THE EXPLORATION OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS
AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AT
BEVERLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Arts in Education at
Marietta College

By
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ABSTRACT

Beverly Elementary School, a small school in the Fort Frye Local School District, did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) according to results stated in the 2006-2007 Report Card issued by the Ohio Department of Education. This has placed the school in a “Continuous Improvement” designation. The school did not make the “Effective” status, partially due to low scores in the economically disadvantaged subgroup. All schools in Ohio are rated according to student achievement test score as a result of No Child Left Behind. The researcher used a QUAL/quan approach to determine what impact socioeconomic status has on student achievement scores, taking statistical information from the Ohio Department of Education and surveying parents on what effects that they believe low socioeconomic status has on those scores.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all of the students, staff, and administration at Beverly Elementary School who have blessed me with a wonderful start to a great career in education. These individuals have inspired me to be the best teacher that I can possibly be and to “reach for the stars” in my profession.
I would like to thank my husband, Jason, who has supported me, and encouraged me to push myself to excel in my work. I am thankful for his patience and understanding in times of personal struggle.

I am equally grateful to my parents, Harold and Karen Arnold, for the sacrifices that they have made and the scaffolding that they have provided throughout my educational career that has permitted me to achieve my lifelong goals.

I appreciate my adviser, Dr. William Bauer, for his guidance in the creation of this research thesis. The time he has contributed to me through the research process, and through the graduate process has enabled me to be successful.
VITA

October 6, 1980 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Born- Marietta, Ohio

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Local School District

PUBLICATIONS

Research Publication


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Early Childhood Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Like a child waiting for their birthday to arrive, many teachers, principals, and administration wait eagerly for the results of the State of Ohio Report Card and the documented designation for the previous school year. As members of the Beverly Elementary School staff from the Fort Frye Local School District realize that Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) has not been met in the economically disadvantaged subgroup, a sigh of disappointment is released. Sutton and Soderstrom (2001) put the problem into perspective by stating, “Poverty is the common thread that links most academically troubled schools that are placed on a state-mandated academic watch list.”

The Ohio State Board of Education’s goal is “to ensure high educational expectations for all Ohio students in light of a globally competitive economy. This includes an aligned, seamless pre-kindergarten through post-secondary system that ensures that Ohio educates world-class students.” (State Board of Education Priorities, 2007) This pressure to be “seamless” is felt throughout school districts in Ohio, especially when there are consequences for not meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress mentioned above.

Many studies have been performed to measure the correlation between low socioeconomic status and test scores, reporting positive relationships from as young as infants (Rubin & Barlow, 1979). Rouse and Barrow state that socioeconomic status show effects on educational outcomes that include test scores, and continue to affect the child throughout their adulthood (2006). This researcher also states that some studies find
small, but positive correlations, between socioeconomic status and student achievement (White, Reynolds, Thomas, and Gitzlaff, 1993).

The researcher, a teacher at Beverly Elementary School, has developed a questionnaire to explore the impact of socioeconomic status on student achievement. This study explores teacher and parental views of how socioeconomic status affects the scores of student achievement on the Ohio Achievement Test.

*Statement of the Problem*

Beverly Elementary School did not meet the Adequate Yearly Progress designated by the Ohio State Board of Education as a result of the scores in the economically disadvantaged subgroup. This placed the school in School Improvement for the first year, therefore, forcing many changes to be made to ensure success for the 2007-2008 Ohio Achievement Test Scores.

According to the *School Improvement/District Improvement Questions and Answers* (2004), if Beverly Elementary School does not improve test scores and remove themselves from School Improvement the following may be implemented each year that they remain in that status:

- Public School Choice: allows a student to attend another public school of choice and their home school would have to pay to transport them to that school.
- Development of a school improvement plan: this plan states exactly what the school plans to do to remove themselves from School Improvement.
- Notifying parents what School Improvement means and what has caused the school to be placed in that status,
✓ Create Supplemental Educational Services for students from the low-income families.
✓ Taking corrective action that may include replacing school staff relevant to the failure, implementing a research-based curriculum, decrease management authority, appoint outside experts to advise the school, extend the school year or school day, and restructuring internal organizational structure of the school.

**Purpose**

As a teacher in the third grade, a grade in which students are tested in reading and mathematics, the researcher was determined to explore the impact that socioeconomic status has on student achievement scores. In order to accomplish this, the researcher has created a questionnaire to discover how parents of Beverly Elementary School felt that socioeconomic status impacted the scores of the students in their school.

The purpose of this study was to determine if parents feel that socioeconomic status truly affects student achievement and to what extent that socioeconomic status has on student achievement.

**Research Questions**

There are many factors that research urges readers to consider when determining what may or may not affect student achievement scores. Socioeconomic status is one of those many factors.

This study aimed to find that parents within Beverly Elementary School recognize that socioeconomic status impacts student achievement. The study asks: “What characteristics of low socioeconomic status impact student achievement?”
Hypothesis/Central Phenomena

What does academic achievement mean at Beverly Elementary School?
Definition of Terms

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS – The federal mandate that holds schools accountable for the performance of subgroups, as well as all students. The goals for schools, districts, and the state are to meet or to exceed the annual objective or to make progress over the previous year. The final goal is to have 100% of all students at or above proficient by 2013-14 in reading and math.

ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED (may also be stated as low socioeconomic status) – Students who meet the following criteria may be considered economically disadvantaged:

1. Students who are known to be eligible to receive the free or reduced-price lunch (a program through the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs).
2. Students who are known to be recipients of or whose guardians are known to be recipients of public assistance.

OHIO ACHIEVEMENT TEST - Required assessments that measure students on what they know and are able to do in mathematics, reading, science, social studies and writing. These tests are criterion-referenced tests that measure what students know based on indicators taught at each grade-level. They are also administered to students in a standardized way and test students from third to eighth grades (replacing Ohio's proficiency tests).
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STATUS – A school or district enters improvement status after missing AYP for two consecutive years. Being in improvement status due to missing AYP for two years means students have the option of school choice. Being in improvement status due to missing AYP for three consecutive years means in addition to school choice, the students have the option to receive supplemental services, such as tutoring. Missing AYP for four or more consecutive years means the school or district is in corrective action and more intensive consequences accrue; students still have the option for school choice and supplemental services.
Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the fact replication of results may be complicated to achieve. The researcher was focused on a specific group of students in a small school. These students and parents may not have the same ideas as a student or parent from a different school, a different district, or even a different geographical location.

As with most research, human error in data collection may create inconsistency in the results of the study. Interpreting the responses of individuals could be problematic as the researcher feels that a specific response would constitute an additional response for a particular theme, but the participant may actually be leaning toward a totally diverse theme.

A third possible weakness is the number of responses that the researcher may or may not collect. With a small number of students and parents to sample, it will become a great challenge to receive a large enough number of responses to form a valid theme. Even when the researcher receives the responses, there may not be enough information in the response to find a theme, or some responses may be void of any relevance to the topic.

Finally, finding a sample population will create some discrepancies. The researcher can not truly find a random population, as there are a small number of students and parents within the school. Also, stratifying the population to obtain responses from students and parents who would fit into the low SES category would make the research more valid, but again would further limit the amount of responses obtainable.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many various avenues for teachers, parents, and administration to venture down as they are trying to evade the roadblocks to student achievement. These avenues can be looked at as possible explanations for a lack of student achievement on the Ohio Achievement Tests. A quote mentioned in an article from Rouse and Barrow (2006), states how Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1967 felt concerning socioeconomic status and its affects on education, “The job of the school is to teach so well that family background is no longer an issue.” School districts are still facing the same issues faced 40 years ago.

To magnify the effects of socioeconomic status, White (1982) states, “The family characteristic that is the most powerful predictor of school performance is socioeconomic status (SES); the higher the SES of the student’s family, the higher his academic achievement.” There are many studies that support that general statement about socioeconomic status. Studies as early as Gough (1946) find that there is a correlation of .30 between status and achievement, showing a slight positive relationship. More recent studies show that independent variables that schools cannot control, including low income, are good for predicting achievement scores (Sutton and Soderstrom, 2001). In contrast, some studies do not find significant relationships among socioeconomic status and student achievement. White, Reynolds, Thomas, and Gitzlaff (1993) state that the “knowledge of a student’s SES provides only modest assistance in accurately predicting his or her performance on standardized tests”. On the same track, Nye and Hedges (2002) and White (1982) find that socioeconomic status is more of a predictor at early
stages of education, and much less of a predictor as the students progress into the later stages of education, where other variables become more of a factor in student achievement scores than being economically disadvantaged.

The Ohio Department of Education is determining the quality of schools based on scores obtained from the Ohio Achievement Tests. Sutton and Soderstrom (2001) make a statement that shows a strong belief about this process stating, “Educators, and especially legislators and the public, should consider our results when comparing student achievement among school districts, and rank them accordingly.” These researchers feel that comparing schools and school districts in this way will favor schools that serve advantaged students, and adversely affect schools with a large population of economically disadvantaged students.

For the academic year 2006-2007, Beverly Elementary School did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress, due to the subgroup of economically disadvantaged not meeting their goal. The following figures were taken from the Ohio Department of Education website. Figure 2.1 shows the percentage of students that fit within the economically disadvantaged subgroup. This is a very large percentage of the student population at Beverly Elementary School.

Figure 2.1. Percentage of students within designated subgroups at Beverly Elementary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Daily Student Enrollment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Native Alaskan</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>99.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NC= Not calculated. Used if fewer than 10 students in student group.
Figure 2.2 shows the percentage of students within each subgroup that are at the proficient level, as stated by the Ohio Department of Education. Seeing the percentage of students proficient in the economically disadvantaged group and comparing them to other groups can help to illustrate the effects of socioeconomic status on student achievement scores.

Figure 2.2. Percentage of students at a proficient level in each subgroup.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUR SCHOOL'S PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AT AND ABOVE THE PROFICIENT LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd GRADE ACHIEVEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th GRADE ACHIEVEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th GRADE ACHIEVEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th GRADE ACHIEVEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NC = Not calculated. Used if fewer than 10 students in student group. -- = No data reported

Figure 2.3 shows Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) information for each of the subgroups, showing the difference from the standard goal for each subgroup. The economically disadvantaged subgroup did not meet the goal in the area of Reading.

Figure 2.3. AYP goals met/not met by subgroup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Reading: Grades 3-8 &amp; OGT (Grade 10)</th>
<th>Mathematics: Grades 3-8 &amp; OGT (Grade 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Tested Goal: 90%</td>
<td>Weighted Difference from Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native Alaskan</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>-6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NR = Not Required for AYP due to student group size below minimum number for statistical reliability. The minimum student group size is 30, except “students with disabilities,” which has a minimum group or size of 45.
The subsequent information provided are variables that have been examined throughout numerous quantitative studies, and themes drawn from qualitative studies. This researcher looked to find some similar themes stated throughout the data collected through questionnaires distributed to parents and faculty of Beverly Elementary School.

**Expenditures Per Pupil**

Schools with a higher number of economically disadvantaged students have less revenue to spend on their children. One specific study states that socioeconomic status is the most important determinant of school financing, due to the fact that funds are received through property taxes (Sirin, 2005). Schools where most of the population is low income are more likely to be “inferior” to the schools that are wealthier. They have less income to distribute per student, lowering the per-pupil expenditure amount. Sirin’s study (2005) suggests that this puts students at a disadvantage when considering student
achieve. Students who attend schools with higher per pupil expenditures experience higher levels of achievement (Parcel and Dufur, 2001). Rouse and Barrow (2006) suggest that some school districts with a low socioeconomic status do not efficiently spend their resources because they are not managed as effectively as a school district with a higher socioeconomic status.

A contrasting study from Okpala, Okpala, and Smith (2001) states that instructional expenditures per pupil do not provide a statistically significant explanation for changes in student scores. A second contrasting study shows a negative correlation between school expenditures per pupil and student achievement scores in reading (-.31) and mathematics (-.19) for students at a third grade level (Sutton and Soderstrom, 2001).

*Student-Teacher Ratio*

The ratio of students to teacher per classroom is a variable that can negatively affect student achievement (Elliot, 1998). Students who attend a low socioeconomic school district may have larger class sizes that affect the amount of time and personal attention given to each student (Van Laar and Sidanius, 2001). Rouse and Barrow (2006) determine that the quality of a school is strengthened when smaller class sizes are available, stating, “Smaller sizes seem to be one promising avenue for improving school quality for disadvantaged students.” This may only be an effective strategy for improving student achievement at the primary education level, as Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) find that class size has modest, but statistically significant, effects on achievement in reading and mathematics and will decline in its significance as students progress through school. Interestingly enough, one study concludes that small class sizes in the early grades would lead to higher academic achievement; showing a greater
advantage for lower achieving students in reading and for higher achieving students in mathematics (Nye, Hedges, Konstanopoulos, 2002).

Divergent views do not feel that student-teacher ratio demonstrate a strong relationship with higher student achievement. Sutton and Soderstrom (2001) report weak relationships between elementary student-teacher ratio and student achievement scores. Jepsen (2004) mentions that class size may not have an effect on a “low-stakes” test, but could have a larger significance when there is a possibility that teachers “teach to the test” to prepare for the “high-stakes” tests such as the Ohio Achievement Test.

**Teacher Qualifications**

Stating that the effects of well-prepared teachers on student achievement can counteract the effects of poverty, or even that teacher quality are more strongly related to student achievement than other variables such as school expenditures and class size are powerful statements involving the importance of teachers in student achievement (Croninger, Rice, Rathbun, and Nishio, 2006). These researchers found that significant positive effects on reading achievement resulted from teacher preparation and degree level. Years of experience that a teacher has acquired is also a variable that has been examined. Vanderhaar, Munoz, and Rodosky (2006) have found that higher mean scores were obtained by students who were taught by teachers with 13 or more years of experience, as compared to teachers with 10 to 12 years of experience, and teachers with less than 10 years of experience. Interestingly, the same statistics are shown for principals with higher levels of experience. Principals with 9-17 years of teaching
experience before their administrative position will yield higher student achievement
scores (Vanderhaar, Munoz, and Rodosky, 2006).

Opposing research has found the alternative to be true. A study by Jepsen (2006),
mentioned previously, also concludes that teacher education and certification (specialized
degrees) do not have any significant impacts on student achievement. This research is
supported by Sutton and Soderstrom (2001), which states that teacher experience does
not present a strong correlation with student achievement scores and also by Rivkin,
Hanushek, and supported by Kain (2005) who finds that having a master’s degree
improves skills need to improve student achievement.

Expectations

One research study suggests, “children from low-income families attain less
education than children from more advantaged families” (Rouse and Barrow, 2006). The
researchers state that this may be a result of expectations placed on students from a low
socioeconomic status. From one viewpoint, parents of a higher socioeconomic status
expect their children to advance further in their educational career and these higher
expectations result in a significant effect on student achievement and their own
perceptions of academic success (Benner and Mistry, 2007).

A second viewpoint is the expectations set forth by teachers of students within a
lower socioeconomic status. Van Laar and Sidanius (2001) state that statistical-based
discrimination by teachers is placed on students from a low socioeconomic status due to
the achievement of this group as a whole, and also as a result of culturally shared
stereotypes. This research also shows that just a mere reminder of these negative
A third viewpoint, expectations of students themselves, has an effect on student achievement scores. The lower expectations expressed by parents and teachers will take its toll on students’ perceptions of their own academic abilities. When there is no support to be successful, and no push from those who are the most influential in a student’s education, lower expectations should be expected from students in a low socioeconomic status (Van Laar and Sidanius, 2001). This study shows that “group debilitating behaviors” such as higher rates of school truancy and drop-out, less time to devoted to studying and homework assignments, and less care and attention devoted to completed assignments are results of strategies used to maintain positive self-esteem. Oddly enough, these students are working to maintain a positive self-esteem, working against negative expectations, and the result brings negative consequences. These behavioral patterns exhibited make it more difficult for these students to develop academic proficiency (Van Laar and Sidanius, 2001).

*Home Environment*

In the year 1999, approximately 19% of all American children under the age of 18 are members of families with incomes below the poverty line (Buckner, Bassuk, and Weinreb, 2001). Students within that low socioeconomic status may deal with environmental stressors within their neighborhood such as feelings on insecurity about their safety, housing status, and violence within their community. Henrich, Schwab-Stone, Fanti, Jones, and Ruchkin (2004) found that students who were within safe
environments and did not witness violence were twice as likely to meet standards set by the state on achievement tests. Contrasting studies state that the type of neighborhood that students live in does not greatly impact academic achievement, but urges that the relationships found cannot be ignored (Thompson, 2002; Buckner, Bassuk, and Weinreb, 2001).

When parents are a part of subordinate social groups they are less able to provide supplemental resources to aid in the learning that begins in the classroom (Van Laar and Sidanius, 2001). Resources include goods and services that would enhance academic success; goods including educational videos, games, and toys; services including tutoring and other academic support. This research also states that limited wealth also exposes limited “quality and variety of enriching experiences to which lower status children are exposed”. On the other end of the educational process, parents who are economically disadvantaged are less able to provide for further education after high school, so students may not be working to their fullest potential that would be required to enter into higher education (Rouse and Barrow, 2006).
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Study Design

An exploration of socioeconomic status and student achievement at Beverly Elementary School was completed using a mixed-method. This was accomplished in a qualitative manner with a questionnaire that poses open-ended questions distributed at the participating location. The responses to the questionnaire were used in a qualitative manner to discover possible themes concerning student achievement and how socioeconomic status may affect this variable. Participants of the study were rewarded with a food discount coupon from a local fast food company. As questionnaires were returned, they were then coded and placed into themes for reporting.

Qualitative data was used with the presentation of the questionnaires. The participants were shown the statistical results reported by the Ohio Department of Education on the Beverly Elementary School Local Report Card. These statistics stated that Beverly Elementary School did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress in the economically disadvantaged subgroup in the area of Reading.

Participants

The participants used in this purposeful sampling were parents of Beverly Elementary School students who have taken the Ohio Achievement Tests. A non-probability sampling method was used. The principal of the school was given copies of the letter of intent of the study and the attached questionnaire. The principal then continued to use a snowball method to distribute the information to teachers and parents of the qualifying students.
There are a few disadvantages to consider. One disadvantage of this design is that using a primarily qualitative design, a true-random design will not be effective in this research. Limiting the population to one school will not allow for a random sample to be chosen. Also, the sample cannot be limited to the low socioeconomic subgroup, where the responses to the effects of student achievement are most valid. The researcher would not be able to obtain enough responses to form valid themes.

There is one major advantage of using this type of method for sampling. With more diversity in the population, it will be interesting to see how views from low socioeconomic families may be similar to, or how they may differ from, families that are not in the low socioeconomic group.

Procedure

The first thing that the researcher had to accomplish was gain permission from the superintendent of Fort Frye Local School District. Appendix 1 shows a copy of the letter that was used to gain that permission. Secondly, the researcher gained verbal permission from the principal of Beverly Elementary School. The researcher and the principal then determined possible participants. This takes into account that some of the present students did not attend the school district during the 2006-2007 school year. The researcher did not need to gain parental permission, as the students were not directly participating in the study. Next, the researcher sent copies of a letter of intent of the study, which explains why the research is being done, how the results will be used, and what the researcher hopes to gain from the study. Attached to the letter of intent was a questionnaire for each participant to complete and return to the researcher. Upon completion and return of the questionnaire to the researcher, the information was then
coded and placed inside separate folders, each folder representing one possible theme that has been generated.

Getting a significant amount of responses was challenging, so the researcher set up a reward system. As a reward for returning the questionnaire, the student who returned the questionnaire received a coupon for food at a local fast food restaurant. Since there were a very low number of responses and returning of questionnaires, the researcher sent the same letter and questionnaire home in an addressed envelope, to account for possible student misplacement from school to home. With a recurring low number of responses, the researcher could have set up a face-to-face meeting with willing participants at school who were not willing or who were unable to complete the written questionnaire.

One possible limitation to this type of data collection would be human error on the researcher’s part. The researcher, analyzing data by hand, could easily confuse data, leave important data out, or possibly misinterpret data. To provide for less human error, future researchers could use computer software programs for qualitative studies.
RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact that socioeconomic status has on student achievement scores. In order to determine this, questionnaires were distributed to parents/guardians of students in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades at Beverly Elementary School. One hundred twenty-five questionnaires were distributed, and only thirty-four completed questionnaires were returned for a rate of 27%. Twenty-three questionnaires were returned stating that they did not wish to fill out the survey, which is a rate of 18%. After sending the questionnaires out three separate times, this left sixty-eight non-responsive questionnaires, for a rate of 55%.

There were four questions on the questionnaire that did not directly pertain to student achievement in the manner that the researcher was looking for. Please see questions #3, 5, 6, and 8 from the questionnaire located in the appendix of this paper. Of the thirty-four families that completed the questionnaire, 32% can be considered to inhabit the low socioeconomic status group. This was figured from the participants who qualify for a free or reduced lunch price. Only 15% of the participants stated that their student was not involved in some sort of after-school activity, with some participants specifically mentioning that they did not have the funds to allow them to participate. Encouragingly enough, 91% of the participants plan for their child to attend college, or plan to encourage their child to attend. The other 9% did not discourage a higher education, but were undecided, leaving the decision up to their child when the time approaches. Finally, 100% of the participants felt that the most valuable aspect of their
child’s education was to gain knowledge; whether it be intellectual knowledge to be able to support themselves as an adult or to attend college, or to gain knowledge of how to be productive in society socially.

When asked to explain in detail what is preventing students from achieving in school, there were various responses.

**Environmental factors that affect student achievement.**

_Students come to school tired and hungry, cold or hot (not dressed properly), or sick. I feel that a healthy, comfortable student will be able to achieve more in school._

_Poor nutrition, poor sleeping habits/routines, family hardships, and frequent illnesses are some of these factors._

_Too many children have major issues that they are dealing with emotionally—divorce, housing, custody… It is hard for children to leave their problems at home and have trouble focusing at school._

_A good home life is essential to achieving in school. Without it students lack the ability to excel._

_Too many outside distractions: TV, Playstation, and busy lifestyles._

_Class size and disruption of children who have no desire to learn._

_Distractions, disciplinary problems, peer pressures, and student-teacher ratios._

_Noncompliant behavior of some students._

_There are too many outside activities._

_Larger classes and not enough one on one help for those that need it._

**Teachers affect student achievement.**

_There are too many teachers that will not take the time to help explain things when the student does not understand._

_Teachers who are not concerned about their students. (Teachers who are only there to get a paycheck.)_
Teachers seem to think that they are therapists/doctors as well as educators.

Failure to recognize students who may be struggling.

Poor teacher support is a factor.

If kids are not taught how important it is to work hard and do the best that they can do in school, they are not going to care whether or not they succeed.

Teachers and staff too worried about who they can get money from instead of teaching and worrying about kids.

The basics are being rushed through in the lower grades.

I believe students struggle in school because of the presentation of material. Students all learn differently and sometimes they are taught by only one or two methods that does not meet their learning style. There needs to be a balance between hands-on and paper-pencil.

I feel a lot has to do with the teachers doing their job and interacting thoroughly with the students in their class. I understand that not all students perform in their classwork the same, but I feel the teachers are more for themselves and not the students in their classroom!!!

**Parental support affects student achievement.**

Parents not working with their children at home and not concerned at school work.

Attitudes of parents and how they value education.

Lack of parental support is a factor.

Lack of support and encouragement from home.

Parents not being able to help with homework because of work hours or because they don’t understand the homework themselves.

In general, I believe a lot falls to families. Whether or not they are involved with their kids and spending academic and non academic time with them. If you believe the school is responsible for educating your child (and you just stay out of the way), you are wrong.

Children are doing Math that parents never had in school.
I believe part of the ones who aren’t achieving in school don’t have parents who care whether they do or don’t.

Some kids are very lucky and have parents that are there to help them and make sure their homework is done and are doing well in school.

**Expectations affect student achievement.**

I believe that their school work is too much to achieve, if they are a student with a learning disability.

Sometimes the curriculum is too fast-paced.

My opinion is expecting too much at such an early age. School is becoming stressful and learning is more of a burden. Learning should be fun.

Achievement tests. We are worried too much on how we score on this test and they ship around so much so the kids can get good scores on it. They don’t learn the basics, don’t change curriculum for it just track the kids.

Some students are expected to learn the same way at the same speed. There is not time to slow down and go over things until the whole class understands. Teachers and students are hurried through, to get all “test” material taught before testing, even if students don’t understand.

There is no emphasis on learning and memorizing the basic Math facts. Our findings are that students are pushed onward.

The children receive so much homework after school, so that they have to stay up late so that they are not at their best the next day at school.

When asked if low socioeconomic status plays a role in student achievement at our school, 56% said that it does. The other 44% thought that did not affect student achievement, or did not know for sure if it does.

**Parents do not have the time or the appropriate knowledge to assist their children.**

Parents who have to work all the time and do not have time to sit down and help their children with school work.

If parents are working long hours it limits the time they have to help their kids. And if a good education and achieving good grades are not important to the parents then that is what will be passed on to their children.

Lack of education on parents’ part.
Not all families are able to provide extra help at home.

Children can’t always have the help they need with homework.

The children with the low status either do not have parents at home that are willing to help, able to help, or that will enforce importance of learning.

When parents were asked if they are pleased with the education that their child is receiving, 85% of the participants said that they were. There were various answers to this question, but one major theme prevailed, both in positive and negative ways.

**Teachers affect how parents feel about their child’s education.**

I feel the teachers at Beverly-Center Elementary are very good at their job and care about the students here.

The teachers that my son has had or has now at Beverly Elementary have been very good. They are informative to me as a parent if there are problems. My son understands their teaching skills and they work one on one with my son. If my son has a problem or question he does not understand, then they have always helped him. Parent/Teacher communication is very good.

Sometimes I feel they grade their own or each other’s homework/quizzes too often.

She has good teachers.

The teachers my children have had take a genuine interest in the students. They have even adapted different teaching styles and taken into consideration strengths and weaknesses of them.

I think they need to explain to those who are having a harder time. If they think they need a visual give them one!

My son was recently diagnosed with Aspergers, a form of Autism. His teachers have worked closely with us to provide the best instruction with modifications needed.

The teachers she has had are very caring and are focused on making sure all the kids are understanding the assignments.

Too many teachers are not doing their job.

The teachers, staff, and principal acknowledgements are great for self-esteem.
I feel several teachers are traditional and unwilling to use anything other than textbooks. I also feel several teachers feel threatened by anyone with an educational background and are unwilling to listen to suggestions, even when presented in a non-threatening manner.

I believe teachers feel they can’t spend enough time, they have to keep up with what some bureaucrat thinks they ought to do. Just like an engineer (book smarts with no practical experience).

Teachers are bringing their home life into the classroom. Some teachers bring their “bad day” to school and yell at the kids when it is not their fault.

I feel that some of the teachers are just there for the paycheck and don’t even try to come up with lessons that will encourage or challenge the students.

When asked what challenges parents face in helping their child achieve, two major themes prevailed. These themes are resources that are necessary for parents to possess when aiding their child in the educational process.

**Time is a scarce resource for many parents and their children.**

Not enough time in a day to help my son with school work when he has a lot of homework and after school activities are the same night.

Time. But we always find it to complete homework.

Like everyone else, life is very busy so I just need to make sure I take the time to make sure she is staying on track.

I would say my biggest challenge is “time”. She gets on the bus at 6:45 am gets home at about 4pm, she is tired and hungry, and the last thing that she wants to do is her homework. I wish she had time to relax, I feel I have to push her time to work.

Working limits time when home.

I work evenings and weekends (7 days a week) and am unable to help her with her homework. I am unable to attend school functions in the evening.

I understand homework and agree that it is very important for parents to be involved. I like to work their homework with them. But at the beginning of the year 5th grade had an enormous amount of homework (45 min +) and I lost the time to help our 2nd grader with reading.

I suppose finding time to work with homework can be a challenge.
Working their schedule into mine and visa versa.

Trying to juggle all that we have to do as a family and find time for them to complete assignments.

Parents are not always able to comprehend their child’s work to assist them in their work.

I have been out of school for 50 years and things have changed a lot since I went to school.

I don’t always understand the ‘new’ math and that is one of her problem areas.

School has changed a lot since I graduated and a lot of the school work that is brought home is hard to understand, so it is hard for my husband and I to help him even more, so in math we all get very frustrated.

I don’t have a college education. And in math, the stuff they are learning I don’t think I ever had it.

I do not do well in English. This is something she must do on her own with little help from me.

Some of her work from school, I do not understand it.

Some things I don’t understand myself.

Being able to understand their math.

I myself have some problem helping my child to understand some things.

Where I didn’t try in school sometimes if I’m not sure on something about math.

The following table shows themes found through this study’s research compared to possible themes stated in the literature review.

Table 4.1. Comparison of themes from this study and literature review.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Present in Literature Review</th>
<th>Present in Researcher’s Study</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Expenditures Per Pupil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-Teacher Ratio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Qualifications</td>
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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary

Socioeconomic status has continued to affect student achievement here at Beverly Elementary School. Although many parents who filled out the questionnaire do not see that socioeconomic status affects student achievement, teachers and administrators at Beverly Elementary School are determined to do everything that they can to make sure that each student has an equal opportunity to learn and to be successful regardless of income status.

The researcher was not surprised by the responses that she received from the parents filling out the questionnaires, nor was she surprised by the number of parents who refused to fill out the questionnaire, or even give any type of response. The researcher feels that this could be indicative of the problems that the students are having with achievement. Teachers need the support of parents at home in order for the students to be successful at school. Teachers at Beverly Elementary are expected to keep a line of communication open with the parents of the students, but in many cases, not all cases, communication seems to be a “one way street”. The questionnaires show many parents who are frustrated with the teachers, and expect so much more from the teachers. There could be instances where parents have the right to be upset with a teacher, but parents have to take on their part in the educational process. As a teacher herself, the researcher understands that teachers can not be perfect at all times, teachers do make mistakes. Parents have to realize that teachers have to address each individual’s strengths and
weaknesses, and that it may take some time for a teacher to address their child, as there are several other children in the same class having different problems.

Expectations of students are a concern that is shared by parents and teachers alike. Teachers are expected to teach a specified set of indicators each year. Students in grades three, four, five, and six are tested at the end of the school year to see if they have mastered the skills indicated by the State of Ohio Content Standards through the completion of the Ohio Achievement Tests. Not all students learn at the same pace, but are still expected to know the same content as their peers in the same grade. Even students who have documented learning disabilities are expected to master those same concepts, even if they are only able to comprehend information on a first grade level. The Ohio Achievement Test place a lot of stress on the students to be successful, and even more stress on the teachers as their whole year of teaching is evaluated by this one test. As an added stress to the teachers, consequences of performing poorly on the test affect the school building’s reputation, as well as the school district.

Some aspects of funding for schools are also decided by results of the Ohio Achievement Tests. Take a school district that already struggles to keep a balanced budget, and try to make them pay for more mandated programs with less money. The school district then has to rely on levy funding, which is hard to come by when almost half of the school is part of the low socioeconomic status. How is the school supposed to pay for the resources and programs that they need to address students’ needs? Teachers ponder this question every day, and even a few parents mentioned the concern in their questionnaires. One statement from a parent sums up this concern quite well:
“Really we don’t have much say in the matter as far as education goes in the public school system. The government has already taken care of that matter for us.”

Parental academic skills, or even the lack thereof, were mentioned several times throughout questionnaires. The researcher has participated in various programs at Beverly Elementary School that were aimed at helping the parents learn more about their child’s academics, and showed them ways that they could help them at home. These programs included topics on mathematics, reading, using technology, and preparing for achievement testing. There were so few parents in attendance at some of those programs that the informational sessions were not considered for the following academic year. Teachers were willing to share their time and put much effort into planning a program that would benefit the students and their parents, but only a handful of parents accepted the opportunity to better themselves and their children.

Finally, time is something that parents and teachers alike struggle to manage. The researcher participated in numerous conversations with other teachers and with parents of her students in which time was a major factor in student achievement. Teachers mention that they feel that there is not enough time to complete the rigorous amount of learning material that is expected to be taught within grade levels each year, as determined by the State of Ohio. Teachers look to parents to help support and enrich the learning that takes place at school. Teachers must also realize that students are active members in various after-school programs that take time from the students and their parents. As a teacher, the researcher sees the necessity of involvement in these activities in order to create a well-rounded individual. This researcher also sees where parents struggle to find time after they arrive home, and understands that not all students have the convenience of
parents who are at home all evening; as many parents have to work odd hours just to keep their finances afloat. In essence, teachers and parents do what they can in the small amount of time that they are given. Time is one thing that the government can not give or take away from us at this moment, so parents and teachers must learn to manage in creative ways.

Future Implications

The topic of student achievement has been an important issue for many school districts under the same pressures of the Ohio Achievement Test. Pressures from the Ohio Achievement Test are felt from every angle in a child’s education, including students, parents, teachers, and administration. Despite their differences, if parents and teachers could find a common ground, students could benefit greatly from a “tag team” effort.

In conclusion, further research would be beneficial to understand more deeply how parents react to and comprehend student achievement. Under the current conditions, it would be interesting to conduct this study in a school that has a much lower percentage of low socioeconomic status families, and also to a school with an even higher percentage of low socioeconomic status families than Beverly Elementary School and study how the results would compare to the results from this study that the researcher conducted. Also, redistributing the questionnaire to the same parents following a successful year of Ohio Achievement Testing and then compare the results of the two studies would be interesting to see.
APPENDIX

Appendix A. Letter to Superintendent to gain permission for research.

January 29, 2008

Dr. Dora Jean Bumgarner,

I am writing this letter to ask for your permission to perform a study here at Beverly-
Center Elementary. The study is regarding low socioeconomic status and student
achievement scores at our school, based on the 2006-2007 School Report Card from the
Ohio Department of Education. Goals were not met in the subgroup of economically
disadvantaged that attributed to the school being placed in School Improvement for the
2007-2008 school-year. The study will attempt to find out what parents feel attributes to
low achievement scores, zooming in on specific attributes of low socioeconomic status.

Attached you will find a copy of the informed consent form that I will be sending out to
parents of students in the 4th-6th grades that attended this school last year, and were
included with the test scores from May 2007. The process that I will use is explained in
more detail in the informed consent letter.

Please look over the informed consent form and the parent questionnaire. If there are any
concerns, please notify me and I will address them to the best of my ability. If everything
looks to be in order, and I have your permission to perform this study at Beverly-
Center, please sign below so that I have your written permission.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in my master’s thesis process.

Sincerely,

Beth R. Hanes

Beth R. Hanes

Signing below states that I am granting Beth Hanes permission to conduct a study titled:
“The exploration of low socioeconomic status and student achievement.”

Dora Jean Bumgarner

Print Name Here

Dora Jean Bumgarner

Sign Name Here

Jan. 29, 2008

Date
Appendix B. Informed Consent Form

Student Achievement and Socioeconomic Status Informed Consent Form
Researcher: Beth Hanes
Email: ff_bhanes@seovec.org
Advisor: Dr. William Bauer
Email: bauerm@marietta.edu

This study of student achievement and socioeconomic status involves research conducted succeeding an approval from the research site’s administrator and from Marietta College’s Human Subjects Committee. Through this study, the researcher plans to determine what impact socioeconomic status has on student achievement scores, surveying parents on what effects that they believe low socioeconomic status has on those scores. Your participation in, and completion of, this questionnaire will be the only task that the researcher is requesting.

Prior to the completion of the questionnaire, please read over and sign this consent form at the bottom of the page. This will allow the researcher to take the information that you provide on the attached questionnaire and use it in the research. Then, please read each question on the attached questionnaire and answer the questions to the best of your ability. Please be thorough in your responses, as the more information that you can provide, the better understanding of what effects that you believe low socioeconomic status has on student achievement scores the researcher can gain. All of the information that you provide will be used anonymously. Your name will not be used in any circumstances; the information is for research purposes only. Upon completion and return of the questionnaire and the consent form to the school principal, your student will receive an incentive coupon to be redeemed for food.

If you are unable to complete the written questionnaire, contact the researcher and you may set up a meeting time where the questions can be asked directly to you and the responses will be recorded by the researcher. Secondly, an electronic form (email) of the document can be attached if you send your name and email address to the researcher at Beverly Elementary School. Also, if you are unable to complete the questionnaire within a week of its distribution date, the researcher will send an additional copy to you in case the document was misplaced or forgotten.

Participation in this study is voluntary, which means that there is no penalty to you or your student if you choose not to participate. If at any time you feel that you are not comfortable or are unable to continue, you may discontinue your participation, again without penalty to you or your student.

If you have questions or concerns at any time about research subjects’ rights, or your rights in this study, please contact Dr. Jennifer McCabe, Marietta College Human Subjects Committee Chair, at 740-373-7894. You may also reach her at Jennifer.McCabe@marietta.edu if you prefer email.

Again, thanks for your participation. Please be sure to sign, date, and print your name on the designated lines below. You are signing this form with the full knowledge of the purpose and procedures of the questionnaire. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

_____________________________ _____________________________
Signature Date

_____________________________
Printed Name
Appendix C. Parent Questionnaire

Student Achievement and Socioeconomic Status Questionnaire

Please answer the questions to the best of your ability and be as thorough as possible. You may write your responses in the space provided, or you may attach your answers with the corresponding question numbers on a separate sheet.

1. What is preventing students from achieving in school? Please explain in detail.

2. Does low socioeconomic status play a role in student achievement at our school? If so, in what ways?

3. Is your child involved in any after-school activities (academic and non-academic)? If so, what activities? If not, why is your child not involved?

4. Are you pleased with the education that your child is receiving? Please explain, in detail, why or why not.

5. What do you feel is the most valuable aspect of your child’s education? In other words, what do you want your child to accomplish by attending school?

6. Do you plan for your child to attend college after graduation? Why or why not?

7. What challenges do you face in helping your child achieve?

8. Do you qualify for free or reduced lunch prices?

Thank you again for your cooperation and your participation!
REFERENCES

http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=578&ContentID=19816&Content=31971


