relationship had in understanding her cultural and lifestyle differences, "A teacher can intervene when the relationship is good because that may be more of a relationship or support than the child has with anyone at home." It was agreed that teachers who are aware and accommodating to a child's situation at home, cultural differences, and family circumstances are more likely to build lasting relationships with students.

Participant 3B expressed similar thoughts during her interview and elaborated on the role of individual connection in cultural understanding. She stated, "I think that getting to know the child as an individual will help the child, and the teacher understand more of the culture and the child's background." She explained that the relationship between a teacher and student could

work in one of two ways. It could be a wedge that further separated the child from the teacher or a means to make a strong and transparent connection. She expressed that teachers of urban students have to be willing to work hard at seeing each child in an individual way that respects their culture and promotes understanding. She stated,

I feel like it doesn't matter where you come from, it may be harder for each individual teacher, but it's not impossible. Most of my teachers didn't come from the inner-city schools and didn't experience what a lot of the children growing up experienced, you know what I mean? And just because I was from the southside of town I deserved to be respected and valued. I am thankful for those teachers that tried to make connections and got to know me and kept it real.

When asked, “What qualities are needed in a teacher to make a strong connection with students?” Participant 1A stated,

A teacher working with urban children must really know the situations of the kids and accommodate them. Be respectful and consider what is going on with each child. Urban kids need someone to believe in them and see the good. Get to know the families and meet them where they are, just be kind, caring, and try to understand. Differences, like culture or community, neighborhoods, can be a divider or a uniter, it depends on the teacher.”

When participants were asked to reflect and share a description of a high-quality teacher, Participant 2B addressed the importance of having an awareness of cultural differences. She recalled there being a clear divide in how she lived and how the teachers lived. She stated she still felt connected to the teacher in spite of the differences, if the teacher was open-minded and understanding even knowing the teacher had never experienced what she was going through. She

said, “Even though they [the teachers] may not have lived in our area, they tried to understand how we were raised.” She believed that the teacher was expected to learn and connect with the students when there was a cultural gap. “You [the teachers] have to understand that these children, they may not come from what you may have come from. Even though you are the teacher you can still learn.”

Participant 2A recalled her own experiences as an urban student and shared similar sentiments stating, “the good teachers were the ones that knew where we were coming from, they were experienced or at least aware of what happens in our neighborhoods and how we lived.”

Participant 2D added to the conversation, sharing that the negative experiences she had with teachers stem from the teacher “lumping” her in with a “certain crowd.” She expressed not feeling understood which led to a negative relationship when teachers based their actions and disposition on incorrect assumptions. She added,

My negative experiences in school were based on how teachers treated me just based on my family situation, or that we were poor or the side of town we lived on. If they believed in me I would raise up to their expectations, but some teacher just saw me as a poor kid from a bad neighborhood that wasn’t going to do well in school. They [the teachers] made assumptions and that impacted how they viewed me and how I viewed them. I was more than just my environment and I needed teachers to see that.

Several participants shared, either, a feeling of connectedness or separation from a teacher based on how they perceived their acceptance of them. The importance of teachers acting in an accepting and understanding way, without conditions, was identified as a characteristic of

high-quality teacher -student relationships. Teachers who made an honest effort to validate and understand students were considered meaningful and positively impactful, in both the long and short term, by participants. Participant 1D reflected on his upbringing and the impact an understanding teacher made in helping him as a student. He shared that he grew up in a high poverty, high crime neighborhood. His single mother of three young children worked hard to make ends meet and from a very early age he was expected to be the man of the house and contribute at home. At times he knew his home life and personal situation impeded on his ability to focus and succeed in school. He acknowledged his experiences did not represent all urban children but he knew a lot of his peers grew up in similar situations. He said, “It took one teacher to see me and understand what I was going through at home.” He took a long pause shaking his head as though he was recalling the exact moment he shared. He added, “She was the real deal, she encouraged me and she was aware of all I was dealing with. She talked to me and even though she never lived like I did she understood my struggles.”

Participant 1E contributed to the conversation, “When you [the teacher] are comfortable it is obvious. You [the teacher] are not acting in a way that judges’ students for what they come with, and that builds natural relationships.”

Participant 1D added that urban students need someone to invest in them on all levels and that is difficult for a teacher to do if they are not aware or do not understand the child’s background, culture, and home life. He said,

Be understanding of where these kids are coming from. You [the teacher] just might have to invest more time into them, too. Some kids might be so scared or act out, but be understanding cuz this fear might not have anything to do with

school. The teacher might just not get it or not know how to approach needs that they never had as a kid.

Participant 3E referenced the disconnect some students face when transitioning from home to school as it relates to what is appropriate or acceptable. He described students' abilities to code switch as something the teacher must understand as academic and social challenges are often related to differences in lifestyles. He stated, "The normal at home is different from school for these kids and the teacher gotta know what some of them live like." The teacher's awareness of a child's culture, background, home life, and support systems are a means for connecting and relating to the student. Participant 3E further stated, "You [the teacher] can't just jump in the middle of this journey without knowing the start. You have to have a starting point. You have to have some type of grounding to get it right and to have a relationship with the student."

Following that statement Participant 3F added, "Don't assume anything unless you know for sure. Build a bridge. You have to understand where they come from first." Similarly, Participant 2B expressed the teacher's need to know the community, "really know what's going on in the community, even if you're not from the community. Because your students are from the community and they live a different life than most of the teachers." Many participants expect their child's teacher to have an awareness of where their child comes from, as it relates to life and experiences outside of academic. Characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships were teacher attunement and situational understating.

Participant 3A identified the differences in teachers of nonurban children and teachers of urban children. While she recognizes teachers were trained in their field, many teachers come under prepared to work with urban students because they place too much emphasis on content

learning and not enough on empathy and understanding. She explained that the content is only teachable once the student feels understood, safe, and important. In quoting Participant 3A,

We are talking about urban kids, it's different, they lack certain things at home ... the majority is lacking certain things at home and the teacher needs to fill the voids. They see violence. Teachers gotta consider the factors causing issues ... it might be home life, poverty, drugs ... whatever. They need kindness, understanding, and love, not just a professional.

Participant 3F stressed the importance of not allowing a child's background to place false limitations on them. He claimed there was a difference in cultural understanding which was necessary and using a student's background as an excuse for not achieving. He stated, "Don't see my kid as just another black kid from a rough side of town. Don't put a cap on them. Don't use it against them. Just try to understand." Several other participants agreed, sharing their expectation of teachers to push students to achieve at their highest potential. The need to be understanding of situational circumstances (i.e. poverty, neighborhoods, cultural differences, parenting styles, etc.) but not allowing limitations to be placed on urban students because of them was expressed across all three interviews.

Participant 3G added, "I expect teachers to realize that something going wrong in their academics could be a result of what's going on at home. Take a little extra time with it...try to understand it might be because of what they're going through." Participant 3C echoed the need for cultural understanding and teacher resilience in teachers by saying, "teachers need to know the culture, the homelife ... really understand the hard to hear stuff and keep going." Participant 1F placed the power in the teachers' hands in how the child will react to the teacher. It begins with the teacher to establish a process of understanding and for the teacher to be resilient in

building a relationship. Although in urban schools, the cultural dissonance was real and understanding was work, a high-quality teacher-student relationship was expected. Participant 1F was simple and concise in affirming this as he stated, “Build a wall that won't break down.”

The theme of cultural awareness and understanding was embedded throughout each focus group interview and by each participant in some way or another. Characteristics mentioned by participants that supported the theme included teacher understanding, recognizing that the student has unique and specific experiences different than that of the teacher, teacher willingness to value cultural differences, teacher empathy when the situation is related to homelife, and acknowledging the challenges students face academically when living in poverty, high-crime areas, or underserved neighborhoods. Participants believed that high-quality teacher-student relationships were built and sustained when the teacher understood and recognized differences, challenges, and individual student needs related to culture, homelife, and student background.

Theme Four: High Expectations and Individual Standards

Expectations for and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents include setting and holding students to high standards (RQ1, RQ2). The fourth theme of high expectations and individual learning standards was identified as a characteristic and expectation of high-quality teacher-student relationship by all urban parent participants. Data supporting the theme directly correlated to both of the primary research questions.

Research Question 1:

How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

Research Question 2:

How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

The theme of high expectations and individualized learning emerged as thematic and categorical coded took place. The theme was further strengthened when analyzing the written questionnaire data, notes and observational data, and transcripts from each of the three semi-structured focus groups. Holding students to high and consistent expectations is necessary in creating high-quality teacher-student relationships because students in urban school systems often underperform academically, and often have teachers with lower expectations (Ahram et al., 2011). Table 12 presents the findings supporting high expectations from teachers of urban students as noted by parents of urban elementary students. Responses were extracted from participants' written questionnaire form which each participant completed prior participating in the interview focus groups.

Table 12

Evidence of the Need for High Expectations from Participants Written Questionnaire

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	
What is most important to you when it comes to your child's teacher?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 2C “ ... hold my child to high expectations.” ● Participant 3F “ ... that they hold high standards for my child and not judge them on their own stereotypes.” ● Participant 3G “ ... that the teacher sees and treats my child like an individual and respects diversity in the

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	<p>classroom, that they have high expectations and helps them reach their fullest potential each day.”</p>
I expect my child’s teacher to ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="586 646 1333 825">● Participant 1A “ ... set goals and help my child reach them, socially and academically. Believe that my child can do anything.” <li data-bbox="586 863 1317 968">● Participant 2A “ ... be clear on their expectations, and help them reach their highest potential” <li data-bbox="586 1010 1333 1115">● Participant 3F “ ... reinforce the expectations I have, to treat me and my child with practice and respect.” <li data-bbox="586 1157 1308 1409">● Participant 3G “I expect the teacher to be caring but also to push them to be better and do everything they can to help them reach their highest potential as a student and as a growing individual.”
In order to have a strong relationship with the teacher I expect my child to ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="586 1478 1297 1661">● Participant 1D “ ... know what is expected and work hard to reach those expectations, to do their best at everything they do.” <li data-bbox="586 1703 1268 1803">● Participant 2B “ ... put forth full effort each day to reach the expectations the teacher has set.”

Question/Sentence	Participant and Sample Responses
Starter	
Describe a teacher that positively impacted you when you were in school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1F “She saw potential in me that no one else did. She made me believe I could reach her goals and succeed.” ● Participant 3A “She understood that I was capable of much more than I was showing. She expected me to do better, so I did.”

Examining the emerging themes and clustering them together according to conceptual similarities through thematic and categorical coding proved to be a successful and relevant approach to construct meaningful findings. The findings included the theme of high expectations as both a characteristic and expectation of high-quality teacher-student relationships expressed by participants. In viewing the transcriptions and applying contextual value to the lived experiences and voiced expectations of participants, the need for high expectations in teacher-student relationships was a significant finding. The theme of high expectations revealed that participants placed value on teachers holding students accountable for reaching high academic and behavioral expectations. The participants expressed that the teacher should hold students accountable by placing student ownership on learning; setting clear, challenging, and attainable expectations; and providing the necessary support needed for students to reach high expectations. Many participants noted that all students should be held to high expectations; however, what was expected of each individual student should reflect their individual needs. As with the other noted

themes, high expectations were more likely to be in place when a teacher had a strong relationship with the student and viewed the student's learning as an individualized process.

During the semi-structured interview process participants were asked to share characteristics of high-quality teachers and to identify a teacher-student relationship that positively impacted them as a student. Participant 1F described the teacher in her past as "structured" and someone who "held all students accountable for their learning." She viewed high expectations of that teacher as "demanding, yet fair" and attributed her success as an adult to the skills impressed upon her by her former teacher. She stated, "The teachers that expected the most of me and were the most demanding, helped me learn the skills I needed when I was out of school."

Participant 2D recalled her former elementary teacher and described him as, "supportive, demanding, and inclusive." She said he had high standards and he pushed each student to work hard without making them "dependent on the teacher." Holding students to high expectations regardless of the student's background or the teacher's personal beliefs was a recurring concept throughout all three interviews.

During the interviews the participants were asked to describe urban education and identify aspects of high-quality teaching in urban educators. Participants openly shared that urban education was unique and the teachers of urban children needed to understand how to uniquely and individually connect with the child and the family. Many participants discussed their disappointment in urban schools accepting low performance as the "norm." Expecting students to be successful starts with the teacher. Participant 1A emphasized this when saying, "I expect the teacher to see my kid as a success story. Don't look down on them, don't expect less

for them. They [the student] got what it takes.” As described by many participants, exemplary teachers were those teachers that consistently hold students and families to high expectations and believed they could be reached.

Participant 1D reflected on his exposure to many types of schools and claimed urban students were often expected to fail while other systems expected students to achieve. He felt that high-quality teachers were the difference makers in this area for urban students. He acknowledged the power a teacher has in pushing a student to do more than that student believes is possible. The stronger the relationship between a teacher and a student the more likely the student is to put forth maximum effort and excel academically. According to this participant, the opposite is true when there is a negative relationship in place. Students will either rise up or fall down to the expectations put in place by the teacher. He further expanded on this concept by impressing on the importance of having teachers with high-expectations in an urban school, iterating that environment is most vulnerable and most in need of teachers with high standards.

Participant 3F shared the need for teachers to set and hold students to high standards without placing limitations on them. He stated,

Keep the expectations high, like whatever you expect for your child to learn, expect for my child to learn. Don't dumb it down or change it because you think you know. Even if you [the teacher] may go about it a different way, hold them [the students] to their potential, but don't let how much you care about them or think you understand their life be a crutch for lower expectations. They [the students] can reach more if you [the teacher] believe in them, support them, and expect them to.

When meaningful teacher-student relationships are created the teacher sees the student's potential and creates an environment where high expectations are the norm. He stated,

Urban schools are lower performing, it's no secret. It shouldn't be that way. Urban kids are expected to fail and in other schools' kids are expected to succeed. It is about setting the expectations and making the students see they are more than an urban kid. Teachers that set those high standards are the ones changing how kids see themselves.

Participant 1A believed when students were seen as individuals rather than judged as the "typical urban kid", teachers could build expectations based on the abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and needs of each child. She said, "I expect the teacher to see my kid as a success story. Don't look down on them, don't expect less from them."

Participant 1D agreed, and related the need for high expectations to carry over to student behaviors as well, "Don't act like you don't want to deal with it, or the behaviors are too bad. Make them reach your expectations instead of accepting it." He elaborated on the conversation by saying, "some students might think, I'd rather be bad than dumb, so let me just act out instead of being called out." Many participants used nonverbal indicators such as head shaking or pointing to express agreement with his statement. Conclusively, there is a need and an expectation for teachers to hold urban students to high expectations and put in place the skills and scaffolds required to help each student advance.

All participants expressed the power of a teacher's words and actions in making students feel successful, adequate, accepted, and empowered. Participant 2A said, "kids in urban neighborhoods are up for more challenges. And they don't have as many people holding them to a high standard at home or at school." Teachers were expected to hold students to high standards

for behavior and academics. Quotes were extracted from all three focus group interviews and presented in Table 13 as further evidence of support that participants identified high expectations as a characteristic and expectation of high-quality teaching.

Table 13

Participant Quotes Referencing High Expectation and Standards

Participant	Quote
1A	“Classroom control comes from the teacher knowing how to make each student learn and setting what is expected for each student. Push them. Don’t lower your standards.”
2A	“The teacher has to set their expectations for the students. They need to be clear on what is expected for behavior, academics, and respect. They need to know the needs of each kid to do this.
2A	“I was just like, I was impressed. She [the teacher] was confident, prepared, had clear rules and boundaries and the students rose up to what she expected.”
2B	“Teachers need to know about the differences each child is coming with and meet all their needs in order to help them grow.”
2B	“She [the teacher] made it like he [the student] was expected to act a certain way. She was loving and caring but also pushed him. She made him work through his academic struggles instead of accepting them. She

had those expectations and. And they knew what to do because that was the only way she [the teacher] worked.”

2C “My daughter's teacher, she's very caring, she has high expectations and expects the kids to reach them no matter what. She listens, she understands, she communicates, and she don't play games. That's how it should be. And I know her class loves her.”

3A “Kids need to know this is how we do stuff here. There needs to be consistency and connection and communication and high expectations so the teacher is on the same page as the parents. And the kids is on the same page as the teacher. And that's that, period, no wavering.”

3B “These children see a lot but the teacher should still hold high expectations and believe they are not all the same. Yeah. It all depends on the teacher's outlook, how they work, and what they expect but that family bridge piece is important.”

3B “Teachers need to teach that code switching piece, too. It's okay to act a certain way in a certain environment. We don't always act the same way when you're here. But when you're here, these are expectations. These are our consequences. Have those clear expectations for everything.”

3F “When I send my son to school, that teacher needs to recognize what my needs are and my expectations as a parent and help reinforce them when he is at school. Hold him to those same expectations.”

3F “[Teachers]set and hold your standards high. Mean it. Don’t settle.”

Participants shared that it is not just having high expectations in the classroom but also clearly communicating them to the students and families that is important. Participant 1A shared that parents have to help facilitate and support the expectations of teachers when the child is at home, “You know, I want to help the teacher, I want to carry on her work at home but I gotta know what is expected so I can help better.” Participant 1E added, “I think then the academics would kick in as soon as you know, that triangle was formulated with the student, teacher, and parents and everybody's on the same page, when everyone has the same high expectations.”

Similar sentiment on the perception of urban students’ teacher expectations were also shared by participants in the second and third focus group interviews. Participant 2A believed that teachers and parents need to support each other as it relates to holding students to high expectations. She shared, “Kids are different now. It goes back home. It all starts at home and transitions to school. If the teacher knows the expectations from home, she can hold the students to high expectations in school and vice versa.” Many participants expressed that high-quality teachers were those that do not place limitations on students, work with families to hold students accountable, and enforce high expectations in all areas, academic, social and behavioral.

The teachers described as set high standards were the ones that participants respected and remembered as impactful and invested. High standards, clear expectations, and an unwavering

belief that urban students can achieve was identified as both a characteristic of, and expectation for, high-quality teacher-student relationships. Participant 3E described his desire for his child to have a teacher that set high expectations and one that places the right tools and opportunities in the student's hands to be able to reach those goals. He stated, "I want my kids' teacher to be super, not just ordinary. I expect them to hold my kid to the highest standards because that is what they signed up to do ... raise kids up."

Participant 2B stated, "a good teacher pushes students to be better than even they think they can be, they set the standards a smidge higher and keep pushing." The theme of setting high expectations was a significant finding in all focus group interviews and announced by all participants. Comments from the written questionnaire and conversation transcripts, along with personal notes and memos, were used to analyze and summarize the essence of this theme in terms of its importance and relevance in better understanding the phenomenon of urban parents' described characteristics and expectations for teacher-student relationships.

Theme Five: Student Engagement and Individualized Learning

High-quality teacher-student relationships include student engagement and individualized learning (RQ1, RQ2). This ongoing theme evolved from thematic coded responses related to teacher engagement, student engagement, individual interest-based learning opportunities, excitement about learning, passionate teaching, and teacher awareness of individual student needs both academically and socially. As with the other themes, this theme was also a result of an in-depth data analysis of participants' written questionnaires, observational insight, notes, and memoing throughout the interview process, and the transcription of three semi-structured small group interviews. Table 14 presents connected findings supporting the identified characteristics

and expectations of student engagement and individualized learning when high-quality teacher-student relationships were described by parents of urban elementary students.

Table 14

Evidence of Student Engagement and Individualized Learning from Participants Written Questionnaire

Question/Sentence Starter	Participant and Sample Responses
I expect my child’s teacher to ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1D “ ... do what they can to make my child love going to school. Creating lessons that are engaging, hands on ... be passionate and excited to teach.”
Describe what a positive teacher-student relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1C “Each child learns based on their academic needs. The teacher is excited and committed to teaching so that each child can also be excited to learn.” ● Participant 2B “The student and the teacher are passionate, excited, and invested in learning. They are motivated by their success.” ● Participant 3A “Engaging.”
Negative outcomes of poor teacher student relationships include ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant 1A “ ... not wanting to go to school, not being engaged or excited about school.”

-
- Participant 1C “ ... a lack of interest or excitement in school, might lead to bad behaviors or not wanting to go to school.”
 - Participant 1D “ ... If students are not engaged they might not want to go to school and will not learn.”
 - Participant 2D “If the students are not engaged or interesting the teacher may not want to plan or teach lessons, and if the teacher is not engaging the kids will act up.”
-

The written responses of participants, along with the focus group interview transcriptions validated the finding of engagement and individual learning as a descriptor of high-quality teacher-student relationships recognized by urban parents in the study. The transcripts of each focus group interview, along with my observations, memoing, and notetaking were analyzed and applied as further evidence supporting student engagement, teacher passion, and individualized learning opportunities. Thematic and categorical codes contributing to this finding included participants voicing a need for teachers to have excitement and passion, dedication, awareness of individual student needs, student engagement, teacher engagement, connection, and relevance in the learning. Additional words and phrases identified in this categorical findings included references to fun or enjoyment, attention, teacher differentiation, real-world applications of learning, investment in teaching, student curiosity, student satisfaction in learning, hands-on instruction, and motivation. Table 15 presents quotes across all three focus interviews in which

participants referenced the characteristics of engagement and individualized learning when describing high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Table 15

Participant Quotes Referencing Engagement and Individualized Learning

Participant	Quote
1E	“You [the student]can tell when a teacher is excited about teaching and when they don’t care, you know. They [the teachers] need to be invested and fun.”
2B	“The teacher has to know what each child is supposed to be doing and create an inclusive environment in which all children are excited and connected to the learning.”
2C	“Sometimes the quietest, most well behaved students are the ones that fly under the radar. Teachers need to identify each child’s needs and make them part of the lesson.”
2D	“Every child is at a different place academically and mentally, treating them individually is expected. Not everybody's gonna learn the same thing in the same way, meet the child where they're at.”

- 2D “Instead of just standing up in front of the classroom and teaching the math lesson, know that there's a few kids who need a little bit more support. Um, and just being willing to provide that support and engage those kids, too ... seeing them really as individuals.”
- 3A “If you [the teacher] ain't making no eye contact, you not engaged, you not compassionate, you not paying attention to see who got the head down. You just teaching. They not engaged. They not about to learn nothing. You stay excited, they stay engaged.”
- 3C “You [the teacher] signed up to be a teacher, you need to be excited and committed and ready to motivate each kid.”
- 3C “The passion is missing in a lot of teachers, especially in urban classrooms, and you can tell they are not excited to teach so how will my kids be excited to learn if no one is engaged? If the teacher isn't passionate? You [the teacher] get up and gotta give you best every day to make the kids engaged and excited to learn, and you gotta understand what they have going on.”

In efforts to capture the lived experiences of each participant interview questions which required self-reflection and a connection to personal interpretations of events were used to guide the discussion among participants. The theme of engagement and individualized learning

emerged throughout each interview when participants were asked to reflect on high-quality teachers in their past and the characteristics required to create high-quality teacher-student relationships. In the interview, the lived experiences of participants were connected to a desire for engagement and individualization in the classroom. Many participants expressed student engagement and motivation as a direct result of teacher passion and engagement in teaching. I asked participants to describe an impactful teacher. Participant 1E shared that she recalled most of her time in school as boring or disengaging, the teachers that made an impact were those that made learning “fun” and that “understood that each student learned a certain way.” She added, “the ones [teachers] that stood out were not monotone or boring, they were actually excited to teach and put effort into the instruction.

Participant 1A shared how she was not interested in school and how she struggled academically. She believed that even the most unmotivated students will put forth effort if the teacher is engaging and interesting. She stated, “if the teacher is motivated to teach and excited to be there that energy is picked up on and the student is more motivated and engaged. And, if not both will have a negative experience.”

Individualized learning was mentioned in each focus group as an expectation in high-quality teaching. Participants viewed individualized learning as a means to neutralize the behavioral and academic issues that many teachers face when teaching in urban schools. Participant 1F believed that relationships were strengthened when the teacher viewed the student as an individual learner and used their individuality to create an environment of excitement and connection. She stated, “Teachers need to find common ground with each kid on an individual level and use the relationship to make the student comfortable.”

Participant 2B addressed the impact of individualized learning and student identity in creating engagement and personalized relationships. She connected individualized learning to her child's teacher and stated, "She [the teacher] understood my child, and was willing to work with him on an individual level. She provided alternatives to problems and worked to get to the root of the problem. This was possible because she knew his needs and what motivated him."

Knowing how to reach the students is part of creating an engaging environment. Participant 3G noted the importance of knowing a student's needs in order to create an environment of individualized learning and personal. Participant 3G stated, "Teachers have to motivate, and get kids excited to learn. Being able to build upon their strengths and help them at least improve in their weaknesses. Teachers have to know, really know the kids to do that."

Participant 3B added to the conversation saying,

Teachers have to prioritize individualization and personal needs if they want to make that connection in the classroom. They need to be willing to see what each child's individual needs is, you know, identifying those things, know how to get them interested, to see what, what areas that child is lacking at. Versus just, you know, treating, not treating everybody the same, but just making sure each child can be as successful as other children. Knowing what each child needs and how to get it to them makes a good teacher. It comes down to the relationships they have with their students and with the parents to really know what each child needs and use that to engage them.

Several participants contributed to the conversation, voicing their desire for their child's teacher to value individualized learning and to use each student's individual interests, talents, abilities, to engage, motivate and differentiate the learning experiences. Participant 2D elaborated on the positive impact of a teacher-student relationship expressing that individual

learning, student motivation, engagement, and excitement were side effects of a meaningful and connected teacher-student relationship.

Student ownership, interest-based learning, individualized goals, and student-centered options support student engagement. Participant 1E related engagement to autonomy by stating, Give a student five options and let them pick, let them have ownership in the learning and they will be engaged. Teachers need to know what they need to teach each individual kid. And know how a student learns, and not just not how the teacher teaches. Choices work for engagement and in meeting the child's individual needs, because each child comes with totally different needs. Choice and options will make the kids more excited to learn.

When asked about the benefits of a high-quality teacher student relationships the participants drew a correlation between student engagement and positive student outcome. Participant 1D shared that his son wanted to go to school and was eager to see his teacher because he felt connected to her and the learning. He recognized that the relationship his son had with his teacher the previous year was not the same, and because of that he was not nearly as excited or invested in school. He stated,

This year my son loves school and is excited to learn. He loves his teacher. You can't learn if you aren't at school and if you aren't motivated. You can't be motivated if you are not engaged and invested in what you are doing. It is full circle. That's how it works, so the teacher needs to find a way to connect with each child so that they are individually engaged and motivated.

Participant 1A agreed, "Yep, that's right. A strong relationship will help them [the students] grow academically and be more engaged in what's going on in school."

Many participants made strong connections between student engagement and student motivation. For example, Participant 2A stated,

Relationships are a part of the real world. And the relationships between a teacher and a student is a way to increase how each person is invested in the other. The relationship between a student and the teacher will help the student academically and make the student want to learn more and do better. If they enjoy their teacher, if they respect their teacher, if they are excited, they are going to want to learn from their teacher. And when that happens, the motivation will increase and students will be engaged in their learning. When you like where you are going every day, and you care about the teacher and the friends you are with, you become excited and engaged in what is going on in the classroom.

The theme of student engagement and individualized learning opportunities was clear in each interview session and expressed by the majority of participants making the finding relevant and significant to the intent of the study. What is known is that student engagement is a dependable and robust predictor of academic and social success (Lee, 2012). As the participants expressed, teachers are a crucial component in creating a space where students feel individually recognized. As presented by the participants, engagement, motivation, and individual student learning opportunities are expectations and characteristics that are essential components of high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Summary of Findings

Descriptions of the research methods applied to analyze the collected data in this study were presented in this chapter. The rationale and connection of the research questions to study outcomes was evident as the findings were presented. The use of a qualitative, phenomenological

design method imploring semi-structured focus groups was determined to be an effective means to gather personal insight, experiences, and expectations from the lived experiences of 16 participants on their views and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. The core research questions which were used to develop questions in the written questionnaire and the interview guide are:

RQ1: How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

RQ2: How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

Secondary research questions were also designed to gain optimal insight from participants over their perceptions, characteristics, and expectations of teacher-student relationships in an urban school. An in-depth data analysis included participant responses of interview transcriptions, written questionnaire responses, observations, and personal note taking to support how responses were coded. Before the collection and analysis of data occurred, and throughout the data analysis process, I engaged in the epoché process which included bracketing personal experiences as a means to mitigate personal researcher bias and increase data validity and reliability. This was a preliminary, ongoing, and operational process. Reflection and review of the processes was intentional and completed on a spiraling continuum throughout the study. Interview transcripts and written questionnaire responses were shared with participants after edited for perceived precision to member check for accuracy. This step was in place to further strengthen the validity and reality of the data through member checking.

Thematic and categorical coding was used to ensure that the careful and vigilant emergence and extraction of themes was consistent and meaningful. A color-coded system was

done by hand as redundant and careful analysis of interview transcripts occurred. Predominant, conclusive, and consistent themes emerged after an in-depth data analysis process of coding, data comparison, and data saturation was completed. Five primary, predominant findings emerged.

The themes and samples of the words or phrases identified to support the thematic coding of each theme are presented in Table 16.

Table 16

Findings and Aligned Supportive Thematic Codes (Words, Phrases, Associations)

Finding:	Supportive Interpretive Thematic Code Samples:
<p>1. Communication. Clear, consistent, and ongoing communication was considered a necessary attribute and an expectation of high-quality teachers as described by urban parents. (RQ1, RQ 2)</p>	<p><i>Communication, ongoing interaction, transparent discussions, respectful communication, listen and inform, reach out often, include me in all conversations, comfortable and clear talks, constant communication, approach with concerns, fill me in on achievements, keep me connected, listen to my concerns, regular communication</i></p>
<p>2. Care and connection. Care, personal connection, a sense of belonging, and authenticity are</p>	<p><i>Love, connections, investment, discernment, a sense of belonging, authenticity, compassion, empathy, discernment, a feeling</i></p>

Finding:	Supportive Interpretive Thematic Code
descriptive characteristics in building meaningful teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents (RQ 1)	<p data-bbox="808 300 927 331">Samples:</p> <p data-bbox="776 386 1360 1003"><i>of community, care, nurturing, peaceful, mutual love and care, prioritize the student's well-being, attentive to their emotional needs, model how to be caring and kind, mutual love, care about student beyond school, unconditional care, personal involvement and investment, show vulnerability, be reliable and kind, a sense of acceptance, affection</i></p>
<p data-bbox="250 1115 732 1808">3. Teacher awareness and understanding. Expectations of high-quality, teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents must include an awareness of the students' culture, individual situations, and urban challenges. Teacher awareness and understanding will strengthen the teacher-student relationships (RQ1, RQ2).</p>	<p data-bbox="776 1115 1360 1808"><i>Cultural understanding, awareness of student backgrounds, individual situations, urban challenges, differences in urban students, do not make judgments, stereotyping, know what the students are up against, see them as individuals, do not make assumptions, situational, circumstantial, beyond academic, cultural differences, value diversity, support the individual needs, know the community and neighborhoods the</i></p>

<p>Finding:</p>	<p>Supportive Interpretive Thematic Code</p> <p>Samples:</p>
	<p><i>students live in, be aware of what each child goes through, recognize what is not known as a teacher, respect student's culture and background</i></p>
<p>4. High Expectations. Expectations for and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents include setting and holding students to high standards and recognizing parental expectations (RQ1, RQ2).</p>	<p><i>Clear expectations, high expectations, clear standards, consistent expectations, fullest potential individual success, know what is expected at home, goal setting, push the students, do not make excuses, hold students accountable, raise the expectations, hold students to behavior and academic expectations, no limitations, awareness of expectations, do not lower the standards for urban students</i></p>
<p>5. Student engagement and individualized learning. High-quality teacher-student relationships include</p>	<p><i>Individualized learning, choice, interest-based learning, motivation, engagement, connection to the learning, excitement about school, know what each child needs and</i></p>

Finding:	Supportive Interpretive Thematic Code
student engagement and individualized learning (RQ1, RQ2).	Samples: <i>teach them on an individual level, differentiation in teaching, engagement, creative and student-centered learning, teacher passion and excitement</i>

Each identified theme was substantially supported with direct quotes, written responses, and interpretations from conversations of the participants. Findings were compared to the literature studied on expectations of teacher-student relationships. According to the participants in the study, the findings of aligned research that supportive relationships fostered between a student and teacher are essential in developing a climate of inclusivity, care, and academic achievement (Anyon et al., 2018). It was evident that many of the expectations and characteristics of high-quality student teacher-relationship revealed by participants with elementary students in an urban school in Northeastern Ohio were aligned to those identified in the inclusive review of empirical literature as presented in Chapter 2. There were, however, some discrepancies when considering what the urban parent participants did not identify as the expectations or characteristics of a high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Teacher credentials, class-size, ongoing professional developments or training sessions, standard-based learning, the condition of the physical school building or classroom, teacher experience was not specifically addressed as necessary characteristics or expectations needed in

creating high-quality teacher-student relationships. Many participants made connections to an awareness of individual student needs, knowing the child beyond the academic setting, and expecting ongoing communication; however, very little was directly said related to the expectation of physical safety and mental health needs. Additionally, there were few comments worthy of consideration which did not justify enough substance or consistency to yield the development of a conclusive theme. Lightly noted was the connection of a need for deeper training of teachers at a higher education level when it comes to working with urban students. This was brought up by Participant 3C as he stated, “we really have to take a better look at what goes into the preparation process for urban teachers. Are the programs and courses preparing them to be successful in an urban setting?” He added “the better prepared teachers are out of college, the more likely they are to be successful in teaching our kids.”

According to the five predominant findings of the study, it could be confirmed that the urban participants from one setting in Northeastern Ohio recognized the impact that high-quality teacher-student relationships can make in the short- and long-term success of urban students. Each recalled a meaningful and memorable teacher-student relationship that shaped them. Every participant reflected on the impact a teacher from their past made in determining how they viewed school and grew academically and socially. Every participant addressed the challenges and difficulties urban students face and recognized that teachers in an urban setting are also often facing challenges and frustrations. Mutual understanding and care were discussed as a means to develop a trusting relationship between the teacher, student, and family of the student. Connection of home life to school was an especially pressing point made by numerous participants. Consistency, respect, connection, recognizing individual needs, authenticity, creating a sense of belonging, and care were noted characteristics of meaningful teachers. The

importance of teacher awareness of diversity, cultural attunement, and understanding personal situations was also discussed in each interview. Conclusively, every participant believed that the teacher-student relationship is the driving force in student success at all levels. When the teacher-student relationship is rooted in mutual care, love, trust, high-standards, understanding, and individual needs, challenges disproportionately facing urban students can be mitigated.

The characteristics and expectations described by the urban parent participants used in the study were generally aligned and similar to the characteristics that teachers identified as important and that students identified as important when comparing with the literature findings on teacher-student relationships. This study explicitly depicted urban parent perspectives of teacher-student relationships which was a concept not as widely studied as both the perspectives of teacher and students on teacher-student relationships. According to participants, clear and ongoing communication, maintaining high expectations, viewing students as individuals, developing motivating and engaging learning opportunities, showing love and care, investment beyond academics, and respecting the background of each child were expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships in an urban school. The relationship matters.

Chapter 5 presents additional implications, conclusions from the study, recommendations for data use, continuation of interest for further studies, and comprehensive conclusions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

This qualitative, phenomenological study focused on describing the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives of urban elementary parents. Described in the results of the study are the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships presented by exploring the perspectives and lived experiences of parents of current urban elementary students in Northeastern Ohio. This chapter will conclude the study by summarizing key research findings in relation to the research aims and questions and presenting applications for use and benefactors of the study results. A synthesized summary of the study design, the sample size and participant descriptors, major points, research outcomes, and the emergence of new questions are included in this chapter. Suggestions for future research and the potential for expanding on this study to yield new information is also included. The value and contribution of the findings, along with implications and limitations of the study are addressed. A connection to existing literature and theory, along with the potential opportunities for continuation of the topic in future studies, is presented within this chapter. The chapter concludes with an overall comprehensive summary of the research in relationship to the research questions which drove the study. This phenomenological qualitative study investigated the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher student relationships.

This research sought to bring insight into urban parental perspectives of high-quality teacher-student relationships when viewing characteristics and expectations of relationships through the lens of urban parents of elementary students. Participants' lived experiences were

essential in better understanding the phenomenon's essence and the connection to meaning to participant responses. The two central research questions guiding the study were:

1. How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships?
2. How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

Three semi-structured focus groups were conducted by implementing a qualitative, phenomenological design approach, which provided rich insights into parental expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships in an urban school. Participants engaged in open conversations guided by the presentation of semi-structured interview questions and discussion prompts developed to better understand the characteristics and expectations of urban parents on high-quality teacher-student relationships. An analysis of the data collected provided relevant and meaningful perceptions using the unique and shared lived experiences and responses of urban parents as it related to expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Summary of Findings

The study aimed to describe the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspectives and lived experiences of urban elementary parents in Northeastern Ohio. The summary of findings section discusses key findings and critical information from the study. The target population for this qualitative, phenomenological focus group study was parents who currently had children in an urban elementary school, specifically in grades kindergarten through second grade. It was essential that all participants experience the

phenomenon being studied and independently contribute to the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2017). The sample population included a total of 16 urban parents who volunteered to participate in and contribute to the study. As described in Chapter 3, the sample selection method used for the study was purposeful criterion-based sampling, in which all participants voluntarily responded and elected to participate in the research study. Snowball sampling was also used as a secondary sampling method to meet the required sample size for the study. The consideration of participants in the study was essential in ensuring the phenomenon being studied was supported with information-rich, personal responses rooted in lived experiences and unique perceptions of those contributing to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Participants completed a written questionnaire and engaged in a semi-structured interview in a collaborative small focus group setting. Data were analyzed from both the written responses and transcripts of the audio focus groups. Researcher notes, memoing, and interpretations of responses were also considered in the data analysis process. Three focus groups interviews lasting 60-90 minutes were conducted. Each interview session had between four and seven participants. As the researcher, I facilitated each interview, taking notes and asking appropriate follow up questions to elaborate on or clarify responses of participants. The interviews were semi-structured in design to encourage and promote open discussion, sharing personal experiences, and meaningful connection to questions and topics. A guided list of questions and discussion topics was used to facilitate conversational-style responses and encourage comfortable sharing of lived experiences in each interview. Participants were asked to reflect on, both their current state as a parent of an urban elementary student, and their own previous school experiences in order to gather deep and meaningful comprehensive responses on the characteristics and expectations of parents in teacher-student relationships.

The data analysis process involved an in-depth examination of the audio transcriptions retrieved from each interview, thematic and categorical coding of data, and identification of themes through data deduction, constant comparative methods, and data saturation. Member checking with each participant was included after the transcriptions were completed to ensure reliability through authenticity, transparency, and accuracy.

Through the lens of parental insights and lived experiences of their expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships, participants' stories, responses, and conversations within each interview provided rich and meaningful personal descriptions. It was as though each parent participant traveled back in time, reflecting on their own experiences as elementary students. Snapshots of the past, along with influences of current situations and aspirations for the future, were evident in participants' responses when discussing characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Retrospective events and feelings from the participants' time as a student themselves seemed to come to life as they engaged in conversation with each other. Stories and experiences were weaved together by participants as each reflected on their time and experiences as an urban student and to their current situation as a parent of an elementary student. At times during the interviews, emotions were high, voices were passionate, stories were vivid, and open conversations were a means of making connections as participants expanded on their unique and shared experiences. It was as though the conversations, memories, hopes, and expectations of the parent participants acted as a time capsule, reflecting impression from their own educational experiences, and as a portal, opening a window an ideal future as expectations for their children were clear and passionately communicated. Conclusively and without waiver, participants agreed that one teacher matters in

the trajectory of an urban student's life. The teacher is an essential and profound component of student's success in all aspects of a child's life.

Five key consistent findings emerged from the data analysis process relative to the study's two research questions, which follow:

RQ1. How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

RQ2. How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

The following five findings were derived through thematic and categorical coding:

1. Clear, consistent and ongoing communication (RQ 1, RQ 2)
2. Teacher care and connections (RQ 1)
3. Teacher awareness and understanding (RQ 1, RQ 2)
4. High expectations (RQ 1, RQ 2)
5. Student engagement and individualized learning (RQ 1, RQ 2)

Key Finding 1: Clear, Consistent, and Ongoing Communications

Urban parents in Northeastern Ohio described clear, consistent, and ongoing communication as an expectation and characteristic of high-quality teacher-student relationships in elementary school. Communication was further defined as the communication between the teacher and parents, teacher to students, and students to teacher. The entities of strong, clear and ongoing communication include the parent, teacher, and student. Clear, consistent, and

continuous communications were identified as necessary attributes, characteristics, and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships (RQ 1, RQ 2).

Key Finding 2: Teacher Care and Connections

Urban elementary parents in Northeastern Ohio described teacher care, personal connection, a sense of belonging, and authenticity as characteristics of building and maintaining high-quality teacher-student relationships with urban elementary students (RQ 1). Teachers providing care and acting in a nurturing manner, developing a personal and individual relationship with both the student and the family, and presenting themselves in a transparent, authentic and relatable manner were identified as characteristics needed in high-quality, teacher-student relationships as identified by urban parents. Urban parents expressed the need for teacher authenticity, transparency, compassion, and kindness in individualized teacher-student relationships, which can foster deeper connections, a sense of purpose and belongingness for students.

Key Finding 3: Teachers' Awareness and Understanding

Characteristics and expectations of high-quality, teacher-student relationships as described by urban parents in Northeastern Ohio, included teachers' awareness of the students' cultures, individual situations, and urban challenges. Parents believed that teacher awareness and understanding strengthen the teacher-student relationships (RQ1, RQ2). Other characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships included teacher consciousness, interest-based learning, understanding individual backgrounds, and investment in knowing and understanding the personal lives of students. Urban parents in the study expected that teachers be aware and respectful of cultural competencies and student diversity. Teacher empathy, understanding, and

support for barriers facing students and families, such as the negative impacts of poverty, limited resources, and challenges with homelife situations, should be recognized and respected.

Key Finding 4: High Expectations

Expectations for and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships, as described by urban parents of elementary students in Northeastern Ohio, included setting and holding students to high academic and behavioral standards and recognizing the expectations parents hold for their child (RQ1, RQ2). Holding students to high and consistent expectations is necessary for creating high-quality teacher-student relationships because students in urban school systems often underperform academically, and often have teachers with lower expectations for academics and behavior (Ahram et al., 2011). Parents expressed the need for teachers to hold students to high levels of academic and behavioral standards; not lowering expectations based on the personal judgments or stereotypes of the teacher.

An awareness of what parents expect from the student was also identified as an expectation to assist in streamlining and supporting consistency in setting and monitoring high expectations for students. Participants' characteristics and expectations for high-quality teacher-student relationships included teachers holding students accountable for reaching high academic and behavioral expectations, presenting meaningful learning opportunities for students to be accountable and owners of their learning, creating challenging academic learning targets, and providing the necessary support for students to reach high academic and behavioral expectations.

Key Finding 5: Student Engagement and Individualized Learning

Characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships, as described by urban elementary parents in Northeastern Ohio, included student engagement,

motivation, and individualized learning opportunities (RQ1, RQ2). The engagement of both the teacher and the student were referenced as factors impacting teacher-student relationships. Student engagement in lessons is a dependable and robust predictor of academic and social success (Lee, 2012). Participants expected teachers to be excited and invested in making learning opportunities for students' interest-based, engaging, individualized, applicable, and relatable. Student engagement and student motivation were noted as a direct result of teacher passion and engagement in teaching. Student choice and academic autonomy were also noted as a means to make learning individualized and interesting for students. Participants described characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships as personal, engaging, motivating, and individualized.

Connection Across Data Sources

Data triangulation across all data points provided substantial evidence, increasing the validity and reliability of the key findings to the initial research questions. As noted, the two essential research questions were: RQ1. How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships? And RQ 2. How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships? Data collection sources included transcripts from each of the three small focus group interviews and participant written questionnaires. Data were also retrieved from notes, memoing, and observations. When findings converge across multiple data sources, a phenomenon can be analyzed through a new or different perspective, mitigating biases and alleviating unsubstantial findings. Viewing the findings in a triangulated format provides a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena (Carter et al., 2014). Table 17 includes the triangulation of data sources aligned to the initial research questions and aligned to the five

identified key findings. The cross-triangulation data sources included the transcripts from each of the three focus interview, the written questionnaire and the thematic coded findings.

Table 17

Data Triangulation of Research Questions to Key Findings in Data Sources

Aligned to Research Questions	Key Findings	Focus Group One	Focus Group Two	Focus Group Three	Written Questionnaire
RQ1: How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher- student relationships?	Key Finding 1: Clear, consistent, and ongoing communications (RQ1, RQ2)	X	X	X	X
	Key Finding 2: Teacher care and connections (RQ1)	X	X	X	X
	Key Finding 3: Teachers' awareness and understanding (RQ1, RQ2)	X	X	X	X

Aligned to Research Questions	Key Findings	Focus Group One	Focus Group Two	Focus Group Three	Written Questionnaire
RQ 2: How did urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?	Key Finding 4: High expectations (RQ1, RQ2)	X	X	X	X
	Key Finding 5: Student engagement and individualized learning (RQ1, RQ2)	X	X	X	X

Conclusions

The findings of this qualitative, phenomenological study brought about new insights into the expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships through the lenses of urban parents' perspectives. Although there is no shortage of existing studies and empirical literature viewing the impact, characteristics, expectations, and benefits of teacher-student relationships from student and teacher perspectives, more was needed to be known about the characteristics and expectations of urban parents when viewing the relationship between a teacher and student. To date, many of the researchers of teacher-student relationships have utilized quantitative

methodologies to examine predictors of engagement among white, middle-class samples with very few studies exclusively focusing on the impacts of teacher-student relationships on at-risk, underserved or economically disadvantaged urban elementary students (Fredricks et al., 2019). Because of the limited studies to date and the lack of research from urban parent perspectives, this study is particularly important in yielding valuable new information on teacher-student relationships from an urban parent perspective.

As the results of the study were further analyzed it was determined that several outside factors should be recognized as situational or environmental impacts which may impede on a teacher's ability or desire to build and maintain meaningful, positive relationships with students. Although the need for high-quality relationships between teacher and students, especially in an urban setting, is undeniably beneficial for numerous reasons, there are circumstantial roadblocks which often interfere with the teacher and student's ability to formulate and grow those relationships. The barriers facing teachers, and students alike, should be recognized as a means to identify concerns and to address areas of personal need. By identifying the shortcomings impacting high-quality relationships from occurring it allows for additional insight for educators on how to best create opportunities to overcome the interferences which may obstruct the path to a positive teacher-student relationship.

The challenges for urban teachers may include a personal discomfort due to cultural dissonance, an overwhelming amount of academic demands as it relates to content, assessments, and interventions, a lack of experience, inability to prioritize the aesthetic elements associated with education because of academic pressures, and ignorance or lack of awareness of the benefits of relationships between teachers and students. Acclimating teachers to the needs of urban education requires time, patience, and commitment. Students may also face challenge's which

stifle their ability to engage in an optimal, mutually beneficial, and trusting teacher-student relationships. Challenges for urban students may include a lack of trust, lack of high-quality relationships to act as models, high teacher attrition in urban schools, frequent or abrupt changes to the academic setting, and outside influences such as personal experiences, responsibilities at home, or poverty. Educational leaders must be the driving force in tearing down these roadblocks and creating intentional opportunities for relationship building for both teachers and students. Educational leaders should be asking, what can be done differently? What tools, skills, trainings, or experiences need to be in place to emphasize the importance of building and maintaining meaningful, high-quality teacher-student relationships. Ownership and accountability should not be mutually exclusive when it comes to teacher-student relationships.

As presented in the literature, urban students were especially impacted by strong teachers. Positive relationships between students and teachers have implications for improving the social and academic development of the student (Booker, 2021; Frisby et al., 2020; Jensen, 2016; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2015). Urban students benefited from high-quality, meaningful relationships with their teachers. Supportive relationships fostered between a student and teacher are essential in developing a climate of inclusivity, care, and academic achievement (Anyon et al., 2018). When those relationships are individual, authentic, and long-lasting, they have the potential to mitigate the disproportionate negative challenges facing many urban students, such as high absenteeism, low academics, poor behaviors, lack of investment, or a disconnect from homelife to school (Jensen, 2016; Scales et al., 2020).

This study specifically focused on the parents of urban elementary students because of the gap in literature addressing parents' views on high-quality teacher-student relationships. Better understanding what is needed, expected, and identified by parents of a current elementary

student in an urban school allows for a deeper awareness when viewing the phenomena of the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships.

Essential Takeaway 1: Teachers Matter

The findings in the study yielded new and valuable information on better understanding the urban parents' expectations and characteristics of elementary teacher-student relationships (RQ1 and RQ2). First, the most impressive and conclusive takeaway is that the teacher matters greatly, within and beyond a child's educational experiences. Every participant provided clear evidence and deep insight that the teacher is essential in all aspects of creating meaningful and pivotal relationships with students. All participants agreed that the relationship a student has with one teacher has the potential to forever change that student. Increase in motivation, engagement, a deeper sense of connection, the feeling of love and acceptance, being understood, and feeling valued were recurring topics associated with the influence of a powerful teacher.

Aligned to RQ1 and RQ2, the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships identified by urban parent participants indicated the need for an invested, caring, ethical, and motivational teacher. The teacher is foundational and empirical in all areas of student growth, including academic, social, and emotional. The concept of the lasting teacher impression on students and ability of a teacher to change student outcomes in all areas of a student's life was streamlined across all focus group interviews and directly or indirectly by each participant. Identified by all participants and emphasized in each focus group was the idea that the teacher is the single most impactful element of a student's education. "A teacher can change everything if they connect to the right kid in the right way" (Participant 3A). The teacher matters in all aspects of a student's life.

Participant 2B emphasized the holistic impression a teacher can make by saying, “Because our children are picking up the traits of their teachers, they are becoming part of who they are, so teachers need them to be more than just strong in the classroom. They need them to be strong people.” All participants recognized a teacher's short and long-term influences; many embraced the need for teachers to be moral, ethical, caring, kind, invested, and patient, and that the student will change based on the trust and investment of the teacher. Aligned to the noted key findings (e.g., communication, care, teacher understanding, high expectations, student engagement), these characteristics present an opportunity for the teacher to change the student, academically and socially, in the present and in the future. Positive relationships between students and teachers can offset or compensate for the risk’s students face outside school (Sanders et al., 2016). Participants contributed a student's ability to be resilient, improve academically and socially, increase engagement, and connect with others as a direct result of the relationship between a student and a teacher. Motivation and investment in learning was determined to be impacted by the perception of the relationship a student has with their teacher. “A good teacher pushes students to be better than even they think they can be, they set the standards a smidge higher and keep pushing” (Participant 2B).

Participants reflected on their lived experiences and recalled specific teachers as influential and formative, not only to their time in elementary school, but to life choices beyond their school years. Throughout the interviews, teachers were described by participants as *mentors, models, hope, peace, strong, influential, critical, the reason for growth, a mediator, a planter, a fixer, difference makers, sources of love, a family, a community, a safe space, comfort, welcoming, gentle, nurturing, supportive beyond school, and the one thing working in a broken system*. Although the research questions focused on identifying the characteristics (RQ1) and

expectations (RQ2) of high-quality teacher-student relationships presented by the parents of urban elementary students, it was clear that the expectations and characteristics were reflective of the participants' unique and shared lived experiences. A new awareness of the importance of high-quality teacher-student relationships was discovered by merging personal experiences with the expectations and desires of their urban elementary students. When investigating the phenomena, the past experiences and current expectations of participants could not be separated or viewed in isolation. The participants' pasts shaped their current views, which provided insights for the future.

Some participants discussed this change in attitude when viewing education and teacher qualities retrospectively to prospectively. Participant 2B believed, “A teacher can change everything if they make the right connection with the right kid in the right way. I have seen it happen. It changed everything for the kid, all because of one teacher.” The positive experiences shared by participants acted as a guide showing the expectations for their own children and the desire for them to have teachers that created lasting and positive impacts. Participant 2A emphasized this point by saying, “Those teachers that make a difference are those that find that common ground, they see the best parts of the situation not the worst. Good teachers find how to make the kids see the best so they have hope and effort”. Teacher support, awareness of individualized needs, and personal connections with students are areas of importance described by participants when creating a mind-shift for students. The teacher-student relationship can be used as a pivotal tool to guide a student to achieve academically and beyond a school setting.

A teacher can reshape any situation. Participant 3A compared a teacher to a gardener planting a seed, saying,

The great teachers impact the hardest students. That impact is like a seed. Once you plant a seed you might not check it for a while but it is growing, growing deep roots, changing, becoming stronger. That is what a teacher can do. You [the teacher] never know the impact you can have that would help the child in the future. The fruit takes a while to grow. Teachers are special, they change kids.

The teacher-student relationship does make a difference in all aspects of a student's life. Participant 3G reinforced a teacher's power in changing students: "A teacher can make or break a kid. That's a lot of responsibility. But as an urban kid, you find that one that believes in you, and they see you. It will change. It can and will change the trajectory of your life. I know that."

Essential Takeaway 2: Connections Beyond School are Crucial for Successful Relationships

A second takeaway aligned to both RQ1 and RQ2 and shaped from key findings was that according to urban parents in Northeastern Ohio, the teacher should consider the parents an essential component, who through intentional collaboration and communication, could assist the teacher in developing strong relationships with students. As connected to the research questions, the characteristics and expectations of participants in describing high-quality teacher student relationships indicated that the teacher is a critical component necessary for positive change in students. The teacher-student relationship is a dyadic relationship; however, it should not be overlooked that the parents are a contributing partner in strengthening the dyadic relationship between teacher and student. Parents acknowledged their roles and valued being a collaborative partner in their child's education. "Consistency at home and consistency at school matters. That consistency is done through ongoing communication" (Participant 2B).

Collaboration, communication, awareness of the student's life outside of school, aligning academic expectations and behavioral expectations to those put in place by parents, and the quality of the relationship between an urban elementary student and the teacher were expectations of urban parents. "Not every child is the same. Their home life isn't the same. Understanding the parents' wants and knowing where the family is in general is important in creating a relationship of respect and understanding. Parents are part of it, too" (Participant 1A). Communication and connection are not achieved in a mutually exclusive setting. Parents, teachers, and students are equally valuable and necessary in creating meaningful teacher-student relationships rooted in open and ongoing communication, transparency, and awareness of the academic and social needs of the student.

The parents are an indispensable and often overlooked resource, however they are vital in creating and supporting a strong teacher-student relationship. According to participants, family dynamics, situations in a student's home life, and personal challenges impact a student's success in school. As stated by Participant 2B, "The parents can help the teachers understand family dynamics and what is going on at home. These kids are faced with tough stuff sometimes. They [the teachers] need to know so they can understand and support the student when they are in school." Knowing the needs and expectations from a parent perspective allows for the teacher to acknowledge the student's homelife, culture, expectations, needs, and interests, which are foundational for increasing motivation, developing engaging lessons, and understanding individual situations students are facing outside of school.

Essential Takeaway 3: Teacher-Student Relationships are Significant to Urban Students

In synthesizing the study's findings, the third takeaway is that the teacher-student relationship was significant in creating a sense of belonging, care, and accountability for urban students. Participant 2A stated what many participants expressed; “the kids in urban neighborhoods are up for more challenges. And, they don't have as many people holding them to a high standard at home or at school.” Teachers need to show students that they are loved and valuable in and out of school. Teachers lay the foundation for success by building positive, meaningful, relationships that have the potential to decrease negative behaviors and increase student relational belonging and connectivity (Fredricks et al., 2019; Trust, 2021; Yang & Anyon, 2016).

As described by urban parent participants, the teacher-student relationship was a lifeline for many urban students. When teachers demonstrate a sense of care and invest effort into building positive relationships with students, students in turn felt a sense of belonging and a deeper connection to the classroom and the teacher (Cooper & Minness, 2014; Hanna, 2014).

Participant 2B profoundly addressed the role of teachers as it related to urban students when she said,

Eventually the kids in the city, the urban kids, the poor kids, are faced with the consequences of a series of bad choices that you can't come back from. It's like one challenge stacks with another where maybe in a different system, you remove the challenge, but around here, it seems like one thing, then another, then another, and then another, another, another, another. But, the kids that make it, that really make it long-term

are the ones that had support from teachers, that knew they were loved, and knew someone was expecting them to do good.

Parents of urban students understood the vulnerabilities facing many urban families. They expressed a strong desire for a positive teacher that sees their child as more than a student. Participant 2A iterated the importance of an unconditional investment, “finding that common ground, seeing the best parts of the situation, not the worst. Good teachers find how to make the kids see the best so they have hope and put forth effort.” They did not deny the challenges that came with being an urban educator, but they did consider the connections beyond school as a crucial element in building and sustaining meaningful teacher-student relationships. The teacher was not just an important component of a child’s education but necessary in providing a safe space, providing care, and creating a sense of belonging without judgment.

Participants knew the power an understanding teacher could hold. As stated by Participant 2D,

The kids that get lost in the system are the ones that don't feel like they have a place. Whether it's at home, in the school, in the community, in education, they're the ones that get scooped up by the streets because they're vulnerable. A teacher that gets it can change everything. A teacher can be that safe space, or sense of belonging.

High-quality teacher student relationships can fill voids or mend areas of emotional deficiency when students feel loved by, and connected to the teacher. Once those needs are met, academic needs are more likely to be successfully addressed.

Essential Takeaway 4: Interconnectability in Teacher-Student Relationships

The last takeaway is the participants' recognition of Interconnectability. Nothing in urban education when viewing teacher-student relationships was independent of each expectation or characteristic. Simply put by Participant 2A “Everything about good teaching overlaps. Each expectation, characteristic is part of something else. They all just start to snowball together.” If a teacher was caring or loving, then naturally, needs were being met beyond academics. When a teacher was invested beyond academics, the students were inclined to be more engaged. The teacher-student relationship was beneficial for the teacher and the student. As educators acquire knowledge about students’ needs on an individual level and realize how much more than the standard curriculum is needed, they are inspired to increase their own personal competence and motivation is mutual (Noddings, 2013). Teachers in caring relations with students are continually pressed to gain greater competence, it is known that the caring relationship is a necessary start for all other aspects of growth (Mackness, 2021). Knowing the individual interests and needs of students is a powerful means for teachers to strengthen the connection between school learning and the connections beyond school (Noddings, 2013).

The characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships identified by participants are interrelated. When strong communication occurs at all levels then an awareness of cultural needs, parent expectations, and individual challenges are more likely to be known. The content is important, but it will never be on the front stage until other areas of need are met. A caring relationship between a teacher and student provides the foundation necessary for successful pedagogical activity and academic growth (Mackness, 2021).

Participant 2B believed, “Interpersonal traits drive the results, like differentiated instruction, safety, respect, integrity. If the teacher is kind and ethical, they are gonna make sure the

resources are in place and all students have support.” Care is a cyclical concept that spirals as it is both provided and received (Noddings, 2013). One positive characteristic inevitably will lead into the next.

Discussion

The critical themes, aligned patterns, and essential takeaways of the study are outlined in the discussion, which supports the need and relevance of the conducted research. Connecting the findings to established research and theoretical frameworks further strengthened needed areas for reinforcement and presented new developments in the field. Limitations, generalizability, and threats to the validity and reliability of the study are presented to emphasize the transparency of the researcher’s actions and validate the analysis processes, thus ensuring the authenticity and trustworthiness of the stated outcomes.

Connections to Theory and Literature

The findings of the study were also rooted in theory and supported by empirical literature reviews of previous studies. Further evidence was provided in the results of the study to strengthen what was known from previously established studies and to align with the grounded theory, as presented in Chapter 2. By aligning the study’s results to the noted theoretical frameworks (Noddings, 1988; Maslow, 1943), the results were intentionally guided by developed theory and able to intellectually transition from simply describing a phenomenon to generalizing about various aspects of that phenomenon using both established research and the results presented in new findings (USC Libraries, 2023). Phenomenological research helps interpret and explain sophisticated phenomena through understanding people's lived experiences through deep discussions or interviews (Sofaer, 1999). Aligning the findings of the study to established

research is essential in explaining the meaning, nature, and challenges associated with a phenomenon. Often, those challenges are experienced but unexplained in the world, therefore the outcomes present additional knowledge and insight to act in a more informed and effective way when added to an existing body of research (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon of the impact of teacher-student relationships was further studied through the lenses of parental perceptions of the characteristics and expectations of urban parents.

A comprehensive review of literature was conducted, as presented in Chapter 2, to determine relevant needs, gaps in research, and acknowledge pre-existing findings. The theoretical frameworks which acted as guides and underpinnings of the study's design were Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care model (Noddings, 1988; Noddings 2005) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) framework. Both provided foundational information on the impact of care, motivation, reciprocal relationship traits, and deficiency and growth needs when engaging in didactic relationships. Each theoretical model is distinctive in its claim and contributions to understanding relationships; however, both are largely connected to the study's results when investigating the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspective of urban elementary parents.

The Theory of the Ethics of Care

The implications of care in education are telling and deeply connected to the ethical and moral foundations evidenced by strong teacher-student relationships (Noddings, 2013). Noddings' Ethics of Care theory connects moral imperative and caring relationships as deliberate ways to advance others through relational engrossment (Noddings, 2013). As presented in the findings of the study, a teacher's ability to show care and act in nurturing ways with students was

unequivocally an area of high priority by all participants when identifying characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Caring relationships are core in all aspects of student growth (Noddings, 1988; Noddings, 2005; Noddings, 2013, Mackness, 2021). Authentic caring relationships are reciprocal and unconditional, in which the caregiver acts unselfishly and with pure intention to better the one that they are caring for (Noddings, 2013). The Ethics of Care theory is often characterized by two distinct actions, which are responsibility to care and response of being cared for (Noddings, 1988). According to Noddings (1988), teachers model care as the caregiver to students when they encourage responsibility, kindness, moral decision-making, self-affirmations, opportunities to practice personal achievements, autonomy, individualized investment, respectful communication, and continuous growth. As presented in the research results, participants recognized each of the noted characteristics when identifying the expectations and characteristics of teachers. Noddings model (1988) is rooted in a reciprocal and spiraling concept that the one being cared for will eventually learn to be the caregiver when care and nurture are consistent and authentic.

When viewing the results of this study, the teacher is considered the caregiver and the student is the primary beneficiary of the care; however, care can become a reciprocal concept when fostered and modeled with authenticity and individuality. The long-term implications of The Ethics of Care (Noddings; 1988, Noddings 2005) model include that, through a caring relationship, one person can alter the actions and behaviors of another, in positive ways. The teacher-student relationship is foundational in creating a climate of care. Leading with care as a teacher presents opportunities to change the trajectory of a student beyond the moment and beyond an education setting; lifelong change can be connected to caring relationships (Noddings, 2005; Mackness, 2021). All participants agreed that the teacher was an agent of change,

influencing all facets of students' lives. To do what is genuinely best and right for students, teachers must be fully committed to all aspects of each student's life, focus on moral and ethical obligations, act in a caring and loving manner, and invest beyond the classroom. In analyzing the study results, care was determined to be a core finding in parents' perceptions of the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher student relationships.

Evidence of the theoretical models in the study's findings were presented in quotes from participants, thematic coding of data, the core findings, and the essential takeaways of the study (See Tables 4, 6, 8-15). For example, when reflecting on the impact of a teacher in her past, Participant 3E stated, "She cared for me and believed in me, she even checked on me for years after I left her classroom. Eventually, I changed my ways because her caring about me was not conditional, it was always there." The concept of care was heavily noted by all participants. Participant 3G stated, "My relationships with my teachers were positive, I knew they [the teachers] really cared. They would give us hugs and show love but they were much more involved in us as individuals than just us as a student. She [the teacher] made me believe I mattered to her". Participant 3B added insight on the long-term influences of care provided by a teacher, "That care and connection; it really developed me to be who I am today by having those positive influences from caring teachers I felt loved. It changed how I acted and how I thought about everything, knowing I meant something to my teacher." Participant 3F shared, "That constant love and effort even when teachers don't think it's working, is just working slower than they want but it is happening over time." In alignment with established research study, results show students in an underserved or at-risk environment need those deep connections in order to have an established sense of belonging (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Trust, 2021).

Participant 3E contributed to the conversation by addressing the important role a teacher has in validating students and teacher-student relationships through care and kindness, especially for students in an urban school:

These kids have it rough and they need chances to do better, a teacher that is patient and caring and kind goes a long way for these kids. For some, the only love and praise they get is at school. They don't need to have their teacher give up on them, too. I was that kid that needed to feel cared about, I needed to know I had a place where I was loved and valued no matter what. I had to feel like I belonged, and was important even when I was acted out.

Many participants related the aspect of care as an essential factor in developing a sense of belonging, creating a meaningful connection, and showing investment beyond the academic components of school. The need for care from the teacher is especially pressing for urban students (Sparks, 2019; Trust 2021). Participants recognized the challenges some students faced, including a lack of resources or support, limited positive affirmations at home, negative impacts of poverty, and instability or lack of consistency at home. Care was identified as a means to support students both in school and beyond the school setting. Care is connected to motivation, engagement, resilience, and perception of investment (Jensen, 2016; Noddings & Soltis, 2005; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Sanders et al., 2016).

In alignment with Noddings' theory (1988, 2005), ethics and moral dispositions were factors in strong relationships. Participant 1F stated, "If the teacher cares about more than just the academics, the kids will want to learn and do better in school. When they are connected and feel cared for, they are motivated." Participant 1D recognized the power of one, "It takes one

person. It just takes one. One good teacher changes it all. Every kid deserves to have that one teacher, the one to make you feel that they care and that goes a long way with your whole life.”

When collectively considering the role of care, the Ethics of Care model, and the response of participants it is clear that a caring and invested teacher matters as an essential component of positive growth in all areas of a student’s life. Every participant included care as a characteristic and expectations of a meaningful teacher-student relationship. According to participants in the study, high-quality teacher-student relationships are built on genuine and unconditional care and personal connection beyond academics. When that is established other areas, such as strong communication, positive school climate, increased motivation, high expectations, a sense of belonging, long-term change, and advancements in the student’s ethical and moral character are also evident.

Research (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Jensen, 2016; Sanders et al., 2016; Yang & Anyon, 2016) shows that teachers are the game changers, the power players, and the motivators in fostering caring relationships with students. Urban students often face many disproportionate challenges, thus making it more difficult for them to reach their fullest potential academically and socially (Fredricks et al., 2019; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Yang & Anyon, 2016). The results of the present study identified care, connection, and unconditional support as mitigating factors supporting how students navigate such challenges. Participants specifically addressed the impact of care in connections, teacher discernment, and investment in the student beyond academics. Every core finding and major takeaway from the study can be traced back to the principles of the Ethics of Care model in some form or another.

Maslow's Theory of the Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943) views human motivation as a hierarchical system to categorize needs by physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization; once lower needs are met, it is possible to advance to the next higher-order need (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2020). According to Maslow's theory of the Hierarchy of Needs model (1943), human needs can be separated into two types of needs, which are deficiency needs and growth needs. Participants directly and indirectly addressed both areas of need. Deficiency needs increase motivation as the needs are satisfactorily met and include biological, physical and physiological, safety, love/belonging and esteem (McLeod, 2020). Growth needs are considered the highest level in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model, and refer to the realization of a person's potential, self-fulfillment, and seeking personal growth (McLeod, 2020). Growth needs focus on the motivation to fulfill human potential and seek growth through change (Maslow, 1943).

According to the current study's participants, the stronger the relationship was between a teacher and a student the easier it was for the teacher to identify and meet the basic and advanced needs of the student. Participant 2D's response when asked to recall a positive teacher was based on the level of need satisfaction provided by a teacher. She stated, "They [the teachers] created an inclusive environment, we all belonged, it was a community in the classroom. The teacher took time to know our needs on an individual level." Participants identified high-quality teachers as those who met students where they were, provided levels of support, and pushed them to the next level with love and support. The results of the study can be connected to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory in that one can only move onto the next stage of higher needs once the lower level needs have been adequately satisfied (Maslow, 1943). The teacher-student relationship is a factor determining how tiered needs are met and advanced.

Individualized instruction, awareness of each student's situation beyond school, cultural attunement, mutual respect, compassion, understanding, and a sense of safety and belonging were identified by urban parents in the study as characteristics or expectations of high-quality teachers. As stated by Participant 1E, "Each child comes with totally different needs. Teachers need to know what they need to teach each individual kid. Knowing the needs is only part of it. Teachers have to help them meet their needs too." In a similar context, Participant 2C shared memories of a high-quality teacher and said, "You know, she knew your family's needs beyond the school. She asked about what is important to the students. She knows about the home life, the family, the family issues. She did what she could to meet our needs."

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) was a significant theoretical model anchoring the outcome and findings of this study to those of other perviously established studies. The results of the study are complementary to Maslow's theory (1943) in that making determinations about the impact and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships are individual and gradually fulfilled on a continuum when the right supports and motivators are in place to reach individual student needs. All participants identified individualized learning, teacher investment, and an awareness of need as characteristics of high-quality teachers-student relationships. When needs are satisfactorily met in the right environment, every person has the capacity and desire to move up the hierarchy toward self-actualization (McLeod, 2020).

When basic needs of school-aged children are met, growth needs are positively impacted (Noltemeyer et al., 2020). In relation to a student's development, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) suggested that children's ability to be motivated by "growth needs" (e.g., academic achievement, self-actualization) must be built upon the satisfaction of "deficiency needs" (e.g., physiological needs, safety needs, love/belonging needs) (Noltemeyer et al., 2020). The results

of the current study further support the need for students to feel safe, cared for, and have an established sense of belonging. Addressing the most basic needs was not constantly noted as a characteristic or expectation by the majority of study participants, although it did come up. A discrepancy in the research findings compared to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) is that only a few participants explicitly expressed that it was the teacher's job to meet students' most basic needs (i.e. food, shelter, and basic safety). However, in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), all participants indicated the importance of teachers knowing the needs of their students and providing necessary support for growth and advancement. Participant 2B was one of the few participants who directly identified the teacher as a support mechanism in meeting the most basic deficiency needs in saying,

Great teachers recognize all the needs that a successful child needs. And they provide help. Cause you [the teacher] might know somewhere we [the families] can get some food or help. You might know how to help the parents, which will help the children, too. The teacher should be a resource for the family. They need to understand what the family is going through and help them connect to resources or agencies that could help them. Every part of the student's life should be considered.

The direct connection of safety on an emotional scale, love, connection, belonging, personal advancement, and motivation were also noted by participants as characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Teacher-student relationships, like all relationships are personal and involve meaningful mutual benefits in order to prosper. Results of the study indicated that the teacher can, when there is a trusting and meaningful teacher-student relationship in place, assist in identifying and addressing students' deficiency needs, thus helping to provide scaffolds and opportunities for students to reach growth targets. Students must feel

valued, connected and cared for by those they are learning from before being motivated to achieve (Booker, 2021; Maslow, 1943; Noddings, 2005). Aligned to established research and to the noted theoretical frameworks, the results of the study reinforced what was known; the students of teachers who are relationally connected to their students achieve at higher-rates and display deeper investments academically and socially (Jensen, 2016; Lee, 2012; Maslow, 1943; Noddings 2005; Trust, 2021).

The theoretical frameworks, of both Noddings (Noddings, 1984) and Maslow (Maslow, 1943) are aligned with human connectivity as a means for human growth and satisfaction. Each was embedded, in some way, with the findings and outcomes of the current study. Connections through high-quality teacher-student relationships in an urban area means establishing ethical, moral, and situational changes for students. The participants in the study believed that teachers were pivotal in creating a sense of purpose, belonging, and motivation in students. As identified in the study results and rooted in Maslow's theory, all needs are important and the spiraling and continuum of success is dependent on the satisfaction of individual needs. Participants recognized the impact a teacher has in addressing student needs (academically, socially, emotionally, morally, etc.) The relational mindset teachers must convey is to connect with students both academically and personally, seeing them first as a unique individual and then as a student (Jensen, 2016). Ethics of Care (2005) and the Hierarchy of Needs (1943) are tiered systems in which personal evolution is connected to deep connection, caring, authenticity, awareness of expectations, self-motivation, and satisfaction of needs; each aspect also represented and aligned in the study results as characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships by participants.

Limitations, Threats, and Generalizability of the Study

This study aimed to understand the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships through the lived experiences of urban elementary parents. Limitations are constraints based on the study's methodology and design, which are typically out of the researchers control and connected to the methodological design of the study (Theofanidis et al., 2019). Limitations in this qualitative phenomenological data collection method included that participants' reliability, accuracy, and willingness to engage in transparent and open discussions involving expectations and descriptions of high-quality teacher-student relationships largely depended on each participant's personality, individual life experiences, interpretations of events, and personal interactions. Identifying and reflecting upon the limitations of the study was empirical in determining the validity and reliability of the data, noting potential threats, identifying considerations for future replication, and determining the generalizability of design or outcomes.

This study, as with all phenomenological studies, relied on the transparency and truthful contributions of participants to gain deeper insights on how their lived experiences are interpreted and expressed (Moustakas, 1994). Because of this, there was an opportunity for subjectivity in the interpretation of participants' responses and in their levels of openness. For instance, a limitation included the participants' abilities to accurately articulate and honestly respond to the interview questions related to their past and current experiences. The comfort level of each individual participant to engage in a small group discussion may also be viewed as a limitation. When using a phenomenological method to gather data, the subjectivity and personal biases connected to the researcher and the participants make challenging the establishment of external reliability and validity and interpretations of data. The qualitative

phenomenological research approach applied in this study involved the intimate study of human subjects and their perception of lived experiences, describing the essence of characteristics and descriptions of meaningful teacher-student relationships.

In this study, I acted as the sole researcher and was the primary instrument in the data collection and data analyses process. As the primary investigator, I depended upon personal intuitions, assumptions, interpretations, and independent background knowledge to assign codes and identify themes. Another limitation of the study included the subjectivity of qualitative interviewing, note taking, and transcribing (Creswell, 2017). Member checking was used to address the potential threats to data validity, which allowed each participant to provide clarification and check for accuracy in the interview transcripts, thus mitigating the threats of personal interpretations on the reliability and validity of the data.

Additional limitations included a personal connection to the topic and environment. Although the practices of epoché memoing and ongoing self-reflection were put in place throughout the study, it remains necessary to consider the potential for researcher bias and the impact of personal life experiences as possible influences impacting the data collection, data analyses, and presentation of findings. Even with the noted safeguards in place, my experiences in working with urban students and families in a professional setting may have presented unwarranted or unconscious biases when interpreting data and prompting participants for details related to their lived experiences.

By design, this study was limited to a small group of urban elementary parents in one setting in Northeastern Ohio. Due to the sample size, research methodology, and scope of the study, the results of the study are not generalizable beyond this point in time and outside of the

specific population used in the study. Additionally, based on specific purposeful, criterion sampling, each parent or guardian participant had a current kindergarten through second grade student in an urban elementary setting. Although the criterion sample method was a necessary element in creating an appropriate and meaningful sample, there were limitations to the study as the population was not representative enough to make wide generalizations beyond the study's sample. By limiting the study to one school in Northeastern Ohio, the results of the study may be specific to the demographics of the community, not allowing for, or limiting, external generalizations of results. Although the specific sample and narrow pool of participants may be viewed as a limitation to the study, the notion of generalizability was not a priority in the design of the study or phenomenon. Because the study is qualitative in design, it is not replicable in its entirety; therefore, a limitation of the study is the testing for reliability through replication. Any future research studies seeking to further explore teacher-student relationships as an extension of this research should consider means to mitigate known limitations. Variations in the study, which may yield new and valuable insights, might include altering the grades of students, type of school system, demographics of participants, and experiences of teachers. Viewing teacher and student perspectives in addition to parental insights would allow for a deeper layered approach when analyzing results.

Delimitations and the scope of the study should also be recognized. Delimitations are the choices made by the researcher that present boundaries within the scope of the research (Theofanidis et al., 2019). Delimitations in the study included the inability to make broad generalizations of the results based on the individual nature of participants' lived experiences and the data being retrieved from one singular site with a narrow focus on parents of urban kindergarten through second-graders in a particular region of the state. For this study, I elected to

be the primary data collection agent, acting as the interviewer and the data analyzer. Because of this decision, the data may be viewed as constructed through my viewpoint in regard to coding, theme development, and data analysis. A researcher who acts as the investigator and collector of data may rely on personal abilities and intuitions to make sense of the data which presents both a limitation and delimitation in design and intended aims (Creswell, 1994).

Collectively, the design choices in the study may not allow for larger insights on urban parents' perspectives or for the application of data beyond the parameters of the study. The study was delimited by the small sample size, the criteria put in place for participants, the location and configuration of the study, including days and times of interviews, the interviewer, and the general format of each focus group session. Participants' responses depended on their recollections and reconstruction of personal events and experiences from the past, present, and anticipations for the future when asked about characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships. The stories, anecdotes, and feedback of participants should be taken at face-value as the truth without the ability for me to defend or present evidence of support. Limitations of participants' levels of honesty and accuracy should be considered. To address this limitation, I triangulated data sources and asked several follow up interview questions within each focus group, drawing on the details and recollections of participants.

The study yielded valuable data for current educators and future researchers even within the limitations, delimitations, restrictions, potential threats, and limited external generalizability. Intentional safeguards were in place to alleviate or mitigate the concerns as outlined. The limitations and delimitations of the study were proactively considered throughout the research process, including in the research design, data collection processes, and dissemination of findings to best strengthen the validity and reliability of the study.

Benefits of the Study

This study presents the lived experiences of urban parents as insight on the characteristics and expectations needed for high-quality teacher-student relationships. The benefactors of the study are many. Consideration for use of the study results is vast, ranging from state policy makers, urban school resource officers, and even advocates of underserved or at-risk youth. More specific beneficiaries of the study's findings include teachers, educational administrators, school counselors and social workers, parent-school engagement advocates, community stakeholders, educational service centers and state supports, institutions of higher education teacher preparation programs, parents, and most importantly, students. The outcomes of the study have determined common themes of need when considering all aspects of the tripartite relationship between teachers, students and parents. The lived experiences of urban parents provided necessary and meaningful insight on the characteristics and expectations needed for high-quality teacher-student relationships. The benefactors of the study are many.

Results of the study can be used to assist teachers and educators in making more informed academic and social decisions related to parental feedback, parental engagement, out of school experiences, and perception of teacher-student relationships. Findings support teachers in developing high-quality lessons and instructional practices aligned with parents' expectations and promote a deeper need for viewing students beyond the academic setting to increase motivation, investment, individualized learning, and meaningful teacher-student relationships grounded in authentic care. As defined by Noddings (2005), positive teacher-student relationships are those that prioritize and demonstrate care and concern in all daily practice. Understanding the essential role teacher care plays in relationships was constantly and

continually noted by all participants as a characteristic and expectation of high-quality teacher-student relationships with urban students. The results of the study provided necessary information needed for teachers to gain insight on specific areas of focus and reflection contributed by parents, which can strengthen practices and identify areas of refinement and reinforcement within the teacher-student relationships, especially in urban education.

Educational administrators are also able to gain insight from the study results. I identified areas of importance expressed by urban parents which will allow for an increase in focused collaboration and goal setting between school systems, teachers, parents, and students. School counselors, parent-school engagement advocates, community liaisons, and school social workers will be better able to meet the needs of both students and parents through the information gained in the study.

The findings of the study presented new knowledge on the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspective of urban parents, which was not a widely studied viewpoint. School counselors, parent-school engagement advocates, community liaisons, and school social workers will be better able to meet the needs of both students and parents through the information gained in the study.

Institutions of higher education can use results to determine how well current preparation programs are aligned for teacher candidates in meeting the needs of students and the expectations of parents. Because of the parent feedback on the importance of cultural attunement and situational understanding, teacher education preparation programs may consider a more narrow focus on training teachers in cultural awareness, urban education, and parent partnerships. Additional insights from the findings can assist university faculty in

communicating the importance of parental experiences and multiple perspectives when viewing education as a holistic process. Learning with care and authenticity as an educator is a concept identified as especially important by the parents in the study. The themes and instructional best practices identified in the study can be applied when considering the preparation and growth of both current and future teachers.

Parents and caregivers of school-aged students, with a focus on urban elementary students, will benefit from the findings of this study by becoming more aware of all aspects of teacher-student relationships. Ongoing conversations on perspective and experiences will further assist parents in becoming involved and valued in their child's school community. Identified as a key finding, ongoing, clear, and consistent communication is both an expectation and characteristic of high-quality teacher-student relationships as determined by urban parent participants. Allowing parents, the opportunity to engage with teachers is powerful in creating a climate of respect and understanding, which allows for a strong foundation in teacher-student relationships.

Lastly, students, specifically urban students, are a direct and important benefactor of the results from this research as the findings are aligned with the expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships. The results encourage students to consider academic and social growth on a seamless continuum, including invested stakeholders at home and in school. Allowing students to see the parents, teachers, and students working in unison for the betterment of student success is powerful. Students who view parents as valued and active members of the school community are more likely to be committed to the learning process (Hattie, 2009; Krane & Klevan, 2018). When viewed as a resource and learning opportunity, the results of the study have the potential to help bridge the gap for students between home and school expectations in

relational practices increasing educational and social outcomes. While these findings are promising in helping better understand the expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student relationships it is important to state that more research should be conducted to continue to grow what is known about the impact of and expectations for teacher-student relationships.

Future Research

As more was learned about the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships from the perspective of urban parents in Northeastern Ohio, new questions arose. Suggested alterations to the study design to be considered, which may produce different or additional findings, include comparing urban parent responses to those of suburban and rural parents to analyze consistency or discrepancies in findings when replicating the design of the study in various settings. A focus on participants with middle school children and high school children in an urban school may also yield new and valuable information on the topic of high-quality teacher- student relationships from urban parents. The use of focus groups allowed for collaborative conversation in this study, however future research may include adding one-on-one interviews with individual participants, as well as increasing the sample size for a broader prospective.

A possible expansion of this study includes delving deeper into intentionally defining care in relationships and moving from the abstract concept of care and nurturing to an observable behavior or tangible outcome. Suggestions for exploring noticeable and distinct signs of care, connection, belongingness, and nurturing could be done through the development of a checklist, anecdotal note-taking, examining classroom interactions, and the categorization of behaviors of

the teacher and the student. Interviews with parents, teachers, and students on the discernable elements of care is also a suggestion. Future research focused on the observable markers of care and connection is a means to better understand the actions, behaviors, outcomes, and deliverables associated with the evidence of care, specifically in a caring teacher-student relationship.

Should the design of the study be altered or expanded in the future, the results would vary, presenting a wider body of information to strengthen aligned core findings. Future phenomenological studies should examine the teacher perspectives, the student perspectives, and the administrative leadership's perspectives when exploring the characteristics and expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships in an urban elementary setting. Gathering data in each area would allow for optimal triangulation of data and layering of findings when considering several entities impacting the teacher-student relationship. Future research in the areas of exploring and investigating impactful teacher-student relationships is crucial in growing and adding to the already existed studies.

Recommendations

The value of understanding parent perspectives is both informative and essential in student success. The need for care, consistency, and belonging at school is especially evident when working with low-income, at-risk students (Noddings, 2002). The study brought to light the importance of open and intentional discussion with urban parents as an important element in understanding the expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships. When parents are considered as an instrumental component in shaping the characteristics and expectations of teacher-student relationships, the outcome of the discussions is beneficial for the teacher, student, parent, school leadership, and other entities of education, such as teacher preparation

programs, policy reform, and social, emotional learning opportunities. The role of parents, as essential and crucial participants in shaping and providing valuable insight to student success can no longer be ignored or passively addressed. Parents hold the key to unlocking the doors for teacher. When opened, the doors allow teachers to better understand areas of importance to parents and students, be more awareness of individual expectations, values, needs, and cultural difference. Because the expectations and characteristics of high-quality teacher-student have been identified through the lens of urban parents, actions can be taken to communicate the outcomes of this study to better prepare teachers and teacher candidates in areas of communication, care, motivation, individualized learning, high expectations, and cultural attunement. This can be accomplished through high-quality teacher -student relationships, therefore the focus should be on providing opportunities, resources, discussions on how to best prepare teachers to build, sustain, understand, and grow meaningful relationships with students. The impact of the teacher is crucial in all aspect's student growth and successful development, especially in an urban setting.

Recommendations for educators include creating opportunities in schools for intentional and ongoing discussions with parents to learn more about what is important to them as it relates to the teacher-student relationship. Educators must be able to be prospective and reflective when working with parents and to use the opportunity to listen as a means to learn and change their teaching strategies, instructional practices, and interaction with students and families. "Being aware of the differences is key. Those differences create a gap that is hard to close if the teacher is not perspective. Teachers have to be empathetic, and aware of what is going on at home to make that child feel important" (Participant 3F). Educators and parents alike must be willing to put aside assumptions, preconceptions, and stereotypes about the urban schools, urban students,

and educators in an urban setting to work collaboratively to assess the needs of students and families and do what is best for students as it relates to developing high-quality teacher-student relationships.

The call to action includes recognizing the urgency for educators to understand the vital and crucial role of parent perspectives in all aspects of education. Parents belong in all conversations, as they offer unique and essential insight on what is desired and impactful for students. The educational system, at large, must consider the role relationships have in all aspects of student success and act accordingly by providing resources, training, opportunities, and experiences to teachers and students which prioritize and strengthen the relational components of education.

Final Summary

Through this phenomenological study, which focused on perceptual data and urban parental insight, it became apparent that there is a need for a spiraling continuation of further discussions, open communication, and ongoing focus group sessions to gather additional insight on parent characteristics and expectations of teachers and more specifically of the teacher-student relationships. Much has been learned about the expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships by exploring the perspective of urban parents. However, this study merely presents as the tip of an iceberg when investigating attributes, characteristics, and impacts of teacher-student relationships. The results show a need for parents to share their expectations with teachers to create alignment in need and expectations of relational characteristics. Additionally, teachers must be genuinely invested in the personal lives of the students and families. As stated by Participant 3A “The teachers that made difference were the ones that

gained respect by being invested in us [urban students]. They [good teachers] set expectations and provided the tools and support for us to succeed. They went out of their way to love us, we felt that care and gave it back.” The concept of care and investment beyond academics is imperative in developing meaningful, formative, and lasting relationships between the teacher and the student. Time and effort must be spent on investing in the student in a loving and caring way to build a relationship of trust, motivation, and reciprocal care.

The findings of the study were synthesized into five overarching and influential themes that, when added to the body of research from current empirical studies, provides insight on how to best create an optimal environment by promoting and recognizing the impact of high-quality teacher-student relationships. Results indicate high-quality teacher student relationship in an urban elementary setting must include; 1. Teacher communication, 2. Care and connection at all levels, 3. High expectations and individualized standards, and 5. Student engagement and individualized learning opportunities. It is known that the relationship between the student and the teacher during the elementary years of a student’s education is often the most significant and impactful relationship for at-risk or marginalized students (Hansen, 2018). The results of this study provided a much-needed parental perspective on the topic of high-quality teacher-student relationships, deepening the insight and understanding of expectations and characteristics identified in positive teacher-student relationships with urban elementary students.

Results of the study yielded several applicable and essential takeaways. The essential takeaways include recognizing that the teacher matters in all facets of a child’s growth, that the connection between a teacher and student must go beyond academics alone, the teacher-student relations is a significant indicator in student motivation and empowerment for urban students, and there’s is a sense of belonging and interconnectivity in positive teacher-student relationships.

Much has been learned about the expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships when viewing the needs through the lens of urban parents. Implications, results, and the recognition of further needs are valuable contributions to the field of education in general and more specially when determining areas of importance in educational relational practices and classroom experiences. Does the relationships between a teacher and a student matter? The results of this study present an indisputable, yes. Participant 1D addresses the urgency and cruciality of the impact teachers make; “It takes one person, it just takes one. One good teacher changes it all. Every kid deserves to have that one teacher, the one to make you feel that they care, and that goes a long way throughout your whole life.” The outcome of the study indicates that the teacher-student relationship is an impressive and essential vessel in all areas of academic and social success for urban students. The impact and effect of the teacher-student relationship is not confined to the academic setting and the has the potential to go far beyond a moment in time, leaving impressive influential imprints on urban students. It is clear that a supportive, caring, and positive teacher-student relationship is a crucial contributor to the longer-term success outside of school for many students.

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APPENDIX A

IRB NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Date: 1-9-2024

IRB #: 2023-137

Title: Insights on expectations of teacher-student relationships; A phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of urban parents

Creation Date: 11-7-2022

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: [REDACTED]

Review Board: YSU IRB Board

Sponsor:

Human Ethics

Dashboard Studies Submissions Tasks

Studies / Study Details

Study Details

Approved

2023-137 Insights on expectations of teacher-student relationships; A phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of urban parents

PDF

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Approval Date:
01-13-2023

Expiration Date:
N/A

Organization:
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Active
Submissions:

IRB#	Study Title	Status
2023-137	Insights on expectations of teacher-student relationships; A phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of urban parents	● Approved



Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Insights on expectations of teacher-student relationships; A phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of urban parents

Decision: 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,
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board

APPENDIX B
SITE AUTHORIZATION LETTER

11/7/2022

Dear Youngstown State University Institutional Review Board Members:

As the principal of our K-2nd grade campus at [redacted] with approval from the school president, [redacted] full support is given to use [redacted] as a site for Ms. Kristen Italiano to implement her qualitative research case study. The purpose of this letter is to inform you that she has explained her project to our administrative team and she has been granted permission to conduct research for her doctoral dissertation, *Insights on expectations of teacher-student relationships; A phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of urban parents*. We understand the research will involve small focus group interviews with a total of 10-15 parents/guardians used in the study, and that the research will not include working directly with any students. We are aware that she is expected to obtain informed consent from parents in the study, that participation in the study is voluntary, and participants are able to withdraw from the study at any time.

I confirm that Kristen Italiano is authorized to conduct research at VCS beginning in [redacted], and ending at the conclusion of her study (anticipated [redacted]).

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at: [redacted] or [redacted] ext 1502.

Sincerely,

[redacted] Principal [redacted] Campus (Gr. K-2)

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Focus Group Informed Consent Form:

Dear Parent/Guardian, or Primary Caregiver:

I am a doctoral student from Youngstown State University. I am conducting a study to investigate the parental perceptions associated with the expectations and characteristics of teacher-student relationships. In this study, you will be asked to participate in a small focus group interview with 4-6 other parents. In the focus group interview you will respond to questions and prompts related to your expectations and desired characteristics of teacher-student relationships. You will also be asked to discuss events and experiences related to the topic of study. This study is phenomenological in nature and intended to learn from the lived experiences of those who volunteer to participate.

The researcher will need to collect information to describe you, such as your relationship with the school-aged child (i.e. mother, father, grandparents, etc.), your experiences in urban education, and your views on teacher-student relationships. If you are selected as a participant in the study you will meet with me in a small group setting for one, 60-90 minute, session. The session will be face-to-face and audio recorded to best capture the accuracy of responses. The purpose of the study is to gain insight on the perspective of parents as it pertains to qualities and characteristics of teacher-student relationships.

Safeguard protocols will be in place to secure data and protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Safeguards include locking interview data in a secure location, coding data, reporting findings in an unidentifiable manner, and responsibly destroying sensitive data after the study has concluded. Data stored on computer programs will be password protected, and hard copy data will be in a double-locked location.

Although the risk is little to none, potential negative factors associated with compromised data may include a privacy breach, and/or social/emotional/mental distress for the participant.

The likelihood that you will be harmed is minimized because of the explicit preventive measures in place to handle data in a sensitive and secure manner. Your privacy is important and I will handle all personal information in a confidential manner. I will report the results of the project in a way that will not identify the exact site of the study, you or your child.

The benefits of the study are vast. Findings may support educators, students, parents, schools and institutions of teacher preparation to gain a deeper understanding of expectations and characteristics of meaningful teacher-student relationship. I plan to present the results of the study during a dissertation defense at Youngstown State University. Please consider the valuable impact your contributions hold in this important research.

You do not have to be in this study. If you do agree to volunteer for the study, you can stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw at any time please let me know. If you have questions about this research project please contact me, Kristen Italiano, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact the Office of Research Services at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu

Thank you,

Kristen Italiano

INFORMED CONSENT FORM:

I understand the described study and have been given a copy of this consent document. I am 18 years of age or older and I, _____, (Print first and last name) voluntarily agree to participate in the described study.

_____ Signature of Participant Date _____

Option responses:

My child is in (Select grade of child/children): Kindergarten First grade Second grade
Your child will not be directly involved in the study or be used to gather data.

I am able to participate in a scheduled focus group interview on: (please check all that apply). All groups will take place at [REDACTED] Campus, in room _____. Selected participants will be asked to come to one session, which will last 60-90 minutes.

_____ March 21st 2:15-3:15

_____ April 24th 9:45-11:00
_____ May 16th 11:45-1:00

**All selected participants in the study will be offered a gift card as an expression of gratitude for their time and contributions to the study.*

APPENDIX D SCRIPTED QUESTIONS

Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Guide: Scripted Questions and Definitions

Review/ define basic terms that appear in the questions or prompts:

Teacher-student relationships

Meaningful relationships, high-quality teacher-student relationships

Characteristics

Expectations

Care

Caregivers

Mutually impactful, mutual care (care-giver/one receiving care)

Basic needs

Review the concept of climate, culture, safety, caring, and communication as used in the study

Explain:

Overarching research questions:

The central questions for the study follow:

1. How do urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe the characteristics of high-quality teacher- student relationships?
2. How do urban elementary school parents in Northeastern Ohio describe their expectations of high-quality teacher-student relationships?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. From parents or caregivers' perspectives, which teacher attributes are associated with high-quality teacher- student relationships?

2. How have the personal experiences of parental figures affected their expectations of teacher-student relationships?
3. What role does the teacher-student relationship contribute to urban elementary students' overall academic performance?
4. How do parents define the role of positive teacher-student relationships in the social outcomes of students?
5. How do parents define the role of positive teacher-student relationships in the academic outcomes of students?
6. What impact do parents associate with negative teacher-student relationships in the social and academic outcomes of students?
7. What are the characteristics of positive and meaningful relationships between teacher and students?

APPENDIX E

WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE

Additional Information from Participants: Written Questionnaire

Name: _____ Age: _____ Relationship to the child _____

Grade levels of children: _____

As a student did you attend (circle one)

An urban school *a suburban school* *a rural school* *other* _____

As a student were your own personal experiences with teachers in school: (circle one)

Mostly Positive *somewhat positive* *indifferent* *somewhat negative* *mostly negative*

List 4 or 5 words that you would use to describe a positive teacher-student relationship

When it comes to your child's teacher and schooling, what is most important to you?

Think of a teacher that has impacted you in a positive way. Why or how did they impact you? Describe that teacher.

Complete the following sentences: "I expect my child's teacher to

_____”

"I know my child's teacher cares when

_____”

"In order for my child to have a strong relationship with the teacher I expect my child to

_____”

Teacher-student relationships are valuable. Positive outcomes of teacher-student relationships include:

If the relationship between a teacher and student is negative, negative outcomes for the student or teacher may include: _____

APPENDIX F

FULL INTERVIEW GUIDE AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Focus groups are scheduled for 60-90 minutes
- Each focus group will be audio recorded
- Researcher will take notes, ask follow up questions, and seek clarifications/extensions on responses as needed

Basic Information Questions:

1. Share your experiences as an elementary student.
 - a. Were they mostly negative or positive? Why?
2. Think about an elementary teacher that impacted you. In what ways were you impacted by a teacher?
 - a. What characteristics did that memorable teacher have?
 - b. How did you respond to that teacher? Why?
3. How do you define or measure good teaching?
 - a. What does a good teacher do for students?
 - b. Do you think a teacher should be responsible for more than academic content? If yes, in what ways? Explain.
4. How do you define an urban school?
 - a. In your opinion, what are some challenges urban students may be facing?
 - i. (In school and outside of school)
 - ii. How can those challenges be supported in the classroom by the teacher?

Teacher-Student Relationship Questions:

5. Do you think the relationship a teacher has with a student can change the student? (negative/positive impacts)

1. In what ways? Explain.
6. Describe a high-quality, effective urban elementary teacher.
 - a. What elements are essential in the teaching/instruction?
 - b. What are the characteristics of the teacher?
 - i. Why did you select the characteristics that you did?
7. As an urban elementary parent, how do you characterize high quality teacher-student relations? or as an urban elementary parent, what are the characteristics of high quality teacher-student relations?
 - a. Take a moment to think of your expectations for teachers and the characteristics of a meaningful teacher-student relationship. Share 5-7 important characteristics you feel are evident in a strong teacher.
 - b. Justify the importance of the shared characteristics.
8. Provide an example of how a teacher can show care for a student?
9. What characteristics are needed in an effective teacher of urban students?
 - a. Why?
10. How would your child describe their favorite teacher?
11. In your opinion, what makes a teacher-student relationship meaningful? Why?
 - a. What role, if any, does the student play in meaningful teacher-student relationships?
12. What do you expect from your child's teacher? Why?
 - a. How do you describe a high-quality teacher-student relationship?
 - b. What do you expect from your child's teacher in a high-quality teacher-student relationship?
 - c. What do you expect from your child in a high-quality teacher-student relationship?
13. Consider the two sides of a teacher-student relationship. What are the characteristics of the teacher in an HQ teacher-student relationship?
 - a. What are the characteristics of the student in an HQ teacher-student relationship?
 - b. What is expected of the teacher in an HQ teacher-student relationship?

- c. What is expected of the student in an HQ teacher-student relationship?
14. If you were an elementary teacher in an urban school, how would you build connections with students?
- a. What benefit does a teacher-student relationship have?
 - i. For the student?
 - ii. For the teacher?
 - iii. For the parents or caregivers?
15. Tell me about your current perception of your child's teacher.
- a. What, in anything, are they doing well in terms of building a better relationship with your child?
 - i. Why are those characteristics important to you?
 - b. What could they be doing differently to have a better relationship with your child?
16. Is it the teacher's responsibility to address areas outside of academics in order to have a strong relationship?
- a. What role does safety/ security have in teacher-student relationships?
 - b. What role does emotional connection, social emotional care play?
 - c. Address the importance of each of the following:
 - i. care / loving relationships
 - ii. Meeting basic needs
 - 1. Food, safety, emotional stability, connections
 - iii. Communication and connection with parents/ guardians
 - iv. Parental mutual investment in supporting the teacher
 - v. The child's perspective and mutual care for their teacher
 - vi. Overall school climate
 - 1. Understanding
 - 2. Compassion
 - 3. Connection
 - 4. Academics
17. Suggestions you have for educators/ teachers on how to build, sustain, and improve on relationships between a teacher and the student?

- a. What can be done better? Where are teachers missing the mark when it comes to what matters?
 - b. What is most important?
 - c. What needs do your children express as important or meaningful?
18. What else would you like me to know about your perception of teacher-student relationships?
19. Questions or comments you have for each other as it relates to building strong teacher student relationships in an urban school

Closing:

Allow 10 minutes for parents to ask each other questions related to teacher -student relationships, high-quality teachers, characteristics and expectations of meaningful relationships, and the impact teachers have on students.

Review:

The research process and data collection timeline

Member checking

Intended outcomes and use of the study

Thank participants

APPENDIX G

MEMBER CHECKING EMAIL

Good morning,

As you recall, you were a participant in a focus group of elementary parents at [REDACTED] who contributed to the research for my dissertation study at YSU. Thank you again for your important contributions to the conversation. My study was intended to determine characteristics of teacher-student relationships and what is considered necessary or expected from the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of the parent. After an in-depth review of the interview transcriptions and your questionnaires, the findings indicate five recurring concepts of importance in high-quality teachers:

1. communication
2. care and compassion
3. high expectations
4. cultural understanding
5. student engagement / individualized learning opportunities

To ensure accuracy and validity in the study, copies of the audio recorded transcripts from each interview are attached. Participant names were removed to support data anonymity. Participants are only identified using a coded letter and number (ex: 1A, 2G). Member checking is a means to increase accuracy, transparency, and the trustworthiness of the data. Please check the transcripts and notes. If you believe anything is misrepresented or if you have anything further to add please let me know by 7/31/23.

Thank you again for sharing your time and experiences. You are appreciated.

Kristen Italiano